

Navigating the Great Barrier Reef:



What to do When Your
Coalition Swims into Barriers

The Great Barrier Reef.....

is the largest coral reef system in the world, composed of over 2,900 individual reefs and 900 islands stretching 1,600 miles over an area of approximately 344,400 square kilometers or 133,000 sq mi.

So, what does this have to do with prevention activities? Sometimes it seems like there is a great barrier reef composed of 2,900 individuals and 900 organizations/organizational policies stretching over our entire community, hindering our efforts to create a safer, drug-free community.

So, what do you do when your coalition swims head first into an barrier? It depends on the barrier.

Developed as a resource for community coalitions by
Bluegrass Prevention Center's *Alcohol Prevention Enhancement Site*.
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Great White Shark

There is one influential person in the community that you really need on your side

Sea Star

Your opposition is a vocal minority

Not Enough Fish in the Sea

Your community lacks necessary resources

Undertow/Rip Current

Your coalition tends to drift with the tide

Octopus

So many hands wanting a hand out

Coral

Those hard, prickly individuals who refuse to budge

Sponge

There is one person/organization that sucks the life out of your coalition

School's Out

Your coalition lacks enough members to have an impact

Jellyfish

The things unseen

Surf 'n' Turf

Individuals and organizations are territorial

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Great White

So....your coalition is interested in passing a Social Host Ordinance but the County Attorney refuses to meet with you and won't even return your phone calls. Or.... maybe your problem is that your local Superintendent refuses to let you see the Kentucky Incentives for Prevention (KIP) survey results. Or.... you may need to reach a more informal gatekeeper such as the matriarch of a small community, and she doesn't trust "outsiders".

Don't worry! Your efforts aren't dead in the water yet. As they say, there is more than one way to skin a fish – even if it is **a very big fish.**

Even great whites don't live in a vacuum. Someone, somewhere holds influence with them. Find out where the matriarch goes to church or with whom the Superintendent plays golf. Maybe the County Attorney's daughter is on the cheerleading squad with your niece, so your families see one another on a regular basis. Enlist one of those people to help talk to the great white about your cause, or at least encourage them to meet with you. Relationships are powerful. *Utilize someone with a current relationship to help you develop yours.*

Do you know specifically the basis for the opposition? What history is involved? Unless you know this and are prepared to address the issues, there may continue to be a threatening presence.



Great White Shark

Shark

If your great white is an elected official or works for an elected board, getting voters on your side may help.

- Community surveys can help you quantify the amount of support your cause has in the community. Surveys can be easily conducted online or using a pencil and paper format. Just be sure to consult a prevention professional to insure the questions are being asked in an effective way. Your Regional Prevention Center or Prevention Enhancement Site should be able to help.
- Another strategy utilized by communities is support cards. Brightly colored, post card sized, signed, support cards serve as a visual symbol of the amount of support your cause has in the community.
- Other signs of support such as letters and phone calls can be invaluable.
- Emails and form letters tend to carry less weight.

From local officials to members of Congress, decision makers keep an eye on what is happening in the media. According to the American Public Health Association, "Advocacy is used to promote an issue in order to influence policy makers and encourage social change. Advocacy in public health plays a role in educating the public, swaying public opinion or influencing policy-makers." So, use letters to the editor, Op-Ed pieces, press releases and media events to further your cause and get the attention of decision makers.

Humans are not on the great white's menu. The sharks are naturally curious and merely sample biting.

Sea Star

Sea stars can work either for or against a community coalition, depending on whether the voice of the sea star is a reflection of the group. There will always be people with dissenting views, which is a good thing because it makes the coalition clearly define issues and utilize research in defending its position. However, a barrier can be created when a sea star becomes star of an opposing viewpoint, bringing attention to an area that does not reflect the majority. When the majority voice is not being heard, it is time to look for ways to "change the tides!" and clearly develop the majority opinion with a representative sea star.

sea Star

- First, the coalition must identify a parent, business person, elected official or other person in the community who strongly supports its efforts and is willing to talk about it..
- Next, make sure this champion is well-versed on issues and keep him/her up to date on current research. Provide them with talking points and help schedule opportunities for them to speak with community groups.
- Help your champion submit editorials or letters to the editor of the local paper and send letters to community leaders.



The starfish has been renamed the sea star because it is not a fish at all. The sea star is an echinoderm.

Can your coalition identify some common ground or areas in which your concerns are matched with those of the opposing sea star? If so, utilize those places to start developing a relationship and create small steps in working toward the same goal.

