tcc group

Responsibility

Honesty  Trust  Integrity  Courage  Teamwork

# What Makes an Effective Coalition?

Evidence-Based Indicators of Success

**MARCH 2011**

**By:**
Jared Raynor, TCC Group

**Forward by:**
*The California Endowment*

# Introduction by TCE

The California Endowment is committed "to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians."[1] As part of its grantmaking, the Endowment supports public policy and advocacy work by its grantees which include coalitions that can leverage the resources of disparate groups that come together around a common goal in order to create critical momentum on issues that might otherwise be overlooked in a complex policy environment.[2]

Recognizing the importance of coalitions in its work, the Endowment asked TCC Group to review the literature to identify best practices with regard to effective advocacy coalitions. This review also draws upon TCC's own knowledge and experience, including work with several Endowment grantees.

---

[1] The California Endowment Mission Statement taken from website: http://www.calendow.org/Article.aspx?id=134
[2] This paper emerges from the premise that coalitions are a valuable tool for doing advocacy work and, thus, provides no justification or substantive discussion of the relative merits of coalitions. However, it should be recognized that coalitions are not always the optimal approach to advocacy work. Individual organizations must weigh the relative benefits and costs of participating in a coalition before choosing to join. Further, the literature seems to indicate that attempts by funders to force coalitions (as opposed to supporting the opportunity to create a coalition or support an existing coalition) frequently struggle for traction.

*"The paper draws on a broad multi-disciplinary review of academic literature, both theory and applied research, regarding the "conclusive" components of effective coalitions…"*

# Table of Contents

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

Coalition of Essential Schools. San Francisco Bicycle Coalition. Coalition of the Willing. National Coalition for the Homeless. Christian Coalition of America. Anti Spyware Coalition. National Ethanol Vehicle Coalition. Safe Community Coalition…

The list is lengthy, if not endless. Chances are you have participated or at least been asked to join one. An Internet search reveals thousands of examples of coalitions, ideas for how to create them, and reasons they are important. Coalitions are a central component of policy/advocacy work, especially for the growing number of nonprofits engaged in this arena, working to create systems change with scarce resources compared to others in the policy environment. By definition, coalitions represent sets of relationships, which can be complex, inefficient, and mired in managing process.

This paper explores the evidence base for what makes an effective coalition with the assumption that understanding what makes them effective and how to assess and improve them will increase their effectiveness as an advocacy tool and reduce potential frustrations associated with operating in coalition.

This paper skirts two important aspects of coalitions: how/when to form them (strategy decision) and differences between types of coalitions (nuance). The formation issue is a strategy decision that is context dependent. Coalitions are not always the right strategy for policy and advocacy work, but rather represent a distinct choice that may be used as a means to an end. Generally, coalitions are helpful when "going it alone" is not an option due to lack of resources or influence. While there are many reasons why organizations might choose to form or participate in a coalition, it is up to individual strategists to determine whether a coalition is the right tool; this paper is for those who have decided that a coalition is appropriate and want to maximize its success. In regard to the different types of coalitions, we acknowledge that there are informal

"This [strategic engagement in coalitions] is especially true today because the growth in the number and diversity of organized interests in national politics has made it more difficult for any one group to dominate the decisions made within a particular policy area. To be effective, rational group leaders must choose strategies that enhance their chances for advocacy success."[5]

*— Marie Hojnacki, Political Scientist*

and formal coalitions, with different amounts of resources and different types of goals. In establishing a broad framework for coalitions we wanted to lay out the central principles for understanding and evaluating coalition capacity and outcomes. As such, this paper should be relevant for many various types of coalitions, with the understanding that every coalition will need to carefully examine the framework in light of their own unique context and adapt it accordingly.

To explore how to increase the value of coalitions, this paper examines the questions: "What are coalitions?" and "How can we monitor their progress and effectiveness?" Part I of the paper presents a basic framework for defining and understanding coalitions. Part II uses the lens of assessment/evaluation to explore what we know about successful coalition members, coalition capacity, and coalition outcomes/impact. The paper draws on a broad multi-disciplinary

review of academic literature, both theory and applied research, regarding the "conclusive" components of effective coalitions, described in a straight-forward manner and punctuated with examples.[3,4]

---

[3] The origin of this paper was a non-scientific but comprehensive review of the academic literature on advocacy coalitions. The original document was written in a more academic tone, with less emphasis on examples. The draft of the more technical paper, including annotated bibliography of key sources isavailable by contacting the author via email at jraynor@tccgrp.com.

[4] The literature specific to advocacy coalitions is limited, and, more importantly, there is considerable overlap between coalitions for advocacy work and other purposes (which may or may not fall along a broad advocacy continuum).

[5] Hojnacki, Marie (1997), page 62

# Part I: What is a Coalition?

## Defining a Coalition

There are several different strategies that advocates use to move an issue through the policy process. Organizations generally begin by framing the problem and setting the issue more prominently on the public agenda, followed by actual policy changes and implementation. Coalition building is one strategy that occupies a central place at all stages of the policy process.

This is depicted in the middle of the strategy column of the generic logic model presented in Figure 1: Logic Model for Advocacy Initiatives.[6] As TCC began to review various advocacy strategies, it became apparent that coalition building is unlike other advocacy strategies for one important reason: it isn't a strategy unto itself. In almost all instances, building a coalition is not enough to influence advocacy outcomes; rather, the coalition must itself act, implementing advocacy strategies such as *issue analysis, organizing, raising public awareness*, and *lobbying*. It

becomes an advocacy actor, as depicted in the first column of Figure 1. As such, defining, building, and evaluating coalitions requires consideration of the coalition existing simultaneously as both a strategy and an acting entity.

For the purpose of this paper, we use the following definition of coalitions as a departure point: "an organization or organizations whose members commit to an agreed-on purpose and shared decision making to influence an external institution or target, while each member organization maintains its own autonomy."[7] One reason we chose this definition is that it accommodates many different types of entities labeled as coalitions. The phrase "influence an external institution or target" is specific enough to reflect an external advocacy role, but broad enough to encompass a variety of advocacy targets such as national/local policy, the public-at-large, judiciary, executive, school, or healthcare systems.

---

[6] This generic advocacy logic model was first presented in the publication "What Makes an Effective Advocacy Organization," by Jared Raynor, Peter York and Shao-Chee Sim, (2009) published by The California Endowment.

[7] Mizrahi, Terry and Beth B. Rosenthal (2001).

**Figure 1:** Logic Model for Advocacy Initiatives

| Acting Organization | Project Inputs/ Resources | Strategies | Outcomes | Impact |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**Acting Organization**
- Nonprofit or Advocacy Organization (uses coalition as a strategy)
- Coalition (as an Actor as compared to a strategy)

**Project Inputs/Resources**

Advocacy Staff:
- Time, experience and expertise (administrative, legislative, election-related and legal)
- Core skills (analytical, communication, research, etc.)

Funding:
- Monetary resources
- Non-monetary/ non-staff resources (e.g. volunteers, in-kind donations)

Organizational Reputation:
- Advocacy related
- General perception as a quality organization
- Representative for base constituency

Network:
- Policy makers
- Partner organizations
- Media
- Mobilized base

**Strategies**
- Issue analysis/ research
- Media advocacy/ Public awareness raising
- Grass roots organizing
- Coalition building/ networking
- Policy analysis/ research
- Legal action
- Lobbying and direct policy-maker influence
- Assure good policy implementation (Administrative/ Regulatory oversight, TA, monitoring, etc.)

**Outcomes**
- Better defined and framed problems
- Issues more clearly set on the public agenda and gain prominence (momentum, interest, awareness, etc.)
- Policy makers adopt new policies based on the agenda / do not adopt harmful policies
- Policy decisions effectively implemented
- Impact of new policies is evaluated

Change in Social Structure Reflecting Positive Social Justice Shift

**Impact**

Improvement in the Quality of Living for the Community

As with any organization, coalitions are likely to progress through several stages, including formation and growth. This paper does not look at all of the nuances associated with the various stages, focusing more broadly on the concept of a well-functioning coalition. The adjoining sidebar 'Till death do we part?, however, discusses one of the generally unspoken questions about coalition development: When should a coalition dissolve?

