

## Coalition Relationship Building Tips for Immunization Program Managers



Building strong relationships in a coalition is foundational to its success. For new and more established coalitions alike, the relationship between the coalition leader and the immunization program manager is important to both the success of the coalition and the immunization program. Good relationships lead to the retention of coalition members and the effective implementation of strategies. Immunization program managers and coalition directors can both work on developing their relationships to benefit the coalition's work.



Start by **drafting the coalition's vision, goals, and priorities**. Then seek partners whose objectives align with yours. Consider organizations in the community engaged in similar work or are reaching the audiences you are interested in. After identifying potential partners, research them thoroughly. Understand their missions, values, ongoing projects, and key members. A vision statement should clearly express your aspirations, strategic goals, and long-term plans. It serves as a guide that communicates your direction and provides an actionable roadmap for success.



**Build interpersonal relationships** that go beyond work (e.g., sharing meals, making small talk at coalition meetings). Strong interpersonal relationships can amplify and improve the collaboration between immunization programs and coalitions and help get through challenges in the relationship.



**Show up for other organizations in the coalition**. Go to their programs and events. Also, immunization program managers can attend coalition meetings and participate actively on committees and at events. Be a good partner to encourage others to be good partners for you.

**“Networking is key.** I go to everything I’m invited to. If there’s a retirement party, I’m there. I’m mingling with people. I’m able to talk with them about the coalition work we’re doing... The local health department staff need to network with all those organizations that they want at their coalition meetings. So, if one of them is having a health fair, go table there. Or if you’re not tabling, then go and mingle with people... Building those relationships is so important.”

**-Statement from a coalition director during AIM listening session. Edited for clarity.**



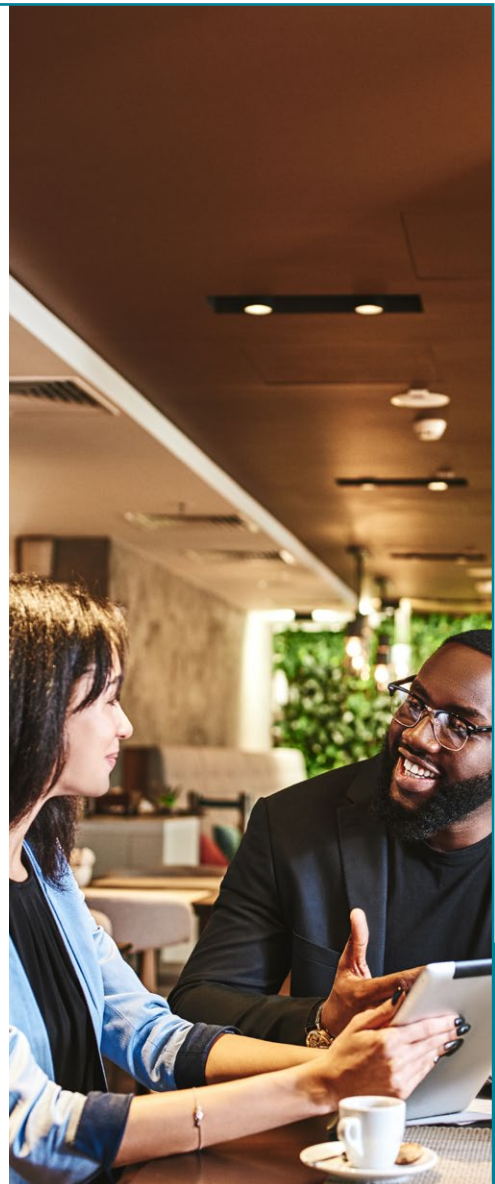
**Have open, honest, and consistent dialogue to find common ground.** Think about why a partnership will help. By listening well, you will identify where the coalition can fill gaps and strengthen the community’s immunization environment and what role the immunization program may play. Examples of what you may hear:

- The issues are too big for a single organization to take on alone.
- A partnership will reduce duplicating efforts.
- Strong relationships can have a greater influence on policymakers and stakeholders.
- Some partners may have organizational capacity or flexibility that others do not.

“The best advice is to just have open and honest dialogue with your state immunization program partner and find common ground. In my case, I think we’re such good partners because we have a lot of things in common. We’re really passionate about public health. We’re really bought into the mission of what we do. So when we come together, we talk about that shared passion before we get to all the other stuff that’s going on and just really sharing that passion we both have in this space.

And we also both love Indian and Thai food so, we are always sharing a meal and then we talk about our kids. So, finding those commonalities with our partners and then we really do become concerned that we are good partners too, you know because we like them as people as well. And then we can have candid conversations about what is working well and what is not working well and we don’t hurt each other’s feelings. We have to have that constant communication, otherwise things get misunderstood and feelings get hurt.”

**-Statement from a state coalition director during AIM listening session. Edited for clarity and to retain anonymity.**



**Meet Regularly.** Having standing meetings on the calendar either in person or virtually will reinforce the consistency of your communication. Coalition partners and community-based programs will always know when they can get updates or share information if meetings are on a predictable schedule. Also, consider having regular meetings with key programmatic leaders like the coalition director.



**Celebrate successes!** Share information and photos on social media. Draft summaries and articles for partner distribution and in their newsletters. Recognize people’s efforts. People like to be acknowledged for their work and the impact they have. Doing this will boost morale and increase commitment to the coalition.

“Vaccine burnout was happening [with coalition partners]. We thought, well maybe this would be our time to start recognizing those that are doing different efforts or unique efforts. So, we put them in our newsletter and recognized those partners to keep them engaged and keep them motivated.”

-Immunization program manager during AIM listening session.  
Edited for clarity.



**Reach for the low-hanging fruit first.** Small projects, that align with the coalition’s mission and strategy, can be completed relatively quickly, allowing the coalition to achieve and demonstrate early successes. These quick wins can boost morale and confidence. Starting small allows new coalitions to learn and improve their processes, communication, and coordination. It is easier to identify and correct mistakes in smaller manageable projects.

Starting with small projects can also provide an opportunity for coalition members to **build trust and develop working relationships**. For example, the coalition might want to participate in another organization’s health fair before organizing one of its own; or it may want to provide information about vaccines through a partner such as a school before holding a school-based immunization event. Successful collaboration on smaller initiatives creates a foundation of mutual respect and reliability.



Remember that coalition members are generally trusted in the community. That trust from the community can transfer to you when you build and maintain strong relationships with coalition members. Coalition members and the coalition itself can often do things that the immunization program may be limited in doing (e.g., advocacy work and social media posts). Forming and utilizing positive relationships with and among immunization programs, coalition staff, and coalition members can increase the ability to meet immunization-related goals of both the immunization program and the coalition.



The Community Toolbox chapter on [starting coalitions](#) provides additional detail and links to resources related to building relationships to benefit the coalition.

More ideas are also available in this National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO) resource on [partnerships and coalitions](#).

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