

# HARVESTING THE WISDOM OF COALITIONS

Literature Review  
Early Child Development Mapping Project  
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## **BACKGROUND**

The Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap) is contracted by Alberta Education for a five-year period (until August 31, 2014) to conduct research on early childhood development in Alberta and build community coalitions to respond to local needs. ECMap is part of the Government of Alberta's Early Child Development (ECD) Mapping Initiative. The Initiative will provide families, service providers, educators, communities and policy makers with a picture of how young children in Alberta are doing, so that they can work together to support healthy development.

ECMap works with communities across Alberta to map their boundaries and gather and analyze research information within their boundary areas. Assistance is also provided to communities in interpreting their research results, building early childhood development coalitions, applying for seed grants and developing local action response plans.

In the fall of 2012, ECMap brought together representatives from the 100 early childhood coalitions across the province for a two day gathering to discuss the sustainability of their individual coalitions. It is from this gathering that the inspiration for the Harvesting the Wisdom of coalitions emerged. The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize the literature and research on all sorts of coalitions in the hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of what successful coalitions look like and what contributes to their sustainability.

Numerous community coalitions of different sizes have formed in Alberta in past years, for a wide variety of purposes. The formation of these coalitions and their continuation over time has involved many people and organizations. The effort to form and sustain coalitions is an engaging process that has often led to learning from practical experiences by coalition members. Newly forming coalitions can benefit from what others have learned. This literature review is the first phase of a four-phase project with the goal of harvesting and sharing the wisdom of coalitions across Alberta.

In addition to the literature review:

- An inventory of community coalitions in Alberta will be compiled.
- A meeting with leaders and members from coalitions across Alberta will be held for the purpose of finding out what they know about forming and sustaining coalitions and what coalitions need to support the well-being of their communities.
- A final report summarizing the findings and recommendations that have come out of this process will be produced.

This initiative is undertaken in partnership between the Ministry of Alberta Culture, the Ministry of Alberta Education, and the University of Alberta through the Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap). This literature review was prepared by Samantha Berger with contributions from Carmen Ellison, Jennifer Stark, and Line Perron. It was overseen by a Steering Committee comprised of the following individuals:

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For more information on ECMap, go to [www.ecmap.ca](http://www.ecmap.ca).

## Executive Summary

The literature addressing community coalitions' definition, development, sustainability and effectiveness is not yet a cohesive, well-defined body of work. Authors tend to use different definitions of terms, measures of success and expectations of outcomes. Alongside these inconsistencies is a lack of valid comparative, long-term, broad studies of coalitions. However, a number of key consistent themes emerge in the literature written about coalitions. This literature review summarizes these common threads, with two particular points of focus: a) coalition sustainability and b) effective coalition organizational models.

### DEFINING COALITIONS

In the literature under review, terms such as collaboration, partnership and coalition are often used interchangeably or defined similarly; however, there are a number of features of coalitions that can be said to differentiate them from other organizational models:

The core features of coalitions are identified as follows:

1. Emphasis on broad representation/open participation
2. Broad approach to an issue
3. Bottom-up decision-making
4. Community mobilization
5. Long-term goals

Given these five core features, this literature review defines "coalition" as follows:

**Coalitions** are groups of people who come together around a particular issue, with the goal of being a catalyst for change in their community. They value and benefit from diverse membership, egalitarian practices, a broad focus and long-term goals. By bringing together people from different sectors of society and pooling resources, coalitions can accomplish goals more effectively than an organization working independently.

Studies looking at forms of organizing that fit this document's working definition of coalition were included in this review.

### DEVELOPMENT OF COALITIONS

What is the life cycle of a coalition? Articles that deal with the way in which coalitions develop are reviewed. The literature suggests that coalition development should be understood as cyclical; however, broad stages of development can be identified.

### **SUSTAINABILITY OF COALITIONS**

What factors contribute to the sustainability of coalitions? Academic articles comparing and contrasting the success of one or more case as well as resources available to coalitions around how to build sustainable groups are reviewed.

The literature suggests that the following factors are of particular import in coalition sustainability, and each forms a sub-section of this review:

- Historical factors
- Membership
- Quality of relationships
- Leadership
- Vision and purpose
- Concrete, measurable 'wins'
- Larger ecological factors
- Dollars and resources
- Technical assistance
- Marketing

### **EFFECTIVENESS OF COALITIONS**

While understanding the factors that make coalitions sustainable is important, it is also essential to examine the effectiveness of coalitions as a mode of organization. The literature is not unanimous in finding coalitions effective; however, these evaluations tend to widely vary in their methodologies as well as to experience challenges associated with assessing coalition impact.

Two promising approaches to this type of evaluation do emerge – collective impact theory and community coalition action theory. Both are frameworks that provide a comprehensive approach to understanding why coalitions are an effective way of organizing and how this mode of organization can be optimized.

Kania and Kramer's (2011) collective impact theory, for example, provides five tenets of coalition organizing, which address themselves to coalition effectiveness:

- 1) Common agenda
- 2) Shared measurement systems
- 3) Mutually reinforcing activities
- 4) Continuous communication
- 5) Backbone support organizations

## **EVALUATING COALITIONS**

Not only is evaluation important for understanding whether coalitions are sustainable or effective, but such evaluation is also an important activity for coalitions themselves. Coalitions should have evaluation in mind when developing their mission statement, objectives and timeline for coalition activities. By consistently evaluating coalition progress according to measurable outcomes, coalitions can improve their internal processes, outcomes and impact on the wider community. Strategies to calculate success and complete such evaluations are reviewed in this document, and resources that coalitions can use to evaluate themselves can be found in Appendix 1 and 2.

## **WIDER POSITIVE IMPACT OF COALITIONS**

Finally, this review examines the idea that coalitions contribute uniquely and positively to their communities – beyond their explicit priority area. The process of coalition development has the capacity to increase social capital, organizational capacity, community capacity and levels of trust in a community. This type of impact is usually beyond the scope of formal evaluations but can be an important unintended outcome of organizing as a community coalition.

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## INTRODUCTION

Coalitions have recently become a popular way of organizing for change on important social issues. Coalition-based organizing is appealing in part because of the egalitarian processes most coalitions use in approaching their work, but also because granting agencies increasingly require coalition-style organizing as a pre-condition for receiving funding. It is widely recognized that organizing coalitions can require more time and resources (human, social, and/or financial) than other methods, so it is important to have a clear understanding of whether they are effective and sustainable means of organizing.

Therefore, the main research question this literature review intends to answer is as follows:

### **What are the factors that impact the sustainability of coalitions?**

In answering this question, a number of secondary questions are also addressed:

- **What is a coalition?**
- **How can we conceptualize the development of coalitions?**
- **Are coalitions an effective means of organizing?**
- **How do coalitions evaluate their practices in terms of sustainability and effectiveness?**
- **What do coalitions contribute to their communities more broadly?**

These questions are explored through a review of academic articles and case studies, as well as technical guides intended for use by coalitions. There are several challenges associated with addressing these questions, as Kegler and Swan (2011) point out. The complexity of coalitions as a form of organization is one challenge, but so too is lack of consensus on a range of issues: how coalitions should be defined; what aspects of a coalition's work should be measured; and which coalition connections are most important. Nonetheless, a number of themes do emerge from the literature, and each forms the basis of a section of this document:

1. Defining coalitions
2. Development of coalitions
3. Sustainability of coalitions
4. Are coalitions effective?
5. Frameworks to understand and improve effectiveness of coalitions
6. Evaluation of coalitions

## METHODOLOGY

With the exception of a few key texts, only documents that were published after 1999 were included in this literature review. Academic literature reviewed was found using

keyword searches with EBSCO, Google Scholar and Google. Initial search terms used included: “coalition sustainability”, “coalition effectiveness”, “coalition guide.” Reverse searches of key documents obtained through this initial search were also performed, in order to find more recent articles that cited these key pieces. References in key articles – especially recent literature reviews – were also reviewed. Grey literature was reviewed by using search keywords such as “coalition handbook”, “coalition guide”, “coalition self-evaluation,” and the websites of relevant organizations involved in promoting coalition work were consulted directly (e.g., Kellogg Foundation, Prevention Institute).

An iterative approach was used in this review: once patterns emerged from the initially gathered body of literature, more specific searches were performed, such as “coalition evaluation”, “coalition leadership”, “coalition population-level evaluation”, “coalition and ‘social capital’ or empowerment.”

## DEFINING COALITIONS

A common complaint in the literature is that definitions of coalitions are inconsistent, making comparisons between studies very difficult. Moreover, a number of terms are used interchangeably with 'coalition' or are defined in similar ways. In particular, 'collaborative partnership' is often used to denote something very like a coalition. As a consequence of this lack of consensus, clearly defining 'coalition' for the purposes of this review is important.<sup>1</sup> This section provides an overview of various terms used to describe models of community-level organizing (with definitions compared in Table 1, below) and then forwards a working definition of 'coalition.'

### COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP

'Collaborative partnerships' is the most common term to be used almost interchangeably with coalition. Collaborative partnership tends to be used as a more general term than coalitions – all coalitions can be considered collaborative partnerships, but not all collaborative partnerships can be defined as coalitions. The generality of collaborative partnerships is well-captured by Roussos and Fawcett's definition: "people and organizations from multiple sectors working together in common purpose" (2000: 369). Beyond coalitions, collaborative partnerships may encompass partnerships among service agencies, grassroots advocacy groups, or health care providers coming together in a consortium (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000).

Although they are often more broadly defined than coalitions, collaborative partnerships share much conceptually. Collaborative partnerships tend to be based upon the idea that a goal can best be reached through the efforts of multiple sectors in the community, rather than by single players; that their membership should reflect community diversity; and that working towards the same goal will enable consensus among members (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000).

However, points of difference between the two modes of organizing have also been identified. For example, Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) suggest that collaborations can be more task-specific, have mandatory membership, be relatively short-term, and have fewer organizational actors. In contrast, coalitions are more likely to have a broader area of interest, to have voluntary membership, and to have an external focus. Because of these differences, collaborative partnerships cannot necessarily be understood to be the same as coalitions.

### ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Advisory committees are made up of a group of experts who are involved in an organization to provide professional suggestions and technical assistance (Cohen et al., 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> This literature review examines community coalitions only, rather than state-level or international coalitions which address issues at a broader level with a different scope in mind (Butterfoss, 2007). Community coalitions represent defined communities, reflect their diversity, and build community capacity (Butterfoss, 2007). While it is possible, and sometimes beneficial, for community coalitions to work with coalitions at other levels, unless otherwise stated in this document, 'coalition' refers to community coalitions only.

### **COMMISSIONS**

Commissions consist of individuals appointed by official – often governmental – bodies (Cohen et al., 2002).

### **CONSORTIA AND ALLIANCES**

While consortia and alliances often share with coalitions a broad area of attention for their work, they are most often comprised of representatives from particular organizations rather than being open to interested individuals (Cohen et al., 2002).

### **NETWORKS**

Networks are groups of individuals (or representatives of organizations) who share resources and information, but may not engage in coordinated action with one another (Cohen et al., 2002).

### **TASK FORCES**

Task forces typically focus on short-term projects. This type of group is brought together for a finite time at the request of a larger organization (Cohen et al., 2002).

### **COALITIONS**

There are a number of features that are commonly emphasized across the literature on community-level coalitions.

#### *BROAD REPRESENTATION/OPEN PARTICIPATION*

One of the defining features of coalitions is that they aim to represent the entire community that they are operating within (Butterfoss, 2006; Kadushin et al., 2005). This not only means that participation in the coalition is completely open, but that there is a concerted effort to involve people who would not typically participate in community-based action. The premise behind this style of coalition membership is that a diverse group is able to accomplish goals in a way that an individual – or individual organization – could not (Cohen et al., 2002).

