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Box 80, Folder 12, Coalition building, 1984.



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

# National Affairs

PROGRAM AIDS

IRVING M. LEVINE  
Director, National Affairs Department

December 21, 1984

TO: Area Directors

FROM: Irving M. Levine

The National Affairs Department during this election year has been particularly interested in the issues of group politics and coalition building. We have used the release of the publication The Art of Coalition Building: A Guide for Community Leaders by Cherie Brown as the focus for a series of consultations in New York and Chicago with a wide range of community leaders, intergroup relations professionals, government officials and the media.

NAD is recommending that the AJC chapters sponsor similar coalition building consultations due to the intense interest in intergroup relations and ethnic, racial, religious and gender-based politics raised by the 1984 election.

#### Formats:

1. Release of The Art of Coalition Building: A Guide for Community Leaders at a luncheon or dinner meeting with Cherie Brown address and response by local ethnic leaders.
2. Coalition building workshops for AJC leaders that teach the following skills:
  - How to define group-self interest
  - How to find common ground amidst conflicting positions between groups
  - How to initiate a coalition and develop a set of working principles
  - How to assess the gains and losses from any particular strategy
3. AJC-sponsored coalition building workshops for AJC leaders together with other ethnic group leaders.



A variety of workshop models are available and can be conducted by Irving M. Levine, Director, National Affairs Department or David Roth, National Ethnic Liaison in addition to Cherie Brown. For further information call Peggy Brill, ext. 323.

The schedule listed below is Cherie Brown's travel plans for January-March. The times listed are booked, however, she is available before and after these commitments as well as during times not listed:

January 11-13	Albuquerque	Albuquerque Conflict Mediation Center
January 27-29	Washington, D.C.	Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the National Council of Churches
February 1-3	Albuquerque	Albuquerque City Council
February 22-24	Orlando	Multi-Cultural Issues for Reform Synagogue
March 3-5	Los Angeles	UAHC/NCC
March 29-31	Seattle	Counseling Conference - Jewish Christian Relations
April 19-21	Birmingham, Ala.	Multicultural Issues, National Conference of Christians and Jews
May 3-5	Washington, D. C.	Jewish Christian Relations Counseling Conference

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P.S. We are enclosing additional flyers for the publication so that you can mail them to your local ethnic and religious leaders in addition to the appropriate academic and intergroup professionals



# The American Jewish Committee

Institute of Human Relations • 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022 • 212/751-4000 • Cable Wishcom, N.Y.

## SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER

Dear Colleague:

We would like to invite you to join a select group of community leaders, intergroup relations professionals, government officials and the media in a consultation and luncheon marking the publication by the American Jewish Committee of a major new work, The Art of Coalition Building: A Guide for Community Leaders. The meeting will take place at AJC headquarters, 165 East 56th Street, New York, from 12 Noon to 3 P.M. Thursday, January 5.

AJC has long maintained a primary interest in coalition building. We have consistently upheld the legitimacy of advocacy by ethnic, religious, racial and women's groups for issues of major importance to them. It is crucial, however, that groups pursuing policies high on their communal agendas also seek to relate their aims to the larger society and form alliances to build majority support for their positions. To be effective, in short, they must act coalitionally.

The Art of Coalition Building offers incisive analysis and a practical guide to forming alliances. The author, Cherie Brown, is an intergroup relations trainer who has devised and run pioneering programs in tension reduction and group processes both in the U.S. and abroad. This work, in our view, significantly advances both theory and practice in the field and should be of great use to organizational leaders and activists around the country.

At the January 5 meeting, Cherie Brown will give an overview of her findings and guidelines for coalition building in the 1980s.

Her presentation will be followed by a distinguished panel of commentators who have had extensive experience in group politics and the forming of alliances. Governor Mario Cuomo of New York has been invited to lead off the discussion of the practical ramifications of Ms. Brown's work.

In the discussion that will follow, we hope to consider not only the theory of coalition building but also its current state and practical ways to advance the field. Recent local community action developments, legislative battles, and elections in several American cities demonstrate that intergroup cooperation is currently both inadequately developed and urgently needed. It is our goal,

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through the publication of The Art of Coalition Building and the holding of this consultation, to promote mutual understanding and joint strategies among a variety of groups in the U.S.

I think this will be an important meeting and hope you can join us on January 5. A reply card is enclosed for your convenience.



Sincerely,

Irving M. Levine  
Director  
National Affairs Department

IML:nk

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## The American Jewish Committee

### ABOUT CHERIE BROWN, AUTHOR OF THE ART OF COALITION BUILDING

Cherie Brown has been a lifelong community activist who has gained national attention for her success in teaching business, civic and government groups how to work together to increase their political effectiveness.

In doing so, she is pioneering in a new field called coalition building. THE ART OF COALITION BUILDING -- A Guide for Community Leaders, 1984, published by the American Jewish Committee, is the first major handbook on the subject by the woman who has become its most outspoken and knowledgeable proponent. It is the key political-action thesaurus for the eighties, that promises to give thousands of new leaders the skills to reach across intergroup dividing lines that have hampered the democratic process since the seventies.

Throughout her unique career, Ms. Brown has clung to two essential beliefs: that the world ought to be made safe for all groups to live in, and that the best way to accomplish this task is to teach groups how to work alongside one another to form coalitions and use agendas that at once serve the needs of their distinct constituencies and enlarge community support.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1949, Cherie took an early interest in the civil rights movement, leading dialogue sessions there between young blacks and Jews. When Cherie and her family moved to Van Nuys, California, in 1965, the Watts riot erupted unleashing changes across the nation that eventually brought an end to the old coalition of freedom fighters, students, Jews and other minorities, who had formed the backbone of the massive civil rights movement.

It was a poignant episode in Brown's life. In the aftermath, she participated in rap sessions at Operation Bootstrap in Watts, where for the first time someone stood up and called her a white Jewish 12-letter word.

"I realized then," recalls Cherie, "that to blacks, I was not only white but Jewish, and that there was a love-hate element in that relationship between blacks and Jews."

Cherie immediately set to work on the UCLA campus trying to keep blacks, Jews, Hispanics and others communicating within the student movement. She brought Jews and Arabs face to face in encounter sessions and mobilized Jewish students out to the picket lines for Caesar Chavez. Across Los Angeles she taught rabbis how to do draft counseling.

But by the time she finished her degree in clinical community psychology at UCLA in 1971, it was clear that the sixties coalition had splintered beyond simple repair. Cherie redoubled her efforts at coalition building, experimenting with new techniques that taught groups to maintain their separate identities while uniting on common goals.

After moving to Boston the next year she began expanding her services to those outside the ethnic communities, including women's groups, environmentalists, the elderly and poor, discovering that the same cycle of fragmentation that had hurt the students and civil rights coalitions, were now impairing the new self-interest groups as well.

During the 70s she honed her skills and acquired experience to be of practical help to groups such as the Maine People's Alliance, Massachusetts Fair Share, the National Coalition of Citizen Action, the National Council of Churches and the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

In 1981 in Israel she worked at the Nevey Shalom center establishing links between Arabs and Jews, and in 1983 she was asked by a faltering coalition of women's groups in Ireland to help them defeat a harshening anti-abortion bill.