There may be times when those matching points cannot be found and it is necessary to agree to disagree. For example, if your coalition is advocating for the enforcement of underage drinking laws and your opposing sea star wants the minimum drinking age lowered, the common ground may not be there. This is a distinct time where disagreement becomes necessary.

Always remember, this is about important issues facing your community—not personalities. Make sure you keep your focus on the issue not a person.

Not Enough Fish in the Sea

If you feel there are not enough fish in the sea or at least not enough funds in the coalition's bank account, you are not alone. Finding resources is one of the greatest challenges facing community coalitions. One key is to redefine resources to include more than just money.

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There are 28,000 different kinds of fish ranging in size from 1/4 inch to over 51 feet.

Coalition resources take many forms: *people, relationships, facilities, supplies, funding and much more*. Believe it or not, NOT having a great deal of money can actually strengthen a coalition by forcing it to develop additional resources and relationships.

- If you can't afford to rent an office, try to find a community partner like a school or business that will allow the coalition to utilize some of its space as an office. One coalition is allowed to make copies free of charge at a local bank, lessening the amount of money needed for supplies.
- Other coalitions have been able to leverage clerical help from local agencies which allow a percentage of an Administrative Assistant's time to be devoted to the coalition.

The possibilities are endless!

You may want to go fishing for funds as well....

- Funding available in the form of federal and state grants may be an option for your coalition. Visit www.grants.gov for information on federal grants. There may also be national, state or local foundations willing to provide some funding for your efforts.
- Companies with a presence in your community may be willing to help out—just ask!!
- Most large chain stores, such as Wal-Mart and Target, have programs to give money back to local communities. Visit the store's website or ask the manager for details.
- Fund raising and entrepreneurial ventures are options as well. Your efforts could be as small as a bake sale or silent auction or as large as packaging a successful program your coalition developed and marketing it on a national level.

Undertow / Rip Current

While undertow and rip current are different occurrences in the ocean, they result in the same thing—being dragged away from the ultimate destination, the beach. In coalition work, this is often experienced as mission creep or chasing the money.

Mission creep happens when your coalition, either formally or informally, deviates from its mission. There are many worthy causes and, unfortunately, many social ills in every community, so losing focus of the coalition's mission is not difficult.

In an effort to gain or maintain funding, coalitions may be tempted to address issues outside of their mission statement. For example, a coalition with the expressed mission of preventing underage drinking may decide to apply for an adolescent pregnancy prevention grant since the two can be related and both involve adolescents.



The best way to avoid a rip current in your coalition is *strategic planning*. Simply put, strategic planning determines where an organization is going over the next year or more, how it's going to get there and how it'll know if it got there.
(www.managementhelp.org)

If you are caught in a rip current, don't fight it. Instead, swim parallel to the beach until you are out of the current.

The focus of a strategic plan is usually on the coalition as a whole, and was developed and voted on by the coalition.

Ensuring that any new projects or funding opportunities fit into the coalition's strategic plan will help the coalition stay focused on its mission.

Whether facing a rip current in the ocean or in your coalition, be patient and keep your eye on the goal.

Octopus

Congratulations! Your coalition just received a new grant! But beware of the octopus trying to get hold of your funds – with all eight tentacles wanting a hand out.

Nothing excites coalition partners like a new grant! It may even bring new partners to the table. One thing many people don't realize is that your new funds are probably to provide for specific programs, strategies or personnel. "We all know how grants work. You apply to do one thing, but once you get the money you can spend it however you want." was how one coalition leader put it. In the age of accountability, that simply isn't true.

Funding organizations require documentation that you spent their money as you were funded to. Money not spent as intended may have to be repaid to the funding organization and could put future funding in jeopardy. One way to put an end to all those tentacles looking for a hand out, without hurting any feelings or jeopardizing relationships, is to blame the funding source. Let your partners know the coalition's windfall can only be spent as *allowed* by the funding organization.

The coalition's strategic plan can also help tame the octopus. *The priority for utilizing resources of all types should be determined by the strategic plan.* In order to prevent the coalition from drifting with the tides, even good projects which are not on the strategic plan can not be taken on by the coalition. This *doesn't* mean that the coalition can't provide verbal support for the project and help develop other linkages in the community.



Octopus tentacles are covered with suckers which are used to grab and taste things.

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Coral

You may be experiencing individuals who are "set in their ways," refuse to budge and can be a little prickly.