That being said, coalitions have also been found to be an effective means of supporting individuals in becoming more involved in community change (Kadushin et al, 2005). Alongside coalitions' diverse membership are differences in levels of participation in a coalition. Active or core members are more involved, affiliates are somewhat less involved, and inactive members may be people who are interested in the work of the coalition and want to stay informed, but who do not actually participate in meetings (Butterfoss, 2007).

The literature suggests that broad representation (i.e., diverse membership) is needed at two levels of a coalition – the demographic and the sectoral. In other words, the population of a community should be represented (age, race, income level, gender, etc.) at the coalition table, but so too should there be adequate representation from various sectors of a community's working and voluntary organizations. Bringing together people representing all relevant resources and interests in a community is viewed to be an effective way to work toward a common goal (Berkowitz, 2011; Butterfoss, 2007; Kellogg Foundation, 1997; Zacoks and Edwards, 2006).

Broad representation is not just a core element of what defines a coalition, but, according to Motley et al (2013), also a key contributing factor to coalitions' successes:

[Coalitions are] an organization of various community sectors using collective partnerships to address targeted problems. Coalitions can function to enhance a community's ability to identify problems, mobilize efforts, and may help reduce disparities by leveraging resources including social and human capital. These forms of capital are also known as community capital. (208)

In other words, coalitions are – by virtue of their diverse membership – able to create a synergistic “community capital” through the differing knowledge, work, and resources of coalition members.

The benefits of broad representation is not only in the coordinated efforts of a broad swath of the population, but also an attempt to promote diversity, social justice, an active local citizenry and personal empowerment (Berkowitz, 2001).

#### *BROAD APPROACH AND LONG TERM GOALS*

Generally speaking, coalitions have a fairly broad approach to a particular issue (Berkowitz, 2001; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). When coalitions form around an issue, they often seek to understand it broadly – through a prolonged and comprehensive approach rather than using the lens necessary for more short-term, finite projects. In this way, coalitions can be said to be “formal, multipurpose and long-term alliances” (Butterfoss, 2007; Kadushin et al., 2005: 258).

#### *BOTTOM-UP DECISION-MAKING*

The impetus for starting a coalition may originate from outside of the community – from a larger organization; however, coalition decision making emphasizes local community needs and democratic processes (Berkowitz, 2001; Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

The literature suggests that consensus is an important feature of coalition decision making. Consensus does not necessarily mean unanimity; rather, consensus indicates that all members of a group have agreed to a decision after discussing all concerns (Butterfoss, 2007: 198). Decision making by consensus is time-consuming, but this model for taking decisions is crucial to supporting accountability, empowerment, group cohesion, and overall positive relationships between coalition members (Butterfoss, 2007: 198). Facilitators play a key role in bringing a group to consensus and deciding when majority rule may need to be used as a necessary alternative to consensus (Butterfoss, 2007).

#### *COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION*

Coalitions are not service agencies or delivery centres. They are used to mobilize action around a particular issue and should be understood as a catalyst for change that stems from and is grounded in the community (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Coalitions not only bring together representatives from different institutions, but their intention is usually to

bring people together at the grass roots level – mobilizing people as members of a community rather than as representatives of organizations (Berkowitz, 2001; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). By being rooted in the community in this way, coalitions are then able to engage new members and build capacity and connections among people. This, in turn, increases their effectiveness (Kubisch, 2005). Community engagement and empowerment are therefore goals *and* benefits of the coalition organizing model (Kadushin et al., 2005; Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

It is important to note, however, that while members of the community who may not be engaged previously can be mobilized through coalition building, if a concerted effort is not made in engaging less-likely participants, coalitions may simply unite leaders from existing groups around a common agenda (Butterfoss, 2007).

### **WORKING DEFINITION OF A COALITION**

**Coalitions** are groups of people who come together around a particular issue, with the goal of being a catalyst for change in their community. They value and benefit from diverse membership, egalitarian practices, a broad focus and long-term goals. By bringing together people from different sectors of society and pooling resources, coalitions can accomplish goals more effectively than an organization working independently.

**Table 1- Key Characteristics of Forms of Community Organizing**

	Open participation	Broad representation	Community mobilization	Broad approach	Long-term goals	Coordinated action	Bottom-up decision-making
<b>Coalition</b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<b>Collaborative Partnership</b>	√	√	-	X	X	√	√
<b>Strategic Alliance</b>	X	X	X	√	√	√	X
<b>Network</b>	√	√	X	-	X	X	-
<b>Task Force</b>	X	-	-	-	X	√	-
<b>Commission</b>	X	X	X	X	X	√	X
<b>Advisory Committee</b>	X	X	X	-	-	√	X

**Legend**

- √ Key Characteristic of this form of organizing
- X Explicitly not a part of this form of organizing
- No specification regarding this form of organizing

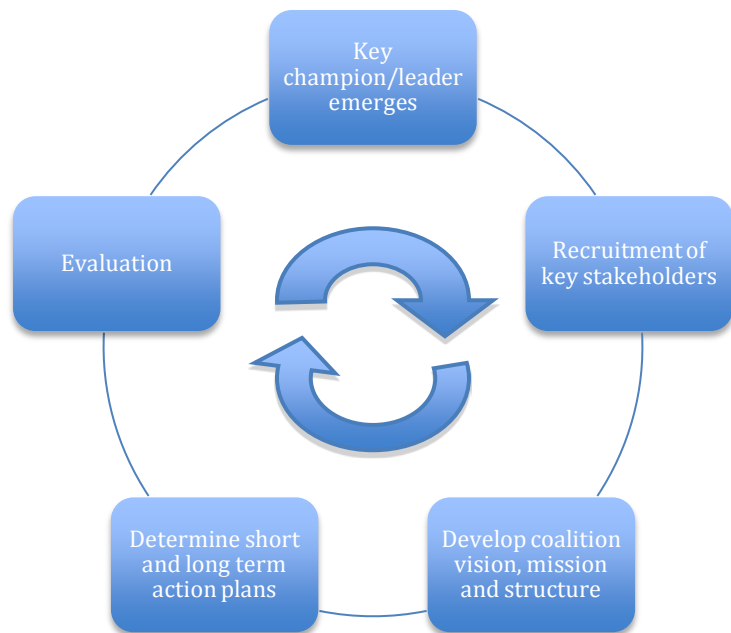


## DEVELOPMENT OF COALITIONS

Before considering the sustainability or effectiveness of coalitions, it is useful to examine how a coalition develops and its life cycle more generally.

There is no 'recipe' for developing a coalition. In fact, experiencing the struggle of building a coalition can contribute to coalition members' feelings of passion and ownership over the coalition, one of the most important factors for coalition sustainability (Butterfoss, 2007; Wolff, 2001). Moreover, aspects of coalition development continuously feed into one another in a non-linear way. There is constant feedback between different aspects of coalition building as the coalition and the community in which it is situated continues to change. However, keeping this in mind, a number of broad steps can be identified in terms of coalition development.

Often, the first step in building a coalition is the capacity and passion of one individual to create broad-based community change (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). This may be a reaction to an event, threat or opportunity in the community, such as a favorable political environment or funding opportunity (Coalitions Work, 2007; Rabinowitz, 2013). However, in order to transform this individual passion to a coalition-based effort, key stakeholders from within the community must be recruited (Kellogg Foundation, 1997; Rabinowitz, 2013). Key stakeholders will consist of individuals who have strong personal or professional connections to the coalition's area of interest (Rabinowitz, 2013). Recruiting this core group will often consist of intimate engagement strategies such as face-to-face meetings or direct, personal phone calls (Rabinowitz, 2013). While recruitment will continue throughout the life cycle of the coalition, bringing together a core group, that represents multiple sectors within the community, is a key, early step in coalition development (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

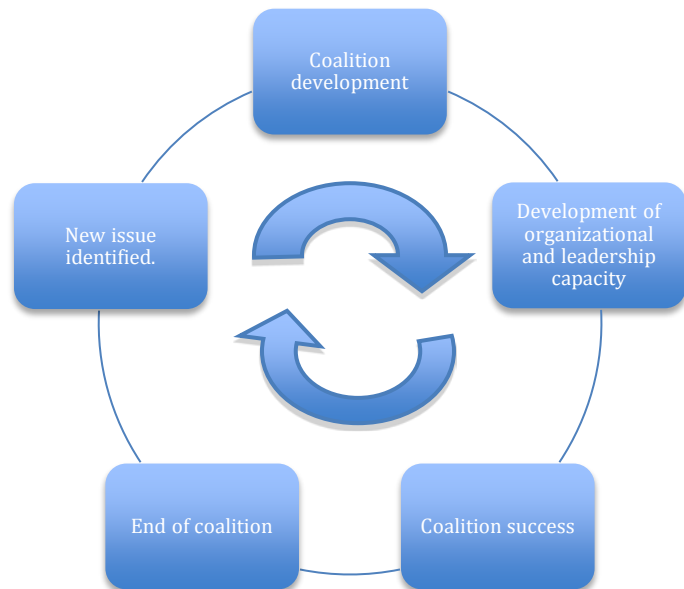


Once a core group has been brought together, the coalition can start to meet and develop structures around leadership roles, decision-making processes, staffing and membership expectations, and recruitment strategies (Coalitions Work, 2007; Kellogg Foundation, 1997; Rabinowitz, 2013). These decisions continue to be made as more people are brought on board, meaning that the coalition must be flexible enough to incorporate new points of view and priorities as they emerge (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). In tandem with these decisions, both short and long term action plans will be sketched out (Kellogg Foundation, 1997; Rabinowitz, 2013). These plans, along with the

coalition's vision and mission, will be constantly re-assessed as the coalition grows and the needs and priorities of the community shift (Coalitions Work, 2007; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). This planning will lay the groundwork for future evaluations (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

As the coalition grows, understanding the resources that members have access to, exploring potential avenues for funding, keeping existing members engaged and invested, and networking with and recruiting more members and organizations within the community will be important (Rabinowitz, 2013; Coalitions Work, 2007). Moreover, communicating the coalition's goals, activities and successes to the general public will be key to maintain community awareness and ownership over the issues that the coalition is addressing (Rabinowitz, 2013).

Eventually, most coalitions will reach the end of their natural life cycle. For some coalitions, ending their work will not represent a failure, but instead, a success; they were able to address the problem that they first set out to address. However, the impact of the coalition does not end with its disbandment. The organizational capacity and leadership that the coalition has fostered can feed into the development of a coalition in the future, contributing to the 'life cycle' once again (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Zakocs and Guckenberger, 2007).



While coalition development is too complex to map out as either linear or cyclical keeping this generalized life cycle in mind when considering the aspects that effect a coalition's sustainability and effectiveness will help to put these aspects of its development in context.

## SUSTAINABILITY OF COALITIONS

Coalitions require resources, learning and individual and group efforts in order to establish themselves and run effectively. At the same time, use of a coalition model is increasingly required by the bodies providing funding for organizing around issues of concern to communities. Given the amount of effort and investment required to build a strong coalition, as well as the growing popularity of this type of organizing, it is important to consider whether coalitions represent a sustainable model of community organizing.

There is disagreement in the literature as to whether coalitions are sustainable and a worthwhile form of organizing. It is not possible to estimate the success or failure rate of coalitions in anything approaching a systematic way. Thus, it is difficult to make broad statements about the 'overall' success or failure rate of coalitions. Because many coalitions begin at the grassroots level and are not registered as a formal organization, there is no reliable record of coalitions or database of all coalitions that have existed and the time period that they were active. And, while the disbanding of a coalition can represent failure, it can also indicate success – that the coalition finished their work. More detailed information is therefore needed to understand just how successful coalitions are.

