

Structuring Coalitions to Maximize Community Participation

Coalitions adopt a variety of governance structures, membership configurations and decision-making methods in order to accomplish their goals. Some are predominantly fluid and informal in how they decide to govern themselves, while other groups may have very structured or formal models of governance. These forms may evolve over time, based upon the group's learning of what works in their particular community.

If the underlying values of the group are to embrace inclusivity, participation and shared leadership, the coalition will want to adopt a non-traditional organizational structure in order to promote maximum participation among community members.

Governance models to consider:

Leadership Team/Steering Committee/Governance Committee/Board

A core group that is committed to bearing the major responsibility for guiding and maintaining coalition functioning (e.g. budget, staffing, deliverables/reports). This group is often "the glue" that holds the collaborative together, sometimes referred to as "weight bearers."

However, this should not be an exclusive group that holds more power than other members. To balance power, some coalitions maintain open membership policies or rotate membership periodically.

Some of the functions of this group may be to:

- Understand the "big picture"
- Guide overall direction
- Keep the coalition moving forward
- Develop and/or review Memorandum of Agreement and other legal documents
- Handle personnel issues
- Assist others with problem-solving
- Develop preliminary agenda for meetings
- Make administrative decisions
- Employ processes to include the general membership and community in decision making

Action Team/Work Group/Sub-Committee/Task Force

Small sub-groups of the coalition that are committed and/or passionate about a particular strategy or activity and therefore are willing to do the work to accomplish it.

The group may be permanent or temporary. For example, an action team may organize a one-time community event or focus on a particular aspect of the coalition's work such as youth media relations, fund development or data collection. Participation can help develop new leadership as well as provide many opportunities for community members to use and expand their skills and talents.

Some functions of this group may include:

- Convenes and disbands as needed
- Full autonomy to make decisions within a scope of work approved by the whole collaborative
- Reports progress to full coalition periodically
- Chooses a "lead" person to keep the group moving forward

Coordinator/Director/Manager

An individual who is the main person dedicated to keeping the coalition moving forward. Ideally, coordinators have paid positions and can devote their full attention to coalition business. Coordinators also may serve as main contacts for the coalition. While the job of a coordinator may vary from coalition to coalition, one thing is certain: The coordinator is often expected to "wear many hats", have an array of talents, and be excellent at multi-tasking. This role requires excellent "people" skills and an ability to communicate effectively with diverse sectors of the community.

Responsibilities of coordinators may include:

- Follow-up with new and potential members
- Facilitate meetings
- Develop internal and external communications
- Engage media
- Write grants
- Coordinate events
- Prepare materials, reports and budgets for meetings, funders, etc.
- Network among community members, associations and policy makers
- Supervise employees or volunteers