Rosemarie Crawford, LVT – Co-Founder National Kitten Coalition

Full Paper

If you've ever felt overwhelmed by the amount of work to be done in animal welfare or limited by what you or your organization can do to address community concerns or provide more services, then a community coalition may provide the solutions you need.

It may seem overwhelming to start, but with some brainstorming and thoughtful planning, successful coalitions can not only be formed, but can provide a huge benefit to the community and to each of the partnering organizations as well.

Identify the need:

First, identify what issue or concern do you want to address – and solve! Do you want to reduce the numbers of stray cats in a particular area? Provide additional services for pet owners? Increase services available for rescue organizations? What types of questions and requests do you get from your community that your organization is not able to provide responses to? Those may be the basis for looking into coalition building.

Identify the key components or partners for solutions:

Next, take a careful and detailed look at the parts and players required to address the need. By teaming up with partnering organizations, the burden of providing services is shared or divided and the community concern becomes easier to address with component parts.

What components might be needed:

In addition to, of course, the shelters and rescues, a variety of other partnering agencies and supplies may be required. The goal that the community coalition aims to solve will determine those requirements. It should be noted, that in almost all cases, cooperation within and between shelters and rescues is a required starting point. Some other key components or partners might include, for example:

-Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) groups and supplies like traps and transfer cages

-Spay/Neuter/Desexing for stray and owned animals

-Microchipping for managed colonies and owned animals

-Foster homes for kittens and social cats found in the field

-Training for TNR volunteers and fosters who will care for found kittens

-Pet food pantries to help community members care for and keep their pets

-Access to veterinary care for the TNR groups and individuals in the community

-Humane educators and Animal Control Officers (ACOs)/Rangers to go out into the community

-Advisors for government policy or legal issues

-Businesses to supply products, funding and help spread awareness within the community

-Individual members of the community to volunteer in a variety of ways. For example, from creating and distributing informational flyers, to working at TNR spay/neuter clinics, to fostering animals, providing donations, etc.

Creating your team:

Once you've identified the many components and players needed for your coalition, it's time to bring them on board. Before approaching prospective partners, get your information together and package it in an understandable way. Potential partners will need to have confidence in you and may also need you to convince them of the need within the community AND that the program your undertaking can be successful. Create your documents and talking points that clearly show that you have done your homework and that you are a knowledgeable and reliable partner. Be able to provide them with brochures, fact sheets, estimated amounts of anticipated time or financial investments, timelines, etc., and be sure your information also shows the potential benefit to the community and to them as a partnering organization. The benefit to them might be simply community good will and being seen as part of a positive solution, or it may have broader and more tangible impacts like increased business revenue.

Once you have your materials ready to go, set up a time to meet with prospective partners and thank them for that time when you are there. Make your case for their partnership by presenting the problem, the solution and the reasons for how and why their partnership is essential in achieving a successful outcome. Be sure to leave them with a business card or contact information should they have questions and set a tentative date for following up to get their decision.

Defining roles:

Once you've gotten your key players on board, it is important that everyone is clear about the overall plan and about their roles and responsibilities within that plan. Set up an advisory committee with one person from each partnering organization. Work together to detail required steps along the way and any associated deadlines. There will likely be differences of opinion on how to proceed, but keeping the focus on WHY you are all doing this and the ultimate goal of helping the animals goes a long way to smooth out those differences. Once there is consensus, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or other written document is useful so each person or organization understands what is expected and in what time frame.

Getting community support:

If your project will require support from individuals in the community -as many projects do- be sure to create a strategy for making that happen. Don't assume that the community will instantly support your goals – and in some cases you may even experience push back, criticism or interference. As with approaching potential partners, it is important to plan your messaging to the community and present it in a way – or ways – that will be understandable and meaningful to them. Show them how the project will ultimately benefit the community. Consider multiple outlets including pamphlets at community locations or via mail, social media, in-person events, phone calls and door-to-door depending on your project goals, budget and volunteer availability. Provide contact information and let individuals in the community know that you need and appreciate their support.

Now you're ready:

You've planned, you've prepared and now it's time to put it into practice! Congratulations! You made it happen just like you wanted, but don't be discouraged if things don't go perfectly or as smoothly as you hoped. Even with great preparation, there may be unexpected situations or minor glitches. Review and revise along the way as needed and have a more formal review within the Coalition annually or semi-annually. Measure the positive impact that your Coalition's project is having on the community – and most importantly on the animals within that community, keep what's working well, tweak where improvements are needed, and celebrate the successes.

For additional information on helping kittens in your community, please visit https://kittencoalition.org/ or email The National Kitten Coalition at Info@KittenCoalition.org.