### **HISTORICAL FACTORS**

Coalitions are not built in a vacuum. It is important to take into account the historical context of the community that they are being built in, as these contexts can have an important impact on how coalitions are formed, accepted by the community, and able to be sustained (Wolff, 2001). This history can be directly related to previous attempts at organizing coalitions as well as historical relationships between different organizations and segments of the population (Doll et al., 2013; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). It can also be valuable to learn from the mistakes made by other coalitions, or even other attempts at organizing cooperatively in the community (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

Histories of coalition success or failure in a community are an important predictor of whether coalitions will be successful again, because of the intermediary factors that can influence coalitions (Wolff, 2001). Communities with prior successes may have pre-existing leaders and support available, as well as experience with cooperation and building relationships between different sectors (Wolff, 2001). And, whether they are success stories or not, narratives of past interventions guide how those in the future perform and how people make choices in the present (Kadushin et al., 2005). Moreover, the amount of trust and level of citizens' engagement before the coalition or partnership is formed can influence the effectiveness of a coalition (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). This is closely tied to a community's history of collaboration and people's experience and ability to share risks, resources and responsibilities as they work together toward a common goal (Fawcett and Roussos, 2000).

### *MEMBERSHIP*

Engaging a broad cross section of the community is not only in the spirit of equality and democracy most coalitions value, but actually contributes to the sustainability of

coalitions. The more meaningfully representative a coalition is of the makeup of the community, the more legitimate, supported and respected the coalition will be in the community at large (Community Catalyst, 2003; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). By actively engaging the community they work within, coalitions create connections that are essential to the long-term success and sustainability of coalition activities (Community Catalyst, 2003).

#### *DEFINING INCLUSIVITY*

Having open and inclusive membership means aiming to represent each aspect and sector of a community to ensure as many points of view as possible are represented (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). This would include a demographic cross-section as well as representation of all major interests around a particular issue (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). In terms of demographics, one should consider aspects as diverse as: age, gender, income, family status, educational background, ethnicity, area of origin, social class, spiritual practice, race, sexual orientation and occupational background (Butterfoss, 2007). Not only is it important to consider diversity in terms of different sectors of a community but also in terms of engaging those who typically have a less powerful voice around issues (Wolff, 2001). The importance of ongoing recruitment, inclusivity and diversity has been held up as key to coalitions' successes (Wolff, 2001).

At the same time, considerations around the diversity of membership should be closely tailored to the issue the coalition is addressing (Butterfoss, 2007). It is especially important to consider who the priority population is in terms of the work that is being completed and to make sure to involve this group in the coalition (Butterfoss, 2007). For example, if the coalition is addressing teen pregnancy in their community, there should be a concerted effort to include teenagers and youth on the coalition. Strategies are more likely to be relevant, effective and sustainable if the coalition membership includes active participation from with a close relationship to the coalitions' work (Butterfoss, 2007).

Defining 'the community,' and therefore who the target population is and who should be included around the table is also a challenge for community coalitions (Kadushin et al., 2005). Using a zip code or a defined neighborhood as a surrogate for a community may not actually mean that the people you are bring together understand themselves as part of the same community (Kadushin et al., 2005). When lines of a community are drawn from the outside and do not actually take into account the importance of internal cohesion of the designated group, problems can arise, especially a lack of unity in the coalition (Kadushin et al., 2005). While it may be more manageable (in an administrative sense) to have 'communities' match local political or funding boundaries, it is a trade-off in terms of effectiveness (Kadushin et al., 2005). On the other hand, being situated in a particular political jurisdiction may provide coalitions with the ability to access higher political levels, enabling them to further their cause more easily (Kadushin et al., 2005).

## *STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT*

Individuals join coalitions for all sorts of reasons. It is important to understand the motivations behind people's volunteerism in order to attract them to become involved in your coalition. There are a number of possible reasons for becoming involved in a coalition: personal or group achievement, being part of something important, being part of the debate, staying 'in the loop' of community affairs, and finding power – or the power of group affiliation (Butterfoss, 2007). It is also possible that some individuals are mandated to be part of a coalition, and this compulsory service can change how they engage in the coalition work (Butterfoss, 2007).

While individuals are complex and may have multiple reasons for wanting to join a coalition, it is important to think about the different possibilities and corresponding strategies for engagement. Engaging individuals who have a strong connection with the issue at hand and are willing to put aside individual interests for the betterment of the group is important (Kreuter et al., 2000). This may include making personal invitations to specific individuals asking them to join the coalition. While this may seem excessively time-consuming, this type of personal engagement strategy is often successful, and may be the only way to engage those who may not otherwise participate (Wolff, 2001).

Developing and maintaining cultural diversity within a coalition is an integral and challenging aspect of building partnerships in a diverse community (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Active recruitment of people from the community's many cultural groups may be necessary. Developing cultural competency – being aware of and working effectively with the cultural differences that exist in a coalition – is key to success (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Coalitions must be prepared to operate and communicate in new ways and to understand issues from different cultural perspectives (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Cultural competency and coalition diversity extends to all aspects of coalition organizing – from taking into account the level of formality and meeting times of the coalition to the food that is served at coalition gatherings. All of these can have tangible effects on the participation of different cultural groups in a coalition (Butterfoss, 2007).

Certain groups in the community, such as parents and grassroots organizers, may be harder to recruit than members of large, formal organization (although the opposite can be true, depending upon the circumstances) (Butterfoss, 2007). No matter the challenges, it is important to remember the importance of bringing members aboard who are especially invested in the issues the coalition is dealing with. This investment might take the form of community ties, expertise, or specific connection to the community issue the coalition addresses (Butterfoss, 2007).

Recruiting a fully dedicated and engaged membership base is essential for the success of coalitions, but different levels of engagement and participation should be allowed in order to include members of the community who may not have the time to participate as fully as may be ideal (Community Catalyst, 2003). For example, allowing people who are not full members of the coalition to participate in rallies, fundraisers and other types of gatherings encourages the broader community's ownership of the coalition's area of concern, but also provides coalition members with broader access to information, ideas and resources that they would have had access to otherwise (Community Catalyst, 2003).

Recruiting individuals to leadership positions within the coalition is also very important, and it can be difficult to find someone with the leadership qualities required who is also willing (or, indeed, *able*) to put in the time and effort required for successful coalition leadership (Butterfoss, 2007). Whether recruiting a sole leader or someone to be one of the many leaders on a coalition, it is important to emphasize the benefits of participation: furthering their own interest in the issue the coalition works on; networking with other leaders; further development of leadership skills; gaining a deeper connection with the community; and having an opportunity to connect with the media about coalition efforts *and* their own organization (Butterfoss, 2007).

### *STRATEGIES FOR RETENTION*

Maintaining an active and satisfied group of people within a coalition is a challenge (Doll et al., 2013). Member satisfaction is important to consider in terms of sustainability of coalitions and has been correlated with more committed and involved members (Kreuter et al., 2000). Keeping up participation over the long term is closely tied to providing members with more benefits than costs because of participation (Kreuter et al., 2000). Through their participation in coalitions, people want to be recognized, be respected, feel needed, build relationships with others, and see tangible results in their community (Butterfoss, 2007; Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

Member satisfaction can be actively promoted in a number of ways. For example, although planning is important at the outset, small, tangible, clear victories for the coalition are important in order to keep members and communities on board with coalition work (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). At the same time, expectations should be kept in check in terms of how much the coalition can achieve in the beginning (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Celebrating and affirming the strengths of the coalition, and the community more generally, is important in order to ensure coalition members feel hopeful that their hard work will pay off (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

A number of additional strategies can be useful contributors to retention of coalition members. For example, it may be a good idea to provide training opportunities for members to enhance their skill set. Connecting newer and more experienced members so that they can learn and form relationships with one another can also be effective. And, assigning members tasks that are relevant to their personal or professional interests is another way to support retention (Butterfoss, 2007).

Recognition for the work that coalition members do is also an important way for members to feel appreciated, recognized and respected (Butterfoss, 2007). This includes ensuring that members can see the impact that they are having, feel appreciated, develop skills and feel a sense of solidarity with other coalition members (Butterfoss, 2007; Kreuter et al., 2000). It is important to highlight that participation in coalitions can provide members with access to information, visibility and influence (Butterfoss, 2007).

When thinking about the costs of participating in a coalition, personal, as well as social-organizational, costs should be taken into account (Butterfoss, 2007). Anyone who is participating in a coalition is giving of their time and efforts, but they may also experience more specific costs, such as inter-personal conflict, through their participation (Butterfoss, 2007). Moreover, practicalities such as meeting times, childcare at

meetings, and the use of language (such as acronyms) that alienates the general population should all be taken into account when trying to retain and engage coalition members (Butterfoss, 2007; Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

### *MEMBER QUALITIES*

While a lot of work has gone into describing the qualities that make a good leader, there are also certain qualities that make a good member of a coalition. This is not to say that coalitions should restrict membership to individuals with these qualities, but that certain personal characteristics and values may fit better with coalition work and should be promoted. For example, coalition members who cooperate with others, value collaboration, respect and value different perspectives, trust other stakeholders, believe that collaboration is worthwhile in itself as well as contributing to their own interests, and are committed to target issues will be more successful in a coalition context (Butterfoss, 2007; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Moreover, if an individual is representing a particular organization, it is important that they act as a connection between the coalition and that organization so that both can benefit (Butterfoss, 2007).

Many of the attributes of a good leader are also the attributes of a good member. Depending on a member's personal characteristics and the resources available, different members may be more adept as a convener of discussion, a catalyst for participation, a conduit for funding, a funder, an advocate, a community organizer, a technical assistance provider, a capacity builder, a partner, or a facilitator (Butterfoss, 2007). Members' resources are integral to a coalition's capacity for change. These resources might include an ability to assist other members or meetings; providing organizational support and backing to the coalition; providing technical assistance; providing a good level of understanding of the target community; and contributing an understanding of policies, politics and community change (Foster-Fishman, 2001). Valuing and reinforcing the skills of members is important in order to fully maximize the benefits of a coalitions' diverse membership structure (Foster-Fishman, 2001).

### **MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABILITY**

Some of the most challenging aspects of developing and maintaining a coalition or partnership include engaging people with little social capital who may be deeply affected by the given problem; maintaining broad representation; spreading the risks, resources and responsibilities among all of the members of the coalition or partnership; overcoming conflict among the different stakeholders; maintaining mutual trust, respect and understanding between participants; and maintaining continuous resources and leadership in order to have the time to actually effect change (Butterfoss, 2007; Doll et al., 2013; Roussos and Fawcett, 2000).

### *MANAGING CONFLICT*

Coalitions set out to bring different sectors of a population together. As a result, one of the main challenges that coalitions face is the ability to get these different groups to work together toward the same goal (Doll et al., 2013). While coalitions that are successful at this are a powerful tool to address a given issue, the tensions between different groups

within a community can also affect the sustainability of this mode of organizing (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

Given that community coalitions' goals are often more general and abstract (than, for example, the mandate of any particular organization), and given that participation in a coalition is open to an entire community, agreeing on how to approach the coalition's issue can be challenging (Kadushin et al., 2005). Having people leave their self-interests at the door can present a challenge, as can building a shared interpretation and approach to the coalition's work (Kadushin et al., 2005).

Conflict can stem from a number of different sources. There may be conflict over goals, resources, geography, methods, public perception, personalities and mixed loyalties (Butterfoss, 2007). With practice, however, coalition members can learn effective conflict management strategies, by listening actively to other people's points of view; keeping emotions under control; separating the person from the 'problem'; focusing on interests, not on position; and reframing the situation (Butterfoss, 2007).

#### *INTER-COMMUNITY TENSIONS*

While most coalitions speak of 'bringing everyone to the table', there are a number of barriers that need to be recognized in this regard, especially in terms of ethnic, racial and class divisions (Kadushin et al., 2005). In cases where there are strong cleavages along ethnic lines, the problem of power differences between different groups cannot be ignored or made out to be unimportant (Kadushin et al., 2005). This is especially the case when traditional 'leaders' of a population also coincide with a particular ethnic group compared to the people who traditionally participated in 'grassroots' organizing or the target population (Kadushin et al., 2005).