## The Machinery of a Coalition

The coalition, as an acting organization, has a holistic identity. In many cases, the coalition is recognized by a unique name and is represented to the external world as a singular entity. As we dissect the coalition to understand how it works, it may seem crude to state the obvious: coalitions are made up of multiple entities (generally other organizations), which, in turn, are made up of multiple individual actors (e.g., staff, volunteers, board members, etc.). However, it is an examination of this fact that highlights the inherent complexity of operating and measuring a coalition. (See Figure 2). Given the many different actors, understanding coalitions is largely about recognizing multiple sets of relationships and understanding how they function and operate in pursuit of specific goals. As seen in Figure 3, adding organizations to a coalition creates a set of relationships, as depicted by overlaps

in the concentric circles. In all, there are six different relationships that emerge:

• Coalition to the External World
• Organization to Coalition
• Individual to Coalition
• Individual to Individual
• Individual to Organization
• Organization to Organization

Each of these relationships could be evaluated as a way to understand coalitions and their effectiveness. For example, some of the relationships that could be evaluated include:

• Coalition to External World: general advocacy evaluation techniques; brand identity
• Organization to Coalition: Equity analysis; power sharing; identity politics; matrix decision-making
• Individual to Coalition: Power dynamics; identity politics; group dynamics
• Individual to Individual: Interpersonal skills; social network analysis; knowledge exchange
• Individual to Organization: Power dynamics; identity politics; Brand identity; positive perception/attitude
• Organization to Organization: Network analysis; Collaborations; systems theory; mergers and acquisitions

Given these relationships, one can imagine the complexity that emerges in trying to categorize them. Even a simple

**Figure 2:**
What is a Coalition?

Coalition

Organization

Individual
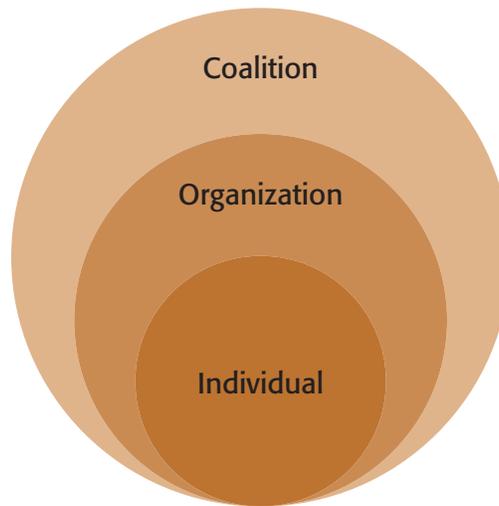
**Figure 3:**
Coalitions:
Creating Relationships

Coalition

Organization

Organization

Individual
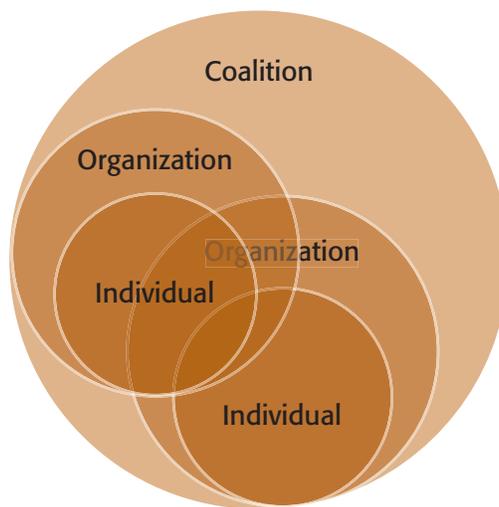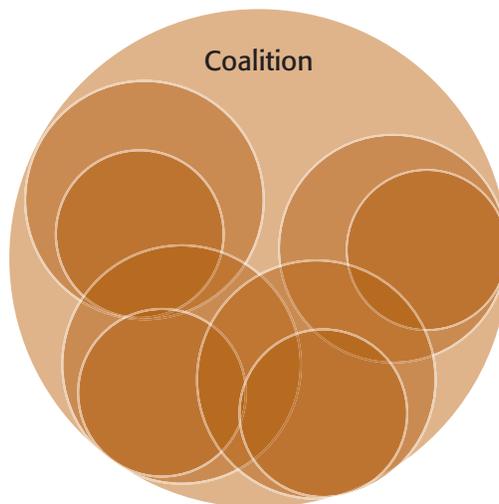
Individual

**Figure 4:**
Increasing Web of Relationships

**Number of Relationships**

2 Person Coaltion:   8
3 Person Coaltion: 18
4 Person Coaltion: 32

Coalition

two-organization coalition would have eight different relationships, and that number increases significantly as new organizations are added (see Figure 4).

While these relationships may be worth examining, they are likely to be less valuable to advocates and funders engaged in the daily work of making coalitions function. A simplified approach is more likely warranted.

### 'Till death do we part?

In general, coalition development has been described as having seven stages: mobilization, establishing organizational structure, building capacity for action, planning for action, implementation, refinement, and institutionalization.[8] In this paper we do not attempt to segment the various stages, but they are worth keeping in mind when considering the capacity needs of a coalition.[9]

What we have not mentioned is the disbanding of the coalition. One of the things that a coalition should consider early on is how to plan for its end. Over the life of a coalition (months, years, or even decades) there may be ebbs and flows, depending on the resources of members, the coalition itself, and the need for the coalition to exist as changes occur in the environment. Some coalitions continue to exist even after substantive policy wins on their issue, focusing on implementation or related issues. In order to not end prematurely or drag on beyond their usefulness, coalitions might consider asking critical 'existence' questions at key junctures in the coalition's history (e.g., formation, policy win/defeat, etc.). Three key questions include:

• Will the coalition endure because the goal is likely to continue?
• Does this coalition want to end after accomplishing a specific task?
• Will the coalition acquire assets that multiple members might claim?

There is not a clear indicator of when a coalition should end excepting through the loss of its value proposition. This may happen when a coalition reaches its goals (though many coalitions find that there is always another hill to climb) or when members stop finding value in the work. It is perfectly acceptable for coalitions to end and it need not be dramatic. Coalitions that accomplish their goals or that no longer have a high value proposition can simply decide to close their doors. Some things a coalition may want to do during its final stages include:

• Review what was accomplished and lessons learned.
• Celebrate work together. Such a ritual may provide a solid jumping off point for future collaborations.
• Establish how, if at all, the group would like to stay in touch on a more informal basis.
• Announce the coalition has completed its work, to clarify everyone's expectations.

[8] Florin, P., Mitchell, R. and Stevenson, J. (1993) "Identifying technical needs in community coalitions: a developmental approach." *Health Education Research*, 8, 417-432 as cited in M. C. Kegler, et al. 1998.
[9] Butterfoss, et al. (1993) were among the first to look at coalition needs as segmented by stage of coalition development and the reader is referred to their work for a deeper analysis on this topic.

*"Each of these relationships could
be evaluated as a way to understand
coalitions and their effectiveness…"*

# Part II: What are Characteristics of Effective Coalitions?

## A Simplified Approach

Considering the complexity of the relationships, we created a simpler methodology to make coalition assessment more feasible and useful. Three separate yet intertwined evaluation aspects emerge:

A. Capacity of organizations to be good coalition members
B. Capacity of the coalition
C. Outcomes/Impact of the coalition work

The remainder of this paper explores these three elements. The greater part of the text is dedicated to the section on coalition capacity, as this is an area that has received considerably less attention in the academic research.

> ### Evaluating Coalitions
> A. Capacity of Coalition Members
> B. Capacity of the Coalition
> C. Outcomes/Impact of the Work of the Coalition

## A. The Capacity of Organizations to be Good Coalition Members

At a minimum, a coalition's capacity is inherent in the collective capacity of its members. The capacity of individual members to be good coalition members can be particularly beneficial as an ex ante approach to building and assessing coalitions—helping those exploring the formation of a coalition understand what to look for and informing those considering joining a coalition about how to make strategic decisions. Building strategic partnerships is a key capacity of all effective advocacy organizations, This capacity includes leadership to articulate and mobilize others around a common vision, an understanding of an organization's strategic niche, and good interpersonal skills. Capacity associated with building strategic partnerships for an individual organization engaging in advocacy is detailed in The California Endowment publication "*What Makes an Effective*

"There were times when I represented the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in the Coalition for Human Needs that a legislative proposal would increase government funding for needed services (an NASW goal), and at the same time create problems for social workers' (our members) ability to provide those services. Sometimes we had to temporarily focus on fixing the problem critical to our members, while other coalition members carried the water on pushing forward the bigger legislative proposal for increased funding. The Coalition openly recognized when members had to pull away from a certain strategy or activity, making it easier for groups to stay engaged in the bigger campaign."

*— Sue Hoechstetter, Alliance for Justice*

*Advocacy Organization.*"[10] Beyond the strategic considerations described in that publication pertaining to collaboration, networking, and partnering, important coalition member capacity extends from the obvious, such as having skills to work collaboratively and dedicate resources to the less obvious, such as understanding how a single issue fits into a broader network of issues and the ability to weigh the value of coalition membership against other resource expenditures.