Coral may seem hard, immovable and even sharp, however, that is just the outer shell formed by calcium secreted by the polyp which lives inside. Your coral may be hard and prickly on the outside as well.

- Spend time getting to know him or her. What makes him/her tick? Why are they involved in your efforts? What is their background?
- Getting to know him or her as an individual may help you to understand where they are coming from. You may find out that you agree on many issues, but simply have different communication styles. Even if you don't agree on the issue at hand you may develop mutual respect and a good working relationship.

If the person is coral-like on specific issues only, *try to utilize their skills in areas in which they are more likely to agree with the rest of the coalition.* For example: your coral strongly believes alcohol should be legal at age 18 and can not be convinced otherwise. He is also concerned with the rise of prescription drug abuse in your community. Asking your coral to participate on the newly established Diverted Prescription Drug Task Force may be the perfect solution.

Use caution when placing your coral in the position to speak on behalf of the coalition. If the person has a prickly personality in general, they may turn others off to your organization. If they are coral-like on specific issues only, others may think all of the individual's opinions represent those of the coalition, even when they don't.

Coalitions usually operate on the democratic principal of voting or by consensus building which can also help neutralize your coral. If the majority rules, everyone else must go along with the group.

Is the science on your side? If the research on the topic of disagreement points in the coalition's direction, use it to put the issue to rest. One coalition successfully used this tactic when dealing with its coral. The coral strongly advocated a curriculum in which the limited evaluation not only did not demonstrate positive results, but indicated possible negative results long term. The coalition *welcomed the involvement* of the coral in the community process, but would not consider using the curriculum until positive results could be demonstrated.

You may find that getting to know your coral or utilizing other strategies doesn't solve all your problems. In this case you may have to do what the boats do – avoid the coral or at least go around it when you need to. A boat headed full speed ahead at a coral reef is likely to sink.



Thoughtful planning and methodical steering can help you avoid disaster.

*Remember.....
coral may be hard and immovable, but it is also unique, colorful and beautiful in its own way.*

Although coral reefs cover less than 1% of the Earth's surface, they are home to 25% of all marine fish species.

Sponge

Like a sponge soaks up water, you have a person or organization that is sucking the life out of your coalition. It is that person who causes a whispered groan when they enter the room. Sea sponges grow in every ocean in the world and most coalitions will experience a sponge of its own at some point.

Strategies for working with someone who sucks the life out of your coalition vary and depend on the individual and values set forth by the coalition.

- If the individual or organization is annoying but doesn't threaten the existence or effectiveness of your coalition, *or*, if it is an essential partner you may decide to *grin and bear it*.
- The coalition's volunteer leadership may decide to have an *honest discussion* with the individual about how his/her behavior is affecting the organization. *It is possible that he/she doesn't realize the negative impact they are having and will adjust with a little coaching.*
- Others may need a lot of coaching from the coalition's leadership. Coaching can also be a valuable approach when one of the coalition's values is that it is open to anyone in the community, and therefore, will not ask someone to no longer participate.

If your sponge tends to dominate the conversation or veer off topic, *meeting facilitation skills* can help.

- Establish a time for the meeting to end and encourage members to help the facilitator stay on track.
- You may even want to establish a time limit for each person to speak. Gently stating, "You always have a lot of input. Lets see what everyone else thinks." can move the discussion along.



Sponge

The sea sponge is classified as an animal, although it doesn't have a brain or a central nervous system.

- Non verbal cues can be helpful as well. Avoid eye contact. The sponge may interpret the eye contact as giving him/her the floor to speak. If possible, seat the sponge next to the facilitator. This makes it easier to not have eye contact and will allow the facilitator to use other non-verbal cues such as touching the sponge's arm or shoulder to signal that his/her turn to speak is over.

At first, these strategies may make you feel awkward or rude.

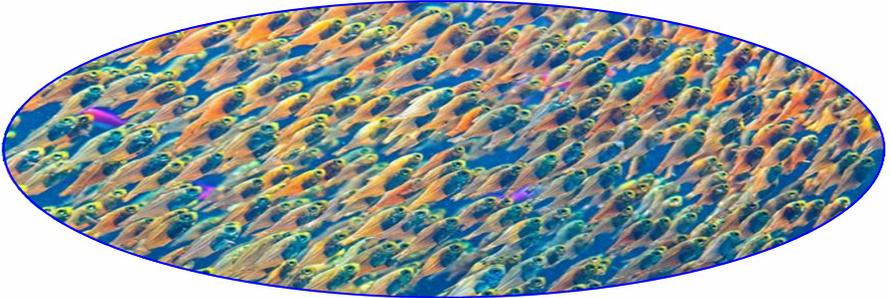
But, chances are your sponge is used to others utilizing these techniques.

