

# Setting Up a Community Action Team (CAT)

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## What is a CAT?

For individuals who are ready to become involved in a sustained effort to prevent domestic violence, joining or forming a Community Action Team (CAT) is an effective way to build momentum for change. In the Transforming Communities model, volunteers join together as a team, decide on a specific prevention project, and plan strategies to achieve the goal of creating safety for women and girls in their community. A team of five to ten community volunteers form the core of the CAT. The CAT meets between two and four times a month to plan activities for a local campaign. CAT members learn that “community ownership” is the key to successful organizing. The principle of community ownership is rooted in the belief that community members themselves--rather than outside “experts”--are essential for generating solutions to problems within their own communities. Groups may select a peer as facilitator for meetings or call upon staff from a domestic violence organization or community education program to serve as organizers, providing training and leadership, until the CAT learns to function independently.

## Why Form a CAT?

According to a 1995 national survey conducted by the Family Violence Prevent Fund and the Domestic Violence Advertising Council:

82% of Americans would do something to reduce domestic violence if they knew how to help in a way other than intervening in a specific incident of violence.

55% want to take action but do not know what they can do to help.

A CAT provides the structure and focus needed to transform individual intentions into collective action. The excitement of sharing a collective vision, purpose, and set of goals keeps people energized and involved. The CAT structure helps keep the group’s activities connected to its long-range goals. CAT members quickly discover that their ability to effect change is much greater when they work together as a group than when each person acts alone.

## What is the CAT Organizer’s Role?

The organizer provides training to team members, facilitates team meetings, and helps the group learn how to function as a team. Primary duties of the organizer are to:

- Develop leadership skills among the CAT members.
- Promote the perspective that each member has skills and expertise to contribute to the CAT.
- Educate the CAT about domestic violence and activism on an ongoing basis.
- Promote cooperative decision-making and conflict resolution among team members.

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## How Does a CAT Work?

Because the CAT's work is grounded in principles of cooperation and equality, *how* the CAT does its work is as important as *what* it accomplishes. Running a CAT involves a delicate balance between *process* (how the work is done), *outcomes* (what is accomplished), and *relationships* (how members relate to one another). A primary goal for CAT members is to build cooperative working relationships among team members based on respect for difference and each person's dignity. In the Transforming Communities model, a CAT functions as a *team of equals*. This means that team members:

- Share responsibility for decisions, activities, and leadership.
- Value each person's input and experience equally.
- Work to develop trusting and respectful relationships among all members.
- Strive to create a sense of community that reflects the group's common vision.

## What Are the Goals of a CAT?

Before a CAT can plan its campaign, it needs to establish a set of goals. Goals help guide the team's decision-making. The goals should reflect CAT members' interests and priorities and be action-oriented. Examples of strategic goals that a CAT might adopt are:

Educate the community about domestic violence and motivate community members to take both individual and collective action to stop violence against women.

Hold men accountable for the full spectrum of their violent and abusive behavior and for changing the underlying attitudes and beliefs that support abusive treatment of women. Encourage men to become advocates for other men to change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors similarly.

Educate women to understand how they have been socialized to accept violence and unequal social status. Encourage them to challenge and change these injustices.

Impact the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of all individuals residing in the county on the issue of domestic violence.

Invite people to participate in building a social change movement to end men's violence against women.

Create local policy changes in support of ending domestic violence.

Adapted from Transforming Communities' organizing kit, *Community Mobilization for Domestic Violence Prevention, and manual, How to Facilitate Community Action Teams*.  
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