

community and make recommendations regarding the changes needed, often with little or no input from community members.

Although planning is still often done in this manner, community groups are increasingly demanding involvement. They are tired of outsiders coming in and telling them what is right for their community. Thus, community groups are gaining access to the planning process nationwide. Social work roles in the social planning process include planner, researcher, manager, proposal writer, and negotiator.

Program Development and Community Liaison The purpose of program development is the creation of a new service or expansion of an existing service or program to meet community needs. The process involves conducting a needs assessment, planning new services specifically designed to meet community needs, and implementing and evaluating those services. To be effective, the program development process should include input from all those who will be affected by the new program. This includes current clients, potential clients, agency staff, community leaders, and community residents. Practitioner roles include planner, proposal writer, mediator, facilitator, and liaison with the community.

Political and Social Action The political and social action model focuses on helping citizens gain political power and a voice in the decision-making process. The aim of this model is to increase social justice by pressuring political and corporate leaders to replace harmful policies or practices with ones that benefit disadvantaged and low-income groups. The model attempts to increase participatory democracy by engaging citizens who have traditionally been left out of the process.

Public and elected officials and corporate leaders are often the targets of political and social action campaigns. These include efforts to stop corporations from polluting the air and water in low-income communities, increase funding for education or social services, pressure legislators to support legislation to ensure access to health insurance for all members of society, pass legislation to require stiffer penalties for hate crimes, and elect a legislator who supports progressive causes to replace one who supports policies that harm low-income and marginalized groups. Practitioner roles include advocate, organizer, educator, and researcher.

Coalition Building Coalitions are formed when separate groups come together to work collectively on an issue of concern. Joining a coalition allows groups to increase their power base and available resources while also maintaining their autonomy. Most groups do not have the number of people or the resources necessary to create large-scale change on an issue. However, when a number of groups join together, their combined membership is large enough and strong enough to influence policy and demand additional resources.

Coalitions usually focus on a single issue and are often time limited. They may join together to support or oppose a specific piece of legislation or to

address a common problem. For example, the federal government may propose dramatically reducing funding for environmental protection. Various groups may come together to oppose the funding reduction—environmental groups whose purpose is to protect the environment, public health groups who fear increased pollution will harm citizens, children's advocates who are concerned about increased asthma risks, and tribal groups who want to protect water flowing through their lands.

Coalitions present a number of interesting challenges to community practitioners. Groups that join together may agree on one issue, yet disagree on many others. There may be tensions over who gets to make decisions, who speaks for the group, how resources are divided, and what direction the coalition should take. Social work practitioners often take on the roles of mediator and negotiator to help keep coalitions together. A practitioner may also act as a spokesperson and teacher.

Whichever approach practitioners decide to use, to be effective in community practice they must have a strong understanding of the population with whom they are working and of their own biases, strengths, and challenges. They must also have good interpersonal and critical thinking skills and a lot of patience, persistence, and passion.

Ethical Challenges in Working with Communities **LO 7**

Community practitioners face a number of unique ethical challenges. Some of the biggest challenges come in the form of the process or product debate. As mentioned earlier, many efforts to create social change focus on both internal capacity building (process goals) and external task accomplishment (product goals). Process goals involve working with group members to help them improve their skills and become increasingly self-sufficient. Achieving these goals takes time, and tension can result from trying to build the capacity of members and also trying to achieve an external goal.

Social work values stress the importance of client self-determination. This suggests the importance of process goals, which help community members develop skills that let them take more control over their lives. Yet communities often have limited time available to address an issue of great concern. For example, a city council is planning to close a neighborhood elementary school that predominantly serves low-income students of color. Residents believe that sending their children to schools elsewhere in the city will be harmful. Action has to be taken quickly for the city wants to close the school in less than two months. The organizer can put together a protest event and notify the media and the public in a short period of time. This would meet the product goal. Meeting the process goal requires that the residents themselves take on many or all of the tasks so that they will learn skills to increase their self-determination and continue the work in the future. However, because they have not done these tasks before, it will likely take the residents much longer to accomplish them, possibly threatening the product goal.