- Books, trainings, webinars and other meeting facilitation resources abound. Try looking on the internet or contacting professional organizations for more information and instruction on conducting effective meetings. The book *'Roberts Rules of Order'* may be helpful to your group in establishing good meeting practices. There are condensed versions available at your local bookstore.

In the event that the coalition's strategies to neutralize the sea sponge are not effective or if the sponge threatens the existence of the coalition, leadership may need to make the difficult decision of asking the person to leave the coalition. Kindly, but firmly, asking the individual/organization to no longer participate in the coalition is a last, but possibly necessary resort.

School's Out

For some reason it seems as if every other community group has schools and schools of fish just waiting to volunteer, but for your coalition – school's out! You lack enough members to have an impact on your community.



There are approximately 28,000 different types of fish.

The first thing you need to do is take an honest look at your organization and ask some hard questions.

Some good questions to begin with are:

- Has the coalition always been small?
- If not, when did membership begin to decline?
- What other things happened at the same time the coalition began to decline?
- Have former members indicated why they no longer participate?
- Have there been events in the community which could impact the coalition's appeal?
- Is your coalition focusing on community needs?
- Does your coalition lack influence, general membership (large number of people), individuals willing to do the work of the coalition or a combination of the three?

The answers to these and other questions will help you determine the best way to chum the waters and attract a lot of fish.

First of all, you don't have to be the world record holding 1,402 lb. blue marlin to be important. After all, it is the plankton, which can be as small as .05 mm, that are the staple of sea life.

A small working coalition which is focused and dedicated can have a tremendous impact on the community.

- Determine if your problem is that the coalition *lacks members* or *lacks influence*. If the coalition lacks for members but has influence in the community, keep swimming. If it lacks influence, determine why and come up with a plan to address those reasons.
- Conducting a survey or interviews of former coalition members may help you determine why participation has declined. One coalition surveyed former members and found out that when the meeting time was changed from noon to 8am, parents were no longer able to attend on their lunch hour, and therefore dropped out of the coalition.

Many coalitions want to increase membership but don't know what to do with new members when they get them!

- If you are out trying to recruit volunteers, make sure they have something to do. Provide new members with an orientation of the organization, and give each person a way, *from the very beginning*, to meaningfully contribute .
- You may want to consider establishing different levels of membership. Key influencers in the community may be very supportive of your efforts but unable to attend meetings. Establishing an "Advisory Membership" may allow them to remain affiliated with the coalition, and allow you to utilize their name and the influence it carries, without having to attend the working meetings of the coalition. Just be sure to keep your advisory members up-to-date on the coalition's activities.
- An honest, confidential survey on the internal aspects of the coalition is also an important step in pulling together the needed information about coalition functioning. From this input, coalitions have determined that members didn't feel needed or weren't given important roles to play and therefore dropped out. Others have determined that the issue was something as simple as an inconvenient meeting time.

Coalition functioning measurement tools are readily available via the internet. See the Additional Resources section on the back cover for suggested websites.

Jellyfish

The translucent nature of jellyfish makes them difficult to see. Your coalition may come into contact with jellyfish, things unseen, such as groups opposing your initiatives, other events or incidents which grab the attention of your community or internal tensions.

Jellyfish are found all over the world in every ocean and sea. There are also some species which are known to live in the fresh waters of lakes and rivers. Jellyfish are capable of motion but do not swim. They depend upon the currents, tides and winds for all horizontal motion. They come in different shapes, sizes and colors. A jellyfish actually has a translucent or transparent covering. The colors that we see are due to its own pigments or those of micro-organisms that are living within it.

One of the biggest problems jellyfish pose to humans, and coalitions, is the risk of being stung by their tentacles. While a lot of jellyfish stings do not cause any harm, some of them are extremely deadly and can cause severe reactions. This is also true for the jellyfish your coalition may encounter.

Of course the best way to deal with a jellyfish sting is to prevent it in the first place! This is one of the many reasons your coalition should:

- *Conduct a SWOT Analysis each year.* SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of a project or organization. It involves identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving the objective. Strengths and weaknesses are internal aspects, while opportunities and threats are external to the organization.