Since receiving her master's degree in counseling and consulting psychology at Harvard University in 1982, her expertise has placed her in growing demand among organizations seeking her guidance to develop their own skills in coalition building.

For the American Jewish Committee's Youth and Bigotry Project, she has traveled to campuses like Brown, Brandeis and George Washington Universities, instructing student leaders to work together under the umbrella issue of fighting racism and anti-Semitism.

"This manual is intended to stimulate a new commitment among professionals about the significance of improving inter-group relations," explains Ms. Brown.

"It is my further hope to train a new kind of leader, a new breed of community coalition builder, who will become equally adept at interpersonal relations skills and self-interest politics," says Brown.

THE ART OF COALITION BUILDING is an important benchmark in the extraordinary career of such a new-world leader.

#### AGENCIES THAT HAVE USED THE SERVICES OF CHERIE BROWN

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| . American Jewish Committee               | . Wesleyan University                               |
| . Massachusetts Fair Share                | . Upward Bound                                      |
| . University of California-Berkeley       | . Union of American Hebrew<br>Congregations         |
| . Community Training Resources            | . NAACP-Boston                                      |
| . Vocations for Social Change             | . Urban League-Boston                               |
| . Cambridge Women's Health Collective     | . Brookline Jewish Community Center                 |
| . Cambridge Community Learning Center     | . Westford, Chelmsford, Billerica<br>School Systems |
| . Tufts University College Within Program | . Dracut High School Counseling<br>Center           |
| . Brandeis University Waltham Project     | . Women's Center-Lowell, MA                         |

- . Neighborhood Youth Corps
- . Policy Training Center
- . Boston University
- . Wellesley College
- . Nat'l Conf. of Christians and Jews
- . Nevey Shalom, Israel
- . YWCA
- . Jewish Federation-Los Angeles
- . Coalition-Battered Women's Services
- . Maine People's Alliance
- . Nat'l. Coalition of Citizen Action
- . Nat'l. Council of Churches

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# NEWS

FROM THE

# COMMITTEE



**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE** Institute of Human Relations, 165 E. 56 St., New York, N.Y. 10022, (212) 751-4000

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States. It protects the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people.

*MORTON YARMON, Director of Public Relations*

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK, March 5....The American Jewish Committee is launching a nationwide promotional tour this month starting in Chicago for Cherie Brown, author of its publication, "The Art of Coalition Building - a Guide for Community Leaders," the first comprehensive manual for training leaders in coalition work.

Ms. Brown, a resident of Medford, Mass., has worked a decade in the field with ethnic and religious organizations and increasingly with women's groups, freeze and environmental coalitions, the disabled, elderly and poor.

Coalitions, which have grown steadily in popularity in recent years and today number in the thousands, "are an attractive alternative for self-interest groups who have found that extreme separatism has led to rivalry and ineffectiveness," says Ms. Brown.

She predicts, "The economic and social realities of the next decade will continue to force groups out of isolation, and we will begin to see a growing willingness among groups to choose issues on the basis of their alliance-building potential."

Explaining her reason for writing the manual, Ms. Brown states, "Most activists are better advocates than bridgebuilders. I found that in the groups I worked with there was a lack of systematic methodology for handling intergroup conflicts as they came up. There is a history of isolation, mistrust, competition and powerlessness that groups have to overcome in order to work effectively together."

"We have come through two decades of ethnic advocacy," observes Irving Levine, director of AJC's Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity which

more....

Howard I. Friedman, President; Theodore Ellenoff, Chair, Board of Governors; Alfred H. Moses, Chair, National Executive Council; Robert S. Jacobs, Chair, Board of Trustees;

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commissioned Ms. Brown's work, adding, "now is the time to convert group interests into consensus by training former ethnic advocates to take up the business of coalition building."

Ms. Brown's booklet takes the reader step by step through the details of getting a coalition started and the agreements that need to be formalized and adhered to in order to maintain a working coalition, to the staffing, funding and decision-making processes of coalition bodies.

Ms. Brown suggests techniques for identifying overlapping group interests, telling leaders to steer away members from defining positions simply in terms of an opposition.

"It is important to teach groups how to agree to disagree on certain subjects while concentrating on larger problems that concern everyone," states the author.

A decision facing all coalitions, she writes, is whether or not to use a single or multi-issue agenda. "It's useful to remember," states Brown in the text, "that a single-issue coalition may allow diverse groups to test out working together" before trying longer term cooperative work.

In a section on negotiating and resolving coalition conflicts, Ms. Brown writes, "Conflicts should not be suppressed because they can force people to conceive of new options and new ways of working together." However, she cautions, "there are certain red flags to watch out for that indicate a coalition has either skipped a certain stage of negotiation or reverted to an earlier stage." Among these she lists, resorting to rhetoric, moral posturing and repositioning on previous issues, as standard signals that a coalition may be digressing from its purpose.

The training manual concludes with an extensive troubleshooting checklist, offering leaders the means to gauge the viability and solidity of their coalitions' structure and practices.

"The Art of Coalition Training" is forwarded by New York Governor Mario M. Cuomo.

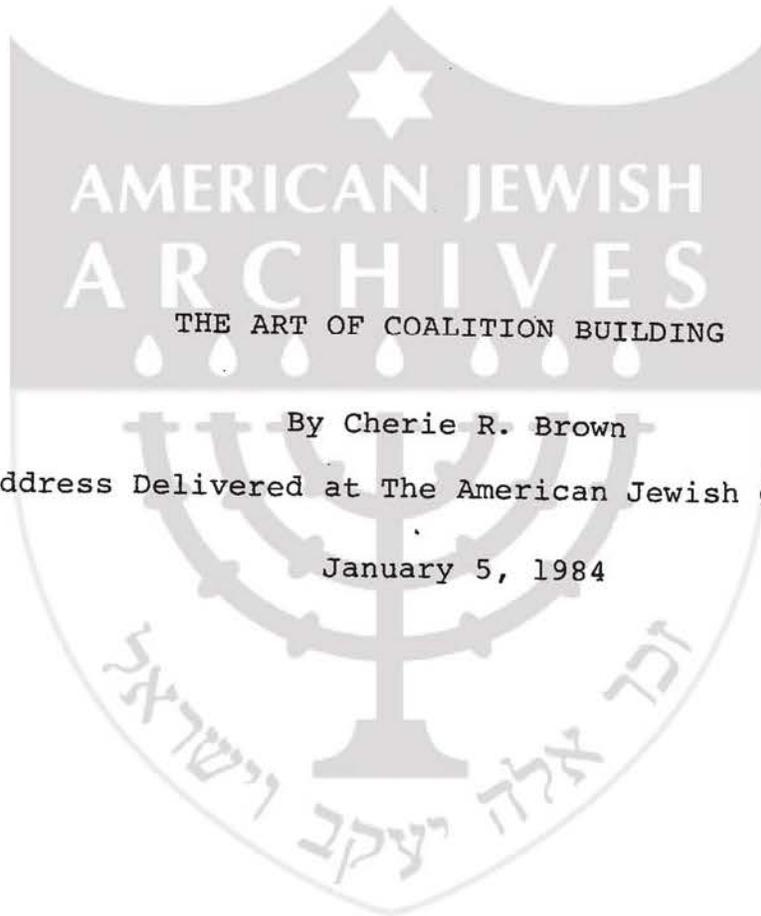
The American Jewish Committee is this country's pioneer human relations organization. Founded in 1906, it combats bigotry, protects the civil and religious rights of people here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people everywhere.

