

The Six “R’s” of Participation

These reasons explain why people participate in all kinds of groups, organizations, or associations. We are a nation of joiners. Our neighborhood coalitions can be successful when we design organizations that seek to meet the needs of all of our members.

Recognition

People want to be recognized for their leadership to serve the members of their communities and organizations. We all want to be recognized, initially by the members of our own group and then by members of other groups, for our personal contribution to efforts to build a better quality of life.

TIP: Recognition can be given through awards and dinners, highlighting contributions and praising and naming at public events.

Respect

Everyone wants respect. By joining in community activities, we seek the respect of our peers. People often find their values, culture, or traditions are not respected in the workplace or community. People seek recognition and respect for themselves and their values by joining community organizations and coalitions.

TIPS: Don't schedule all of your planning meetings during regular working hours--this may exclude many grassroots leaders who hold other jobs. Meet in the evenings and provide dinner and child care, or at least meet late enough so that those attending can take the time to provide dinner and child care for their families. Translate materials and meeting agendas into languages other than English, if necessary, and provide translators at meetings.

Role

We all need to feel needed. It is a cliché, but it's true. We want to belong to a group which gives us a prominent role and where our unique contribution can be appreciated. Not everyone searches for the same role. Groups must find a role for everyone if they expect to maintain membership.

TIP: Grassroots leaders and members have had the experience of being "tokens" on coalitions. Create roles with real power and substance.

Relationship

Organizations are organized networks of relationships. It is often a personal invitation which convinces us to join an organization. People join organizations for personal reasons, to make new friends, and to broaden a base of support and/or influence. Organizations draw us into a wider context of community relationships, which encourage accountability, mutual support, and responsibility.

TIP: Provide real opportunities for networking with other institutions and leaders.

Reward

Organizations and coalitions attract new members and maintain old members when the rewards of membership outweigh the costs. Of course, not everyone is looking for the same kind of rewards. Identify the public and private rewards which respond to the self-interests of members in order to sustain their role in the coalition.

TIP: Schedule social time and interaction into the agenda of the coalition where families can participate. Make sure there is an ongoing way to share resources and information, including funding opportunities and access to people in power.

Results

Nothing works like results! An organization which cannot “deliver the goods” will not continue to attract people and resources.

TIP: To many grassroots leaders and residents, visible projects and activities that directly impact on conditions and issues in their communities are the results they are looking for in return for their participation.