#### *INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL TENSIONS*

In bringing together pre-existing organizations, different habits, resources, power and structures can make it difficult for them to work together toward a common goal (Doll et al., 2013; Kadushin et al., 2005; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Pre-existing relationships between corporations, especially competitive ones, can impact the way that they function and levels of tension in community coalitions (Kadushin et al., 2005). Without trusting relationships between the different representatives of organizations within a given coalition, there will be a lack of willingness to share resources, cooperate more generally, and to take collective risk (Butterfoss, 2007).

In order to work through inter-organizational tensions, it is useful to understand the self-interested motivations of each group and take them into account in order to appeal to the larger good in the most relevant way possible (Doll et al., 2013; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Moreover, it may be difficult to get past 'turf wars', where an individual perceives that their organizations' domain is being encroached upon (Butterfoss, 2007). This can pit coalition members against each other, coalition members against the coalition, members against the lead agency, or the coalition against the population they are working in (Butterfoss, 2007). Talking openly about existing and potential conflicts and trying to illustrate how a coalition's goals fit with an organization or individual's goals is a good place to start (Butterfoss, 2007). Building interpersonal relationships, reminding



people of the big picture, and encouraging flexibility are all approaches to deal with conflict (Butterfoss, 2007).

It is also important to recognize that coalitions themselves may be competing with one another (Butterfoss, 2007). If a coalition is created to address the same issue as an existing coalition, there is not only potential for conflict, but also potential for duplication – a waste of members' time and resources. Whenever possible, coalitions should try to support and integrate with one another (Butterfoss, 2007). Sharing information, coordinating priorities, and sharing resources will help all parties involved in the long run (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Indeed, the work that has been done by an older coalition can be helpful to one that is starting from scratch. At the very least, coalitions should try to coordinate efforts whenever possible – thereby improving and enhancing the work that the other is engaged in (Butterfoss, 2007). Fragmentation between coalitions threatens the long-term effectiveness of each coalition (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

### *POWER DIFFERENCES*

Power differences between larger organizations at the table and the 'grassroots' participants can be difficult to overcome (Doll et al., 2013; Kadushin et al., 2005). This is closely tied to the role of professionals at the table. While professionals can be an important asset to a coalition, their specialized knowledge and confidence may end up dominating other members who may be seen (or see themselves) as having less to contribute. This type of power difference can take away from the grassroots and participatory aspect of coalitions (Doll et al., 2013; Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

The importance of relationships in the sustainability of coalitions cannot be overstated. Trusting and meaningful relationships between organizations and individuals in the community form the basis of a strong coalition and a strong community more generally (Butterfoss, 2007).

When coalitions are built on strong relationships of trust and respect, as conflict inevitably arises, these relationships can help sustain the group (Doll et al., 2013; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Conflicts should not be ignored and need to be able to come to the surface and be worked out (Wolff, 2001). But, building these relationships happens with time, and there are a number of strategies that can promote the development of a strong bond. The first is to unify the group around a common set of values and purpose (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Finding common ground is important in order to be able to put aside differences that may cause friction within the group (Kellogg Foundation). Strategies for building relationships of trust between members may involve integrating network opportunities into activities and providing time for informal socializing between participants (Doll et al., 2013). Informal time before, during and after the meetings is important for people to build a sense of community and connection (Kellogg Foundation, 1997; Wolff, 2001). This not only makes coalitions more appealing (it is an additional benefit of participating), but it supports coalition cohesion (Doll et al., 2013).

Leaders also play an important role in developing relationships. By allowing for collaborative coalition processes, where everyone has a stake and a voice, participants will become more confident in the process and each other (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

## LEADERSHIP

Leadership style is important to coalitions' long-term success. One representative definition of a successful leader of a coalition is the following: "Leaders inspire commitment and action; they lead as peer problem solvers; they build broad-based involvement; and they sustain hope and participation" (Wolff, 2001). Effective coalition leaders communicate, facilitate, negotiate and network among coalition members (Butterfoss, 2007; Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). They resolve conflicts constructively, facilitate smooth interactions in the group and help to promote leadership qualities in others in order to create a strong base of coalition membership (Wolff, 2001).

Effective leaders should be trustworthy, patient, and confident in the collaborative process (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). They are at their best when skilled in conflict resolution and able to bring the coalition through the struggles of developing real collaboration and trust between actors who have not traditionally worked together (Kreuter et al., 2000). Having a realistic timetable in mind from both the funders and the community is key in order to fully work out issues and engage communities in a broad way (Kreuter et al., 2000). Given that coalitions bring together people from so many different sectors, leaders have to be flexible about dealing with different perspectives and adapting to new rules and expectations (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Moreover, an important quality of a leader is that they come from the local community. Leaders who are situated in the local community support long-term capacity building (Butterfoss, 2007).

It is important to emphasize that leaders cannot be the only people responsible for sustaining the coalition or making key decisions (Wolff, 2001). Given that collaboration is the ultimate goal of

### On Leadership

Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) define leadership as possessing both the ability to facilitate smooth interaction in the coalition and the analytical skills to develop trust and support movement toward the ultimate goal of the coalition.

In interviews with 40 different coalition leaders, Mizrahi and Rosenthal found that many (80% of interviewed leaders) saw themselves and their coalitions as successful. In most cases, leaders defined success not only as achieving the coalition's stated mission, but as building connections they were able to foster among their members and the wider community. Even in cases when coalitions ended their work and dismantled completely, leaders did not necessarily identify this as a failure because they saw enduring, long lasting changes in their communities.

Leaders identified commitment to the cause and competent leadership as the two most important factors contributing to their coalitions' successes. Qualities that they reported as being important to successful leadership included being credible, dedicated and proven; trustworthy; articulate' and a trained educated professional.

Other important coalition success factors were commitment to coalition unity, equitable decision making, and mutual respect. Additional reasons given that echo findings in the literature included having a broad based constituency, achieving interim victories, and continued contribution of resources by members. External factors such as 'the right timing', 'critical issue' and 'appropriate target' were also identified as playing a role in the coalition's success.

coalitions, leaders need to sustain this participatory process without pushing their own agenda (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Democratic, consensus-based decision-making is necessary for member satisfaction and participation: this process has to be facilitated by the leader or leaders of the group who have a great influence over the engagement and productivity of coalition members (Butterfoss, 2007). Leaders are essential in supporting the participation of all members of the coalition and making sure that they feel welcomed and valued (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Leaders should protect and promote the openness of the participation process in coalitions (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Balancing the need for discussion and sharing with action-oriented efforts is a tricky balance that successful coalition leaders manage (Butterfoss, 2007).

Leadership does not have to refer to a specific individual 'leading' the group, but can also be understood as being a group of leaders who move the coalition forward (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). Leaders should have no formal power or authority over the group (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). However, the structure of a leader's position (i.e. whether it is a formal position, whether there is a rotation in leadership every few years, etc) should be decided in advance (Butterfoss, 2007).

A shared leadership model may be particularly effective in a coalition context, especially where it may be difficult to find all leadership attributes in one individual (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Shared leadership also gives more than one person exposure to the experience needed to mentor future leaders and ensure that the coalition continues to sustain (Butterfoss, 2007). Moreover, dispersing leadership among different members provides the opportunity and impetus to develop new leaders, which strengthens the coalition and the community as a whole and supports coalitions' broader values of diversity, flexibility, and equality (Butterfoss, 2007; Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

#### *IDENTIFYING AND RECRUITING LEADERS*

Identifying community leaders, such as school principals, police chiefs or heads of service providers, can be quite simple; however, there are a number of other important players in a community who can be easily overlooked (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Grassroots volunteer leaders who are already engaged in the community, such as volunteers in block associations, parent groups, or other neighborhood associations, are important (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). These individuals may have better access to members of the community who are harder to reach. Grassroots leaders are likely to be familiar faces to the people on the ground, having more personal relationships with members of the community than, for example, an elected leader (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). There are also community leaders with a very informal role – a neighbor who knows everyone on their block, for example. These types of informal leaders are the most difficult to identify and engage (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Strategies to attract more difficult-to-reach leaders might include holding a public town meeting; hosting more personal, intimate meeting at someone's house or a coffee shop; participating at community tables; and going door-to-door (Butterfoss, 2007; Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

## VISION AND PURPOSE

When considering the vision and purpose of a coalition, there are two important things to take into account in terms of the sustainability of the group: clarity and ownership (Doll et al., 2013; Wolff, 2001).

### *CLEAR VISION AND PURPOSE*

First, a pre-planning stage that occurs before the coalition actually gets funding is important for coalition sustainability (Kreuter et al., 2000). Typically, this would involve activities like conducting a needs assessment of the community and convening a core group of people who could later form the central group for the larger coalition (Kreuter et al., 2000). A community or needs assessment allows the coalition to better understand the community and how problems should be approached (Butterfoss, 2007). This type of assessment should be conducted at regular intervals throughout the coalition's life course in order to ensure that the coalition is growing and shifting along with the community's priorities (Butterfoss, 2007). Ideally, these assessments would be asset-based – focusing on what the community has rather than only on what it is lacking (Butterfoss, 2007).

Beyond community needs, an assessment also provides insight into potential challenges and strengths that are already present in the community (Butterfoss, 2007). It is important to understand the resources available in a community as well as the efforts that are already going on in the community so that neither of these are duplicated (Butterfoss, 2007). Moreover, having a strong assessment and basis for the strategies that the coalition is putting in place provides a foundation for evaluation of the coalition's work. Evaluation can be an important tool in providing evidence of a coalition's effectiveness to funders, other leaders, members of the media, and, of course, members of the community (Butterfoss, 2007).

A clear direction in terms of rules, roles and procedures related to the functioning of the coalition is essential (Butterfoss, 2007; Doll et al., 2013; Kreuter et al., 2000). Having clear, routine operations is correlated with member commitment (Butterfoss, 2007) and formalizing goals, expectations and objectives is associated with the overall sustainability and success of coalitions (Butterfoss, 2007; Kreuter et al., 2000). For example, communication strategies, both internal to the coalition and externally with the community, media, funders and/or government, should be in place (Butterfoss, 2007; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). There should also be norms of engagement in order to ensure that a democratic decision-making process is maintained (Butterfoss, 2007; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). This may include formal position descriptions that help to

#### **On clarity**

In Roussos and Fawcett's (2000) review of the literature on community collaborations, which include community coalitions, a key finding was the importance of a clear mission, plan and vision to increasing a coalition's capacity to effect change and maintain participation rates.

Specifically, having a clear plan early on in the formation of the partnership or coalition helped to support change and sustainability. While coalitions' overarching focus is to effect long term change, intermediate indicators of success are important – learning from what is being done and celebrating accomplishments are both important in maintaining coalition participant satisfaction.

clarify individual roles within the coalition and ensure that everyone is working as efficiently as possible (Butterfoss, 2007). Organizational charts may be used to show how each job relates to others on the team (Butterfoss, 2007). A similar process and structure should be outlined for issues such as resolving conflict, voting and decision-making (Community Catalyst, 2003; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). This may include the development of bylaws, which would be formal guidelines for operation (Butterfoss, 2007). This type of organizational clarity helps to solidify what members can expect in terms of how the coalition operates and how they are expected to act within the coalition structure (Community Catalyst, 2003).

Third, developing a clear vision and mission for one's coalition is an essential stage in its development (Butterfoss, 2007; Community Catalyst, 2003). Having a clear and common sense of the changed community the coalition participants are working towards is essential for collaborative work that moves beyond individual agendas (Doll et al., 2013; Kellogg Foundation, 1997). This would include developing a vision statement, which paints a picture of the change that the coalition hopes to achieve; a mission statement, which describes the guiding philosophical purpose of the coalition's existence; and a slogan or tagline which can be used to market the coalition to the public and engage the wider community (Butterfoss, 2007; Community Catalyst, 2003). Simplicity, clarity, and brevity are all important when putting together the vision and mission of a coalition as these statements can be used to communicate the goals and perspective of the coalition to the community – and to potential new members (Community Catalyst, 2003).