A full (but not comprehensive) list of capacities of coalition members is presented below.

While all of these capacities are important, two of the most critical capacities pertains to "haves" and "wants." First, coalition members must be able to articulate the value that they bring to the table—what is it that makes them an important part of the coalition. Most organizations do well at this. Second, coalition members must be able to express what they want/need from the table and what their limitations are. This appears to be much more difficult for organizations, but when done deliberately and transparently, enhances the longer-term viability of the coalition (see quote at right). Difficulty around articulating wants likely stems from several confounding circumstances. For example, there may be a lack of opportunity to discuss this need within the coalition setting or there may be a cultural bias of altruism, where members feel it is not appropriate to ask for something. Or, it may stem from the incorrect assumption that "if we are all at the table, we all must clearly want the same things." Regardless of the reason, the ability of members to articulate what they want appears to play a role in enhancing trust, transparency, and a general satisfaction with participation in a coalition. This extends to honesty about any perceived conflicts between the coalition's and their own organizations' strategies.

[10] Raynor, Jared, et al. 2009.

### Capacities of Effective Coalition Members.[11]

☐ Skills/knowledge to work collaboratively

☐ Commit to the coalition in action as well as name

☐ Ability to articulate what you bring to the table (e.g., time, resources, access, relationships, reputation, expertise, etc.)[12]

☐ Ability to articulate what you want from the table

☐ Ability to weigh the value of coalition membership against scarce resource expenditure

☐ Willingness to share resources

☐ Willingness to openly identify conflicts between the individual organization and the coalition

☐ Willingness to share power/credit

☐ Willingness to speak as one

☐ Willingness to explore alternative ideas and approaches

☐ Willingness to dedicate staffing at a high enough level to make decisions

☐ Willingness to dedicate staffing to implement assigned tasks

☐ Strategic use of coalitions to fill critical gaps and leverage resources toward achieving your mission

☐ Willingness to commit to the coalition for an extended (relevant) period of time

☐ Understanding of how your issue fits into a broader network of issues

## B. The Capacity of the Coalition

Overall, there is little consensus on the characteristics that are most likely to lead to a coalition's success.[13] As many advocates openly admit, some of it is simply timing with regard to windows of opportunity. The ability to capitalize on windows of opportunity, however, is not a byproduct of timing, but rather the product of deliberate efforts to create well-functioning organizations. In this regard, there are definite characteristics of coalitions which are clearly linked to success.

These characteristics, drawn from concrete and systematic examinations of coalitions, are presented in this paper using the Core Capacity model. Drawing from TCC's work in organizational development and effectiveness, the Core Capacity Model,[14] identifies four areas

---

[11] See Table 1 on page 244 in Foster-Fishman, et al. (2001) for a more nuanced and detailed analysis of critical elements of collaborative capacity.

[12] Levi and Murphy (2006) indicate that understanding of resources is the leverage that coalition members have. "Thus, coalition members have power over one another by giving or withholding the resources they do control" (page 656).

[13] The work of Zakocs and Edwards did a much broader scientific literature review and outlined capacities explored in studies of coalitions and noted where there was agreement. The reader is referred specifically to Table 3 of their article. Also, note that some of the works examined in their review were also included in TCC's review. It is worth noting that Zakocs and Edwards were not the only source to call attention to the lack of definitive findings (for example, see also Butterfoss, et al. (1993) and Cramer, et al. (2006)).

[14] Connolly, Paul and Peter York, TCC Group (formerly The Conservation Company) (2003).

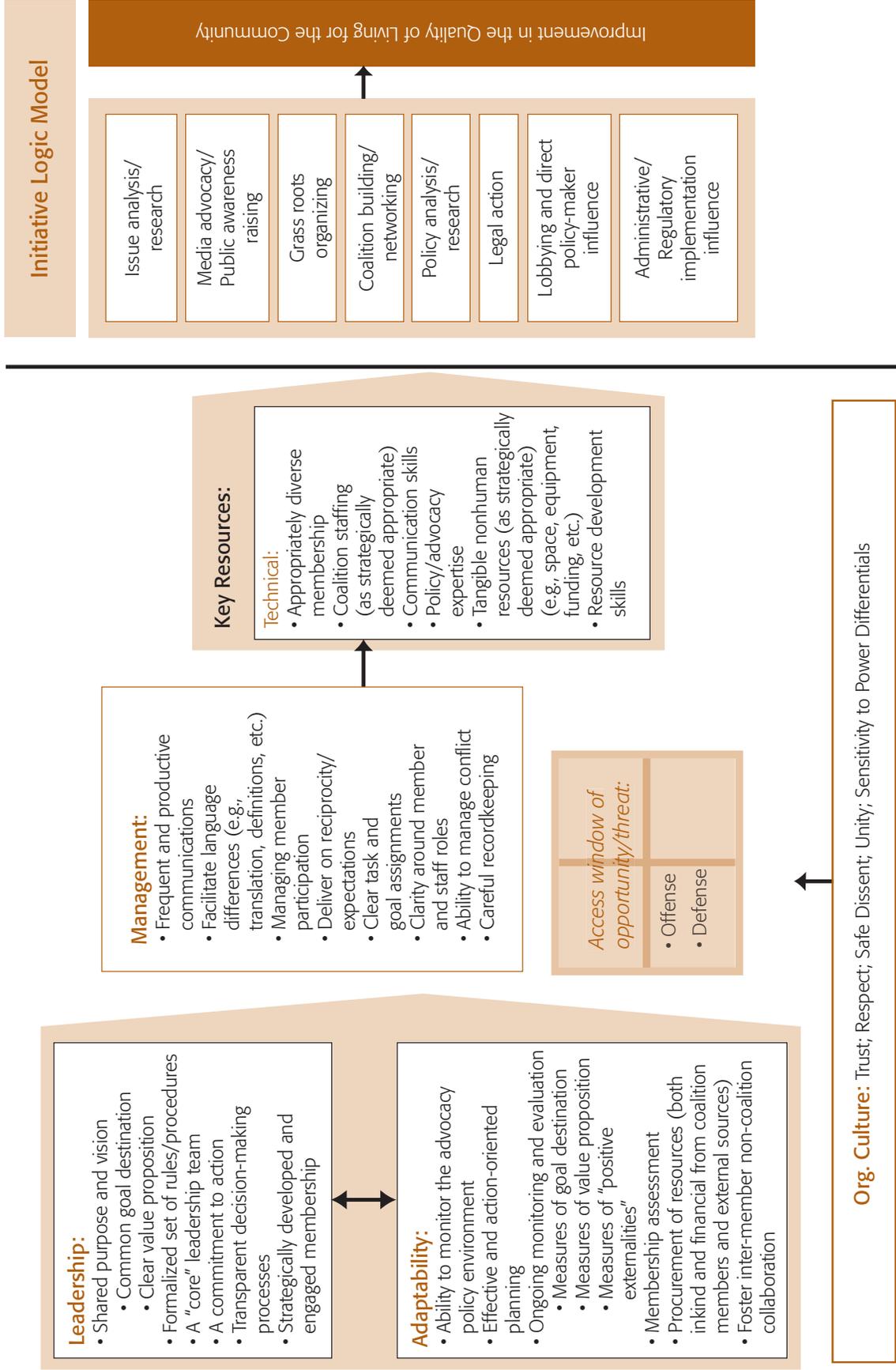that are central to nonprofit organizational effectiveness:

1. **Leadership capacity:** the ability of organizational leaders to create and sustain a vision, inspire, model, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction and innovate, all in an effort to achieve the organizational mission.

2. **Adaptive capacity:** the ability of a nonprofit organization to monitor, assess, and respond to internal and external changes.

3. **Management capacity:** the ability of a nonprofit organization to ensure the effective and efficient use of organizational resources.

4. **Technical capacity:** the ability of a nonprofit organization to implement all of the key organizational and programmatic functions.

In addition to the four core capacities, **organizational culture**, defined as the unique history, language, organizational structure, and set of values and beliefs of an organization, plays a role in how the capacities function.

By using the core capacity model, TCC hopes to provide structure for a meaningful discussion of coalition systems, which can be both complex and confusing. The goal is to allow for a meaningful examination of coalitions so that those interested in maximizing effectiveness have a way to talk using a common language. The remainder of this section presents aspects of effective coalitions using the core capacity framework. These are summarized in Figure 5, depicting all the currently known aspects of effective coalition capacity needed to successfully implement advocacy strategies (listed at the far right of the figure) in pursuit of advocacy outcomes.

