

Steps to Success: Starting and Sustaining Immunization Coalitions



Starting (or restarting) an immunization coalition can be overwhelming; however, numerous resources are available to assist with this important work. This quick start guide is intended to support immunization programs (IPs), vaccine champions, or any group or individual who wants to start an immunization coalition. Immunization programs or other champions may use these ideas as a jumping off point when establishing or reestablishing their coalition.

Determine Need

To help determine if a coalition is needed, you can begin by asking these questions:

- 1. Who is already addressing immunization and related public health issues?** Determine if they are interested in joining the coalition and what resources or expertise they can contribute. Are these individuals or organizations constrained by their mission or capacity, or are they interested in expanding to meet new needs?
- 2. Are there other coalitions addressing immunization with whom you can partner or from whom you can learn?** If yes, are these coalitions operating at the local, state, or regional level?
- 3. Would establishing a local chapter of a national immunization coalition effort meet your needs?** Evaluate existing national resources and consider establishing a chapter in your jurisdiction. As an example, [SAFE \(Science and Families Engaging\) Communities Coalition](#), a pro-vaccine political advocacy organization has Families for Vaccines chapters in several states.
- 4. Is a new coalition necessary, or could immunization needs be addressed through an existing group, such as a broader health coalition?** Sometimes, it's more effective to form a sub-committee within an established effort.

Define Goals and Determine Logistics

Once you have learned more about your jurisdiction's current landscape, gather your key partners and consider these questions to determine next steps in establishing a coalition:



- 1. What is the coalition's vision?** Developing a shared vision and goals among partners in coalition building involves fostering open communication and collaborative goal setting. Begin by facilitating discussions that allow possible partners to articulate their priorities, concerns, and aspirations. Identify common ground and shared values that will serve as the foundation for a unified vision with clear measures of success.
- 2. Who in your community could champion your work?** Consider engaging with local organizations (e.g., community groups, faith-based groups, schools, and chambers of commerce) to identify potential champions. Will these groups amplify your message?
- 3. How will you structure the coalition?** Decide if the coalition will become a 501(c)(3) organization, have bylaws, and establish a board of directors. Determine if the executive director will be a full-time or a volunteer position. Connect with [other coalitions](#) to learn about the pros and cons of their organizational structures.
- 4. Where will you get funding?** Your funding plan should be comprehensive and include all potential sources (e.g., grants, donations, in-kind contributions, government funds). Consider how the coalition will ensure financial sustainability. See AIM's *Tips for Building and Maintaining Immunization Coalition Financial Stability* for more ideas.
- 5. Are there barriers to immunization uptake in your community?** Barriers can be related to mis/disinformation, such as low trust in vaccination or doubts about the importance. Barriers might also include vaccine access, such as not having transportation, being un- or underinsured, or having time limitations in seeking vaccination. Identifying key barriers will help the coalition prioritize activities and how to allocate resources.

Get Started

Once you've considered the questions above, it's time to get to work! The following steps are meant as a guide for starting a coalition.



- 1. Establish your team.** Create a governance structure with clear roles and responsibilities. Include stakeholders from various sectors, such as healthcare providers, immunization program staff, public health officials, universities, educators, community organizations, businesses, faith-based groups, local government, and people who have been impacted by a vaccine-preventable disease. Consider forming sub-committees or workgroups for specific work, such as outreach, education, or policy advocacy.¹
- 2. Develop a strategic plan.** One benefit of coalition work is having access to a variety of data from different partners, including the IP. Utilize this data to identify immunization coverage, determine burden of disease, locate available resources, understand existing gaps, and to develop priority areas. Based on the analysis, create a mission statement that outlines the coalition's purpose and action steps to help achieve goals.
- 3. Secure funding for your coalition.** Develop a clear budget that includes costs for staff, materials, outreach, and events. Research funding sources, which may include government grants, private foundations, corporate sponsors, and other nonprofit or healthcare organizations. See the [Tips for Building and Maintaining Immunization Coalition Financial Stability](#) and the [sample MOUs/MOAs in this toolkit](#) for ideas.²
- 4. Evaluate, adapt, and evolve.** Stay current on the latest research, trends, and best practices related to immunization and public health. Be prepared to adapt your strategies based on evolving community needs, emerging challenges, and opportunities for improvement identified through evaluating the work of your coalition.³
- 5. Develop and implement a maintenance plan for sustainability.** A maintenance plan looks at the key structures, functions, and relationships within the coalition to determine if they need to be updated or evolve. This includes mission, vision, bylaws, funding, membership, strategic plan, leadership, and more. Coalition members must understand that maintenance is a crucial component to the coalition's sustainability and that they need to carry out any maintenance duties assigned to them on a regular basis. This may include internal, external, formal, and informal reviews.⁴ See the [Maintaining Coalitions](#) section of the Community Toolbox for more sustainability tips.