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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

# *National Affairs*



By Cherie R. Brown

Address Delivered at The American Jewish Committee

January 5, 1984



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, Institute of Human Relations, 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022



Text of address by Cherie R. Brown  
on Intergroup Relations Consultant,  
at Press Luncheon on January 5, 1984  
introducing a new manual on intergroup cooperation  
written by Ms. Brown and published by The American  
Jewish Committee.

We are living today in a unique period in human history. For the first time, we have the technology to create a decent life for every human being on the planet. Our major obstacle is the inability of all groups to break through a history of isolation, mistrust, competition, and powerlessness; all of which prevent our working together on behalf of a human agenda.

The 70s was a time, a necessary time, of group separation, where women, Jews, Blacks, other ethnic and racial minorities, the elderly, the disabled and others were building their own movements, turning inward to come to grips with the urgent issues facing their own people.

Now we are entering a period that will demand a radically different consciousness. We will have to see both our individual group agendas and the common denominator underlying our differences.

Nothing to date has adequately prepared us to think in terms of coalitions. The schools teach our children that to cooperate with one another is to cheat. Our professionals -- teachers, community and religious leaders -- are taught that getting embroiled with power and politics will divert them from their mission of service.

However, the economic and social realities of the next decade will force many groups out of their isolation, and we will begin to see them more willing to choose issues for their alliance-building potential. And we need to be ready. We need to train thousands of new leaders who see themselves primarily as coalition builders, who can lead their people through the difficult task of balancing self-interest with larger common concerns.

I come to the business of coalition building as a Jew deeply committed to the long-range freedom and survival of my people. It has been clear to me for a long time that Jews will gain permanent security only by working alongside other groups on a cooperatively-developed program for social justice.

When I was a college student in the early days of campus activism, I believed that Jews belonged in the ethnic center, alongside Blacks, Asians, Native Americans, and Latinos. I spent a frustrating year struggling with all these groups (none of whom, I soon found, were talking to each other either) to draft a program all of us could support. I knew there had to be a way to begin to bridge the years of suspicion and mistrust, but I couldn't yet figure out how.

Then more recently, in Massachusetts, I watched a major coalition fail when it had every reason to succeed. Government, community, religious, and citizen-action leaders had joined to defeat Proposition 2 1/2, a taxbreaker which has since proved to be a disaster. After its passage, I decided that someone had to pull together a usable set of principles for coalition building, and to train leaders to use them effectively. I looked very carefully, but found nothing in writing that could prepare people for the unique difficulties of this work. So I traveled around the country interviewing coalition builders, trying to determine which leadership skills were necessary. I added the information I gathered to the principles I had surmised after years of leading alliance-building workshops between Jews and non-Jews in different parts of the world.

I wrote "The Art of Coalition Building" to help community leaders progress systematically through the stages and common problems of such efforts. While it is true that many skills are required to be an effective coalitionist -- I wanted to reach under the rhetoric to identify exactly what prevented groups from building lasting coalitions. In this work, I found myself grateful again and again for the women's movement and its constant reminder that the personal is political, that to examine the details of our relationships and understand why we fail at building them, might be the most politically significant act our generation could undertake.

In coalition after coalition, I found that it was not lack of political savvy, but lack of a systematic method for handling the intergroup conflicts that accounted for failure. I am offering here the beginnings of a new theory and practice of coalition building, one that integrates the interpersonal with the more pragmatic skills of power, influence, and special-interest politics. That integration of personal and political skills will provide the missing link for training new coalition leaders.

Many groups come to coalition work after a history of tremendous isolation; and it came as a shock to me to see how frequently they simply recreate that isolation within a coalition. For example, a new coalition of formerly independent statewide groups held its first national convention some time ago. Many of them had been operating on their own for years in complete isolation, unaware of how many other individuals and groups were committed to the same issue. Here they were, at last, with hundreds of like-minded people. As soon as the conference began, a sizable group decided they didn't like what was planned and broke away to form a separate mini-conference. It was apparently too uncomfortable to face the possibility that their isolation would end, it felt much safer and more familiar to be separate and different.

Another example: When I dug deeper into the reasons why the anti-Proposition 2-1/2 coalition failed, I found that two key groups had committed themselves on paper to work together, but had developed no system of internal accountability to protect them against the strong pull to remain isolated. There was so little communication that one organization did not learn until two weeks before a deadline that the other had failed to gather its quota of signatures for a counter-referendum. By then it was too late, even though they immediately closed their doors and put the whole staff to work ringing doorbells.

Another phenomenon standing in the way of successful coalition work is what I call "wearing down your best allies." Once I was invited to work with the interfaith committee of a religious organization that was drafting a letter sharply criticizing the action of several local community leaders. These leaders already had a long history as the staunchest allies of that organization, which acknowledged that its letter was prompted by a few minor concerns. It seems that sometimes groups and individuals who have made the greatest effort to become our allies become a safe target for our abuse, the focus of disappointment and resentment accumulated over years of mistreatment by others. Understandably, it is often difficult for many coalition builders to remember that criticism may, in fact, be an indication that they've been effective allies.

Indeed, of all the personal and organizational skills a coalition builder needs to master, the one most lacking, and which causes most coalition break-ups, is the inability to handle attacks against leadership. Most frequently,

the leaders respond either by trying to deflect the attack, or by succumbing and stepping down. Neither response does much good. We need to learn to identify the deeper issues underlying attacks. It may be that disagreements, criticism, even the constant offering of helpful suggestions in meetings is a red flag indicating feelings of powerlessness. For example, I was recently asked to help a statewide coalition whose leaders were under severe internal attack, and the criticism stopped only when I encouraged the group to develop a new strategy that gave member groups a greater sense of their own power. We really need training sessions where coalition leaders can, through role-playing, practice new responses to attack, decrease defensiveness, and turn the attackers into allies.

Another essential skill for coalition leadership is an ability to take apparently incompatible positions and find the compatible interests underlying them. For example, one coalition is trying to pressure a major industry to stop dumping toxic waste. The company denies responsibility, insists that a dumping company which has since left the area is responsible for the waste deposits left nearby, and refuses to budge from its position. This coalition then demands that the company contribute to the costs of removal and threatens to tell the damaging story to the press.

This is the adversary approach. A more constructive way geared to benefit both parties might be to look for some compatible interests among the seemingly intransigent parties. The coalition wants the company to thrive because it provides jobs for many of its minority groups. The company wants to avoid publicity that might bring stricter EPA regulations, greater costs, possibly even a future close-down. So it is in the long-range interest of both sides to come to terms. This underlying compatibility exists in almost every conflict.