**Figure 5:** Critical Organizational Capacities for Coalitions: The Logic Model "Inputs"

## Initiative Logic Model

Improvement in the Quality of Living for the Community

- Issue analysis/research
- Media advocacy/Public awareness raising
- Grass roots organizing
- Coalition building/networking
- Policy analysis/research
- Legal action
- Lobbying and direct policy-maker influence
- Administrative/Regulatory implementation influence

## Key Resources:

**Technical:**
- Appropriately diverse membership
- Coalition staffing (as strategically deemed appropriate)
- Communication skills
- Policy/advocacy expertise
- Tangible nonhuman resources (as strategically deemed appropriate) (e.g., space, equipment, funding, etc.)
- Resource development skills

**Management:**
- Frequent and productive communications
- Facilitate language differences (e.g., translation, definitions, etc.)
- Managing member participation
- Deliver on reciprocity/expectations
- Clear task and goal assignments
- Clarity around member and staff roles
- Ability to manage conflict
- Careful recordkeeping

**Leadership:**
- Shared purpose and vision
  - Common goal destination
  - Clear value proposition
- Formalized set of rules/procedures
- A "core" leadership team
- A commitment to action
- Transparent decision-making processes
- Strategically developed and engaged membership

**Adaptability:**
- Ability to monitor the advocacy policy environment
- Effective and action-oriented planning
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation
  - Measures of goal destination
  - Measures of value proposition
  - Measures of "positive externalities"
- Membership assessment
- Procurement of resources (both inkind and financial from coalition members and external sources)
- Foster inter-member non-coalition collaboration

*Access window of opportunity/threat:*
- Offense
- Defense

**Org. Culture:** Trust; Respect; Safe Dissent; Unity; Sensitivity to Power Differentials

"Over-coalitioned" communities reduce the effectiveness of individual coalitions and the value of coalitions in general. As a result, part of the case for the coalition as the appropriate vehicle is the relative size of its niche and whether it dilutes the value of coalitions already existing in the community that might be able to take up the issues equally well.

# A Breakdown of Capacity

## Leadership Characteristics/ Capacities

Leadership capacity refers to the ability of a coalition to create and sustain the vision, inspire, model, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction and innovate, all in an effort to achieve the coalition's mission. Primary Leadership elements of effective coalitions include the following:

• **Coalitions must have a shared purpose/vision that builds cohesion.** This is the one area where experts uniformly agree. Like any strong organization, coalitions are most successful when they can clearly articulate the reason for their existence. There are two areas of common purpose that merit discussion:

  • Goal Destination**:** Coalitions must be able to clearly express their desired results such as ending homelessness or defeating Proposition X. Goal

destination is about having a clear ideology and generating what has been called a *value-based commitment*.[15] In other words, to be an effective coalition, leaders must help current and potential members connect the coalition's "goal destination" with their own work, community or well-being. Goal destination is the fundamental element in determining likelihood of success and must be articulated for both current and potential members of the coalition as well as

---

### Leadership Capacities:

• Shared purpose and vision
• Common goal destination
• Clear value proposition
• Formalized set of rules/procedures
• A "core" leadership team
• A commitment to action
• Transparent decision-making processes
• Strategically developed and engaged membership

---

[15] Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001).

---

### Table 1
**Benefits and Costs of Membership in a Coalition[16]**

**Benefits:**
- Networking
- Information Sharing
- Access to Resources
- Resource Pooling
- Involvement in Important Cause
- Shared Mission
- Ability to Attain Desired Outcomes
- Enhanced Visibility/Power in Numbers
- Enjoyment of Coalition Work/Camaraderie
- Personal Recognition
- Ability to Build Skills

**Costs:**
- Time
- Loss of Autonomy
- Compromise
- Expending Scarce Resources
- Unfavorable Image of Association
- Lack of Direction
- Reduced Visibility/Recognition
- Negative Exposure
- Middle-Ground Tendency
- Obscured Voices

---

to the broader field. A social goal destination, wherein the goal of the coalition is to provide an opportunity for like-minded and similarly engaged individuals to assemble and discuss common issues and challenges, can be effective for building morale. However, a socially-oriented group generally struggles in gaining traction for any actual coalition activities and is usually not sustainable since the focus is inward on participants and their needs, rather than outward and the needs of the issue.

- **Value Proposition:** Coalitions must be able to clearly articulate why they are the right vehicle for current or potential members that might otherwise join another group or remain unaffiliated. In a crowded field, coalitions must demonstrate their "value add" both in terms of why a coalition is the optimal strategy to meet an organization's goals and why this particular coalition is the right strategy. In general, a coalition needs to have a vision demonstrating how its benefits outweigh its costs, and leadership should foster a belief in the ability of the coalition to achieve its goals. Some of the more common benefits and costs associated with coalitions are presented in Table 1.

At least one of the authors[17] in the literature review noted how "over-coalitioned" communities reduce the effectiveness of individual coalitions and the value of coalitions in general. As a result, part of building the case for the coalition as the appropriate vehicle is the relative size of its niche and whether it dilutes the value of existing coalitions in the community that might be able to take up the issues equally well.

---

[16] Many of these Benefits and Costs are drawn from Butterfoss, et al. (1993), though the full list is collected from across the literature.
[17] Wolff, Thomas (2001).

- **Formalization of Rules/Procedures.** There is a value in developing governance procedures to guide the coalition, but there is no magic "one size fits all" set of rules or procedures that are most appropriate. Coalitions should establish a systematic and agreed upon way of conducting business, but models will vary depending on specific needs. Some organizations create Memorandums of Understanding, others create by-laws, and still others decide to formally create separate legal entities to conduct the work of the coalition (see the box below, Pros and Cons of 501(c)(3) Incorporation for a Coalition, for a discussion on formal coalition incorporation). Formal rules and procedures set the stage for how the coalition will think and act. For example, rules can outline criteria for membership, balance power dynamics and momentum, and establish operating processes important to the group such as valuing community involvement or consensus decision-making.

- **Establish a Leadership Core.** Coalitions need strong leaders to set clear direction and present a unified "face." The purpose of a leadership core is to keep the coalition moving forward, resolve conflict, ensure trust and accountability from members, and keep a coalition focused on its vision. In general, the leadership core should represent the breadth of a coalition's members and stakeholders, but does not need to be all inclusive. In some cases, the leadership core may include key members whose buy-in is essential or whose perspective is unique, but at the end of the day, this group needs to be able to *lead*.

- **Action-oriented.** We have all witnessed how a conversation about why we are doing the work drowns any inclination to actually do the work. Coalitions, by virtue of disparate goals that emerge from bringing groups together, are ripe for abstract conversations. Coalition leadership must balance meaningful discussion with action. Leaders should seek one or two quick "wins" for the coalition, with wins defined as anything the group can cohesively claim to demonstrate the coalition is action-oriented.

- **Transparent Decision-Making Process.** Coalitions are, by definition, inclusive of multiple decision-makers who share a common goal. As a result, effective coalitions establish transparent decision-making processes that allow appropriate member input—a sort of shared decision-making. Coalitions frequently struggle to balance equitable decision-making with an action orientation. It is important to distinguish *equitable* decision-making from *consensus* decision-making. Equitable decision-making allows for a decision to be made, even when there is disagreement

among members; a consensus model requires universal agreement before moving on. Each has its merits; what is important is that all parties are clear about the model and the tradeoffs involved. Some pros and cons of consensus decision-making are listed in Table 2.

• **Strategic Membership.** We have not found data that support either an inclusive (anyone who wants may join) or exclusive (not open to everyone) approach to coalition membership. However, the development of a strategic membership using the lens of purpose/vision does increase the likelihood for advocacy success. Strategic membership takes into account such things as the potential cohesiveness of the group (Do they know each other? Have members worked together before?); the level of participation/contribution by members;

## Pros and Cons of 501(c)(3) Incorporation for a Coalition

Creating a separate legal entity for a coalition has pros and cons, some of which we present here. This is not meant to be a full legal analysis—a coalition should consult legal counsel in regard to specific legal aspects of incorporation. The Alliance for Justice is also a great resource for further information on legal aspects pertaining to incorporation and advocacy work.

**Pros**
• Liability—once the coalition begins work, incorporating reduces the liability of the group as a whole, which would take pressure off individual organizations as fiscal agents.
• Some donors are reluctant to fund a coalition through a fiscal agent (though this appears to be less of an issue than it used to be and not an issue for most of the donors that we know of).
• Incorporation can legitimize the coalition and establish a clear identity if one does not exist, both in the eyes of some members and the broader public (including donors).
• Forces more careful adherence to governance and clarity of roles among participating members.
• The incorporated coalition can put out positions, press releases, etc. that in name can partially shield member organizations from bad publicity.
• The incorporated coalition can move more quickly to put out information, as the formal legal arrangement does not necessarily require as much effort to gain consensus from all members on issues. However, the incorporated coalition could include by-laws restricting how the organization acts in this manner.

