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RESEARCH

Setting group rules for a coalition research project

By Cynthia Allen and Melissa Biel

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts—at least that was the premise behind the American Board for Nursing Specialties (ABNS) coalition research project completed in 2006. The ABNS Research Committee created an alliance of organizations that offer specialty nursing certifications to study the perceived value of certification among certified nurses, non-certified nurses, and nurse managers.

“It was a topic that all member agencies were interested in, and they felt could be tackled collectively,” says ABNS CEO Bonnie Niebuhr, CAE. “Only by recruiting multiple organizations to dedicate resources and engage their specialty nurses in the project could we complete such a widespread study.”

Research by a coalition has many benefits, including a larger (and often more representative) sample size, division of costs, and wide distribution and promotion of the results. Everyone bought into the project idea and the value it would bring to the industry. Without a set of ground rules as a guide, though, the research committee feared the project would quickly derail.

“We worried about getting caught up in details, missing deliverables, running over budget, or losing interest among the stakeholders,” Niebuhr says. “We needed a Robert’s Rules of Order for this type of project, and it really didn’t exist.”

To save the project from getting caught in red tape, ABNS used the following ground rules and completed it on time and on budget.

Invest power and authority to make decisions. Each participating organization must provide a representative who has decision-making authority to keep the project moving forward without having to seek approval from higher-ups.

Keep project participation voluntary. Organizations that feel forced into the project won’t be enthusiastic about it and will probably slow it down.

Hire a research coordinator who represents the whole project and isn’t influenced by an individual organization or participant. He or she can serve as a project administrator and reduce the need for administrative resources from participating agencies.

Agree on the purpose and end products of the research project, as well as on how decisions will be made (consensus or majority rules, for instance).

Outline the research process and assign tasks—literature review, sample selection, development of data-collection tool, data collection, data analysis, and so forth.

Develop an agreement for ownership of and access to the data, privacy, financial commitment of each participating organization, and communication of findings before starting.

Agree on a timeline, but be sure that all participants understand the need for flexibility. Require the project coordinator to manage the timeline and provide updates or revisions as necessary.

Don’t get bogged down in writing policies or bylaws. Rules can be expressed in meeting minutes or a concise agreement.

For ABNS two ground rules reigned supreme—empowering the research coordinator to manage the process and communicating updates and deadlines to all coalition members. Treating the project as a separate entity allowed the coordinator to avoid politics and focus on the end goal of providing valuable data to the nursing community.

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PERSONAL FINANCE

Retirement ready?

The 17th annual *Retirement Confidence Survey*, sponsored by the Employee Benefit Research Institute and Matthew Greenwald & Associates with underwriting support from the Principal Financial Group, was recently released. Here are some findings; the full report is available at www.ebri.org.

30% of respondents are “very confident” that they have enough money to live comfortably through retirement.

42% are “somewhat confident.”

17% of workers experienced a cut in level of retirement benefits offered by their employers.