Probably the single most difficult problem for coalition builders is helping member groups balance their own urgent agendas with the broader task of the coalition. Every group that joins a coalition wants its gut issues taken seriously. Blacks come wanting certain policies on racism; women want certain positions taken on abortion; Jews want to avoid damaging policies on the Middle East. One of two outcomes seems to prevail in most coalition work: either a group is told, "we know your issue is important but we can't take that up in the coalition," or the coalition is co-opted by one group and loses its mass base.

Instead, we need to learn to take seriously the urgency behind individual group agendas and at the same time preserve the coalition's focus. How? A coalition may formulate a few unifying principles and then attach a list of non-binding principles covering the more controversial issues. The coalition can circulate a discussion bulletin or sponsor an evening, similar to a candidates' night, when every group can articulate its position; but there must be a clear prior understanding that these positions will not become part of the coalition's policies at this stage.

We will need to be a lot smarter about providing coalition-sponsored forums to acquaint groups with each other in an uncharged atmosphere, and at the same time resist pressure to enlarge the coalition's agenda. That will mean creating an environment and using language that encourages people to think about new or controversial policies without feeling they must adopt them. In its zeal to impose its own version of a correct position, an organization should not forget that it takes time to raise consciousness on controversial, hotly-disputed issues.

Comparing approaches of two coalitions that wanted to incorporate anti-racist policies in their guidelines can demonstrate how this principle works. In one case, the leaders of a statewide coalition of battered women's shelters insisted on excluding any shelter whose by-laws did not clearly spell out an anti-racist position; and the result was that many city-sponsored shelters stayed away. In the other case, a citywide coalition of day care centers, just as committed to combatting racism and staffing every center with representatives of many ethnic groups, deliberately chose non-threatening language, stipulating quality day care in its by-laws. It welcomed every center into the coalition, including those whose staff did not reflect ethnic balance, offered education programs for all members on how to deal with racism, kept up-to-date files of available teachers from all ethnic groups and helped the centers find them. Thus, although individual centers were not obliged to commit themselves to hiring a multi-ethnic staff before joining the coalition, everything the coalition did supported such a policy, with the result that several previously reluctant centers changed their positions after joining.

In order that diverse groups may work together, some unusual compromises have to be made, some rigid "morally righteous" positions softened, and pragmatic agendas formulated that can lead us closer to our long-range goals. One coalition, formed to put together a joint slate of candidates for a statewide election, made history not only because most of the slate was elected, but because it was the first time that women's groups, labor, and minorities were able to set aside their differences and work for a common purpose. How did it work? It was agreed in advance that the participating groups would commit themselves to certain candidates within the coalition, but were also free to advocate different candidates outside it. For example, on the abortion issue, the labor unions agreed to offer support to pro-choice candidates, but many individual unions could use private resources to support pro-life candidates.

One reason why alliances fail is that groups are not always ready to acknowledge, even welcome, their different opinions. Last summer, I was asked to lead a series of training workshops on conflict resolution at a national convention of community leaders. The more than 1600 people there represented women, minorities, religious communities, labor, students, disarmament and environmental groups, government, welfare rights, and citizen action. The organizers had already negotiated for months on an agreement to convene separate caucuses for constituent groups, although some were concerned that separate meetings of Blacks, Catholics, Jews, Hispanics, and women might create unnecessary divisions. But, all my work to date indicates that there is no way coalition efforts can succeed without setting aside specific times when each group can caucus independently and gather its internal unity and strength.

Another error is to form coalitions prematurely, long before there are enough cooperative links among the constituent group leaders. There are many structures short of an ongoing coalition -- networks, coordinating groups, single-event and electoral-campaign bodies that can precede permanent organizations and build the trust necessary for more difficult work.

Groups also tend far too early to select the thorniest, most controversial issues that require inordinate efforts of cooperation, rather than the small winnable battles that build confidence and organizational strength. In Ireland last summer, I was asked to help salvage a faltering coalition of women's groups formed to defeat a stricter anti-abortion amendment. Tremendous internal fights

were demoralizing all the women, for not only had they picked the most emotional women's issue in the Republic of Ireland, one that systematically polarized groups along Catholic/Protestant lines, but they were dividing an already splintered women's movement by insisting that this was a cut-and-dried matter. You're either for us or against us. When their effort failed, as might have been predicted in Ireland's current political climate, they would have retreated in despair had I not encouraged them to select a small campaign they could win, and then rebuild their demoralized network of support. Their new goal was to establish one of the first multi-denominational schools in the Republic, where Catholic and Protestant children could learn side by side. I have since heard that classes have begun.

Coalition leaders need to become adept at channeling the group energy, often highly emotionally charged, into concrete goals and strategies that can win early victories. They must learn to see beyond short-term defeats, to hold onto the larger vision, to point out that underneath an apparent defeat there have been small forward-moving gains in intergroup trust, organizational strength, and so on.

We need to educate leaders toward a new attitude to conflict. When I have asked a group for their first thoughts on hearing the word "conflict," I have usually gotten a list of negative answers. It becomes something to avoid, get rid of fast; there is very little understanding that it can also be empowering, energizing, a positive force for change. A few months ago, I was working at Brown University with a group of Jewish and Black students and faculty after a series of racial and anti-Semitic incidents on campus. At a particularly tense moment during one session, a Black student started to shout at the Jews: "You're all white and I'll never trust you." One of the Jewish men burst into tears and asked: "How could it have gotten this bad?" This was the first time most of the students had heard each others' gut emotions, and at those moments of intense hostility, they had no idea they could ever span the distances surfacing between the groups. Yet, by the end of the workshop, the same Black student was standing with her arm around a Jewish student saying she wanted to organize ten more of these sessions, because it was the first time she had felt any real hope that white people could be on her side.

I know of no means to break through the difficulties that have blocked successful intergroup relations except a willingness to work in coalition despite a high degree of conflict, and to create forums where we have to hear each other's concerns -- no matter how difficult it may be to be quiet and listen.

A few years ago I was a co-leader with an Arab man of a workshop trying to build cooperation between Arabs and Jews. I didn't know that Nadjua, one of the participants, was a Lebanese woman who had been a nurse in Palestinian refugee camps in her country. At one point in my talk, I said I was proud to be a Jew and proud of Israel, whereupon she jumped up and began to shout, "How can you be proud of Israel?" and she proceeded to give a vivid, emotional account of life in the refugee camps. I did not interrupt her, didn't try to challenge incorrect information she was offering, and didn't apologize for what I had said. I just let her speak. Afterward, Nadjua came up to me and said: "I want you to know that I've never had a Jewish person listen to me before. Can we get together?" That was the beginning of a long friendship, during which she has worked with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to support Arab-Jewish unity.

