Section 1: Get Organized

Introduction:

You have a few people — maybe only a few — with a common goal of wanting to do something about the problem of youth suicide in your community. Your first tasks will be to recruit more people to help, and to create a simple group structure. Take time at the beginning to create a sustainable volunteer organization; it can make all the difference in your success.

In growing your organization, you will look for people with dedication, skills, talents, position, interest and/or community-minded spirit. With more members, you'll have more hands to share the work you will plan and implement together. You'll also have more opinions, needs, desires, conflicting schedules and priorities to balance.

This is why it's smart to establish a few parameters to guide your way, to set up roles and responsibilities and a few guidelines. You can use the brief questions provided to document intentions for the group, or the sample bylaws if you want a more formal structure.

Patience, planning, and listening are three valuable attributes for setting up a new group. There will be paperwork, meetings and decisions to be made, and everything takes longer than you think. Creating an inclusive, fun and efficient setting for your meetings and activities will go a long way to making the experience rewarding for all.

The goal of this section is to:

1.1 Contact new members and potential members
   A few suggestions for people to recruit and tools to get started, including:
   ▪ Sample "talking points" for recruitment
   ▪ Sample contact sheet
   ▪ Sample welcome meeting agenda
   ▪ Member questions

1.2 Define Roles and Responsibilities
   Leadership is the key component for effective community action. But even a great leader can't do it all alone. Figure out how to spread the workload.
   ▪ Define leadership and other key roles
   ▪ Simple Structure: Ground rules
   ▪ Sample Bylaws

1.3 Meeting Guidelines
   Define how you will spend the time you are together to stay efficient and focused.
   ▪ Tips for Effective meetings

> "Individuals in many roles and at all levels of community and society... can make a unique and productive contribution to the prevention of suicidal behaviors."
>
> — UN/World Health Organization National Strategy Guidelines, 1996

1.1 Recruit Members

Whom do we ask?
The people who are most likely to become involved are those who have an interest or stake in the issue, and those who have been directly affected by it. Stakeholders include:

- Survivors of suicide: family or friends of those who have died by suicide are the most active group. However, it's important to postpone prevention work for at least six months to a year after the suicide, for the grieving process.
- Young people
- School district personnel; it's very important to have ties to the schools
- Local Health departments
- Community officials from government and tribes
- Health care and emergency services providers
- Mental health agencies and professionals
- Drug/alcohol agencies
- Law enforcement
- Churches and Clergy
- Community organizations (neighborhood associations, youth advocacy groups, etc.)
- Medical examiners/coroners
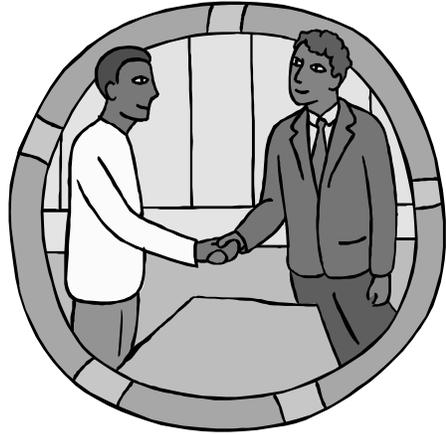
In addition, it's a good idea to recruit influential people, those you consider "movers and shakers" in your community. These folks are known for getting things done, have specialized skills or positions, or are connected to others of influence in business, government, or faith communities. These include:

- Active, civic-minded people (e.g. Rotary, business service clubs)
- People with ties to local media
- People who may be retired, who have time to commit to a volunteer cause
- People with computer expertise, design, promotion, or marketing skills

Steps to Successful Recruitment
1. Your circle of friends and associates is a good place to start recruiting people to join you. Brainstorm a rough list of candidates from your contacts/social circle.
2. Assign current members to contact at least one person from their list.
3. Be friendly and upbeat in tone. Although youth suicide can be a hard topic to bring up, focus on the fact that your group wants to make a positive difference.
4. Use a brief list of talking points to make it clear what you intend to do.
5. Set up a welcome meeting, and invite potential members. Plan to have refreshments.
6. Keep a list of all who have been contacted. Those who may not be able to participate may be willing to serve as advisors, or be part of a resource list.
7. Assign task of maintaining the group contacts and resource list.

> "It's not *what* you know, it's *who* you know."
>
> — Anonymous

Worksheet: Talking Points for Recruiting

The initial contact with a potential volunteer is crucial. First impressions can be lasting. Make sure you are honest and enthusiastic and present your values as clearly as possible.

Here's a suggested script to get you started:

"You may or may not know about _____ (youth suicide in your area)

"Youth suicide is a problem in our community, but it can be prevented – if only more people knew how."

"We are forming a group in _____ (your area) because we want to do something about it."

"The group will define our mission and activities together."

"You would be a very valuable addition to our group because _____

(mention the person's unique skills, position or connection to the issue).

"Could you come to an informal get-together, to meet others who are interested and talk about ideas?"

Optional: mention any other people the contact knows who are involved.

"The meeting will be held:

_____ Day/date/time/place

Thanks so much for your time!"

Notes _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Contact Form
You can copy this form to keep track of potential members, advisors and resources.

