



Stronger Together: Building & Maintaining Coalitions

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.



Action Brief

Vol. 1.1

April 17, 2023

Photo: OCPSC staff met with the San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition, a collective of ethnic community-based organizations and other groups at a Community Connections. Coalitions often have one lead organization who serve as the backbone organization to support aligned activities.

What are Coalitions?

Coalitions are alliances for combined action. They are formed when two or more groups temporarily work together to achieve a common goal.

Why are Coalitions Important?

No one can do it all. Not government. Not community-based organizations (CBOs). It takes *ALL of US* to ensure the safety, security, and prosperity of our community. Working together to organize and leverage each other's strengths and assets—people, money, skills, knowledge and connections—can lead to *greater impact*. Coalitions *expand access*. They *reduce duplication of effort* and *minimize competition*. There is also power in joining forces. Coalitions are the cornerstone of sustainable and *equitable change*.

Coalition-Building Basics

- 1. Create connections.** Contact community leaders. Learn what other people and organizations are doing and reach out. See who is missing and invite them to join. Be as inclusive as possible.
- 2. Find common goals.** Discover your shared purpose (for example, getting people vaccinated during the COVID-19 pandemic) and commit to working together to realize the purpose.
- 3. Organize and mobilize partners.** Share the risks, resources, and responsibilities of doing the work. Have partners lead with what they know/do best. Promoting each other's work on social media builds trust and multiplies the effect.
- 4. Move the coalition forward.** Leverage the partnerships you've built. Find other common objectives. Decide what you can and can't do and continue to act. Help smaller member organizations start and grow their participation in the coalition.

This **Action Brief** is a product of the series "**Learning Labs: From Discovery to Action**." It is based on the first session, held on January 23, 2023, and features excerpts from a discussion with Mario Ortega (CEO, Abrazar, Inc.), Debra J. Williams (Founder and CEO, Building Resilient Communities) and Dr. Inés Ruiz-Huston (VP of Special Programs and Operations, El Concilio California). Recordings are in [English](#), [Spanish](#) and ASL.

What CBOs are Saying and Doing

Why should we partner with other CBOs?

Mario: We cannot do everything ourselves. And we don't want to. We want it to be *authentic*. We want the community to feel comfortable...All our partners have different languages and communities that they support. We don't all do the same thing...You're going to make so much *more progress* if you support each other.

Inés: When we come out and *do events together*, that explodes because now you have multiple languages, multiple symbols, and multiple ways of communicating to bring people together.

What are some guiding principles for working together?

Debra: *Respect* for each other. We don't have to know everything each other believes, but do we have a common cause? If it's a fire, a flood, an earthquake, a pandemic. Whatever it may be. If it's diabetes. Whatever the health issue or economic issue. Where can we find common ground? That's really the whole point.

How do you balance competing needs or priorities within the coalition?

Inés: We all come from *different funding sources*, whether it's national-level or local-level or a giving agency...We are able to diversify and then we can share and help one another as much as we can.

Debra: We don't always play well together, right? Everybody has tended to work in silos. And this coalition has decided not to do that. A lot of it is the way that we have structured ourselves. Even though Building Resilient Communities is the leader, we don't act like we're the boss. We're not the boss. We're really the *facilitator*...The other thing is...get rid of the egos. Just because it's not your idea, be willing to share with people in the collaborative. Give constantly. I am constantly *giving credit where credit's due*.

As a COVID-19 coalition, how are you transitioning to other issues affecting the community?

Debra: We all know what the health issues are in the Black/African American community...And so the whole concept of *one team, one mission* is continuing because now we've been in the trenches with each other. We have those relationships with each other. And now we're developing a vision statement, a mission statement, core values, and membership guidelines to move into the future.

Mario: We've gone from vaccine equity and [now] we've been working on *health equity*, which was our goal all along.

The Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications,

housed within the Office of Planning and Research, initiates and executes campaigns related to the state's highest priority public awareness and community outreach efforts. The intent of a single state entity coordinating California's most important campaigns is so that the state can realize more inclusive and effective outcomes while preventing equity gaps in statewide outreach.



Resource

Building and maintaining a coalition takes conscious, planned, and ongoing effort. Wherever you are on this path, the [Community Tool Box](#) has resources to help you build skills and take action.

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