



QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

The 33 people interviewed were asked a series of questions regarding what is needed to create and sustain viable collaboratives and networks.

The following pages present more extensive answers and quotes to eight specific questions, listed below:

1. When is it useful to form a coalition, collaboration or network?
2. What has been learned about developing a shared mission and goals for a coalition/network?
3. What are the lessons learned regarding effective governance?
4. What is needed to develop and maintain effective membership in the coalition/network?
5. What is needed to develop and nurture effective leadership within a coalition or network?
6. How do you create and nurture diversity in a coalition/network?
7. What is needed to develop and maintain effective staff and operations in a coalition/network?
8. What is the role of funding in starting and maintaining an effective coalition/network? When is early money useful and when isn't it?

Question 1: *When is it useful to form a coalition, collaboration or network?*

To summarize, coalitions are useful when:

- _ All members are clear as to benefits received
- _ Members can jointly seek funding and pool resources
- _ Members are linked to new opportunities

*“When you work for yourself,
you compete for the pie;
when you work
collaboratively you
expand the pie.”*

*“In the past, people did
community organizing based
on their own self-interest.
Today people realize that it is
necessary to see all of the
dimensions of community
issues/ programs and to work
on them in a collaborative
way. This requires the input
and sustained participation
of a broad coalition/network
of diverse groups within
a community.”*

It is useful to form a collaboration when:

- The parties involved are clear as to what benefits they are receiving from being involved.
- There is mutual education regarding the members’ programs and issues.
- Members need to present a united front to political adversaries, and/or when trying to influence politicians and decision-makers who need to hear from a broad constituency.
- There is a need to combat institutional racism and bring about social change.
- Members can involve the whole community in changing the community.
- Members can jointly seek funding, pool resources and integrate organizational services.
- The coalition / network can meet funders’ requirements for collaboration.
- Organizations are linked to new opportunities.
- The coalitions / networks can serve as an informational clearinghouse.

It is not useful to form a collaboration when:

- Members don’t have a clear goal or objective.
- The coalition/network becomes the solution in itself.
- The timing is off – a coalition/network can sometimes highlight differences between groups and exacerbate them.
- Members don’t know how to give up control or empower other people.
- The coalition/network is built on artificial premises and exists in name only.

Question 2: *What has been learned about developing a shared mission and goals for a coalition/network?*

To summarize, creation of shared mission and goals requires that members:

- Have open dialogue about why people are involved, what they hope to accomplish and how the coalition can help them achieve their goals
- Build strong, trusting relationships
- Have a participatory process with the active involvement of member organizations

“Developing a shared mission is not the first question. The first task is to be a good listener and then help people to connect their ideas to a broader vision that is shared by the group.”

“Coalitions are built on personal relationships — that’s what a network really is.”

“It’s hard to develop a shared mission. You can never spend enough time doing it. You have to keep working on it because things constantly change.”

- Members must develop a deep understanding of history and some shared sense of the future.
- Determine your prize — set your goal — that is the threshold test.
- There needs to be frank conversations about why individuals are participating and how they expect to benefit.
- It is more effective to not put the mission together right away; you need to get to know each other first, work together, and get some “wins” under your belt.
- Restrain from having pre-determined (“pre-coalition/ network”) decisions about the mission and goals.
- The mission has to be developed early on – at least a shared sense of why people are coming together.
- Clearly define the mission, with input from each member organization, to build a shared agenda.
- Sometimes, it is necessary to define the mission on an issue-by-issue basis.
- Allow people to dream but keep things practical.
- The coalition/network needs a neutral convener to create the process of defining its mission.

Question 3: *What are the lessons learned regarding effective governance?*

To summarize, effective governance requires:

- _ Explicit membership criteria
- _ Clear operating procedures regarding decision-making, communications and accountability
- _ Specific rules of conduct for member organizations
- _ Strong executive leadership

“The first ground rule is to work with what you have.”

“There are no standard models for governing a collaborative.”

“Governance issues have to be addressed from the very beginning. Misunderstandings about power and roles can create major problems if they are not dealt with in an appropriate way.”

“It is important to establish governance processes that are sensitive to and respectful of the unique cultures of the participating organizations.”

- Regardless of the size of the group or the governance structure, timely, substantive and transparent internal communications are key.
- If there is a preoccupation with governance issues at the beginning, the network is doomed to fail. The focus should be on the mission and purpose and how that will be accomplished.
- The people on the governing body must have the authority to speak on behalf of their member organizations.
- No one organization should dominate the coalition/network.
- The bylaws need to specify the primary groups that are to be the core membership. Each target group should have equal representation on the Board.
- As part of the governance policies, there must be clear rules of conduct for each Board member.
- Consensus is important. If consensus doesn't work then a super majority, not a simple majority, should be used to make decisions.
- The democratic/consensus process can also hamper coalition/networks when group members aren't willing to make necessary key decisions.
- The individuals in leadership positions must represent the entire collaborative rather than their own constituency.
- Informal structures are best. Formal structures are needed.
- The coalition's leadership group must have the authority/responsibility to function as an independent body.
- Trainings should be conducted on organizational development and group dynamics before defining the governance structure.

