Strengthening Communities

A Series of Community Development Skills Guides

- Discovering Why Are We Here
- Living Our Values
- Thinking Creatively
- Making Choices
- **Building Community Alliances**
- Planning and Facilitating

Building Community Alliances

A guide to help your group figure out who else to work with and why

A SPARC of BC Publication

Principal Consultant
Deborah A. Bell

SPARC Staff
Michael Clague
Leslie Kemp

Writing & Editing
Works in Progress

Design & Layout
Community Text Tools

Illustrations
Addison Graphics

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of those who so generously contributed time, effort, ideas, stories, and commentary during the preparation of the Community Development Skills Guides (volunteer readers, focus groups, and pilot communities). We would like to acknowledge the efforts of Michael Clague in conceiving and supporting this project. This series would not have been possible without the generous contribution of time by Principal Consultant, Deborah Bell and Editor, Ellen Schultz. SPARC appreciates their commitment and support, as well as that of all the funders who made this series possible.

The Community Development Skills Guides have been prepared by the Social Planning and Research Council of BC with funding from:
Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation
B.C. Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture
Vancouver Foundation
Contents may be reproduced with credit.

A SPARC of B.C. Publication
ISBN 0921892-24-1 ©1995

Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia

SPARC of B.C. is a provincial voluntary association which conducts research and planning and provides public information and education to help people cooperatively plan for the social well being of their communities. For this Guide series, SPARC has drawn from its more than 25 years of experience with community work.

To order more copies of this guide or others in the series, contact:

SPARC of BC
106-2182 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V6K 2N4
Telephone (604) 736-8118
Fax (604) 736-8697

Before you begin...

What binds your group together?

How We Define Community

We don't. People do that themselves in the many ways they create communities — by getting to know neighbours, sharing common interests, joining different clubs and associations, taking classes, making friends at work, maintaining strong ties to extended families, and joining with one another to address an issue.

Can you describe your community development process?

How We See Community Development (CD)

Community development involves community people taking democratic control by participating in planning, bottom-up decision making, and community action. The process and outcomes of community development reflect common values, conflict and compromise, and the shifting of power to the community.

Have you talked about the values that guide your CD process?

Some Community Development Ground Rules

Community development is a way of working together based on shared concerns and respect for one another. Its values — equality, caring and sharing, social justice — guide what we do and how we do it.

Being welcoming (inclusive, open to others, friendly), sharing resources in an equitable (fair) way, being willing to compromise or reach consensus, basing decision-making in the community, and involving the public are all part of the community development process.

Do you take the time to think about the way you are doing your community development work, and why?

Learn While Doing

Community development involves action (doing), reflection (thinking about, talking about, and understanding what your group is doing) and action (doing it again but doing it better, with more understanding), and so on...

Opportunities for improving skills are often found during times of reflection.

Contents

Introduction 1

Other people's stories 2
stories from others' communities

Why is this important? 3
why this guide is important to community work

Something to think about 4
the theory behind the practice

It's tougher than you think 8
challenges for people working in community

Getting down to work 9
practical exercises to get you started

For more information 15

Worksheets 16

Tips...

► *These are your key to quick skill ideas*

A word about using the Guide...

Plan your learning activity the way your group learns best. Some groups may just want to talk informally about the ideas in the Guide. Others may want to proceed in a more structured way. The *Planning and Facilitating Guide* has lots of useful ideas to help you plan.

The Guides are set up so that you can easily work through them in a logical and meaningful manner, simply following through the Guides section by section. It is probably a good idea to give everyone a copy of the Guide you are working with.

- Begin by sharing and comparing each others' experience and understanding of the topic. (*Other people's stories.*) Are there any common themes? What are the differences and similarities?
- Next, look at some of the theory. (*Why is this important?, Something to think about, It's tougher than you think.*) What do others say about this topic? How does this compare with what the group has already discussed? Does this change your thinking?
- Try a couple of the exercises. (*Getting down to work.*) You will find an exercise to correspond to each of the main ideas in the Guide. Use examples from your own community development activity to put what you've learned into practice.