Sustainability

Between turnover in IPs and coalition leadership, changes in funding, and public interest in immunization topics, coalitions go through ebbs and flows in their membership and engagement. IPs and coalition leaders can be proactive and develop a maintenance plan to prepare for long-term sustainability. See the Tips for Building and Maintaining Immunization Coalition Financial Stability and the sample MOUs/MOAs in this toolkit for ideas.



- Here is a [‘how to’](#) guide for developing a maintenance plan.
- If you need to revisit the vision, mission, and objectives of your coalition, start [here](#).
- If membership is lagging, conduct the [membership gap analysis activity](#) created by the Montgomery County Pennsylvania Coalition.
- When working on funding plans, look at this guide for [developing financial sustainability](#). There is also a [funding tip sheet](#) in the AIM Coalition Toolkit with useful information and additional resource links.
- If you have a great action plan but low participation, look at this guide for increasing [participation in community action](#).
- [The Immunization Partnership](#) has a toolkit for growing and sustaining coalitions with a section on sustainability that offers solutions and activities you can do to assess your coalition.

Membership

It is best to intentionally, thoughtfully, and carefully plan membership recruitment. Regularly evaluate who is represented and who is missing. Consider the following categories when evaluating membership:

- **Subject matter experts** are people working in the immunization field, which could include pharmacists, doctors, researchers, or scientists who can provide valuable insights and guidance on strategies and decision-making.
- **Immunization program staff** are people that work for the state, county, and/or local health department’s immunization program. The immunization program manager should have a leadership role on the coalition, especially if the coalition is funded in part by the IP. The program manager also has connections to other programs/offices within the department of health, including the offices of policy, community engagement, and communications.

- **Community members/survivors** are people interested in resolving immunization challenges or directly affected by vaccine-preventable diseases. This could include parents and immunocompromised persons. Powerful firsthand accounts from community members can guide the coalition's efforts and be used as a persuasive tool when advocating for change or communicating important information to the community.



- **Advocacy groups** that share similar policy goals and can offer support, resources, and networks.
- **Nonprofit groups** working in similar or adjacent fields to immunization can broaden the coalition's network and provide helpful insight into working with the community.
- **Private sector entities** like pharmaceutical companies or manufacturers can be included to bring in financial resources, innovative solutions, political influence, and business perspectives.
- **Educational institutions** can contribute research, data, and academic resources to inform the coalition's education and outreach work. Certain departments might have students who can volunteer as vaccinators, educators, or outreach workers for community service or academic credit.
- **Media organizations** can help raise awareness and communicate the coalition's message effectively to a wider audience.
- **Spokespersons and champions (e.g. community leaders, local celebrity)** can serve as vaccine champions and deliver messaging to their large audiences.

Coalition Building Resources

These resources provide more detailed information on starting, building, and sustaining coalitions.

- Immunize.org coordinates the [National Network of Immunization Coalitions \(NNIC\)](#), providing coalitions with a forum to communicate with and learn from each other during quarterly webinar calls, [resource sharing](#), and private discussion groups, as well as through receipt of the [Network News](#) email announcements sharing information of interest to coalitions. NNIC also holds a biennial in-person meeting, the [National Conference for Immunization Coalitions and Partnerships \(NCICP\)](#).
- The Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) has curated a vast collection of [coalition related tools](#) for planning, start-up, coalition building, assessment and evaluation, and sustainability.

- [SAFE Communities Coalition](#). If you're interested in starting a Families for Vaccine chapter in your state, [contact them](#).
- The Immunization Partnership guide, [A Dose of Change: Building Capacity in Your Immunization Coalition](#), highlights forming a coalition, strategic planning, sustaining effective coalitions, developing media and communication plans, and strategies to increase immunization uptake.
- The Community Tool Box has units on [Creating and Maintaining Coalitions and Partnerships](#) with links to additional resources for every step of the process, examples, and information on [Maintaining Coalitions](#).
- Originally written for state efforts related to heart disease and stroke prevention, this [Coalition Building Primer](#) offers an overview of coalitions, starting coalitions, and elements of successful coalitions.
- This [coalition building toolkit](#) from the Healthcare Association of New York State offers a step-by-step guide to coalition building including activities and advocacy information.
- Tips and tools for [growing and sustaining immunization coalitions](#) are available from the Montgomery County Pennsylvania Immunization Coalition.
- The Prevention Institute developed the [Eight Steps to Effective Coalition Building](#) framework for addressing community concerns providing guidance from determining the need for a coalition to recruiting and convening partners, finding resources, and conducting evaluation.
- The Georgia Tobacco Use Prevention Program offers a bulleted, one-page [Coalition Building Best Practices](#) guide covering planning, formation, implementation, and maintenance of coalitions.
- Ohio State University Extension resources for building coalitions has [factsheets](#) for every phase of coalition development.

References

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