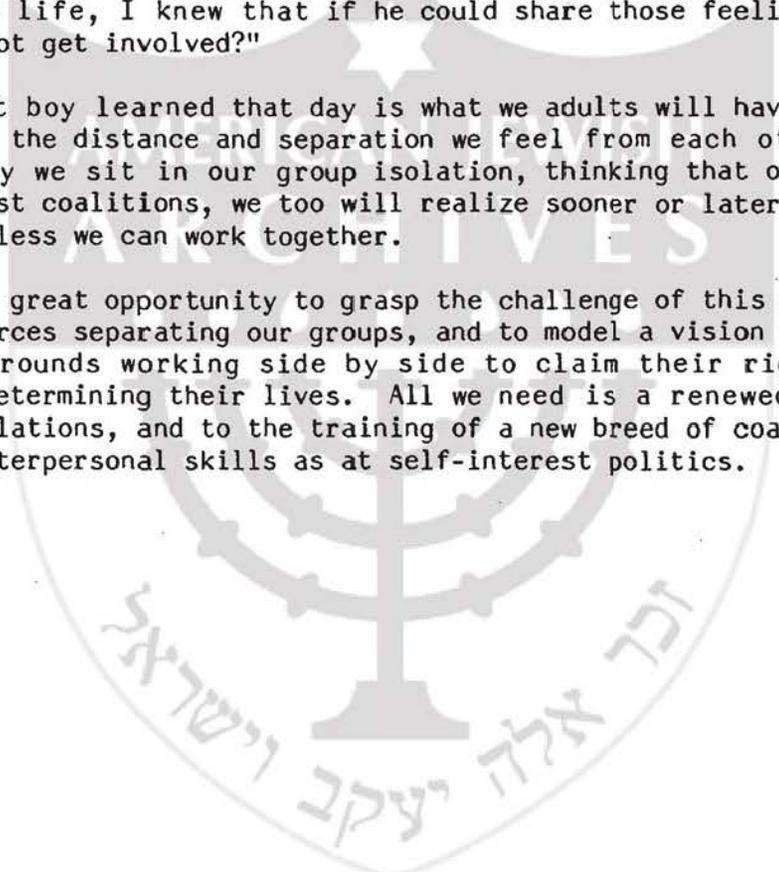
This is the difficult task for which we have to train people: how to set aside the feelings of urgency that may dictate a "quick fix," an immediate emotional response. In the short run that may seem frustrating, but in the long run it will be far more effective.

Finally, one last story that sums up the challenge of coalition work. There is a center in Belfast, called Corymeela, where I once led a training session for Catholics and Protestants who had lost family members through violence. A 16-year-old Protestant boy began one of our meetings by saying, with great hostility, "I don't know why I came here. I've been through this before, and it won't do any good." But at the end of the day, he came to me and said: "You know what I said in the beginning? Well, when I heard Hugh (a Catholic) talk about his father and what it's been like for him to lose the most important person in his life, I knew that if he could share those feelings, how could I sit back and not get involved?"

What that boy learned that day is what we adults will have to learn: that no matter what the distance and separation we feel from each other, no matter how stubbornly we sit in our group isolation, thinking that our self-interest dictates against coalitions, we too will realize sooner or later that none of us can succeed unless we can work together.

We have a great opportunity to grasp the challenge of this decade, to break through the forces separating our groups, and to model a vision of peoples from diverse backgrounds working side by side to claim their rightful power and influence in determining their lives. All we need is a renewed commitment to intergroup relations, and to the training of a new breed of coalition builders, as adept at interpersonal skills as at self-interest politics.

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July 1984  
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THE · ART · OF

# COALITION BUILDING

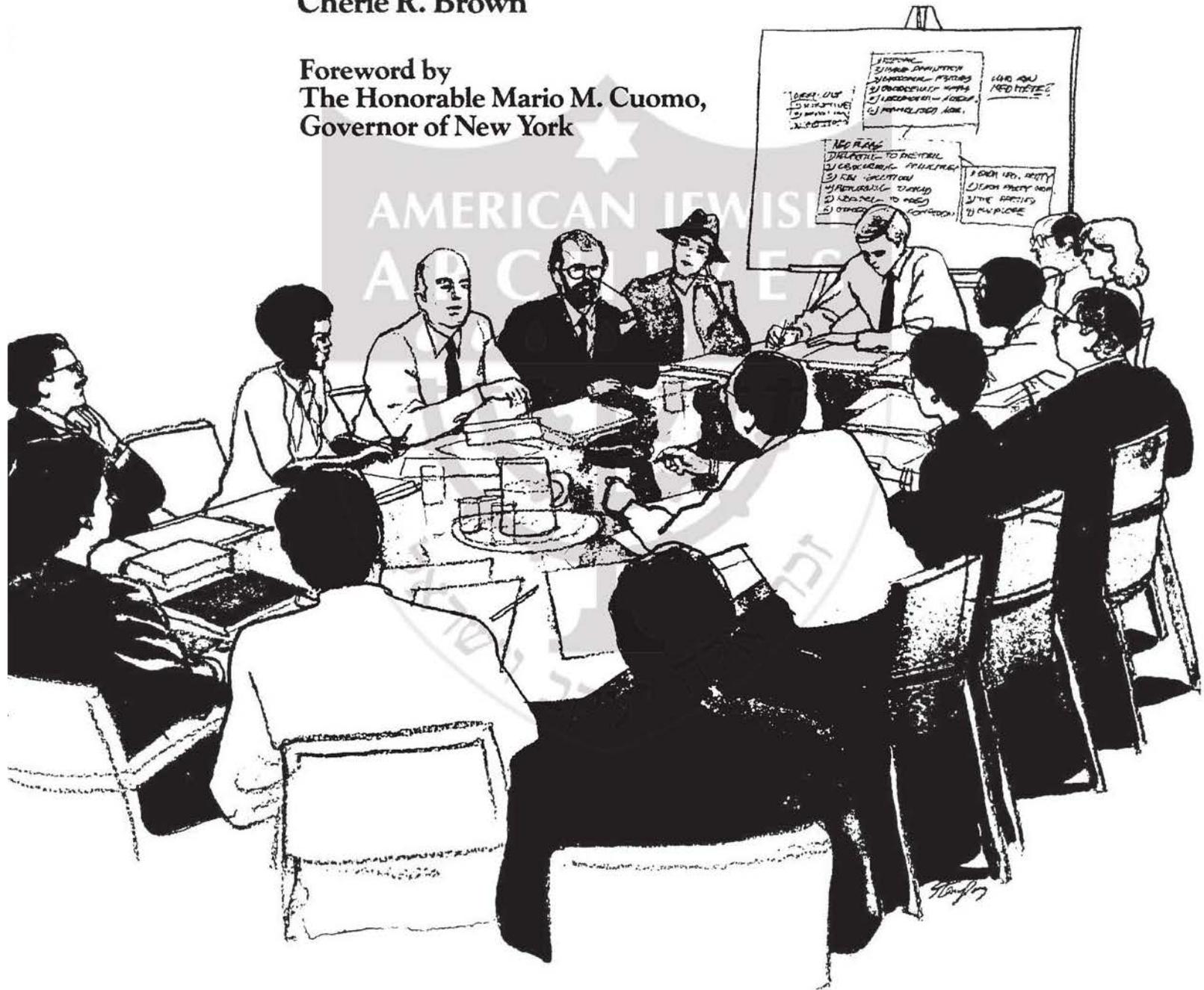
A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS

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Cherie R. Brown

Foreword by  
The Honorable Mario M. Cuomo,  
Governor of New York



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE



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Library of Congress catalogue card number 84-70911  
ISBN 0-87495-063-5  
Printed in the United States of America



## Acknowledgments

**T**HERE ARE MANY PEOPLE whose spirit, commitment to social change and expertise in coalition building permeate this manual. In particular, I am grateful to Irving M. Levine, Director of National Affairs for the American Jewish Committee, who has been a friend, ally and mentor — always pressing me to ask the hard questions.