You can also consult the Guides for ideas or activities as you work through a community development activity.

Introduction

An alliance is an association of groups or organizations. The purpose of an alliance is to bring groups together to achieve a common objective.

Alliances, formed for the right reason and with the right partners are well worth the effort. Successful alliances will be able to do more with fewer resources, and be in a position to tackle complex community issues.

Main ideas in the guide

- Deciding to form alliances
- An alliance for everyone
- Finding the right match
- Picking the right strategy
- Making an alliance work

Ask yourselves...

- Why do we think that we want to form a community alliance?
- Are we willing to share resources?
- Do we want to maintain our independence?
- Who would our allies be?
- Do we trust the people we are working with?

These questions are explored in this guide.

Other people's stories

A small resource community in British Columbia was faced with down-sizing at the local mill because of technological change. A number of individuals from a variety of groups got together to see what they could do to improve the prospects of their community. They included politicians and interested citizens, business people, people from the arts, and retired people.

They decided the town should develop itself as a tourist destination. The focus would be large public murals depicting the history of the community's settlement, its industry, and the everyday life of its people.

They formed a coalition. It put out a very effective message that the community was building a new economy and a new life for itself. Each individual and group was encouraged to take on those parts of the plan that they were the most skilled at and/or knew best.

Some pursued funding from senior governments. Others worked on public relations. The artists painted the murals. The commercial community developed information materials and oriented retail services towards a service market.

The key to success lay in building a broad community consensus and mobilizing the energy and imagination of many people. We can all learn from the experience of people in other communities. What are the stories in your communities?

Why is this important?

Alliances can enrich community work in many ways.

Broadening the base of support

Alliances increase the number and range of people and organizations involved in a community action. Involving people from different walks of life and organizations from different sectors establishes a more solid base of support for any community development activity.

Creating a critical mass

It can take many people to start and maintain the momentum for community action. There is strength in numbers. In an alliance, it is the mix of interests as well as the numbers involved that can make others take notice.

Maximizing resources

By sharing resources, community groups organized as an alliance can often do things that no one group can do on its own.

Getting rid of conflict and competition

Different groups can work together towards similar goals and interests instead of working at cross-purposes.

Meeting new expectations of funders and political leaders

Community groups are having to work in new and more cooperative ways to satisfy funders and to be heard by political leaders.

Confronting difficult and complex problems

The old ways of doing things often don't work. Communities are dealing with are increasingly complex and inter-connected issues. Community groups realize they have to forge working relationships with diverse interests, including 'unnatural allies' with whom they previously had little in common.

Something to think about

Deciding to form an alliance

Groups decide to form or join an alliance for a number of reasons. They may do so to muster broad community support, to bring in new resources to address an issue, to avoid competition, and so on.

Be clear about your reasons for joining a community alliance.

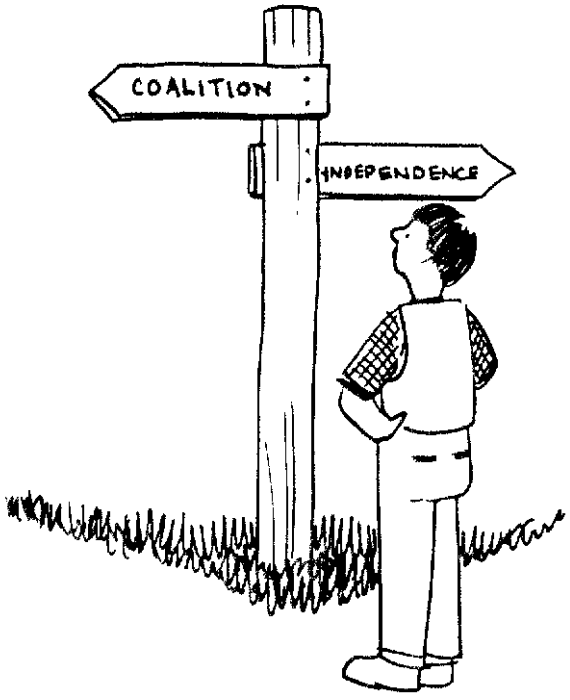
Before joining an alliance, groups need to be clear that there is a genuine need to do so, and that the benefits from doing so will be mutual.