Reviewing, reassessing and planning next steps on a regular basis helps coalitions continue to evolve alongside the needs and assets of their communities – as well as to keep on track in terms of the group's vision and mission (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Mission statements should be periodically reviewed, as this can help coalitions adapt and remain flexible (Butterfoss, 2007). It is important that coalitions continue to discuss their missions and goals for the future; regular re-examination ensures that the coalition's work still resonates with what is important to the community (Wolff, 2001).

#### *OWNERSHIP*

When the motivation for the coalition comes from within the community, it is more likely to be sustainable. This is because a sense of ownership over coalition work and its outcomes is key (Butterfoss, 2007; Wolff, 2001). Ownership includes making sure that the community identifies the issues at hand and chooses the most appropriate interventions (Wolff, 2001). Having communities identify their own relevant issues not only give members a stronger stake in the work, but forges a connection with the community that ensures the coalition's mission matches the need and priorities of the community (Doll, 2013).

In the case where the issue is identified from outside of the community, it is important to design the coalition in a way that promotes ownership over the problem as much as possible. For example, it is essential that community members are involved at every stage following identification of the issues, including engaging high-risk community members, developing solutions, and undertaking implementation (Butterfoss, 2007).

Making sure that the community (even those who are not directly involved with the coalition) feels ownership of coalition goals and feels involved and supportive of the work

is key to sustainability; however, connecting with people and resources outside of the coalition's community may also be important (Butterfoss, 2007). It is a tricky balance to achieve – making sure that the community drives the project is important, but so too is recognizing that outside resources are likely to be required and helpful to effect sustained change (Kubisch, 2005).

## **TAKING ACTION**

Having a clear vision also facilitates the ability to take action, which is important in terms of sustaining membership and building support from external parties like evaluators and funders (Butterfoss, 2007; Wolff, 2001). While a lot of work needs to go into planning the structure and base of the coalition, moving beyond the planning and informational phases of work is important to maintain coalition members' interest and to keeping the coalition focused on community change (Wolff, 2001).

The manner in which action is taken is also key. It is important to have clear goals, objectives and work plans with measurable indicators of success (Butterfoss, 2007; Wolff, 2001). These should be available to the public and constantly reviewed to make sure they continue to match the needs of the community (Wolff, 2001). Action should promote relationships between community members as well as a strong recognition of the need to re-structure power relations and factors external to the coalition that impact it in a meaningful way (i.e. funding policies, programs and practices at the regional or state level) (Wolff, 2001).

It is important to realize that taking action and creating change is at the heart of community coalitions, and while planning carefully is important, producing results at the beginning of a coalition's organizing efforts helps to sustain interest among members and support from the wider community (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Kubisch (2005) calls this the 'process-product tension', referring to the tension between building the capacity of the members and actually pursuing the goals of the organization (Kubisch, 2005). Creating capacity in the community is an added benefit for participants, but is also important in terms of the sustainability of the project and potential for new forms of collaborations in the future. However, maintaining membership participation is dependent on members seeing results from their efforts in terms of the actual focus of the group (Kubisch, 2005).

## **LARGER ECOLOGICAL FACTORS**

One common critique of coalitions is that they are not able to deal with problems that have roots at the regional, state, national or international level (Kadushin et al., 2005). Given that by definition community coalitions are grassroots level organizations, they are not ideally situated to deal with larger ecological factors that may affect the problems that they are organizing around.

Kadushin et al (2005) take this view in theorizing why some community coalitions have not been successful in reaching their goals. This is not to say that coalitions are powerless within contexts where larger forces are playing an important role in the problem they are trying to solve: coalitions should recognize these larger ecological factors as they plan and take action around a particular issue in their community (Kadushin et al., 2005).

For example, coalitions working in communities that are very poor will face unique challenges in terms of maintaining participation accessing and competing for scarce resources (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). In a different scenario, a political and social climate favourable to the coalition's work can be incredibly important to success, especially when responsiveness from actors at other levels of the community are important in terms of influencing the issue at hand (Butterfoss, 2007).

### On Coalition Success Factors

Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) review 41 coalitions in the New York/New Jersey area. They identify many of the same factors that are needed to result in a successful coalition, namely: 1) favorable political, economic and community conditions; 2) a committed core group of people committed to the goal of the coalition; 3) contributions (ideology, power and resources) from their members; 4) the ability to maintain its leadership and membership (Mizrahi and Rosenthal, 2001).

Among salient political, economic and community conditions, a community's past experience with coalitions and similar partnerships, the types of resources available, the urgency of the goal that the coalitions is working toward, and the feasibility of success are all identified as important to take into account (Mizrahi and Rosenthal, 2001).

### DOLLARS AND RESOURCES

A coalition's funding does not alone guarantee success or failure. The ability to sustain without funding is often influenced by whether grassroots groups started the coalition without funding or if it was created because of a funding opportunity (Wolff, 2001). In most cases, even if there is sustained funding for a period of time, if a coalition relies completely on outside funding, it will be very difficult to sustain the coalition beyond the initial funding period (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

Searching for funding is time-consuming, creating the risk of taking up all of the energy coalition members have (Wolff, 2001). Coalitions need to consider whether the time and effort needed to prepare applications for grants is better spent elsewhere, and whether these funding opportunities in fact distract from the original mission and vision of the coalition (Butterfoss, 2007; Wolff, 2011). While grants can help coalitions start projects that they could not have otherwise, it is important to think about the coalition's long-term goals and whether the grant contributes to them (Butterfoss, 2007). Ideally, the focus of the coalition should be to stress empowering and engaging community in order to have the skills and capacity of individuals to sustain the goals of the coalition (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). The restrictions that may be placed upon the activities of the coalition by certain grants, and the potential tension created between a funder's need for control and a coalition's need for autonomy should be taken into account when considering funding opportunities (Butterfoss, 2007). For example, funders like single-issue targeted outcomes, which may challenge the vision of the coalition.

Beyond the risks associated with grant funding, there is a need for material and financial resources to support the work of a coalition. In particular, funding for basic coordination, collaboration and information exchange (core staff, mailings, rental of meeting space, annual meeting) should be considered valuable (Butterfoss, 2007). While there are many successful coalitions without staff, these groups may find they are limited in their work –

resources for staff positions have been found to be supportive of coalition successes (Wolff, 2001).

A number of case studies have shown that having paid staff allows coalitions to take on their issues with a more complex approach and produce results more easily (Butterfoss, 2007). By organizing the structure of the coalition and ensuring that communication and decision-making go smoothly, members are more likely to be satisfied and committed to the efforts of the coalition (Butterfoss, 2007). However, it is important to avoid having staff members take over the essential volunteer work that helps to build collaboration and is a source of some of the skill-building and other benefits that members receive through participating in a coalition (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Sharing the work also helps to avoid staff burnout and turnover, which is a common issue (Butterfoss, 2007). Instead, having a staff member who completes much of the clerical work that is necessary to support the functioning of a coalition can be helpful (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

If outside funding is not available, it may be a good strategy to integrate coalition efforts into a pre-existing community institution (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). For example, if you are developing an after school program, it may be wise in terms of sustainability to integrate it into an organization that is equipped to support the program, such as the YMCA (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). However, it is important to ensure that the coalition does not just become another community service delivery agency (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

A number of characteristics related to coalition funding are important when considering sustainability. First, diversity in funding sources ensures the coalition is not dependent on one source for its existence (Butterfoss, 2007). Second, if a coalition is able to receive in-kind support from members or partner organizations, it may be able to generate funds internally (Butterfoss, 2007). A third consideration is to look at the long term by considering opportunities for multi-year funding or framing their issue as a need that will continue and garner support for many years (Butterfoss, 2007). To support the objective of appropriate funding, the coalition should be clear in its goals and expected outcomes, and illustrate both through its documented strategies and results. Coalitions should also be able to demonstrate that they have strong leaders who are committed to carry out the work of the coalition and manage finances (Butterfoss, 2007). Finally, the coalition needs a constituency who supports its work and lends credibility to the group through its own values and work (Butterfoss, 2007).

## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Training can help members and leaders understand and identify their leadership qualities, learn how to advocate for their cause, and move the coalition forward more generally (Butterfoss, 2007; Wolff, 2001). While training can come in the form of retreats, there are also many written resource materials available to coalition members trying to develop their coalition (Butterfoss, 2007; Wolff, 2001). The most efficient form of training is one that can be ongoing over the formative period of coalition development, as opposed to a one-time-only workshop (Butterfoss, 2007). For example, a popular approach is the *Coalition Technical Assistance and Training Framework* (Butterfoss, 2004), which takes coalitions through six steps of technical assistance and ends with an evaluation to ensure that the coalition was able to take on the recommendations that



were suggested and to help them assess whether additional action is needed (Butterfoss, 2007).

Technical assistance involving bringing experts from outside the coalition in to help with training, network building, material development etc. can help coalitions learn from what are considered best practices in a particular area (Butterfoss, 2007). For the relationship to be a productive one, both parties must be clear about the other's expectations, roles and responsibilities (Butterfoss, 2007).

## **MARKETING**

Marketing is one of the ways that coalitions can actively pursue sustainability. Effective marketing of a coalition is important for a few reasons. First, by marketing your coalition effectively, you are more likely to recruit members who are willing to invest time and resources into the coalition (Butterfoss, 2007; Community Catalyst, 2003). Second, it is important that the wider community embraces the message and activities of the coalition, making it possible to attract funding and provide a broader community base to rely on for advocacy and support (Butterfoss, 2007).

In marketing a coalition to the public, messages must be communicated in a clear and effective way, through an organizational message that is based on the mission and vision statement of the coalition along with a logo, catchy name, and the development of promotional materials (Butterfoss, 2007). By working from the coalition's mission statement, the group can ensure that they are presenting themselves as strong and unified (Community Catalyst, 2003). Branding oneself successfully can positively impact the visibility of a coalition and help engage a larger segment of the population (Butterfoss, 2007). Other materials, such as newsletters, can be used to make the broader community aware of the successes of the coalition over a certain period of time, and provide an opportunity for interaction if feedback is encouraged (Butterfoss, 2007). These can be distributed by paper or on a coalition website, which could be a stand-alone site or one that is housed under a member agency's site (Butterfoss, 2007).

To have a sound marketing strategy, it is important for the coalition to have some sense of the barriers being faced by those affected by the coalition's mission – so that information can be shared as effectively as possible (Butterfoss, 2007). Advocacy may be an important part of this strategy: using education and effective communication, coalitions can work toward effecting change. Ideally, coalitions should aim to build relationships with decision makers and strive to become the go-to source for information related to their mission (Butterfoss, 2007).

While coalitions with available financial resources may want to pursue television, print or radio announcements, other more cost-effective routes are also available (Community Catalyst, 2003). For example, brochures, press releases, flyers, newsletters, and hosting community forums are all cost-effective approaches to marketing (Community Catalyst, 2003). Funding public service announcements, posting flyers around the community, using social media, or organizing a community forum are all ways that a coalition can increase its visibility and make its presence in the community known (Community Catalyst, 2003).

## Case Study – Connect to Protect

The HIV prevention research project Connect to Protect (C2P) is coalition-based and aims to reduce HIV/AIDS incidence among marginalized youth in 15 urban sites in the U.S. and Puerto Rico by targeting the structural factors which influence HIV risk. Doll et al. (2013) researched this project, and their findings align well with the factors most commonly linked to coalition sustainability, as discussed above.

The researchers found four key success factors and four key barriers to success for the coalitions involved in the research project.