I also want to acknowledge the many individuals and organizations I interviewed for this guide: Si Kahn, Mel King, Diane Balser, Arthur Waskow, Harvey Jackins, Karen Thomas, Peter Dreier, Roger Fisher, The League of Women Voters, Mass Fair Share, Coalition of Battered Women's Services, Massachusetts Coalition of Human Services, Coalition of Labor Union Women, Cambridge Day Care Alliance, Boston Committee, Connecticut Citizen-Labor Coalition. Likewise, I wish to thank my editors — David Szonyi and Micki Alperin.

Special gratitude is owed Donald Perlstein, whose friendship, love, and belief in the importance of this work constantly encouraged me to pursue it in depth.

Most of all I acknowledge my Jewish roots — the commitment to social justice, the fierce yearning for freedom and the wisdom I acquired through being raised in a Jewish home.

C.R.B.



## About the Author

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## Foreword

**N**ATURE'S TOPOGRAPHY IS RICH in its variety, which is the essence and source of its beauty. No gardener will plant flowers of only one color; it is the multicolored garden that appeals to our esthetic sense.

The same holds for the topography of humankind. As Carlyle once observed, "God does not rhyme his children." The Talmudic sages said:

Man stamps many coins with one dye and they are all alike, one with the other. The King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, has stamped all humankind with the dye of the first man and yet not one of them is like to his fellow.

The strength and pride of our nation lie in its many ethnic groups, each contributing its special gifts to the enrichment of the total community. I think of the United States as a beautiful mosaic, each part of which represents an ethnic group. When one of the parts is dull, colorless or flawed, the work is diminished. It is good for the mosaic that each part shine in its brightest, most luminous colors.

The old idea of the melting pot is not true to the American ideal. This country does not demand that its ethnic groups discard their cultural baggage when they arrive here. The fact is that a person who is disloyal to his or her own heritage will also not be a loyal American. This is a nation of nationalities, and the essence of its democratic foundation is that it not only tolerates differences but appreciates and welcomes them.

Although the country encourages each group to develop its potential to the utmost, it expects each to be concerned not only with itself, but also with the good and welfare of all.

I have spoken of New York State as a family. I can say the same about the United States. As members of the same family, the various groups in our society must learn to help one another and, through coalition building, to work together for the common good. For that, we need well-trained professionals and lay leaders. While furthering the advocacy of one group, they will also be mindful of the need to join other groups in fashioning a better quality of life for all. We need to develop special skills for negotiation and conflict resolution so that all the members of the family we call the United States will cooperate in the crafting of a better society instead of obstructing and fighting one another.

I congratulate the American Jewish Committee for having prepared this manual, which will in a very practical way serve to further this goal.

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

The Honorable Mario M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York



## Preface

**W**E ARE A NATION in which group identity, group interest and group power have always existed, even though a fear of "factionalism" has deterred many from honestly coming to grips with that reality. It is also true that group interests are more legitimate than many critics wish to admit, and there has been too little effort to find the often elusive common interests that groups share.

A small group of professional intergroup and human relations organizations, of which the American Jewish Committee is one, has consistently acknowledged this need. The field of group dynamics has been seriously studied in order to develop theory and techniques for reducing group hostilities, improving dialogue and building coalitions across ethnic and religious lines. This publication is the result of one such effort, and the privilege of initiating this project has given me great satisfaction.

After two years of investigating this complicated and underpublished field, Ms. Brown has written a "how to do it" guide that is indeed unique. It will prove immensely helpful in pinpointing the first and subsequent steps in organizing a coalition, establishing and maintaining alliances, developing realistic goals, and solving numerous other problems confronting coalition builders.

For those whose communal, civic or political zeal has faded for lack of committed partners, working in coalitions can revive their energies. Even "true believers" can become converts to compromise when new allies come along to create victory out of potential loss.

Irving M. Levine, Director  
National Affairs Department  
American Jewish Committee

## Introduction

# AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

**W**E LIVE IN AN ERA unique in human history. For the first time, we have the technology to create a decent life for every human being on this planet. The major obstacle to achieving that goal is the inability of disparate groups to overcome the history of isolation, mistrust, competition and powerlessness that prevents them from working together on a human agenda.

During the 70s, many groups deemed it necessary to work independently of one another to establish and strengthen their individual identities. Women, the elderly, the disabled, Jews, Blacks and other ethnic and racial minorities built their own movements, turning inward to come to grips with urgent issues confronting their people.

Today, we are entering a new period, one that calls for a radically different consciousness — a consciousness of broad, mutual goals, as well as specific group agendas. The economic and social realities of the 1980s are forcing many groups out of their isolation, and we are beginning to see a growing willingness to focus on issues with alliance-building potential.

We need to be ready. Thousands of coalition builders need to be trained to lead people through the difficult task of harmonizing individual group interests with larger universal concerns. They need to have a workable set of principles for coalition building, which they will have to learn to use effectively.

In my experience as an intergroup relations trainer, I have seen many coalitions fail, even though they seemed to have every reason to succeed. Often they were well organized around clearcut, urgent issues and had political know-how. What they lacked, however, was a systematic methodology to handle intergroup conflicts — one that acknowledges diver-

sity and translates incompatible, legitimate group interests into broad unifying goals.

I prepared this manual because it seemed to me that the available literature failed to address the unique difficulties of intergroup coalition work. My purpose was to cut through the familiar rhetoric about it, identify problems and guide community leaders through the various stages of the process. I noted effective leadership skills used around the country and integrated them with principles I formulated after years of leading alliance-building workshops between Jews and non-Jews in different parts of the world. I also applied insights gained from the women's movement, which has so productively demonstrated that an understanding of interpersonal relationships is fundamental to social action — that the personal is political.

This manual represents the beginning of a new theory that tries to enrich the pragmatic skills of power, influence and special-interest politics with a sensitivity to interpersonal relationships and multicultural issues — and fill in some of the elements that have been missing until now from the training of coalition leaders.



## Preparing the Ground: Coalition Consciousness and Basic Trust



**T**HERE ARE MANY COMPLEX human problems today that concern everyone, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, geography, age, sex and social status. Poverty and disease, crime and drug abuse, bigotry and threats to civil liberties, not to mention the danger of nuclear war, are some of the vital issues that preoccupy citizens and groups. Mobilizing common humanistic impulses to combat these and other evils, in order to make society better and safer, is a special contribution of coalitions.

In a pluralistic society such as ours, community leaders increasingly have become aware of their limited ability to bring about social change when they work alone. The need to become more effective in a time of proliferating single-interest groups and decreasing resources has led many to recognize the potential utility of coalition building.