An alliance for everyone

Alliances come in a number of different forms. They can range from informal associations (an agreement among organizations to share information and meet periodically) to formal, legally incorporated bodies. They may vary in size from two groups to many.

Here is one way to think about alliances:

Sharing *Cooperation* *Collaboration* *Partnerships* *Incorporation*



Alliances can be as informal as meeting for coffee.

Alliances in the **sharing and cooperation** categories are usually easy to manage because of their small degree of risk. Their main purpose is to share information, or cooperate in a public information campaign on an issue. However, there is a limit to what these informal alliances can achieve.

Collaborative alliances are formed when groups agree to actively work together for a common purpose. The collaboration lasts only for the duration of the activity.

The **partnership** alliance is an association of independent groups who formally agree to work together on an on-going basis around common interests and objectives. They do not disband at the end of a specific action, but stay together as long as they believe this will best serve their common interests.

Sometimes alliances need to be legalized.

An **incorporated** alliance is formed when the shared interests of the member groups and their objectives require a legal arrangement.

Whether the alliance is formal or informal, its member groups are accountable to one another. They have agreed to work together for common purpose, and must do so in ways they have mutually agreed upon. However, the alliance does not obligate organizational members to act together on matters that are separate from the ones that brought them together.

Choose your alliances carefully.

Finding the right match

Finding community allies is rewarding but challenging work. Sometimes relationships work, and sometimes they do not. Successful relationships are carefully chosen. There is of course some trial and error, but groups that take the time to think about who they want as allies, and why, will be further ahead in the long run.

Some alliances face issues head on while others work carefully with the system.

Picking the right strategy

Community groups should know and understand the alliance's core strategy for creating change and acting on the interests of its members. Will it be an advocacy strategy, a consensus-building strategy, or both?

Alliances using advocacy strategies face challenges head on, arguing for a particular point of view. They often take political action. This political action is not associated with a particular political party. It is concerned with changing the policies and programs of government or business practices.

Alliances consensus strategies usually seek more gradual change, or take a more gradual approach. They try to bring all interests together at the beginning and move forward when all of its members are ready.

Advocacy and consensus strategies can complement one another. Advocacy strategies press for change. Consensus strategies build broad community ownership and commitment to the results.

Trust makes an alliance work.

Making an Alliance Work

Successful alliances are built on mutual trust, commitment and clearly agreed upon objectives and ways of working together (preferably put in writing). Another key to success is a willingness to share the credit, the resources and the work. Alliances don't work if suspicion and competitiveness prevail among the groups.

Tip on...working together

- *identify common values and respect differences*
- *determine the working objectives for the alliance*
- *agree on ground rules for working together (like how will decisions be made)*
- *identify the spokesperson for the alliance*

It's tougher than you think

Too often groups think of alliances in superficial ways. It takes extra time, effort, thought and resources to establish alliances properly.

The success of alliances depends on how well relationships are managed and how clearly goals are understood. Individuals and groups often come into alliances with their own agendas, creating difficult power struggles.

Community alliances sometimes form strong and persuasive interest groups. When these alliances work well they can serve as effective and positive change agents. When they do not, they can serve to disrupt democratic process by making change at the expense of smaller less organized groups.

Groups sometimes find themselves in alliances which are cumbersome. Decisions are reached more slowly and results will be harder to control.

Many people become discouraged because the hassles of being part of an alliance will outweigh the benefits. Groups may decide it is better to "go it alone".

Alliances need to build consensus and commitment to a particular outlook and purpose. At the same time, alliances need to be open to considering other views and purposes. This is sometimes a difficult balance to reach.

Tip...making alliances work

In the words of Australian Cultural Planner Marla Gubby, "Collaboration gets easier with practice."

so

Practice, practice , practice...