### Success factors

1. Developing trust and cohesion
  - a. This was important for members of the coalition to work together successfully.
  - b. Historical factors/relationships were a barrier to trust for some participants.
  - c. Strategies to promote trust included consistent communication between members; collaborative action plans to encourage people working together; and members following through on commitments.
2. Creating diverse coalition membership
  - a. Provided various means for members to achieve goals
  - b. Expanded the knowledge base regarding access to resources
  - c. Shared work (avoiding burn out)
  - d. Networking with people with different skills and expertise
3. Developing a shared vision
  - a. Need to put aside the vision and mission of one's own individual organization
  - b. Understanding the unique priorities and interests of those involved and then connecting these to the coalition
4. Ensuring clarity of coalition purpose and goals
  - a. Clarify what the coalition is working toward, making it easier to develop focused action plans and strategies
  - b. Development of concrete attainable goals and objectives
  - c. Working toward a unique goal, giving the coalition a place in the community unoccupied by another coalition.

### Barriers

1. Lack of clarity over member roles and responsibilities
  - a. Increases risk of member frustration, disengagement, ineffective coalition actions and confusion
  - b. Decreased members' stake in the success of the coalition
2. Power imbalances between members
  - a. Some members possessed specialized and valuable resources, making them gatekeepers to certain resources
  - b. These power imbalances had to be addressed in an open environment
3. Balancing coalition building and coalition pace
  - a. Difficult balancing the need to do the groundwork and to take action – some participants felt frustration or that the coalition was stagnating.
4. HIV/AIDS stigma

## ARE COALITIONS EFFECTIVE?

A serious criticism leveled against coalitions is that they are not in fact successful in effecting the issues they are organized around (Butterfoss, 2006). In fact, a number of studies have not only concluded that coalitions are ineffective, but that they may have effects that are opposite to those they intended (Herman et al., 2011; Zakocs and Edwards, 2006;).

### Case Study: Fighting Back Program

The Fighting Back program, which supported local coalitions to address issues around substance abuse. Halford et al. (2002) examine the effectiveness of coalitions in 14 communities across the United States. Using indicators of substance use, treatment, community/prevention, Halford et al. found that none of their initial hypotheses related to the success of the coalitions were supported (2002). In particular, coalitions that were more comprehensive did no better than other coalitions; and coalitions that targeted adults did worse on related indicators as compared to control groups; and there were no visible effects on goals related to youth (Halford et al., 2002).

Halford et al. suggest that the findings can be interpreted in a number of ways:

- coalition involvement actually produces adverse effects;
- coalitions require a lot of effort and produce no effects;
- this particular program was poorly implemented; and/or
- outcomes would have been even worse without coalition efforts.

The authors conclude that:

- the broad goals of Fighting Back (to reduce substance use among all groups and prevent harms associated with substance use) do not lend themselves to influencing specific outcomes;
- coalitions are expensive and are not effective means of implementing strategies;
- future coalitions should keep their goals focused and manageable;
- communities should choose interventions supported by research and get help implementing them; and
- coalitions should continually evaluate the impact of their programs.

A second study of the Fighting Back initiative was conducted by Lindholm et al. in 2004, providing more insight into the inner workings of the coalition and possible reasons for lack of coalition success. In particular, the researchers found that the Fighting Back initiatives were unsuccessful in creating trustful relationships between the 'elite' representatives and the 'grassroots' leaders involved (2004). This was because of historical relationships as well as the way the coalitions were set up (Lindholm et al., 2004). Participants also felt like there was too much time spent talking about things and too little on action, a finding which emphasized the need to balance sound planning with concrete activities (Lindholm et al., 2004). Moreover, integrating different service providers proved difficult due to competition over resources, ideological conflict, and logistical issues. And, while occasional inter-agency coordination took place, these incidences were hard to attribute to the coalition itself (Lindholm et al., 2004).

While both examinations of the Fighting Back coalitions emphasize coalition failures, the roots of the issues that the coalitions faced are grounded in the very same aspects of coalitions building that those who support coalitions as a form of organizing hold up as being essential for their success. Rather than disagreeing on the most important aspects related to the sustainability and effectiveness of coalitions, these case studies differ in their final conclusion that coalitions more generally are not viable or efficient forms of organizing.

At the same time, however, a number of reports on the functioning of coalitions maintain that they can be a very effective way of organizing, for a number of reasons.

- Coalitions have access to and can mobilize the human and social capital in their communities in a way that other forms of organizing cannot (Cohen et al., 2002). This helps to create longer-lasting bonds between organizations within a community (Community Catalyst, 2003).
- Coalitions pool the resources of the diverse membership that they engage (Cohen et al., 2002; Community Catalyst, 2003).
- Coalitions provide members with the stability and infrastructure that facilitates the execution of projects (Community Catalyst, 2003).
- Coalitions can achieve a powerful amount of credibility and legitimacy as they are not pursuing the 'self-interested' goals of one organization, but rather, pursuing the broader good of the community (Cohen et al., 2002; Community Catalyst, 2003).
- Coalitions provide a means of sharing information and different perspectives. This is celebrated as a core tenet of coalition work (Cohen et al., 2002).
- Coalitions foster cooperation between organizations and individuals, which can improve community capacity more generally (Cohen et al., 2002).

However, as discussed above with respect to coalition sustainability, being able to foster trust and cooperation between participating organizations takes substantial work. But is the amount of work required for the benefits of coalition work to materialize worth it in the end? While more rigorous, 'scientific' methods of evaluating coalitions have not shown a consensus in answering this question, there is a large literature of community coalition case studies that analyze the factors impacting the effectiveness of a particular coalition (Zakocs and Edwards, 2006).

## **METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES**

### *ESTABLISHING CAUSALITY*

Methodological challenges have to be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of coalition work. Often, community coalitions are trying to effect broad changes that may manifest themselves only in the future, making it difficult to attribute change to the coalition, but also to measure the change at all (for example, the population-level data needed to see change may not be collected) (Herman et al., 2011; Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). Coalitions exist in changing societies, and this makes it inherently difficult to establish which variables affect the coalition and its intended outcomes (Butterfoss, 2007).

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

How do we measure the success, effectiveness and sustainability of a coalition? While coalitions may indeed be effective, it may be that our expectations of what coalitions can do and change are unrealistic (Kreuter et al., 2000). To expect that coalitions can effect systemic or organizational change may be an unreasonable standard against which to judge coalition success or failure (Kreuter et al., 2000). And, while coalitions may be able to increase capacity, empower the community, and raise awareness and participation rates of a population significantly, they may still be judged by performance measures that have inappropriate expectations for coalition achievements (Kreuter et al., 2000).

That being said, there are a number of methods to judge the effectiveness of coalitions at both the population level and the individual coalition level. Participant surveys, event or activity logs, key informant interviews, focus groups, direct observations, and review of existing documents have all been examined in order to evaluate coalitions (Butterfoss, 2006). However, without consensus in terms of how to measure success, it is difficult to establish whether, for example, the disbanding of a coalition should be a measure of success or failure.

Two common measures for community coalition effectiveness are internal coalition functioning and external community changes (Zakocs and Edwards, 2006). There are a number of challenges in terms of setting up rigorous experimentation of coalition effectiveness. First, comparing studies of coalition effectiveness is challenging as there is no consistency in the ways that different groups define their indicators of effectiveness – or even the way that they define coalition (Zakocs and Edwards, 2006). Second, while a number of studies have attempted to compare a coalition community with a ‘control’ non-coalition community, the results of such studies have been very mixed, variously finding no effect, positive effect, and negative effect (Herman et al., 2011; Zakocs and Edwards, 2006). Lastly, it is extremely difficult to parse the factors that may have contributed to the results of these studies: coalitions are embedded in complex social realities that have an effect on the functioning and success of a given coalition, providing little insight into the factors that make a coalition effective or not (Kreuter et al., 2000; Zakocs and Edwards, 2006).

In a review of the coalition literature, Zakocs and Edwards (2006) found that six common factors positively associated with coalition effectiveness.

- 1) Formalized governance procedures
- 2) Strong leadership style
- 3) Active member participation
- 4) Diverse membership
- 5) Member agency collaboration
- 6) Group cohesion (357).

However, it is important to keep in mind that these factors were correlated with different indicators of effectiveness across the different studies (for example, member participation, member satisfaction and number of actions implemented) (Zakocs and Edwards, 2006). Moreover, it is very difficult to establish causality; perhaps, as coalitions are perceived as more effective, a larger, more diverse pool of community members are willing to participate (Zakocs and Edwards, 2006; Kreuter et al., 2000).

## Two Case Studies

### Controlling Asthma in American Cities Project (CAACP)

In a case study of a number of the communities involved in the Controlling Asthma in American Cities Project (CAACP) – developed to implement asthma interventions that could be applied in a culturally relevant, integrated fashion – Herman et al. (2011) found that use of a coalition approach resulted in a number of positive changes. CAACP, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), provided for the administrative support that is often unavailable to other coalitions. Moreover, since the CDC required that the work be executed through coalitions, the authors venture that most of the participating communities had a history of collaboration, which may not be the case in other contexts. In particular, the researchers found that coalitions were able to achieve changes within various institutions and linkages between member organizations. Having a diverse membership meet in the coalition and make connections with one another was one of the key ways that these outcomes were achieved. Moreover, bringing together people from such diverse backgrounds gave the coalitions a powerful voice, speaking as a large collaborative body that could lend credibility to the issue around which they were organizing.

In terms of sustainability, coalitions were able to successfully apply for funding and also received funding generated by the work of the coalition itself.

It is important to note that the success of the coalition work in this study was determined by coalition members themselves, who determined, through their own experience and knowledge of their community, which changes would not have occurred without the coalition. Moreover, these coalitions were made up largely of health professionals, members of academic institutions, and other similar players, and coalitions were managed by an established institution (most often a local hospital or university).

### Campus and Community Coalition – Amherst

Linowski and DiFluvio (2012) examined a community coalition aiming to reduce underage drinking rates at the University of Massachusetts Amherst targeted changing the normative environment around drinking and reviewing policies around drinking and their enforcement. The coalition was successful in increasing enforcement of drinking policies and their interventions resulted in a significant reduction in student drinking. Along with changing policies at the university, the coalition was successful in influencing the laws in neighboring towns (Linowski and DiFluvio, 2012). Contributors to their success included the following:

- buy-in from senior leadership;
- data driven plans;
- evidence based practice;
- engaging a wide range of stakeholders, resulting in broad ranging support;
- strong leadership;
- shared vision and understanding among members; and
- flexible and adaptable in its strategic planning.

# FRAMEWORKS TO UNDERSTAND AND IMPROVE EFFECTIVENESS

## COLLECTIVE IMPACT THEORY (CIT)

One approach to conceptualizing the relevant characteristics for coalition effectiveness is the collective impact theory of Kania and Kramer (2011). The basic premise of CIT is that broad cross-sector coordination is essential for large-scale social change because all of the organizations involved in a particular issue must mobilize together in order for meaningful change to take place (Kania and Kramer, 2011). Unlike most collaborations, initiatives that follow a collective impact model involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants (Kania and Kramer, 2011).

Not only is collective impact a different way of working for many, but it may also represent a different way of understanding social progress than many are accustomed to (Kania and Kramer, 2013). Instead of having pre-determined solutions and expectations in terms of outcomes, collective impact is a process of recognizing resources that may have not been recognized before and learning in an ongoing way (Kania and Kramer, 2013). It is a process through which various organizations that may not have worked together in the past align with one another, learn, and make progress together in a feedback loop that continues to move forward (Kania and Kramer, 2013).

Collective impact theory recognizes that social problems are complex and no 'proven solution' usually exists (Kania and Kramer, 2013). A helpful term in this context is the idea of the 'emergent solution', a term from the field of complexity science that is used in cases where the result of a given intervention is unpredictable because one cannot control all of the factors influencing its outcome (Kania and Kramer, 2013). Instead of working within rigid plans and structure, 'emergent solutions' focus on creating effective rules for interaction – rules that ensure alignment between all actors involved, leading to synchronized results (Kania and Kramer, 2013).

