

COALITIONS: PLUSES, MINUSES & GUIDELINES

Lee H. Staples

Pluses (Benefits of Borrowing Power)

Numbers + more power

Clout, legitimacy, public influence

Ability to deal with larger & more complex issues. Can accomplish what can't be done alone

Ability to reach a wider population

Allies

Unity

Reduce duplication & competition. Rationalize work; groups not working at cross purposes

Lessen chances of divide & conquer, i.e. groups being played against one another by opponents

Community building

Experienced leadership available from some groups

Opportunities for leadership development

Connections, possible linkages to decision-makers

Experience of other groups re strategy & tactics

Information sharing, learn from others. More diversity of perspectives

Shared expertise

Shared training

Staff assistance

Better media coverage

Resources & money

Better access to donors

Donors more likely to fund coalitions

Minuses (Costs or interest paid to borrow power)

0 + 0 + 0 = 0

Give more than get?

Baggage that may come with other coalition members (ex. reputation, enemies, credibility, etc.)

Whose leaders?

How is differential level of group development dealt with structurally. "Apples & oranges"

Conflicting group interests. Different organizations have different priorities and agendas

Level of commitment to coalition ("buy-in") may vary

Decision-making processes? Again, "apples & oranges"

Time required, slow processes. Need to get all members on board.

Drain on staff & resources

Can't raise money directly for participating group. Coalition gets all the money & resources.

OR, coalition is unable to raise funds because of competition from participating groups.

Loss of autonomy

Lost identity. Small groups can be swallowed up.

Shared or lost credit. Whose letterhead? Whose press release? Whose spokespeople?

Strategy & tactics - lowest common denominator may rule, i.e. watered down goals & methods

Communications & logistics can be complicated, especially if member groups are spread out

Harder to evaluate work

Guidelines

Make sure that all participating groups gain

Everyone up front re organizational self interests

Make sure there is sufficient buy-in from participants

Make sure that participating groups can & will produce on responsibilities

Agreed upon representation formula, clear structure

Agreed upon decision-making process, regular meeting schedule

Fair & efficient division of labor

Agreed upon goals, strategy & tactics

Figure out staffing

Formula for fair resource contribution & distribution. Gain not drain resources

Spokespeople & "credit issues" worked out

Team Work

Clear expectations & responsibilities

Clear process for evaluation

Process to restructure goals & methods

Good two-way information flow

Share information, experience & expertise

Joint presentations to donors