### What is a Coalition?

A coalition is an organization of diverse interest groups that combines their human and material resources to effect a specific change the members are unable to bring about independently. Building a coalition is an art that calls for distinctive attitudes and skills. Above all, it requires individuals and groups to be willing to overcome their feelings of separateness and powerlessness and to join forces with others in a spirit of mutual understanding, patience, flexibility and group sensitivity.

Coalition builders need to be aware that promoting cohesion among disparate groups means accepting a number of premises:

- Realizing that individuals or organizations can share common concerns, even if for different reasons, and encouraging groups to think

*Organizing diverse  
interest groups*

of goals that unite them, despite factors that may divide them.

- ▶ Fostering an open, non-threatening atmosphere, in which individuals are free to express feelings about their relation to the larger society and their own groups.

- ▶ Understanding that the dynamics of an extremely diversified organization are different from those of the more homogeneous groups in which people usually take part.

- ▶ Encouraging individual groups to maintain their identity and autonomy as they participate in achieving common objectives.

- ▶ Appreciating the agendas of others, separating compatible from incompatible objectives, and framing issues in a way that many groups can identify with them.

- ▶ Accepting partial consensus at times, and not insisting on unanimous support on every step before the coalition takes action.

- ▶ Anticipating the inevitable clashes of opinion, verbal and non-verbal communication styles, values and attitudes, and working to minimize their divisive potential.

- ▶ Thinking in terms of power and influence — from building power bases to forging new community networks, to generating publicity and votes in electoral campaigns.

#### **Why Are Coalitions Formed?**

- ▶ Coalitions increase the “critical mass” behind a project, a piece of legislation, a candidate. Because of their broad base, they have greater visibility and appeal, more resources to pursue their interests, and more power and influence than isolated groups.

- ▶ Coalitions help groups to trust one another and to break down stereotypes and misperceptions they may have of others. By working together on a common agenda they learn to overcome the suspicion and disappointment that have marred many past relationships.

- ▶ Coalition work is more cost-effective than individual group efforts because research, information, office services and equipment, and other resources are coordinated and shared, avoiding unnecessary competition.

#### **Why Are Coalitions Sometimes Resisted?**

Because of past isolation, potential members are often reluctant to work in coalition. They are either over-anxious to gain allies for their own agendas or have real or imagined fears that their partners may not take a stand on their particular concerns. Other salient reasons suggest themselves as well:

- ▶ Many groups focus only on their own priorities, insisting that their issues are more important than those of others. Thus, they opt for short-term gains and fail to take into account the long-range possibilities.

*Coalitions help groups  
trust one another*

▶ The high priority education in the United States places on thinking and working independently becomes an obstacle to learning how to seek or recognize a common denominator with others.

▶ Most educators, social workers, religious leaders and others in the helping professions see themselves primarily in terms of offering assistance, imparting information, and delivering services to the community. Efforts to build power and influence often seem alien or hostile to what they consider to be their calling.

These difficulties can be surmounted, however, with an understanding of the art of coalition building.

### **Alliances That Build Trust for Coalition Work**

A permanent coalition is, in effect, a new organization, with its own staff, membership and funding needs. Organizations that lack prior experience in joint intergroup efforts may not yet be ready to assume the formal structure and public identity of an established coalition. Initially, such groups may find it more beneficial to participate in limited, informal arrangements that develop the basic organizational trust, links and networks necessary for full-fledged coalition work.

▶ A *climate of cooperation* is a loose association of diverse groups that support one another's programs even as they maintain their independence. It is initiated when one group demonstrates that its program may help advance another's goals.

▶ A *group network* develops from a list of individuals and organizations who may be called on to participate in a hearing, legislative drive or other planned effort around a particular issue. Networks make it possible to raise organizational consciousness about previously unnoticed shared concerns and do not require organizations to reach agreement on issues about which they may differ.

▶ A *coordinating group* is more structured than a network and requires a greater sharing of resources. It does not necessarily require an agreed-upon statement of principles or platform and does not develop policy. Rather, it provides a forum for sharing information and coordinating approaches to a particular issue.

*Organizational trust,  
links and networks*

### **Short-Term Coalitions**

There are even two kinds of coalitions groups may wish to join before they engage in a long-term commitment. Both have limited objectives, yet they build trust and can produce lasting links that may benefit groups in future undertakings.

A *single-event coalition* is geared to a particular activity or function, and disbands when the task is accomplished. Groups that lack resources or the willingness to participate in permanent coalitions may come

together in this manner.

An *electoral campaign coalition* is a special single-event coalition in which a wide variety of groups unite briefly to support a slate of candidates that best meets their needs. It calls for a good deal of coordination because it functions within a very restricted time frame.



## Getting Started



**D**IFFERENT CATALYSTS COMBINE to make people realize a need for unity. *Individuals* assess conditions that make a coalition necessary, consult with potential partners, and otherwise plant coalition “seeds.” Dramatic or disturbing events, the acquisition of new information as a tool for distinguishing substantive data from sentimental attachments to an issue, the decision to share resources in a mutually beneficial way — all these are catalysts in the formation of a coalition.

The time for a catalyst to take effect varies. Some coalitions develop after years of informal intergroup cooperation; others seem to erupt virtually overnight, buoyed by a groundswell of enthusiasm or concern precipitated by events.

Many coalition builders mistakenly assume that groups need a crisis to spur them to action. Yet crises tend to generate quick, emotionally charged solutions. It is far better to form a coalition over an issue where reliable information can be communicated with relaxed confidence.

### Constituency Building

As indicated, a coalition is formed by mobilizing many diverse groups and their followers around a certain cause. The heart of constituency building is developing an individualized strategy, not only for attracting a particular organization to the coalition but for assuring its commitment in the long run.

Groups join a coalition for different reasons: a commitment to the particular issue, the opportunity to have contacts with other organizations, or the sense of added credibility they gain from their association with others. Before inviting potential members, coalition organizers

*Developing an individualized strategy*

should brainstorm about such questions as: Who is affected by the issue? Who will benefit by concerted action? Who has worked on this issue in the past? They should study a group's unique interests and contributions, and evaluate its expected levels of commitment and participation.

### **What Are the "Right" Conditions?**

#### *Assessing the readiness of members*

Coalition leaders should assess when potential members are ready to work together by considering these basic issues:

- ▶ Do all agree that a coalition is necessary to reach their goals? A group will end its isolation only when it is clear that it lacks sufficient resources to be effective on its own.

- ▶ Is each potential coalition partner well organized? Besides identifying the component groups and working to unite them, it must be established that each group's internal organization is effective.

- ▶ Does the particular group maintain sufficient leadership links with other groups? Successful coalitions are based on a history of organizational leaders' personal relationships and work with each other.

### **Estimating Group Resources**

A group's resources can contribute to a coalition's strength and should be evaluated in terms of

- ▶ financial support or fundraising capability;
- ▶ access to a large constituency;
- ▶ contacts with other potential coalition members or allies;
- ▶ expertise in research or knowledge of the issue;
- ▶ volunteers, office space and equipment.