Kania and Kramer (2011) have identified five conditions for the success of collective impact initiatives. All of these conditions are meant to structure the way that actors involved in social change interact with one another to ensure 'emergent solutions'.

1. **Common agenda:** All people involved in the project must have a shared vision for change, which includes a shared understanding of the issue and the best approach for addressing it. This ensures that the focus and efforts of all actors involved are actually working toward the same end goal.
2. **Shared measurement systems:** Agreeing on the way that success will be measured and reported.
3. **Mutually reinforcing activities:** Having a common understanding of what everyone is working towards and how success is being measured allows actors with different strengths to work in their area of expertise in concert with and in support of one another.

4. Continuous communication: Creating a common vocabulary, meeting as equals and developing trust among different organizations and individuals are all supported by continuous communication.
5. Backbone support organizations: Coordinating a large-scale collaboration requires that a group of people are tasked with the organization and coordination of the group itself. The infrastructure that a backbone organization provides is essential for the support and sustainability of such an endeavor.

It is important to re-imagine what 'resources' might include, beyond traditional ideas of monetary funding. CIT provides a lens through which communities can see, in a novel way, what resources are available to them (Kania and Kramer, 2013). Working with people from different sectors provides a new perspective on the resources that are available and has the possibility of enhancing the creativity of actors when looking for resources, and, furthermore, CIT increases the chances of recognizing a previously unnoticed set of resources, best practices, or ongoing efforts that already exist inside or outside of the community (Kania and Kramer, 2013).

By working together, all actors in a relevant sector learn together and, as a result, develop and respond to new knowledge and learning at the same time (Kania and Kramer, 2013). Participants may learn things that may have only been possible in the context of working collectively across different sectors of the population – and, following from this, a coordinated response to these findings is possible, which, in turn, leads to more effective and more relevant interventions (Kania and Kramer, 2013).

CIT promotes a model that is well-suited to developmental evaluation, an approach that is more fluid than traditional outcomes-based evaluation methods. Developmental evaluation “focuses on the relationships between people and organizations over time, and the problems or solutions that arise from those relationships” (Kania and Kramer, 2013: 4). Developmental evaluation is a way of identifying patterns as they emerge as opposed to using a pre-determined logic model to anticipate problems in advance (Kania and Kramer, 2013). This allows groups to respond more quickly and effectively to new opportunities and challenges, and to help focus on understanding how and why certain changes (in either the positive or negative direction) are happening (Kania and Kramer, 2013).

#### *CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTING A COLLECTIVE IMPACT APPROACH*

Funding bodies still tend to base the distribution of their funds on how much impact an individual organization is having on a particular problem (Kania and Kramer, 2011). This encourages organizations to work independently and prove that they made the most meaningful difference with regards to a particular outcome – and to do so by comparing themselves to their funding 'competitors', instead of working together with them to achieve collaborative action (Kania and Kramer, 2011). This challenge is compounded by the traditional isolation of the non-profit sector from government and commercial actors (Kania and Kramer, 2011). Funding structures have yet to learn how to support the more long-term processes involved in developing and maintaining a collective action approach (Kania and Kramer, 2011).



Moreover, bringing together people who have never worked together before and having them work in a synchronized fashion means moving beyond previous relationships, which may have been competitive or distrustful (Kania and Kramer, 2013). Participants in collective impact activities are asked to leave their self-interest at the door and to compromise in order to achieve successes in coalition development, functioning, and outcomes (Kania and Kramer, 2013).

*WHEN IS COLLECTIVE IMPACT APPROACH APPROPRIATE?*

Three preconditions for the success of a collective impact initiative are identified by Hanleybrown et al. (2012):

1. **Influential champion(s):** Having an influential champion is the most important factor of the three. An influential champion must be passionate about the issue, but also willing and able to support others who develop their own point of view and solution to a given problem.
2. **Adequate financial resources:** Resources to fund both necessary infrastructure and long-term planning.
3. **Sense of urgency for change:** an important precondition for successful implementation of CIT is the ability to persuade people in the community to come together and invest their time and resources in mobilizing around a given issue.

**COMMUNITY COALITION ACTION THEORY (CCAT)**

Community Coalition Action Theory (CCAT) provides a framework for understanding coalitions. It can be used to structure an examination of the development of a coalition as well as to try and understand coalitions' strengths and weaknesses in terms of both sustainability and effectiveness. In many ways, CCAT encompasses factors that were already outlined in this literature review. However, CCAT is unique in bringing many of these elements together in a comprehensive framework.

1. **Developmental stages.** Community Coalition Action Theory understands the development of coalitions as a response to a threat, opportunity or mandate (Kegler and Swan, 2011). Coalitions develop through stages that repeat as new plans are developed or new members join: formation, implementation, maintenance, and outcomes (Butterfoss, 2007). Understanding the development of coalitions through the framework of these stages provides a structure for understanding the successes of a coalition at different points in time.
2. **Community context.** Community context, particularly levels of community trust and social-political climate, can influence how a coalition develops (Butterfoss, 2007).
3. **Lead agency of convener group.** In most cases, a lead agency or group recruits members to a coalition with the goal of broad representation from across the community (Butterfoss, 2007; Kegler and Swan, 2011). Lead agencies are useful, especially if they are able to take over some of the clerical and/or administrative work required by the coalition (Butterfoss, 2007). If an agency has taken the lead in initiating the work of a coalition, it is important that they are strongly connected to and have a strong sense of respect for members of their

community; that they believe in the spirit of collaboration; that they are able provide for coalition administrative needs; and that they can advocate publicly for the coalition (Butterfoss, 2007).

4. **Coalition membership.** The characteristics of the core group of a coalition will affect the coalition's success in terms of its ability to engage different segments of the community's population (Butterfoss, 2007). Diverse membership in all regards is key to the coalition's strength in pooling resources, perspectives, and constituencies – so that coalition activities can be undertaken in a holistic and comprehensive way (Butterfoss, 2007). By working together as a diverse group, a variety of organizational resources are brought together, creating 'collaborative synergy' that helps members work toward concrete results such as improved policies, programs and practices related to a given issue (Kegler and Swan, 2011).
5. **Coalition operations and processes.** Once the initial work of putting the coalition together has been completed, a structure and formal procedures can be put in place to facilitate engagement and work toward a specific goal (Kegler and Swan, 2011). This includes structures for decision-making, communication and conflict management (Butterfoss, 2007).
6. **Leadership and staffing.** Effective coalition leadership supports communication and decision-making within coalitions, which, in turn, has important effects on member satisfaction and participation (Butterfoss, 2007). The availability of paid staff to complete the more administrative aspects of coalition work is an important factor in coalition action being carried out effectively and efficiently (Butterfoss, 2007).
7. **Coalition structures.** Formalized – and well-defined – rules, roles, structures and procedures are key to coalition functioning (Butterfoss, 2007).
8. **Pooled member and external resources.** By pooling members and resources, the coalition can accomplish more than it would have if members worked independently (Butterfoss, 2007; Kegler and Swan, 2011) – including the stability and infrastructure needed to carry out projects (Community Catalyst, 2003). Coalition members bring resources, such as knowledge, energy, skills, connections and expertise to the table (Butterfoss, 2007) and the structure of coalitions themselves promotes this pooling and the engagement of skills from across the community (Kegler and Swan, 2011).
9. **Member engagement.** Empowering members through their participation in the coalition not only leads to an engaged and committed membership, but also members who benefit personally from their participation in the coalition (Butterfoss, 2007).

10. **Assessment and planning.** Comprehensive planning and assessment are both important for successful implementation of coalition initiatives (Butterfoss, 2007).
11. **Implementation of strategies.** Implementing coalition strategies depends on the community environment, the planning of the intervention, and the resources available. Using evidence-based practices helps coalitions to achieve their goals, and by implementing interventions at multiple levels, coalitions will be more likely to create change in their community (Butterfoss, 2007).
12. **Community change outcomes.** Coalitions can make change beyond their organization's area of interest, increasing the community's ability to tackle different issues in the future (Butterfoss, 2007).
13. **Health and social outcomes.** Improvement in health and social outcomes is the ultimate indicator of a coalition's success (Butterfoss, 2007).
14. **Community capacity.** Community capacity is another potential area for success (Butterfoss, 2007).

#### **Community Coalition Action Theory (CCAT) Case Study**

Kegler and Swan (2011) look at longitudinal data gathered on the California Healthy Cities and Community (CHCC) program to try and understand how aspects of a coalition in the formation stage affect the coalition's ability to maintain itself. The CHCC was implemented in 20 diverse communities across California, with coalition development managed and funded \$125,000 over three years (Kegler and Swan, 2011).

Broad representation of sectors on the coalition was negatively correlated with cohesion and was not correlated with any other indicators of coalition process or membership (Kegler and Swan, 2011). However, broad sectoral representation was associated with dollars leveraged – which, in turn, was associated with the creation of leadership opportunities and the number of new partners engaged (Kegler and Swan, 2011). Moreover, the diversity of funding sources was correlated with new leadership opportunities and program expansion (Kegler and Swan, 2011). These findings support the broader hypothesis of CCAT, which posits that pooled resources lead to community change and capacity, as defined by new leadership opportunities (Kegler and Swan, 2011). Staff competence was highly correlated with task focus, which, along with cohesion and staff competence, was related to member satisfaction (Kegler and Swan, 2011). Shared decision-making and open and frequent communication were also correlated with measures of participation (e.g., chosen coalition roles, number of hours dedicated to coalition work) (Kegler and Swan, 2011).

Overall, broad representation appeared to be a key piece in the success of community coalitions (Kegler and Swan, 2011). Moreover, task-focused groups who employed shared decision-making and open and frequent communication, and had strong and competent leadership, were more successful in maintaining member participation (Kegler and Swan, 2011).

## EVALUATING COALITIONS

Evaluating coalitions is important for a number of different reasons: understanding a coalition's impact in its community; supporting coalition responsiveness to community needs; understanding the effectiveness and sustainability of coalitions at a population level; and understanding how coalition infrastructure works (Herman et al., 2011).

### CHALLENGES TO EVALUATING COALITIONS

There are few studies that are successful in evaluating coalition functioning and success at both an individual coalition and a population level (Herman et al., 2011). While it is fairly straightforward to evaluate coalition procedures and infrastructure (leadership, decision making structure, etc.), it is far more complicated methodologically to measure the impact of coalitions on their communities or given issue more broadly (Herman et al., 2011). As such, most of the currently available resources address evaluation of internal coalition functioning (Herman et al., 2011).

Evaluating coalitions is enormously complex as a result of a number of methodological issues:

1. Putting together a representative sample of community coalitions is immensely challenging, as there is no public body that keeps track of coalitions and many of them (and their accomplishments) are not formally documented (Berkowitz, 2001; Kegler and Swan, 2011).
2. The researcher has no control over the independent variable, the coalition, in the sense that looking at communities before and then after a coalition has been established is very difficult (Berkowitz, 2001).
3. Controlling externalities (i.e., other things that might influence, either positively or negatively, the coalition's desired impact) is nearly impossible to do or even to adequately theorize (Berkowitz, 2001; Herman et al., 2011; Kegler and Swan, 2011).
4. There is no consensus in terms of how to measure the success or failure of a coalition (Berkowitz, 2001).
5. Changes caused by a coalition's work may not be apparent until a significant time after interventions have been put in place, or even after the coalition disbands (Berkowitz, 2001).