### Table 2
**Pros and Cons of Consensus Decision-Making**

**Pros:**
- Increases Commitment
- Empowerment
- Participation
- Overcome Resistance to Change
- General Satisfaction with Decisions
- Builds Morale
- Theoretical Message of Equality

**Costs:**
- Difficulty Defining Specific Tasks
- Slow/Time-Consuming
- Waiting to take action until all have spoken rather than when a decision has been made

**Cons**
- Establishing a separate entity by definition creates administrative redundancies and resource needs that are currently absorbed by members. There is a level of maintaining a "ongoing concern" that likely requires some level of regular fundraising. This may distract from the broader work of the coalition.
- Donors may be more interested in effective coalitions rather than funding new organizations/costs to run an organization. In other words, some donors may look favorably on a high-performing coalition that does not carry an overt overhead (overhead is carried by members of the coalition).
- Incorporating involves costs for application as a 501c3 (including time, formality, effort and cost), annual renewals, and accounting that are currently absorbed by fiscal agents.
- Incorporation may potentially place additional legal limits on the coalition if members are not recognized nonprofits (consult an attorney for specific legal advice).
- Incorporation requires more formal operating rules and procedures. In and of itself, this is not a con, but it does present a more formal structure which limits flexibility. The legal structure of incorporation makes it necessary to have a formal disbanding if for some reason the coalition expires or disbands. This involves additional effort, sometimes additional costs, and can create negative publicity for member organizations if the media interprets disbanding as a sign of failure in solving a problem or situation.
- Coalition research indicates that a formal organization (e.g., 501c3 status) could reduce the participation of some coalition members as they feel that it is the organization's responsibility to complete activities rather than feeling personal ownership. This is not necessarily the case, as a coalition that is incorporated can still ensure clear roles and responsibilities for members.
- Once formed as a single entity, the coalition becomes an organization. This may make it more difficult to make the case that it speaks for a broad group of organizations because this changes the presumption of participation and buy-in. The coalition must then take extra care and effort to demonstrate that it speaks for a broad group of organizations because it is essentially its own organization.
- Creation of a new organization may create a higher potential for competition between the coalition and member organizations. Without incorporation, individual organizations only put forward funding opportunities for which they automatically perceive a greater value from the coalition. When an organization is incorporated, it may compete with such organizations.

## Member Breadth vs. Strategic Focus

What happens when the pursuit of one capacity comes at the expense of another? This is precisely the challenge that one broad coalition had to tackle as it geared up for a campaign to pursue federal-level policy reform.

The coalition, already a mix of dozens of organizations located around the country and representing an array of issues, decided to expand to include greater diversity. This expansion was deemed essential to generating greater support among both the general public and targeted members of Congress.

The expansion was carried out very strategically, reaching out to specific organizations that both filled gaps in the existing membership and shared the coalition's goals and values. However, this expansion would prove challenging for coalition leaders.

Some of the most critical characteristics in an effective coalition involve a shared purpose and vision. However, organizations that share the same purpose may not be in agreement about the precise tactics to bring about that objective. And nuances may exist in how organizations interpret the desired outcomes of the coalition. The more diverse the campaign, the more varied those interpretations may become. After several months of internal debate following the expansion, the coalition opted for a policy of "unity without uniformity." Specifically, as long as coalition members were on the same page with core values and messages, they were given the freedom to adapt elements of the messages, or to amplify or muffle particular messages as they saw fit.

The growth of the coalition also proved the final straw for its previous policy of consensus decision-making. The coalition, even prior to the expansion, occasionally struggled to build agreement across dozens of organizations. This expansion, incorporating new and diverse opinions, made the previous model untenable. This proved to be a positive outcome for the coalition as nearly all members came to value the efficiency of shifting the decision-making power to coalition leaders.

–Contributed by Ehren Reed, Senior Associate at Innovation Network

credibility of members; and promoting a diverse membership which is likely to increase effectiveness). See the sidebar on member breadth versus strategic focus for an example of the complexity associated with strategic membership.

Regarding the issue of diversity, coalition leadership should be sensitive to barriers to participation that might limit or exclude potential members. Further, coalition leaders should be mindful of power differentials that may exist among coalition members and ensure that all members are respected, valued, have an opportunity to contribute (and benefit), and are engaged in the decision-making processes. Apart from any ethical imperative, attention to these details

demonstrates an acute sense of strategy and creates a more cohesive coalition.

## Adaptive Characteristics/ Capacities

Adaptive capacity refers to the ability of a coalition to monitor, assess, and respond to internal and external changes. Advocacy coalitions must be highly adaptable in order to be effective in everchanging environments over the long-term. Inherent in many of the leadership capacities is the flexibility and adaptability of the coalition. Primary Adaptive elements of effective coalitions include the following:

- **Environmental Monitoring.** Time and energy are scarce resources for most nonprofit organizations that participate in coalitions; burnout can be high. As a result, coalitions need the ability to monitor the advocacy environment so they can call on the coalition members when their participation will have the greatest impact. This starts with inception, where the vision for the coalition describes the reasons why the timing is appropriate for coalition development and extends throughout the life of the coalition when the group makes a strategic decision to disband (hopefully with increased skills and relationships if not big advocacy wins). Environmental monitoring helps coalition leadership determine how and when to draw on resources and provides updates that can be shared

### Adaptive Capacities:

- Ability to monitor the advocacy policy environment
- Effective and action-oriented planning
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation
- Measures of goal destination
- Measures of value proposition
- Measures of "positive externalities"
- Membership assessment
- Procurement of resources (both in-kind and financial from coalition members and external sources)
- Foster inter-member noncoalition collaboration

with members as a way of building knowledge and skills. For example, a national issue-based coalition might monitor legislation at the local, state, and national level, providing members with periodic updates as relevant proposals work their way through the policy process, but wait to issue an action alert until there is a key vote scheduled.

- **Effective Planning.** Effective coalitions plan for the future. Planning includes overall strategic planning as well as more nuanced planning around communications, outreach, and fundraising skills. Successful plans are action-oriented and serve as mechanisms for assigning and following-up on tasks. To avoid "process paralysis," plans should focus on action rather than the articulation of lofty goals or theoretical underpinnings.

- **Evaluating Success.** Research and experience have shown that coalitions are reluctant to indicate that their work was a failure. Rather, coalition leaders often redefine problems as "important lessons learned."[15] Like all nonprofits, coalitions are increasingly called on to monitor progress and evaluate the quality and impact of their work which clearly needs to include more than a simple yes/no on a policy win. Coalitions can make use of advocacy evaluation principles such as measuring incremental progress toward goals and measuring increased advocacy capacity.

- **Evaluating Members.** Apart from evaluating its overall effectiveness, a coalition should be able to monitor and evaluate the skills, commitment, contribution and effectiveness of its individual members. To be clear: in most cases this is NOT the equivalent of a supervisory performance review. Rather, effective coalitions document member skills, resources, impediments to participation, and other factors that determine the assets that members offer so that a coalition has the appropriate information to make decisions regarding strategy, such as leveraging strengths and capacity of members. Regularly tracking indicators such as membership commitment levels and contributed resources helps leaders gauge the strength of the coalition. However, research into human behavior has repeatedly shown, that "what gets measured gets done," and coalition members are not an exception. It should be noted that such accountability stems from shared expectations, individual commitments, and cultural sensitivity as described in other parts of this paper.

- **Resource Development.** Effective coalitions must be able to obtain sufficient resources toward achieving their mission. The primary resources for coalitions are time and skill sets (working with the media, grassroots mobilizing, language ability, research skills, applying for and receiving permits). Other resources include physical space (for convening/work

locations); relationships (with community members, media, policy makers); databases, and production capability/physical products (making signs/banners, bullhorns, video equipment). In most instances, money is not a resource, but rather buys resources. To be sure, the ability to fundraise is important but is only one component of resource development. The primary resource of a coalition stems from its ability to draw on member resources and skills, engage communities and the media, and to network with non-coalition entities (such as other networks and organizations not involved in the coalition). Once a coalition demonstrates strategic and efficient use of existing resources, fundraising becomes more effective.

• **Promote Inter-Member Collaboration.**
While coalitions are collaborative arrangements between participating members, research suggests that successful coalitions encourage collaboration between members *outside* the coalition. Fostering togetherness provides members greater incentive to participate in the broader organization as well as benefits the coalition by increasing member buy-in, promoting group cohesion, and increasing opportunities for innovation.

