There are often barriers to starting a coalition, and it's important to be aware of and anticipate them, because they may dictate the process the coalition will have to follow in order to begin successfully.

Among the most likely:

- **Turf issues.** Organizations are often very sensitive about sharing their work, their target populations, and especially their funding. Part of the work of starting a coalition may be to convince a number of organizations that working together will in fact both benefit all of them and better address their common issues.

- **Bad history.** Organizations, individuals, or the community as a whole may have had experiences in the past that have convinced them that working with certain others - or working together at all - is simply not possible. A new coalition may have to contend with this history before it can actually start the work it needs to do.

- **Domination by "professionals" or some other elite.** All too often, agency people with advanced degrees, local politicians, business leaders, and others, in their rush to solve problems or to "help the disadvantaged," neglect to involve the people most affected by the issue at hand and other community members. Creating a participatory atmosphere and reining in those who believe they have all the answers is almost always part of starting a coalition.

- **Poor links to the community.** A first step may have to be the development of hitherto nonexistent relationships among agencies and the community at large.

- **Minimal organizational capacity.** It might be necessary to find a coordinator, or for one or more individuals or organizations to find a way to share the burden of organization for the new group if it is to develop beyond - or as far as - a first meeting.

- **Funding.** The difficulty of finding funding is an obvious obstacle. Less obvious are the dangers of available funding that pushes the coalition in the wrong direction or requires it to act too quickly to address the issue effectively. New coalitions have to be alert to funding possibilities from all quarters, and also have to be vigilant about the kind of funding they apply for and accept.
• **Failure to provide + create leadership within the coalition.** Coalitions demand a very special kind of collaborative leadership. (Please see Chapter 13, Section 11: Collaborative Leadership, for more on this issue.) If that leadership isn't available and can't be developed from within the coalition, its existence is probably at risk. It may be necessary to bring in an outside facilitator and/or training in collaborative leadership top salvage the situation.

• **The perceived - or actual - costs of working together outweigh the benefits for many coalition members.** The task here may be to find ways to increase benefits and decrease costs for the individuals and organizations for whom this is the case if the coalition is to survive. Part of a solution here may often be providing support for those who aren't used to the "professional" way of holding meetings and reaching conclusions, while at the same time training professionals and others to include those whose opinions are likely to be far more accurate and important to the solving of the problem than their own. This might mean bringing in an outside facilitator, or simply paying careful attention to guiding the process from within the group.

If you understand the potential barriers to forming a coalition in your community, you can plan for them, and increase your chances of success.

Get more detailed information about **COALITIONS**.
MORE Partnerships: **Partnerships with Neighborhood**