Evaluation may also be challenging insofar as funders often require that coalitions use evaluative strategies to measure their accountability to a larger initiative – rather than as a tool for working toward improvement (Butterfoss, 2007). And, since coalitions are so complex to evaluate, they might find themselves in a bind: some may dismiss the ability to look at coalitions through a quantitative lens, while at the same time dismissing qualitative approaches for their inability to provide rigorous information about coalition performance (Butterfoss, 2007). This perspective can result in the dismissal of the possibility that coalitions can be evaluated at all, a situation that leaves coalitions unable

to provide evidence for the effectiveness of their work (Butterfoss, 2007). Moreover, evaluations are important to provide interim feedback to the community and the coalition itself on its successes, when the ultimate, long-term goal may only be realized far off in the future (Butterfoss, 2007).

While a number of studies have tried to put together a more systematic, population based approach to evaluating coalition work, it appears that none of these approaches have been more broadly adopted. A number of checklists and manuals are also available for coalitions to use in self-evaluation (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Please see **Appendix 1** for resources available to coalitions with regards to performing self-evaluation and **Appendix 2** for a short review of attempts to evaluate coalition success at a population level.

## **TRENDS IN SELF-EVALUATION**

Self-evaluation is not only important in terms of coalition self-reflection, but also in terms of sustainability. In order to evaluate their performance, it is important for coalitions to have measurable outcomes that they track according to benchmark goals (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Sharing the information with the community and within the coalition builds ongoing support (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

As was mentioned in the section on establishing a clear vision for one's coalition, evaluating the success and direction of the coalition is important in order to stay in tune with the needs of the community (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). Coalitions that have developed a mission statement, objectives and a timeline outlining expectations for the coalition's activities can use these to structure their self-evaluation (Kellogg Foundation, 1997). When an evaluation is completed, it should be done in such a way that the information that is gathered can be used to concretely strengthen the activities of the coalition (Kellogg Foundation, 1997).

An evaluation can look at a number of different aspects of coalition work (Kellogg Foundation, 1997):

1. Process evaluation: What activities took place?
  - a. Day to day activities
  - b. Activity logs
  - c. Media events
  - d. Critical events
  - e. Process evaluation can also include consideration of coalition infrastructure, function and processes (for example, the number of people the coalition was able to engage) (Butterfoss, 2007).
2. Outcome evaluation: What was accomplished?
  - a. Changes in policies or practices
  - b. Development of new services
  - c. Behavior changes
3. Impact evaluation: What were the long-range effects?
  - a. Ultimate impacts on the community (specific outcomes)
  - b. Changes in broader statistical indicators

Another slightly different way of evaluating the performance of coalitions is to look at three different levels: coalition infrastructure, function and procedures; the extent to which interventions and activities are put in place and impact the intended populations; and outcomes involving health and community change (Herman et al., 2011). While aspects of coalition infrastructure such as leadership and member satisfaction are relatively straightforward to measure, more distant effects – outcomes and impact – can pose a bigger challenge (Herman et al., 2011).

There are also many different approaches that can be employed to evaluate coalitions, none of which are mutually exclusive. In fact, as Grannar and Sharpe (2004) argue, an approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods may be the most appropriate way to evaluate coalitions.

1. **Interpretivist evaluation** focuses on maintaining in-depth contact with those involved in the coalition, resulting in rich qualitative data that can be used to understand the coalition and the context it is operating within (Butterfoss, 2007).
2. **Theory-based evaluation** measures outcomes of the project through the development of a logic model. This evaluation approach aims to assess whether the coalition activities are on track and how to adjust coalition work in order to make a more meaningful, long-term impact (Butterfoss, 2007).
3. **Participatory evaluation** uses an egalitarian process, which empowers stakeholders to be as involved in the evaluation process as the evaluating third party (Butterfoss, 2007). While this approach is the most challenging, in that participants need to work through issues related to trust, conflicting agendas and sound research practices, it is often preferred by coalitions because it is a democratic approach (Butterfoss, 2007).
4. **Evaluating stage of development** is a method for assessing coalition growth through a number of stages:
  - Initial mobilization,
  - Establishing organizational structure,
  - Building capacity for action,
  - Planning for action,
  - Implementation,
  - Refinement and institutionalization (Florin et al., 1993)

There are also a number of strategies that can be employed that make measuring coalition success more feasible and useful (Butterfoss, 2007).

- Employing innovative, qualitative methods that represent the community in a dynamic way
- Creating action around measurable outcomes
- Translating all evaluation results into actionable items
- Starting small and expanding: evaluating a portion of the project instead of taking on everything at once

Overall, evaluation of community coalitions is best when it is participatory, when it looks at successes and challenges from a multidisciplinary approach, and when it is flexible to the needs of both the community and any external initiative acting as an umbrella or impetus for the coalition's work (Butterfoss, 2007). Involving coalition members in the evaluation process not only imparts skills and knowledge to members of the local community but also makes it more likely that the results of the evaluation are acted upon (Butterfoss, 2007).

While consulting a professional evaluator has many benefits, there are also a number of publicly available frameworks and sets of questions to guide coalitions through the process of self-evaluation, including: The Kellogg Foundation's *Steps to Program Evaluation*; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health*; and Kansas University Work Group's *Framework for Participatory Evaluation of Community Initiatives* (Butterfoss, 2007). Please see **Appendix 1** for further examples.

## DO COALITIONS CONTRIBUTE SOMETHING UNIQUELY POSITIVE?

Coalitions are an appealing form of organizing, not only because they may be a sustainable and effective way of tackling a given problem, but because they follow democratic principles and result in other benefits to individuals and the community (Butterfoss, 2007). Ideologically, coalitions support goals such as equality, tolerance, human rights, the rule of law, accountability, transparency, and civic participation (Butterfoss, 2007). While coalitions don't automatically instill all of these qualities into a group, it is often what they are striving for. Ideally, through working together in a coalition, people begin to know, trust and work with one another, which goes beyond the coalition, improving the quality of community life more generally (Wolff, 2001).

Increasing community capacity is one of the key advantages of community coalitions over other forms of mobilization (Zakocs and Guckenberg, 2007). In this context, community capacity can be defined as fostering a sense of community, ownership and commitment to act on what happens in one's community, and the ability to recognize and address systematic problems (and mobilize the resources to do so) (Zakocs and Guckenberg, 2007). Building community capacity is important for coalition sustainability, but also goes beyond the confines of a particular coalition or individual project (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Zakocs and Guckenberg, 2007). Indeed, developing community capacity can serve as a base for a more sustained, coordinated, and effective cooperation in other areas of the community such as the delivery of services and addressing other problems outside of the scope of the coalition (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Zakocs and Guckenberg, 2007). Beyond community capacity, coalitions provide communities with the organizational capacity to carry out recommended interventions and strategies (Zakocs and Guckenberg, 2007). While social and human capital are important, organizational capacity is necessary to implement strategies to tackle various problems in a community (Zakocs and Guckenberg, 2007).

Imparting practical skills like leadership capacity, technical knowledge, and program planning and implementation to members in a community coalition is not only important for the sustainability of the coalitions' work but the capacity to create organizational change in relation to other programs and projects in the future. History of collaboration has been found to be an important determinant of the success of future collaborations

### A Deeper Look: Fighting Back

In a case study of 15 Fighting Back interventions, Zakocs and Guckenberg (2007) examine whether the community coalition was able to influence organizational capacity (measured as the ability to influence existing organizations or creating new programs and policies related to substance abuse). Among the 15 coalitions studied, they found that resources, lead agency, governance and leadership influenced the amount of organizational capacity that they were able to foster.

However, it is important to note that this study of organizational capacity does not then establish a relationship between organizational capacity and a positive effect in terms of successful interventions in the stated goal of the group (in this case substance abuse). Moreover, any changes in substance abuse rates, if examined, would be difficult to attribute (either positively or negatively) to the actions taken by the coalitions.



due to the trust and organizational capacity that participating in coalition work develops (Wolff, 2001).

Understanding the mechanisms through which coalitions improve organizational and community capacity is therefore essential to actively fostering these broader benefits of coalition building. While a number of authors, including those cited above, refer to the broader, positive effects that coalitions can have on the communities that they are working within, there is a lack of case studies and explicit, detailed theoretical work that expands on the mechanisms through which this might take place.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this review a number of key points have emerged that are key to coalition building, sustainability, and effectiveness.

- The community needs to feel that it has ownership of the vision, interventions and proposed solutions if the coalition is to be sustainable.
- Leaders should facilitate the meaningful involvement of all members of the coalition.
- As part of building a coalition, a clear vision, mission, set of success measures, and outline of members' roles need to be defined. These will support future evaluation, marketing of the coalition's work, and staying on track more generally.
- Building a coalition is a slow process that happens over time. Developing trust and meaningful relationships between different stakeholders is essential for sustainability.
- Establishing diversity within a coalition is difficult: it takes a lot of time and resources to expand coalition participation. However, diverse membership is an important success factor for the coalition model, so a concerted effort, which may include one-on-one recruitment, should be considered valuable.
- While coalitions can learn from one another, each one has to deal with the particular circumstances in their community. Historical factors and larger ecological realities need to be taken into account in order to understand the dynamics of a community more fully.
- Training members is important to ensure active participation and that members themselves benefit from their work in the coalition. Training materials and other resources for coalitions are widely available online.
- A 'backbone' organization can benefit coalitions in a number of different ways, especially in terms of administrative support. Even if a coalition does not have a large amount of funding or a backbone organization to rely on, funding for a core staff person is very beneficial.
- Coalitions can help to promote trust, strong working relationships, human capital, organizational capital and leadership skills beyond the coalition. When considering the costs of starting and operating a coalition, these additional benefits should be taken into account.

Overall, the body of literature on coalitions suggests that these factors need to be taken into account when considering the sustainability and effectiveness of coalitions. But more research is needed in three main areas: a) comparable studies of coalitions, b) research aimed at understanding the mechanisms through which coalitions promote larger societal benefits, and c) producing comprehensive frameworks to evaluate

coalitions. Nonetheless, there is a strong body of literature supporting the work and unique benefits of coalitions.

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## APPENDIX 1- RESOURCES FOR PERFORMING SELF-EVALUATION

There are a multitude of checklists and resources for coalitions to perform evaluations of their performance at every stage of coalition building. While there are countless of these available publicly, they have many commonalities between them. The similarities between the tools are outlined in the evaluation section of this literature review.

Below are links to just a few of these resources:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/canada/regions/ab-nwt-tno/downloads-eng.php>

<http://www.achievecommunities.org/upload/Coalition-development-tools.docx>

<http://coalitionwork.com/resources/tools/>

[www.udetc.org/documents/Sample-Coalition-Self-Assessment-Tool.doc](http://www.udetc.org/documents/Sample-Coalition-Self-Assessment-Tool.doc)

[http://www.smartbeginnings.org/Portals/5/PDFs/Altarum\\_Reports/Final\\_Report\\_AppendicesA-E.pdf](http://www.smartbeginnings.org/Portals/5/PDFs/Altarum_Reports/Final_Report_AppendicesA-E.pdf)

<http://hwli.org/leadership-library/resources-for-coalition-leaders/>



## APPENDIX 2- TOOLS TO MEASURE COALITION SUCCESS

The following tools have been developed with the hope of expanding their use more broadly; however, they have not yet been adopted as population-level evaluation techniques for coalitions.

**FORECAST (Formative Evaluation, Consultation and Systems Technique)** is an adaptation of a technique used in epidemiological models of the health problem and models of proposed actions (Kreuter et al., 2000). It has been used to evaluate coalitions' development by taking certain indicators and measuring them at each stage of coalition development (Kreuter et al., 2000). For example, to assess coalition impact, surveys are conducted with the central leaders of the coalition and other community members, and measures associated with the desired outcome, such as health trends, can be analyzed together with these survey results (Kreuter et al., 2000).

The **Framework for Evaluating and Improving Community Partnerships to Prevent Cardiovascular Disease** uses a logic model that structures measurement instruments, process measures and outcome measures (Kreuter et al., 2000).

**Prevention Plus III** is a four-step assessment guide using a logic model approach to correlate coalition activities to outcome measures (Kreuter et al., 2000).