## Management Characteristics/Capacities

Management capacity refers to the ability of a coalition to use its resources effectively and efficiently. Management in advocacy organizations incorporates the hallmarks of any well run concern: good communication, good people, and good resource management. Primary Management elements of effective coalitions include the following:

• **Frequent and Productive Communication.**
Coalitions are built on trust, and trust is built on information. As a result, coalitions must be adept at regularly communicating with their members and keeping them up-to-date on important developments or activities. Most entities join coalitions to be part of something larger than a source of information. As a result, best practice dictates that communications drive members toward some type of action. For example, a healthcare coalition was mired in debate and discussion. After some reflection, they realized that they were sharing information, but no one was actually using the information. They committed to framing their information sharing around some possible areas of action to provide others in the coalition with ideas about how they could act on the shared information.

• **Communication must also be deliberate** and explicit; presumed mutual understanding is one of the pitfalls of communication in coalitions. For example, if a leader calls for community engagement, one member might imagine talking with select

> ## Management Capacities:
>
> - Frequent and productive communications
> - Facilitate language differences (e.g., translation, definitions, etc.)
> - Managing member participation
> - Deliver on reciprocity/expectations
> - Clear task and goal assignments
> - Clarity around member and staff roles
> - Ability to manage conflict
> - Careful record-keeping

community leaders while another member might think of focus groups and town hall meetings. Tools such as logic models and theories of change are a good place to establish a common language around mission/vision.

Another aspect of communication is language itself. Coalition members must be able to communicate so that members who speak different languages can participate meaningfully. This may require translation of meetings and documents or credible representatives that speak multiple languages.

- **Membership Participation.** Coalitions are at their best when members are engaged in work they feel is productive and meaningful. Our research indicates that such participation actually leads to sustained membership rather than burn-out. There are five practices that facilitate productive and meaningful participation in a coalition:

- Deliver on Reciprocity. As indicated in the Leadership section of this paper, part of the vision of effective coalitions is performing a cost/benefit analysis of why a coalition is the right vehicle to achieve organizational goals. Part of the management task of coalitions is to ensure members receive the benefits they expect. One coalition we worked with regularly surveyed members, while another asked members to chart and track their reasons for participation. Regular reorientation of members to the purposes, goals, roles, and procedures of the coalition can prepare members for quick mobilization and help manage expectations.

- Task/Goal Focused. Clearly assigned tasks with tangible action steps give members a sense of accomplishment and keep the work of the coalition moving forward.

- Clarity of Member/Staff Roles. Members must understand what they are asked to do within the coalition structure and what other members are doing. If paid staff are hired, additional clarity distinguishing member and staff roles is necessary.

- Conflict Management. Although conflict can lead to cohesion or fragmentation, it is generally

considered a natural and healthy part of any group dynamic. Effective coalitions have the capacity to manage dissension , including allowing healthy tensions to exist. In particular, conflict management in coalitions should address existing power differentials and provide support so that all groups can meaningfully participate. For example, one community coalition formed to respond to a funding opportunity. The coalition included political figures, social service agency representatives and community representatives. Recognizing the power imbalance between various members of the coalition, the group's facilitator took efforts to minimize the impact of these differentials through group decision-making strategies such as "one person one vote," secret ballots, and well-defined processes.

• **Careful Record-Keeping.**
By tracking the coalition's progress, including assigned and completed tasks, record-keeping can help manage membership participation in a fair and transparent way and can be an important communications tool. Record keeping is also critical for measuring evaluation effectiveness.

## Technical Characteristics/ Capacities

Technical capacity refers to the ability of coalitions to implement organizational and programmatic functions necessary to complete the work. Primary Technical capacities of effective coalitions include the following:

• **Membership Diversity.** As noted, the greatest single resource of a coalition is its membership. Heterogeneous coalitions representing a broad base have the potential to pool the most diverse resources and have the most extensive reach. However, member diversity should be driven by the specific goals of the coalition which may suggest a more narrow membership. In either case, members must have relevant experience, expertise, or interest in the vision of the coalition. Recruitment, a critical skill for any coalition, is especially important for a multicultural coalition which needs to respectfully engage members from distinct cultures.[18] For their part, coalition members also need the specific capacities that make them effective, as discussed in the section on coalition member capacity.

• **Coalition Staffing.** The jury is still out on the value of paid coalition staff. Many reviews indicate that member contribution of time and energy is a more effective staffing strategy. There is research indicating that if a coalition is unable to

---

[18] The work "Building Coalitions Among Communities of Color: A Multicultural Approach" (2004) by SHIRE, in collaboration with Out of Many One and the Campaign for the elimination of Racial and Ethnic Disparities, is a comprehensive look at working in a multicultural coalition.

## Technical Capacities:

- Appropriately diverse membership
- Coalition staffing (as strategically deemed appropriate)
- Communication skills
- Policy/advocacy expertise
- Tangible non-human resources (as strategically deemed appropriate) (e.g., space, equipment, funding, etc.)
- Resource development skills

effectively pursue goals without hired staffing that they are not likely to be able to do so with it. However, there is also strong evidence that staffing can be valuable when carefully thought out. One research study identified five potential roles for staff in coalitions: coach, director, linking agent, "doer," and coordinator. Of these, the only one for which they report decidedly low effectiveness is the "doer"— the staff member who does the work for the coalition, suggesting that paid staff function effectively when they bring strong organizing, coordinating and facilitating capacities.[19] One organization we worked with hired its first ever executive director who abruptly left the organization after a few months. In working with the organization to diagnose the problem, it became clear that the executive committee wanted the director to do the work, but was not willing to cede authority to make decisions.

This led to the director constantly seeking input and approval from the executive committee, causing frustration and inefficiencies by both parties.

- **Communication Skills.** In the Management section we discussed how member communication needs to be frequent and productive. The technical communication capacity is about translating data into useful information for both members and stakeholders. One of the more difficult tasks for coalitions, which already represent diverse groups, is to understand how to communicate with stakeholders that are not part of the coalition. In this regard, coalitions need the capacity to engage non-members and to publicize the coalition's work and to draw attention to its own legitimacy and to the issue itself.

- **Policy/Advocacy Expertise.** While it may seem intuitive that groups forming a coalition need policy/advocacy expertise, it is not always the case that coalitions have such capacity. Clear indicators of a lack of policy/advocacy expertise include frequent and lengthy abstract discussions, continual refining and redefining tasks and avoiding substantive work. In some circumstances, coalitions may need help understanding what they

---

[19] See Kegler, et al. (1998). Both the literature and TCC Group's experience suggest that coalitions are most effective when members are actively engaged in doing the work. Coalition staff that "do" the work can undermine the nature of coalition establishment—that coalitions form precisely because of their ability to jointly address an issue.

don't know regarding policy and advocacy work. For example, do they understand the nuances of the back-room legislative committee process? Are they aware of best practices associated with grassroots mobilization? Can they craft a press release that speaks to journalists or editors? Do they know how to file an injunction? Many groups that come together in coalitions may lack some of this critical information, thereby limiting their effectiveness.

- **Tangible Non-Human Resources.** Despite a strong prioritization of human capital needs, coalitions have the same basic needs as other nonprofits, such as space, equipment, and funding. They are not detailed here because they are highly dependent on context, but are nonetheless critical.

- **Resource Development Skills.** Coalitions require the skills to solicit and acquire resources (financial and human), as part of a broader effort to ensure sustainability. This includes marshalling in-kind resources as well as independent fundraising. Fundraising specifically for a coalition can be tricky. Some things to keep in mind:

  - A coalition may be in competition with some of its own members for funding sources. This requires

sensitivity as well as clear and accepted principles for fundraising.

- If not separately incorporated, a coalition is likely to need a fiscal agent. Some coalitions feel a drive to incorporate for this reason, which is not always necessary. Many funders are open to funding coalitions in ways that make sense for the coalition without requiring its incorporation.

- Funding for overhead/capacity building can be even more difficult to obtain than for individual nonprofit organizations. There may be funding for specific activities of the coalition, but funders may perceive that coalition members should carry the cost of the overhead in-kind. Effective coalitions should be able to make a clear and compelling argument for overhead costs that need external support and how they contribute to the coalition's effectiveness.

The box on the following page, Funding a Coalition, contains contains some ideas that funders may want to consider when thinking about supporting a coalition.

## Cultural Characteristics/ Capacities

Organizational culture refers to the unique history, language, structure, and

## Funding a Coalition

Funding a coalition can be a tricky subject for funders, as there are many dynamics at play. However, coalitions can also be a very effective investment for funders as both grantmaking and non-grantmaking activities (like convening) can be beneficial to coalitions. There are several important questions that funders may want to consider when working with coalitions that can be separated into three sections.