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

_____

Referred by: _____

Contacted by / Date: _____

Notes: _____

_____

_____

_____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

_____

Referred by: _____

Contacted by / Date: _____

Notes: _____

_____

_____

_____

Welcome Meeting: Sample Agenda

A welcome meeting is an opportunity to meet the people you have asked to be involved. It's a time to get acquainted, to share the general intent of the group, and start to discuss the beginnings of group structure.

- Offer refreshments at the beginning as people arrive.
- Have a sign-in sheet.
- Establish who will facilitate the meeting and who will keep notes. Those roles will become more formalized as the group grows.

An agenda to help keep the meeting focused

1. Leader(s) introduce themselves
2. Briefly overview the agenda for the meeting. The focus is less on youth suicide prevention (not yet) but on establishing and organizing an effective group.
3. Tell briefly why you are starting the group
4. Explain that the purpose of the group is to:
   - Get organized,
   - Get educated on the issue,
   - Get Active, through mission and action planning and implementation, and
   - Stay Active
   - You could show the Toolkit, noting the direction and support of YSPP.
5. Ask each person to introduce themselves. Part of the introduction could include a short (less than 5 minutes) answer to any or all of these questions.
   - Have you been in any other volunteer groups?
   - What was your experience like?
   - Did any issues or conflicts arise? What happened?
   - Was it rewarding? Why or why not?
   - Is the group still active? Why or why not?
6. Short discussion: What makes a small volunteer group effective? Compile any suggestions.
7. Structure: Discuss Ground Rules (page 15), Roles and Responsibilities (page 13-14)
8. Membership: Ask attendees if they would like to become a member of the new group. If time allows, review Questions for Members (page 12).

Notes on effective volunteer groups:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Questions for Members

Coalitions need to work effectively and efficiently as possible. Efficiency means that resources are used wisely, wastes are avoided, and the maximum output is obtained.

By identifying what skills coalition members have, what they can do, what they can't do, and what they are willing to do will help the coalition work efficiently.

This questionnaire should be completed by every person who agrees to become a member. It is used to identify skills the group currently has and skills the coalition may need to recruit in order to develop and implement an effective plan.

What kind of things are you willing to do for this coalition?

What kinds of things are you capable of doing for this coalition but would rather not?

What kinds of things are you absolutely not willing to do for this coalition?

What do I expect from this coalition if I am to be a member?

What additional skills do you think we need to recruit?

1.2 Define Roles and Responsibilities: Leadership

Leadership is simply the vision to see a better future, and to want to do something about it. Strong leadership is the primary "make-or-break" factor in a new volunteer group. If you don't have a committed leader or co-leaders, your fledgling group may not have sustaining focus and energy to keep going. It's good to recognize the important contributions leaders make, and also to consider what should happen when their energy flags.

Leader(s): _____

Leader Job Description:

- Meeting Facilitator/Chairperson - Creates agenda. Keeps people focused. Creates an inclusive and positive atmosphere (see Meeting Tips on page 17).
- Cheerleader: Maintains team energy. Moves activities forward.
- Diplomat: Resolve tensions that may arise.

Checklist of Leadership Responsibilities

Prepare for meetings.
_____Circulate an agenda in advance or at beginning of meetings.
_____State the purpose and goals of the meeting.
_____Invite the people needed to accomplish the goals.

Confront issues.
_____Lead the group through the issues. Take a stand on tough issues.
_____Seek definition of the solution. Bring the meeting to the point of decision.
_____Ensure that assignments are made and deadlines set.

Stick to the plan.
_____Establish and adhere to participation guidelines.
_____Be firm and assertive, yet, at the same time, fair to all participants.
_____Encourage others to speak out and state their new ideas.
_____Be open-minded to new possibilities when ideas are expressed.
_____Adhere to the start and stop times.

Follow-up.
_____Confirm assignments and deadlines.
_____Acknowledge help and significant contributions by others.
_____Identify ways to encourage others to take on leadership roles.

Planning for continuation:

Many groups do not continue when the original leadership leaves the group or has less time and attention available. It may not be possible to resolve this issue at the beginning, but your group may want to consider:

How long of a commitment is your leadership willing to make?_____

_____

Who will help keep the group together when leaders need to step down?_____

_____

Other Key Roles

You may not initially have enough 'warm bodies' to assign to all these roles, or even need all these jobs at the beginning. Just assign the ones that make sense.

Secretary/Recorder: _____

Keeps meeting notes, tracks decisions, updates worksheets, maintains tasks and to-do lists in this toolkit and other records. Can take minutes or use the Meeting Summary form on page 20. Should be comfortable with email.

Meeting Logistics: _____

It can make the leader's job easier to assign someone else to be responsible for organizing group meetings, preferably someone familiar with e-mail. Sets the next meeting day, time and place, sends each member of the group a reminder ahead of the meeting topic, day, time and place. The logistics person may also plan or delegate the refreshments – a key component of keeping meetings fun!

Moderator/Timekeeper: _____

Assists the leader by keeping time and discussion on topic.

Treasurer: _____

You will likely not have a budget in the beginning, but may choose someone to keep track of any expenses and donations.

