



Building and Strengthening a Coalition for Effective Advocacy

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Why Coalitions Are Essential

- More votes=more power
- Increased capacity and efficiency
- Increased diversity
- More credibility
- More expertise
- Sustainable beyond the current leaders



The March on Washington in 1963 was an amazing reflection of the power of coalition-building.

Envisioning an Effective Coalition

What does an effective coalition:

- Look like?
- Feel like?

Jot down your thoughts below on what comes to mind and aim for this when doing your coalition work.

Building a Coalition: The Essentials

- 1) Confirm the need for a new coalition versus joining an existing one
- 2) Develop and share a vision/purpose statement
- 3) Co-develop principles/values and norms
- 4) Engage stakeholders
- 5) Build relationships
- 6) Identify and pursue a short-term “win” (this could include wins such as hosting a learning event, educating a certain number of policymakers about your issue, etc.)

Coalitions: Strength in Diversity

“If you're in a coalition and you're comfortable, you know it's not a broad enough coalition.”

Bernice Johnson Reagon

composer, historian, musician, and civil rights activist

Engaging Stakeholders Across Sectors:

Public Sector, including:

- Elected officials
- Government Agencies
- School boards

- Police/Courts

Private Sector, including:

- Financial services
- Energy companies
- Construction
- Healthcare

Civic Sector, including:

- The people!
- Civic associations
- Advocacy groups
- Labor unions

Which sector(s) are you engaging well now? Which one(s) are you not engaging well? Which specific groups across any of these sectors-whether at the local or state level-do you want to engage more?

Elements of a Strong Coalition



Learning/Sharing

Exchange of knowledge and skills among members



Communications

Strategies for internal and external messaging



Policy and Advocacy

Efforts to influence policy outcomes



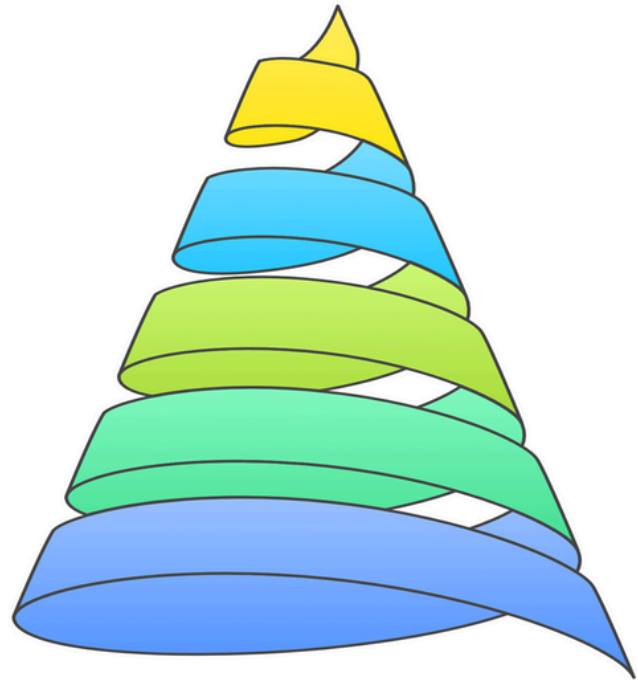
Governance

Framework for decision-making and oversight



Relational Trust

Foundation of effective coalition dynamics



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Foundation: Relational Trust

- This term was coined by two researchers studying how schools work, but it can be applied to any professional community
- They identified 4 considerations for developing this trust:
 - Respect
 - Personal Regard
 - Competence in Core Responsibilities
 - Personal Integrity
- Also developed through:
 - time, listening, being curious, and creating space and opportunity for people's voices and contributions

How are you practicing relational trust in your coalition now? Jot down one or two ways you're practicing it.

Element: Governance

- Define member expectations (time, resources, etc.)
- Establish decision-making processes (voting, steering committee, working groups, etc.)
- Center the voices of people most impacted: Recruit people most impacted by the issue(s) and invite them to take on leadership roles
- Identify backbone support: Identify an organization or a few people to lead and convene the coalition

What kinds of governance, if any, does your coalition have in place now?