Question 4: *What is needed to develop and maintain effective membership in the coalition/network?*

To summarize, effective membership requires:

- Having explicit membership requirements and expectations
- Broad representation/participation in the governance process
- Building mutual understanding and positive relationships among member organizations
- Sponsoring relevant programs addressing the needs of member organizations
- Implementing concrete projects with broad member participation

“When a collaborative has unequal partners, the main question for the least powerful partner is what is to be gained by participating in a subordinate role.”

“The boundaries need to be porous – and there’s a real risk to that.”

“It’s important to establish membership criteria but there has to be some momentum that makes people want to join in the first place.”

“You have to be aware of the different capacity levels of member organizations. Large organizations must be willing to contribute more resources to developing the coalition.”

- Ensure that people have the capacity to participate on an equal basis; i.e., be sensitive to the uneven development of organizations.
- The question of membership criteria depends on what you want to accomplish. If your focus is to have a coalition/ network of leaders, then it’s important to have clearly stated criteria for membership. If it’s a coalition/network of grassroots organizations, then you want to get everyone involved.
- There is often not a lot of shared information about the capacity of member groups in a coalition/network, and yet expectations can be unrealistic regarding what individual organizations can deliver.
- Work on specific projects that involve everyone in the coalition/network. This builds trust and helps members to understand what other organizations are able to contribute and their commitment to the work.
- Keep people involved by doing program work that serves the needs of the member organizations.
- Have clear guidelines for bringing people into an organization (membership criteria) and clear expectations for those who belong (membership requirements).
- Renewal should not be automatic – when organizations don’t comply with membership requirements, their affiliation should be terminated.
- Require members to bring resources to the collaborative – as a measure of their commitment – not just money but access and ideas.

Question 5: *What is needed to develop and nurture effective leadership within a coalition or network?*

To summarize, effective leadership requires:

- _ Developing a shared vision
- _ Building strong relationships within the leadership team
- _ Establishing a leadership development program, including mentoring
- _ Rotating leadership roles
- _ Providing cross-training among member organizations

“The biggest failure of our generation is not developing new leadership. This is a major issue that must be addressed by coalitions.”

“Leadership is a craft; it’s like learning how to cook.”

“People in leadership roles have to be very good listeners who want to serve the community.”

“You can nurture and support leadership but you can’t create it.”

- Challenge the process, enable people to work together, model the way, and celebrate accomplishments.
- Provide a cross-training program to broaden the expertise of member organizations.
- A specific program to develop leadership in the coalition/network is essential.
- Established organizations need to nurture and support (mentor) the new groups.
- Rotate leadership roles frequently.
- Leadership roles in a coalition/network are often assumed but not talked about – question leadership roles at the beginning.
- The institutional memory of a coalition/network should not be housed with one person.
- Do things in a way that allow people to apply what they learn at the network table in their own organizations and communities.

Question 6: *How do you create and nurture diversity in a coalition/network?*

To summarize, diversity requires:

- _ Recruiting a diverse membership
- _ Pro-actively focusing on diversity issues
- _ Committing resources to diversity
- _ Having organizational leadership committed to addressing diversity issues
- _ Developing core operating principles
- _ Sharing information among member organizations

“This question is at the heart of the American dream.”

“Ecological metaphors give us a tool for addressing this – uniformity is unnatural (like Starbucks!).”

“You don’t get real diversity all at once, you get diversity over time. Don’t worry over who isn’t at the table – celebrate who is.”

“We’ve had ten years of talking about environ-mental justice and the lack of diversity in environmental organizations. After ten years not much has changed.”

“Diversity is a resource for survival – it’s not a secondary issue.”

“The problem lies with environmental organizations – they have to diversify their staff and boards.”

- Diversity has to be at the heart of everything you do, otherwise people will not continue to participate.
- Seek diversity in age, not just race and gender.
- Be explicit and address the diversity issue right from the beginning. Otherwise it will create conflicts that will be dealt with in a reactionary way.
- The “old boys’ network” succeeded because of its homogeneity. We don’t have similar models.
- Issues of diversity have to be given primary consideration in all key organizational discussions (e.g., governance, membership, programs, etc.).
- Resources need to be committed to hiring and training diverse individuals who may lack management skills but have community organizing skills.
- Strong leadership is essential in dealing with diversity issues.
- Have a pro-active approach to sharing information (stories) about the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of member organizations.
- Don’t take it for granted that people know each other and can work with each other.
- Diversifying an organization is a journey. It takes time, patience and commitment.