Getting down to work

This section contains some straight-forward exercises to get you started. These exercises can take as little as an hour or as long as a day to complete. Use your own community development project to make the work more practical. Choose the exercises which are best for your group and issue (the *Planning and Facilitating Guide* gives tips on how to plan these activities).

Most of the exercises are highly participatory — one of the best ways to learn about community development.

An exercise for *deciding when to form an alliance*

What is it?

Groups decide to form alliances for a great number of reasons. The exercise will help groups determine if an alliance is for them.

Why use it?

There are many good reasons for doing so but there also many good reasons not to. To avoid going into alliances that do not yield any true benefit try this exercise.

How is it done?

Ask the group to imagine an alliance: What would it look like? Who would be involved? How would it help your issue(s)? Give people a few minutes to actually think of themselves in this setting. Encourage them to put aside any practical considerations.

On a sheet of flip chart paper put two headings across the top the "best outcomes" and the "worst outcomes".

Ask the group to list the best things that could happen if they formed an alliance. Now ask them to imagine the worst things that could happen if they formed an alliance. Discuss the responses once everyone has had an opportunity to comment. What is the overall picture? Does it look favourable? Are there too many pitfalls? How does the group feel about joining an alliance?

Tip...deciding to form alliances

Will an alliance help your cause by:

- *building a broad base of support*
- *bringing in more resources*
- *reducing competition between groups*
- *improving chances for funding*
- *getting government to listen*
- *offering wider representation*

If the answers are "yes" to these questions, then an alliance is well worth considering.

An exercise for *an alliance for everyone*

Choosing the alliance best for you

What is it?

Once a group has decided that their community development activity would benefit from an alliance with others, the next step is deciding what kind of alliance would work best. There is a lot to consider: the issue(s), length of commitment, financial implications, the legal relationship, and how an alliance will affect each group's independence.

Why use it?

Carefully understanding and considering all the dynamics of any alliance helps groups to enter into working arrangements that are in their best interest.

What do you need?

Copies of Work Sheet #3 (see page 18) for each participant, an enlargement of Work Sheet #3, and felt markers.

How is it done?

Copy Work Sheet # 3. Enlarge one copy to place at the front of the room.

Break the large group into small groups of 3 or 4 people. Ask them to check the point on the continuum that best answers the six questions on work sheet #3.

Ask for each group's answer, along with a **brief explanation.** (It is usually a good idea to deal with one question at a time, before moving to the next group).

Plot the answers from each group on the chart. Analyze the findings. Where are most of the answers falling on the continuum of alliances? Is there significant agreement? Can a consensus be reached on the type of alliance the group is looking for?

How can this information be used?

Once the group has reached relative agreement on the type of alliance that is needed, the information from this session can be used to seek allies in the community or to evaluate invitations to join an alliance. The characteristics of the alliance described here can be used as useful guide for negotiating an alliance with other groups.

An exercise for *finding the right match*

Identifying Community Players

What is it?

Identifying community players is an activity designed to encourage groups to think critically about community partners. It uses a simple graphic to help participants visually see relationships.

Why use it?

This exercise will help groups to identify other community groups and agencies that share an interest in a particular community issue, and examines the potential role that groups/agencies might play in acting on the issue.

How is it done?

A community players diagram is provided in this booklet (see page 16). You can either transfer the diagram to a flip chart, overhead, or make a copy for each participant.

Write your issue or reason for working together in the middle of the page. Ask the group to identify all the other players in the community that might have an interest in the issue you are addressing (clients, other agencies, government, community groups, groups typically not included, groups or agencies not typically related to yours). Use the responses to fill in the diagram (this will take about 15 minutes).

You may try this exercise twice. On the second round encourage participants to dig deeper, and to think harder about potential community partners. Sometimes we need to reach beyond those that first come to mind.

- What other groups and organizations are directly or indirectly affected by this issue?
- What groups and organizations share our concerns and interests in this issue?
- What groups' and organizations' support is needed for the actions we want to take?
- What do we know about these organizations and the prospects of working together?