Element: Policy and Advocacy

- Develop a shared understanding of the policy landscape
- Consider creating a SWOT analysis for your issue(s) against this landscape

- Develop policy goals for the upcoming legislative session, and an advocacy strategy with key activities
- Establish relationships with key policymakers
- Eventually, develop and publish a policy agenda aligned with your coalition's principles
- Coordinate your advocacy with other aligned coalitions/organizations

Which of these actions above has your coalition already done/is working on?

Element: Communications

- Send out regular communications to members
- Develop talking points that members can use
- Establish relationships with the media to both pitch to them and be a trusted resource
- Create a public-facing one-pager of the coalition to use in recruitment and advocacy
- Eventually, develop a communications plan to educate and celebrate your issues that will bolster your advocacy
- Consider creating and using social media handles

Which of these actions above has your coalition already done/is working on?

Element: Learning/Sharing Knowledge and Skills

- Organize formal and informal ways to share knowledge and skills
- Ask people to host a site visit, lunch and learn, or other ways to learn from one another
- Capture and share best practices
- Look for research and evaluation partners from local colleges/universities, nonprofits, community foundations, etc.

Which of these actions above has your coalition already done/is working on?

Reflecting on the Coalition Elements

When you think about a coalition you are in currently, which of the elements listed above (relational trust, governance, policy/advocacy, communications, learning/sharing knowledge and skills) do you feel is the strongest right now? Which has the most room for improvement?

If you are not currently involved in a coalition, which of these elements are you most excited about working on? Why?

Lessons Learned from Mary's Experience Leading and Facilitating Coalitions

- Be clear on and able to articulate the coalition vision/purpose and how it aligns with members' priorities
- Co-create specific goals to work towards
- Be clear on the vision and flexible on the strategy and tactics
- Balance time for both whole-group and 1:1 meetings
- Become an amazing listener, facilitator, and consensus-builder
- Keep people engaged and energized
- Model and reciprocate the values and norms you want to encourage
- Stay motivated by your long-term vision while acting and adapting to what is needed right now

Which of these lessons resonate the most with you from your experience with coalitions? Would you add any other lessons? Jot them down here:

Strengthening a Coalition

Once you have built a coalition, focus on these steps to continuously strengthen it.

Relational Trust:

- Continue to cultivate relationships through whole-group, small group, and 1:1 conversations

Governance:

- Continuously assess other stakeholders to engage: “Who are we missing?” “Who else should be here?”
- Refine governance processes (e.g. add a steering committee, working groups, leadership rotations, etc.)
- Set up and use shared tools (e.g. Google Drive, etc.)
- Seek funding for the coalition
- Create pathways/rotations for new leadership
- Reflect on progress and how to continue to strengthen the coalition

Policy and Advocacy:

- Create and share a policy agenda
- Organize group advocacy activities (state legislative day, sign-on letters, etc.)

- Cultivate champions

Communications:

- Organize public events (site visits, panels, etc.)
- Create social media handle(s) for outreach and advocacy
- Celebrate progress and wins, both informally and publicly

Learning/Sharing:

- Organize regular convenings to learn and share about issues and best practices

Reflection: Which of these steps listed above from any of the elements do you want to aim to do next in your coalition? (Feel free to list just one or a few you want to tackle in the coming days and weeks).

Strengthening a Coalition: Assessing Your Impact Beyond Funding

Questions to reflect on-jot down your reflections to one or more of these questions below.

Which groups and individuals are now part of our coalition and advocating with us that were not involved before?

How are we centering the voices of people most impacted by our issues? Are they driving our advocacy? Are they being heard more and understood better?

Which groups and individuals have we helped to become aware of our priorities who were not aware before?

How is the conversation changing around our priorities due to our education, outreach, and advocacy? (What is different about how people are thinking and talking about our priorities?)

What new policies or ideas are emerging around our priorities due to our coalition work? What is now possible regarding policy and practice that perhaps was not possible-or seen-before?

Your Next Action Steps

What are your next action steps for either a coalition you are already part of, or one that you want to join or start? Jot down these steps below.

Some ideas:

- Reach out to someone you want to invite to join your coalition, and schedule a call or coffee
- Work with your coalition members to create a clear vision/purpose statement
- Help organize the next meeting for your coalition and articulate the meeting goals
- Or any other action step that feels right to you now!

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