Question 7: *What is needed to develop and maintain effective staff and operations in a coalition/network?*

To summarize, effective staff and operations require:

- Ensuring adequate staffing with clear roles and responsibilities
- Having written operating procedures for decision-making, communications and accountability
- Developing strong relationships within and between the board and staff
- Creating a representative oversight team from member organizations
- Committing to appropriate use of technology

“We tend to routinely underestimate how much time and resources are required to staff a collaborative effectively.”

“The real challenge is that racial and cultural issues are highly charged and sometimes very explosive. You have to be pro-active in engaging the entire staff in a dialogue about diversity issues.”

“Too often, staff of color are expected to be experts about issues affecting communities of color.”

“Be very conscious of the use of technology – unevenness in access can be a problem.”

- Staff needs to be good listeners, who want to serve the community and who can relate to, and have the respect of, all the member groups.
- You should have a realistic understanding of staff’s capacity in order to prevent false expectations.
- Partner groups need to develop guidelines that define how they will work together across diverse lines.
- Have a management team composed of individuals representing key organizations.
- Make sure you have a clear division of labor and defined roles based on the capacities of the member groups and staff.
- Establish, and enforce, written operational policies that member groups are required to follow (e.g. attendance, committees, task assignments, etc.).
- Have a clear structure that provides accountability to the member groups and funders.
- Staff has to listen to the different perceptions and be able to translate what is being said to the entire membership.
- Whenever possible, staff should not be employees assigned by a member organization; rather, it is better to hire people independently.
- Staff have a dual role: First, a clearinghouse role of collecting and sharing information; second, a leadership role of planning and coordinating organizational action.

Question 8: *What is the role of funding in starting and maintaining an effective coalition/network? When is early money useful and when isn't it?*

To summarize:

Coalitions and networks need to:

- _ Honestly and openly deal with fiscal issues
- _ Get seed funding
- _ Diversify revenue beyond foundation grants
- _ Be mission-driven rather than funder driven
- _ Speak with funders in a unified voice
- _ Have designated fund-raising staff and volunteers

Funders need to:

- _ Have flexible guidelines
- _ Make a long-term funding commitment
- _ Provide start-up funding
- _ Provide funding for planning and organizational development
- _ Continue funding individual organizations

“If funding is the primary motive, then a coalition is dead in the water.”

“You can't start by saying let's get together and then go look for the money. You have to have the money in hand first.”

“White organizations receive more funding with fewer conditions than people of color organizations. And, of course, the funders are also white.”

“Clear accounting = long friendships.”

Internal to networks/coalitions:

- Get seed money before starting a new coalition/network.
- Money issues have to be dealt with in an open and honest way or they become the source of major internal problems.
- Whenever possible, develop independent sources of revenue other than foundation grants.
- A coalition/network needs to be mission-driven, not funder-driven.
- Some coalition/networks have a rotating fiscal sponsor, with different member groups assuming responsibility.
- Develop a common message and speak to funders with one voice.
- Funding changes the relationship between organizations – especially when one of them is thrust into a re-granting role.
- There should be a designated person in the coalition/network who raises money, and who does not have similar fundraising duties with a member group.

- Make sure that a foundation proposal from the coalition/network

“Funding fosters competition among organizations. It’s easier to compete than collaborate.”

“We have resources we don’t acknowledge – investment is more than cash. It is respect, attention, love and knowledge.”

“its bad practice for foundations to be the primary conveners of coalition/networks. When this happens, people are likely to come to the table to see what they can get.”

“Funders have this attitude: ‘Let a thousand flowers bloom,’ but none of them get enough sunlight.”

“Organizations need to move beyond their narrow thinking about raising money. There are 35,000 foundations in this country. Organizations need to develop the capacity to solicit funding together and build relationships with both large and small foundations.”

doesn’t jeopardize funding for a member group.

- Member groups should share their fundraising information, and strategies, including donor lists.

Specific to the role of foundations:

- The funding community needs to have more flexible guidelines. For example, foundations recently put out a guidebook on sprawl. The way to stop sprawl is to fund coalition/networks.
- There has to be a long-term funding commitment to develop an effective coalition/network.
- When starting a new organization have the money allocated up front. Funders can play a key role, as they can be objective about who the funding should go to.
- There are two kinds of collaboratives – those convened by funders and those that emerge from people’s vision and work for social justice.
- Foundations are often not willing to provide funding to help groups work through their internal problems and political differences.
- For a coalition/network to work, a planning process should be funded for two years and include technical assistance and ongoing funding for participation.
- Funding should be provided not just for operations but also for participation – there has to be compensation for people’s time.
- In some cases, when foundations are upfront about the money they have to invest, that becomes the focal point.
- Funding sources need to make it clear that involvement in the coalition/network won’t affect individual member funding.
- Foundations play an important role in convening people. Otherwise, it can be hard to initially get people to come to the table.