Divide your group into small groups of 3 or 4 people. Give each group a piece of flip chart paper and a copy of Work Sheet #2 (see page 17). Ask each group to write the following two questions on the flip chart.

Question 1:
What can each group identified do about the issue?

Question 2:
How can each group work with us to address the issue?

Divide up the list of organizations (identified in step one) among the small groups. (A reasonable number would be 5 to 7 organizations per work group.) Ask the work groups to answer questions 1 and 2 on Work Sheet #2. When completed have them transfer their answers to the flip chart paper. (Allow 45 minutes)

In a large group setting ask a spokesperson from each group to share all the ideas generated in the small groups. Alternatively, group members can walk around the room to read each others notes. (Allow 20 minutes).

With the large group, ask if any of the points need to be clarified.

An exercise for *making an alliance work*

Organizers Check List

If your group is considering organizing or joining an alliance, then review the following check list. Make sure there is clear agreement with your potential partners about:

- ✔ the issue
- ✔ who can join
- ✔ the purpose and objectives of the alliance
- ✔ how the alliance will carry out its objectives
- ✔ the assignment of responsibilities among members
- ✔ how decisions will be made and differences settled
- ✔ who can speak for and represent the alliance
- ✔ who provides what resources
- ✔ the communications plan that keeps all alliance members informed

When the alliance is formed, put these agreements in writing and have all parties sign them.

Once an alliance has been formed, set up regular sessions among the partners to review progress.

Find out what the public thinks, and plan to deal with any lack of information or opposition among the public, other organizations, or key decision makers.

For more information

Aboriginal Joint Ventures: Negotiating Successful Partnerships. Lewis, M. & Hatton, W. Center for Community Enterprise: Vancouver, 1993.

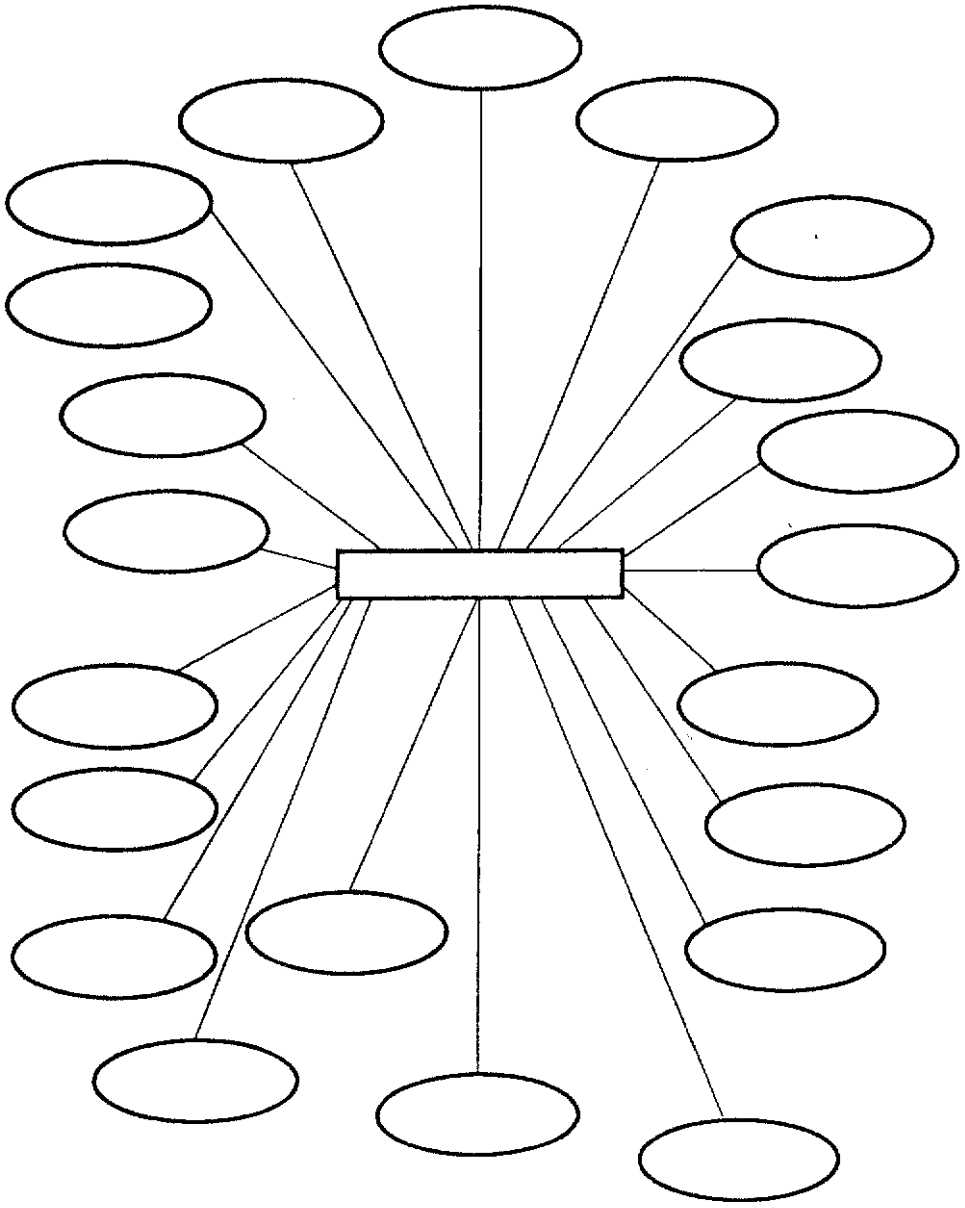
Critical Paths: Organizing on Health Issues in the Community. Keck, J., Dauphinais, H., Lewko, J. Between the Lines: Toronto, 1989.