The Lion's Mane Jellyfish, the world's largest, can have tentacles in excess of 120 feet long and a bell of more than 7 feet in diameter.



- By identifying threats and weaknesses early, the coalition can develop a strategy for addressing them. For example, if your coalition is working on a local ordinance, a threat may be the opposition's main argument against the ordinance. By addressing that argument before the opposition, or at least being prepared to counter the argument, the coalition may be able to neutralize the threat.
- Identifying the weaknesses of the coalition is also important in that it will allow you to address internal issues before they cause irreparable damage to the coalition.

There are many online resources if you are interested in conducting a SWOT Analysis for your coalition. The following websites may be helpful:

[Www.sprc.org/library/swot.pdf](http://www.sprc.org/library/swot.pdf)

[Www.managementhelp.org](http://www.managementhelp.org)

[Www.planonline.org](http://www.planonline.org)

	Helpful To achieving the objective	Harmful To achieving the objective
Internal Origin Attributes of the organization	S Strengths	W Weaknesses
External Origin Attributes of the environment	O Opportunities	T Threats

Unfortunately, you will not be able to anticipate all the possible jellyfish you may encounter. In this case there are two strategies which may help depending on the situation: 1. Be prepared to respond quickly in a well-thought-out, strategic manner, or 2. Like the jellyfish, go with the flow.

Surf 'n' Turf

Surf 'n' Turf is a popular item on the menus of many restaurants. However, the turf or "turf-ism" we are talking about here isn't something you eat but something that can eat away at your coalition. Turf-ism is the non-cooperation or conflict between organizations with seemingly common goals or interests caused by the perception of unequal power (or control) or having to surrender more power than is acceptable to an organization.

These "turf battles" can take place for three fundamental reasons, all related to the perceived effect on power:

1. If one organization perceives the other as a direct and regular competitor for resources that are not likely to be shared;
2. If one organization perceives a "marginal cost" to the proposed cooperation in money, time or energy greater than perceived benefits of collaboration;
3. The degree to which the organization feels it is flexible to change its current goals, tasks and philosophy to adopt the course of action being proposed.

So, what do you do when your coalition identifies a hearty helping of surf 'n' turf? First of all, determine if the conflict is task oriented (substantive) or relationship oriented (affective).

- Substantive conflicts can be alleviated by utilizing an orderly, established problem-solving process to find a solution that can then diffuse much of the emotional element.
- Affective conflicts are often emotionally charged and may be related to a shared history among individuals or groups. Knowing the history may help to understand the conflict, but will not necessarily help resolve it. If at all possible translate the relationship oriented conflict into a task related conflict .

Focusing on the whole coalition instead of conflicting organizations as well as the established, common goal of the coalition will also help minimize conflict. You may even find that by increasing open

communication it will be discovered that the conflict was merely a misunderstanding or lack of information. When necessary, utilize the coalition's *conflict resolution policy*. If the coalition does not have such a policy, consider adopting one.

As the old saying goes, "How do you eat surf 'n' turf?
One bite at a time."

*Keep eating away at the turf issues in the coalition and
swimming toward your common goal.*

The traditional surf 'n' turf consists of lobster and steak, however you can find many combinations of seafood or fish along with beef in local restaurants.



Surf
'n'
Turf

Kentucky's Prevention Enhancement Site System

The Prevention Enhancement Site system is a network of **specialized sites created to conduct** research and provide technical assistance and training to Regional Prevention Centers and community groups across Kentucky. The following Prevention Enhancement Sites are available to assist Kentucky communities:

Alcohol

Tobacco

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Faith-Based

Methamphetamine

The PES network, funded by the Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, Division of Behavioral Health has been instrumental in helping communities develop and implement comprehensive prevention strategies.

For more information on the PES network, please call Marilyn Rodgers, Division of Behavioral Health at 502-564-2880, ext. 4405

This publication was created by the *Alcohol Prevention Enhancement Site*.

For more information, please call 859-225-3296.

Additional Resources

Additional coalition resources can be found at the following websites:

<http://mhmr.ky.gov/mhsas/sa.asp>

www.cadca.org

<http://captus.samhsa.gov/>

www.fadaa.org

<http://ctb.ky.edu/en/>

<http://wilderresearch.org/tools/cfi/index.php>

<http://wch.uhs.wic.edu/01-Prevention/>

www.cyfernet.org

www.cacsh.org

<http://partnershiptool.net>

<http://coalitionwork.com>