**Questions Pertaining to Coalition Value to the Funder**

• Does the coalition goal destination align with the funder's goals?

• Is the coalition clearly able to articulate its value proposition?

• Is the coalition membership representative of the breadth of constituencies

  affected by the issue? If not, is there a good rationale?

• How will the funder hold the coalition accountable?


**Questions Pertaining to Coalition's Ability to do the Work**

• Does the coalition demonstrate capacity to do the work?

• Where are the resource gaps between what coalition members provide and

  what the coalition needs in order to do its work?


**Questions Pertaining to Coalition Sustainability**

• Does the coalition promote transparency and equity?

• Can non-grantmaking resources (e.g., convening, relationships, status) benefit

  the coalition?

• Is the coalition funded at a sufficient level to get people to dedicate their time?

• By facilitating the creation of a coalition, is there a value proposition (or one that

  can be developed) beyond the funder's relationships and funding draw?

One thing is generally clear: funders should not encourage coalitions to formally incorporate except in the most extreme circumstances. Coalitions may decide to formally incorporate, and funders can be a valuable part of the conversation, but receiving funds is generally not a good motivating force for the effectiveness of the coalition. Funders have several options in funding non-incorporated coalitions, such as using a fiscal agent or funding a "chair" organization on a rotating basis (so multiple coalition members administer the funds over a period of time).

---

### Table 3
**Indicators for Evaluating Coalitions**

**Goal Destination**
- Policy adoption/Policy blocking
- Increased visibility/knowledge of issue
- Better relationships with policymakers and allies and reduced enemies
- Development of good research (increased data)
- Writing/testifying on effective policy
- Overcoming important "sticking" points in moving an agenda/policy
- Activation of broader constituency
- Increased public will

**Value Proposition**
- Increased coalition capacity (e.g., clarity of vision; ability to manage/raise resources; better policy analysis; etc.)
- Increased visibility of coalition
- Increased membership
- Increased quality/prestige/engagement of membership
- Increased collaboration between coalition members outside the coalition
- Merging/strategic relationship with other coalitions
- More rapid and organized ability to respond
- Number of different "faces" that the coalition could credibly put forward to advance the issue

---

set of values and beliefs. These cultural elements all serve as the context through which organizations define, assess and improve their effectiveness. There are five cultural characteristics that emerged from our research as important to coalitions:

- **Trust.** Effective coalitions foster trust between members and work hard to maintain that trust through transparency, communication, and inclusion. It generally takes time, resources, and effort to effectively build trust.

- **Respect.** Effective coalitions demonstrate respect to members through word and action. Each member is valued for the contribution they bring to the table and are not "looked down on" for what they do not bring.

- **Safe Dissent.** Respectful dissent is openly encouraged as a way to arrive at fully-formed ideas.

- **Unity.** Once the coalition has decided on a course of action, coalition members must adhere

to the decision and speak to the "outside" world with one voice. This enhances the power of the coalition.

- **Sensitivity to Power Differentials.** Effective coalitions recognize that there are likely to be intra-coalition power differentials, as well as important external differentials (such as those between the coalition and non-organized community members or disenfranchised groups) and work to minimize the effects.[20]

## C. Assessing: The Outcomes/Impact of Coalition Work

Just like any advocacy work, coalition success includes a number of interim achievements such as network development, skill building, and incremental gains in policy development. As a result, coalitions need a continuum of measures and indicators. Clarifying goals from the start and measuring them on a regular basis allows for true lessons learned rather than retrospective justification. Since clarity of purpose is one capacity upon which there is widespread agreement, it seems like an appropriate place to search for evaluation criteria. As coalitions and external stakeholders (including funders) evaluate coalitions, they might focus on the extent to which a coalition is making progress on goal destination ( issue) and/or the coalition as the value proposition

(the right vehicle), both discussed below. Table 3 summarizes some prominent indicators for evaluating coalitions in each area.

- On the **goal destination** side, there is nothing particularly unique to coalition goal destination outcomes as compared to others doing advocacy work. These include such things as the obvious policy win/block, visibility of the issue, and shorter-term "outputs" like media placements or testifying on an issue. Refer to *A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning* for a more comprehensive list of advocacy related goal outcomes.[21] Measures of goal destination that seem particularly relevant to coalitions include: increasing visibility/knowledge of the issue, better relationships (by virtue of having additional relationships to draw on), and overcoming important "sticking points" (as described above—a particularly important role for coalitions in today's advocacy environment), and increasing public goodwill.

- On the **value proposition** side, indicators are more specific with regard to the legitimacy and relevance of the coalition. These include increased capacity; visibility and membership; stronger external engagement; and ability

---

[20] See Chavis (2001) for a more comprehensive discussion of power differentials, particularly as they apply to coalitions attempting to engage at a more grassroots level.
[21] See "A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning" (2009) published by Harvard Family Research Project for a more comprehensive list of advocacy related goal outcomes that are as applicable to coalitions as individual advocacy organizations.

"Just like any advocacy work, coalition success includes a number of interim achievements such as network development, skill building, and incremental gains in policy development. As a result, coalitions need a continuum of measures and indicators. Clarifying goals from the start and measuring them on a regular basis allows for true lessons learned rather than retrospective justification.

to rapidlyrespond to opportunities/ threats.

Apart from these specific coalition objectives, coalitions also serve as fertile ground for other positive developments – often referred to as 'positive externalities'—advancements that aren't central goals but are positive by-products. These include better coordination of non-advocacy program work; reducing the sense of isolation that advocates might feel; the emergence of innovative ideas through cross-fertilization; and any other objectives the coalition might set

for itself. See Table 4 for a list of common positive benefits of coalitions. For example, the members of one coalition we worked with reported that their participation in the coalition gave them renewed energy in their own organizations because they saw other people who were also dedicated to their issues even though they were working on different aspects of the problem.

### Table 4
**Coalition Positive Externalities**

- Better implementation/ coordination of actual programs addressing the issue
- Sustained networks/relationships
- Reduced sense of isolation
- Cross-fertilization and innovative ideas
- Other specific project goals met

# Conclusion

There is significant evidence that advocates are thoughtful, intuitive, strategic, and inclined to common sense approaches to making things work. What is sometimes missing is a framework within which to organize disparate pieces of information and experience. This paper is meant to help advocates, funders and coalition members think about coalition-building in a more informed way, providing the structure to both enhance coalition performance and capture the results of that performance. We described the complexity of what a coalition actually is, how it works, and three specific things to look at in assessing a coalition: **Member Capacity; Coalition Capacity; and Coalition Outcomes.**

The majority of the paper has focused on coalition capacities, exploring the various capacities as distinct elements. We acknowledge that such a breakdown risks simplicity, and that there is likely a high level of interaction between the various capacities. The benefit of this capacity interaction is that anyone intent on strengthening coalitions might focus on one area and benefit multiple areas. Appendix A offers a Coalition Capacity Checklist, a tool that can be used for a quick and informal assessment of coalition capacity, but is not meant to be all inclusive and does not capture many of the discrete behaviors that would evidence actual capacity.[22] As described in the introduction, the purpose of this paper is to establish a broad framework evaluating coalitions and coalition capacity with the understanding that every coalition will need to carefully examine the framework in light of their own unique context and adapt accordingly.

The capacities discussed in this paper present the reader with a greater understanding of what an effective coalition looks like and how it might be assessed. To conclude, let us present the opposite view: what NOT to do.

---

[22] The Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health developed a tool called the Partnership Self-Assessment Tool, which is a detailed assessment tool that was reportedly used by partnerships throughout the United States and beyond. TCC has no experience using the tool or knowledge of its effectiveness for advocacy coalitions, but presents it here for reference. The tool can be found at: http://www.cacsh.org/psat.html

## Seven Deadly Sins of Coalitions

- **Debate to Death**: Nitpicking and nuancing every bit of information or potential action resulting in a bias for arguing over action.
- **Social Orientation:** Commitment to the group as a group rather than the group as a vehicle for action with a clear goal destination and value proposition.
- **Avoidance of Conflict:** Mask dissent or disagreement in order to create harmony at the expense of thoughtful vetting and buy-in. One of the most valuable roles that a coalition can play in today's policy environment is to uncover sticking points and resolve them within the coalition as opposed to airing grievances publicly.
- **Lack of Technical Expertise:** Feeling that the coalition is a substitute for specific technical knowledge on things such as policy and advocacy work, fundraising, evaluation, etc. A coalition, in and of itself, is not advocacy, but rather a tool for generating effective advocacy. Coalitions need the skills and ability to conduct advocacy activities, which may be contributed by coalition staff or individual coalition members with specific advocacy skills (e.g., lobbying, grassroots mobilizing, media engagement, judicial intervention, etc.).
- **Turn it Over to the Staff:** Members play a passive role, leaving the work of the coalition in the hands of staff members (who might be employed by the coalition or dedicated staff from member organizations).
- **No Ongoing Role for Members:** Members in the coalition don't have specific tasks or assignments over time.
- **Dividing up Credit:** As the coalition makes gains, members try to take individual credit for success over the coalition ("I did more than you and am therefore more responsible.").