Organizing: A Guide for Grassroots Leaders. Kahn, S. NASW Press: Silver Spring, 1991.

Strategic Alliances: Collaboration to Merger. Workshop Materials. Miller, F., 1993.

Community Partnerships, New Ways of Doing Business. Hollister, R.M., Miller, F.T., Baily, J. Tufts University: Medford, 1993 (unpublished).

Worksheet #1: Identifying Community Players



from "Community Action Pack"

Worksheet #2: Identifying Community Players

Group	What is our current relationship?	What do we want from them?	What can we offer them?	What steps should we take to work well with them?

from "Community Action Pack"

Worksheet #3: Identifying an Alliance for You

Our reason for forming an alliance _____

CHARACTERISTICS OF ALLIANCES		*CONTINUUM* SHARING — COOPERATION — COLLABORATION — PARTNERSHIP — INCORPORATION	
IMPORTANCE OF SHARED VALUES/VISION	LOW	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	HIGH
NUMBER OF ISSUES OPEN TO COLLABORATION	SINGLE	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	MANY
PROJECTED LENGTH OF COMMITMENT	SHORT	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	LONG
NEED FOR FINANCIAL COMMITMENT	LOW	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	HIGH
NEED TO LEGALIZE RELATIONSHIP	LOW	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	HIGH
DESIRE TO MAINTAIN GROUP INDEPENDENCE	LOW	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	HIGH

Adapted from Frederick T. Miller

The Series

Use the Guides...

...to direct an activity
...to get back on track
...when all else fails!

Discovering Why We Are Here
Help your group figure out what it is about, and why.

Living Our Values
Help your group be clear about what is near and dear to its heart. It will make working together a lot easier and a lot more effective.

Thinking Creatively
Help your group put its creative energy to work.

Making Choices
Ideas are a dime a dozen. Help your group sort through the list and choose what is best for your own work.

Building Community Alliances
Help your group figure out who else to work with and why.

Planning and Facilitating: A Guide to Help Use the *Strengthening Communities* Series
For the old hand and the faint of heart! A step-by-step guide to facilitating groups the CD way.

Although each booklet stands on its own, most will find that the booklets *Discovering Why We Are Here* and *Living Our Values* are a good place to start.

Apart from that, the choice is yours!