Public Relations: _____

Handles press releases and announcements. Comfortable with fax and email.

Membership: _____

Keeps track of membership contact information, follows up on outreach to new members. Could be a person with computer skills to keep a simple database.

Define Ground Rules

Group structures can range from simple to very elaborate. Even small and informal groups can benefit from establishing a few key ground rules at the beginning. These simple questions can be answered by the group and used to help with recruitment.

Informal ground rules: what do we expect?

What do we expect from our members? _____

_____

_____

_____

What benefits do members get from being a part of the coalition? _____

_____

_____

_____

Does anyone discuss these benefits with prospective or new members? _____

_____

_____

_____

What happens if someone says they can't do something the coalition expects? _____

_____

_____

_____

Sample Bylaws

Bylaws are more formal documents for establishing group rules, and while not necessary may be helpful. You may use this as a general outline for your own bylaws if you wish.

Article I: Name and Purpose.

1: The name of the organization shall be _____

2: (Name of organization) is organized for the purpose of _____

_____

Article II. Membership.

1. In order to become a member of (name of organization), potential members must meet the following requirements:

_____

2: Members of (name of organization) have the following rights and responsibilities:

_____

Article III. Officers and decision-making.

1: Officers' titles and main duties are as follows:

a. President: _____

_____

b. Vice President: _____

_____

c. _____: _____

_____

d. _____: _____

_____

e. _____: _____

_____

2: Procedures for filling and vacating offices.
An officer shall be dropped for excess absences from his or her office if he or she has _____ unexcused absences from meetings in a year. An officer may also be removed under the following circumstances:

_____

Section 3: Committees: _____

_____

_____

Section 4: Decisions

1. Decisions are to be made as follows: _____

_____

_____

2. At least _____% of the total membership must be present in order to have a quorum.

3. Amendments to the bylaws must be made as follows: _____

_____

_____

Article IV. General, special, and meetings.

1: Regular meetings are to be held as follows: _____

_____

_____

Meetings may be called by the following people:_____

For meetings, notice _____ (in writing, via phone, via email) of at least

_____ (days/weeks/months) must be given to members.

2: Special meetings may be called by _____

(who has authority to call them) under the following circumstances:_____

_____

_____

These bylaws were approved at a meeting of the _____ (officers, general membership) on _____(date).

SOURCE: sample bylaws adapted from: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_tools_1098.htm

1.3 Meeting Tips

Meeting etiquette
Maintaining group harmony is the first and most important victory for any group. Remember not to talk over people in meetings. Meeting as a group on a regular basis will strengthen your organization. Meetings provide an opportunity to discuss the plans and needs of the group. They should be fun and effective. Everyone should feel welcome and included in group discussions.

A code of ethics sets out the rules for acceptable behavior during meetings and while working on projects. You can use the form on the following page to record your agreements. An example:

- Always respect other people's opinions
- Speak for yourself, not others
- Speak to others directly
- Be honest
- Listen when others are speaking
- Silence is all right
- No fighting
- What is said or happens in here stays in here

Discussion tips: Informal communication works wonders. Dialogue is much more likely to be achieved during informal sessions and opportunities than around a formal table or highly structured meeting. Allowing generous amounts of time for refreshments enables multiple conversations to take place. This will help the flow of ideas. The more people talk, the more elaboration occurs. A series of sessions can help a conversation to unfold. This will give people an opportunity to work through their feelings, have their concerns heard, and to move forward.

Avoid Unproductive Meetings. Many people dislike meetings because:

1. Too many meetings don't have agendas that are followed.
2. Unproductive meetings stray off the agenda.
3. Unproductive meetings don't result in any actions or decisions.
4. Poorly run meetings are a huge waste of time.

TARAC[*] (Time, Agenda, Roles/Rules, Actions, Commitments)
Keeping these items in mind can help make meetings more efficient and productive:
   Time – Set a time to start, finish and handle important parts of the meeting. Stick with the schedule!
   Agenda – Publish an agenda before the meeting so people can prepare for anything that affects them.
   Roles/Rules – Tell people what their role is in the meeting (vote, speak, just listen). Ground rules help you run a better meeting.
   Actions – Focus on making decisions. When a decision is made, record it.
   Commitments – For each action or decision, solicit a vocal commitment from the person who is going to carry it out. Record that information.

Tips to avoid Tension

- Everyone needs to actively participate at every meeting
- Respect everyone you work with
- Agree to disagree when necessary
- Recognize when there is tension and resolve it immediately

*SOURCE: http://www.delalbright.com/Facilitation/meetings.htm

Meeting Ethics

You could compile a set of agreements from the feedback at the welcome meeting.

We agree to these meeting ethics:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Meeting Summary Sheet

I. Basic Information

Meeting of _____

Date and Time _____

Place _____

Facilitator(s) _____

Persons Present _____

_____

_____

II. Decisions Made

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

III. Follow-Up Responsibilities (who will do what by when)

PERSON	TASK	DUE

IV. Incomplete Items (Next Steps)

_____

_____

_____

Summary Prepared by_____Date _____

SOURCE: Community Toolkit: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_tools_1153.htm