Reflecting on the some of the key capacities, above are seven conditions that severely impede the effectiveness of a coalition.

Evaluating coalitions serves an important role in keeping the coalition on track, informing strategy, and serving as an external accountability mechanism. Beyond the obvious and important task of evaluating the outcomes associated with coalition activities, evaluation of coalition member capacity and coalition capacity can serve as an important short-term indicator of the ability of a coalition to be effective in its pursuit of concrete objectives. While it isn't necessary for even the most thriving coalition to exhibit all of the capacities described in this paper (and we have indicated in several places the importance of grounded conversation that takes into account an organization's specific context), it is our contention that conscious attention to these issues indicates a commitment to maximizing scarce resources so that advocacy leaders will use the powerful tool of coalitions to its greatest potential.

# References

Butterfield, Kenneth D., Richard Reed, and David J. Lemak. 2004. "An Inductive Model of Collaboration From the Stakeholder's Perspective." *Business and Society* 43(2): 162-195.

Butterfoss, Frances Dunn, Robert M. Goodman, and Abraham Wandersman. 1993. "Community coalitions for prevention and health promotion." *Health and Education Research* 8(3): 315-330.

Chavis, David. 2001. "The Paradoxes and Promise of Community Coalitions." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 29(2): 309-320.

Connolly, Paul and Peter York, TCC Group (formerly The Conservation Company). 2003. "Building the Capacity of Capacity Builders: A study of Management Support and Field- Building Organizations in the Nonprofit Sector." A report produced with funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, with additional assistance from The Alliance for Nonprofit Management and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations.

Coffman, Julia. 2009. "A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning." Paper published by Harvard Family Research Project.

Cramer, Mary E., Jan R. Atwood, and Julie A. Stoner. 2006. "A Conceptual Model for Understanding Effective Coalitions Involved in Health Promotion Programming." *Public Health Nursing* 23(1): 67-73.

Foster-Fishman, Pennie G.; Shelby L. Berkowitz; David W. Lounsbury; Stephanie Jacobson; and Nicole A. Allen. 2001. "Building Collaborative Capacity in Community Coalitions: A Review and Integrative Framework." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 29(2): 241-261.

Hojnacki, Marie. 1997. "Interest Groups' Decisions to Join Alliances or Work Alone." *American Journal of Political Science* 41(1): 61-87.

Kegler, Michelle Crozier, Allan Steckler, Sally Herndon Malek and Kenneth McLeroy. 1998. "A multiple case study of implementation in 10 local Project ASSIST coalitions in North Carolina." *Health Education Research* 13(2): 225-338.

Lasker, Roz D., Elisa S. Weiss, and Rebecca Miller. 2001. "Partnership Synergy: A Practical Framework for Studying and Strengthening the Collaborative Advantage." *Milbank Quarterly* 79(2): 179-205.

Levi, Margaret and Gillian H. Murphy. 2006. "Coalitions of Contention: The Case of the WTO Protests in Seattle." *Political Studies* 54: 651-670.

Mintrom, Michael and Sandra Vergari. 1996. "Advocacy Coalitions, Policy Entrepreneurs, and Policy Change." *Policy Studies Journal* 24(3): 420-434.

Mizrahi, Terry and Beth B. Rosenthal. 2001. "Complexities of Coalition Building: Leaders' Successes, Strategies, Struggles, and Solutions." *Social Work* 46(1): 63-78.

Raynor, Jared, Peter York and Shao-Chee Sim. 2009. "What Makes an Effective Advocacy Organization." Paper published by The California Endowment.

Summit Health Institute for Research and Education, Inc. (SHIRE), with Out of Many, One (OMO). 2004. "Building Coalitions Among Communities of Color: A Multicultural Approach." Manual prepared for the State Partnership Initiative of the U.S. Office of Minority Health, Department of Health and Human Services.

Wolff, Thomas. 2001. "A Practitioner's Guide to Successful Coalitions." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 29(2):173-191.

Wood, Carolyn J. 1989. "Challenging the Assumptions Underlying the Use of Participatory Decision-Making Strategies: A Longitudinal Case Study." *Small Group Research* 20(4): 428- 448.

Zakocs, Ronda C. and Erika M. Edwards. 2006. "What Explains Community Coalition Effectiveness?: A Review of the Literature." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 30(4): 351-361.

## Appendix A: Coalition Capacity Checklist

The Coalition Capacity Checklist is a way for coalitions to take a quick snapshot of themselves. It is not designed as a quantitative instrument, but rather as a way for coalitions to take a quick pulse on their performance. Fill out the checklist either individually or as a group, indicating how well you feel the coalition is doing in each area. Then use responses as a way to dialogue about how to improve the coalition.

| | Excellent | Better than Average | Average | Needs Improvement | Non-Existent in Our Coalition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Leadership** | | | | | |
| The goal of the coalition is clearly stated and understood by all members. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition can articulate why it is the appropriate vehicle for addressing the goal (as opposed to another coalition or working individually). | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has clearly articulated rules and procedures that are understood by all members, including criteria for membership, member obligations and decision-making processes. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has a clear leadership core tasked with keeping the coalition on track. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition is action-oriented (i.e. more time is spent doing work than talking about it). | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has a decision-making process that is considered equitable by all members. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has members that can strategically help achieve coalition goals (including time, resources, influence, trust, etc.). | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Adaptive** | | | | | |
| The coalition continuously monitors the advocacy environment in order to make strategic decisions about timing and activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has a strategic plan (or equivalent) that is action oriented. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition monitors and evaluates progress and effectiveness. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition evaluates members, taking stock of skills, commitment, contribution and effectiveness. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition successfully engages all available internal resources. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition can mobilize/go after resources external to individual members (e.g. foundation grants). | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition promotes collaboration between members distinct from the work of the coalition itself. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

| | Excellent | Better than Average | Average | Needs Improvement | Non-Existent in Our Coalition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Management** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has frequent and productive communication with all members. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Members actively participate in coalition activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Members feel like they are deriving value-added through their participation. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Members are given clear tasks and goals. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Members understand their roles/obligations. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Coalition staff have clear roles and responsibilities (if relevant). | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition is able to manage conflict among members. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition keeps careful records of assigned and completed tasks. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Technical** | | | | | |
| The coalition has a diverse and relevant membership. Staff in the coalition have a greater role in facilitating the work of the coalition than <u>doing</u> the work. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has sufficient skills to communicate with members. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has sufficient skills to communicate with nonmembers. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has sufficient policy/advocacy expertise. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition has sufficient tangible resources (space, equipment, etc.) to carry out its activities. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Culture** | | | | | |
| Members in the coalition trust each other. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Members in the coalition respect each other. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Members feel free to disagree with one another in coalition meetings. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Members speak with a united voice even if they are not in full agreement with coalition decisions. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The coalition is sensitive to power differentials and works to minimize their impact. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

For over 30 years, TCC has provided strategic planning, program development, evaluation and management consulting services to nonprofit organizations, foundations, corporate community involvement programs and government agencies. In this time, the firm has developed substantive knowledge and expertise in fields as diverse as community and economic development, human services, children and family issues, education, health care, the environment, and the arts.

From offices in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco the firm works with clients nationally and, increasingly, internationally. Our services include strategic planning, organizational assessment and development, feasibility studies, long-term capacity building, program evaluation and development, governance planning, restructuring and repositioning, as well as grant program design, evaluation, and facilitation. We have extensive experience working with funders to plan, design, manage and evaluate long-term capacity-building initiatives.

Our approach is governed by the need to establish a clear and engaging consulting process that offers structure and predictability as well as flexibility to meet unforeseen needs. Working in multidisciplinary teams, we tailor each new assignment to meet the individual circumstances of the client. We develop a scope of work, timetable, and budget that responds to the particular challenges of the assignment.

Sometimes clients engage us for short-term research, problem solving, or facilitation projects. Other times we provide comprehensive planning and evaluation assistance over a longer period or conduct other activities, over one or more years. Increasingly, TCC helps clients manage and implement their work and provide advice on an ongoing basis. We bring to each new assignment the perspective of our expertise, broad experience, and the enthusiastic commitment to get the job done right.