Different types of organizations offer specific assets and skills. Unions can provide financial resources, political clout and communal visibility; citizens' organizations — an active and involved membership; religious groups — credibility and moral suasion.

### **Assessing Group Image**

Just because a group is interested in entering a coalition does not mean it must be invited. Coalition organizers should be sensitive to the image of a potential member in the community. Just as one organization's public image can strengthen advocacy of a particular cause, another's reputation may dissuade other important groups from joining.

### **Establishing a Representative Coalition Mix**

The right coalition mix should be determined by the interplay between the nature of a particular issue and the groups involved in it. For

example, a coalition established to help create jobs for a city's minorities might include the mayor, the president of the largest bank, an outstanding religious leader and key neighborhood ethnic leaders. It would thus have the political power, grass-roots support, and the financial and religious backing to achieve its goals. A coalition working on another issue would conceivably present a different constellation of personalities and groups.

### **The Human Angle**

Indeed, the key to constituency building lies with the contact person who represents an organization in a coalition. A coalition organizer should consider whether that representative is genuinely and personally sympathetic to the cause, and has the necessary power to speak for his or her entire constituency.

However, in dealing with such individuals, it is important to bear in mind that the coalition is usually *not* their main job, and to communicate specifically what work will be required from them.

### **Avoiding Problems**

Perhaps the most important effect a coalition can have is to change existing power relationships in a community. It is useful for a coalition organizer to draw up a chart for each prospective member to assess

- ▶ the group's interests and objectives;
- ▶ its relationships with other groups;
- ▶ its policies and positions that are organizational musts (non-negotiable) and those that are desirable (negotiable). Every member of a coalition compromises on certain positions and is uncompromising on others. Some non-negotiable positions will be compatible with those of other groups; others may not be.

By doing sufficient research on these matters, an organizer will be in a position to estimate in advance what problems will have to be resolved by the coalition so that it can function smoothly.

Last, but by no means least, coalition organizers ought to weigh whether there are sufficient financial and other external sources to support the undertaking; no matter how skillfully a coalition is organized, it cannot survive without such backing.

Sometimes there are circumstances that prevent an organization from joining forces with others. For example, controversy or disunity among an organization's members may erupt if it becomes involved in a particular issue. Or it may be illegal for a certain organization to lobby for an issue of concern to the coalition. Still, ongoing contact with such groups should be maintained, because they may become future partners on other issues.

*Preparing in advance*

## What Should Groups Consider Before Joining a Coalition?

An honest and sensitive organizer should encourage individual organizations to carefully weigh their motives for committing themselves to a coalition. More often than not, an organization simply determines whether a particular issue is important. But other factors, too, should be examined:

- ▶ Are an organization's ideology and priorities compatible with those of the coalition? Might participation in the coalition spark divisions within the organization? If so, is support of the issues addressed by the coalition worth the price of internal dissent?

- ▶ What benefits will accrue to the organization, in terms of additional members, increased visibility, advocacy for its concerns, training for existing or new leadership, and prospects that the effort will be a success?

- ▶ What contributions can the organization realistically make to the coalition? These include staff time, money, office space and equipment, media contacts, research capability, a positive communal reputation, and the ability to attract allies.

- ▶ Can the organization commit its resources over a period of time and still maintain its own priorities? Obviously, any costs must be measured against the benefits acquired from coalition resources so that individual organizational goals are not eroded in the process.

- ▶ Are the coalition's structures and policies compatible with those of the organization? For example, if organizational representatives make final decisions at coalition meetings, the organization must decide if it can live with this arrangement. Sometimes a group joins a coalition, sends a representative, and then detracts from his or her effectiveness — and that of the coalition as a whole — by demanding to be involved in every decision along every step of the way.

## Making it Easier for Undecided Groups

### *Incentives and rewards*

Sometimes potential coalition members will be reluctant to join if initial strategy has already been formulated by others. Therefore, it is best to postpone developing strategy until the coalition is in place.

Undecided groups may be persuaded to come in if they are assured that there is little chance that the coalition will act in conflict with their programs. To facilitate the cooperation of diverse groups, the organizer should offer incentives or "rewards," such as veto power, co-chairing of the coalition, and so on. After a pattern of cooperation is established, competing groups can work out a more unified strategy and power structure.

## No Real Failures

The establishment of a coalition is the result of a gradual, sometimes uneven process. An effort may fail, then partially succeed, then falter, and so on. Since mutual trust is built up over a period of time, coalition organizers should avoid getting so caught up in any one effort as to view it as “make or break.” Every effort at cooperation among groups prepares the way for greater and more sustained efforts in the future. As organizers develop relationships with groups and work with them successfully, they accumulate the experience necessary to deal with matters that require an even greater degree of cooperation.



## Choosing Realistic Positions and Finding Allies



**S**INCE MANY coalitions are local, some people are prone to confuse them with neighborhood organizations and fail to realize that coalition building requires some very specific tasks and skills. Neighborhood organizing involves working with groups that are fairly homogeneous and usually agree on certain relatively narrow, winnable issues, such as putting a stop light at an intersection or lowering electricity rates. In contrast, coalition building means bringing together groups that do not always share similar agendas or agree explicitly on everything. The issues are broader and more complex, hinging on questions of group self-worth and survival, and cannot always be resolved in the short run. Thus, while there is much to learn from the many excellent strategies that work for neighborhood organizing, it is necessary to bear in mind that coalition building requires its own methodology.

### Establishing Realistic Positions

#### *Pitfalls to avoid*

Organizations taking part in a coalition should avoid two common pitfalls: adhering to their own programs so rigidly that they cannot work on a common agenda, and relinquishing important parts of their own programs in the hope of gaining allies.

Some coalitions become bogged down early on and fail to come up with a workable program because members get trapped in a hopeless struggle over ideological positions. Others totally skip the process of defining basic principles and leap into projects that have not been carefully thought out.

Such problems can be avoided if they adhere to a number of rules:

► *Do not define an issue only in terms of the opposition.* Some

methodologies teach that the first step in developing a winning strategy is to identify the opponent. Although this may be simple enough to do for a small, single-issue organization, a multi-issue coalition often includes groups whose present allies were its opponents in the past. Of course, to refrain from defining an issue primarily in terms of the opponent does not preclude taking into account the key obstacles to change and overcoming or working around them.

▶ *Encourage coalition members to consider new or controversial policies, but do not insist that they adopt them.* It is more effective to initiate new policies informally, in a climate of suasion, conciliation and good will than to make them binding on all members.

▶ *Provide a means to discuss the major concerns of the coalition partners without expecting — or demanding — that every group adopt the programs of all the others.* Proceed cautiously in adopting a basic coalition platform. One way is to present draft policy statements of the member groups in a discussion bulletin, so that each may be aware of the programs and concerns of the others in relation to the coalition.

▶ *Do not allow the coalition to deviate from the guiding principles that have been adopted.* Individuals and organizations frequently raise “urgent concerns,” differing from those for which the coalition was formed in the first place. Work cannot proceed unless all groups agree on the definition of the issue at hand and resolve to stay with it. As groups gain experience in cooperating on one issue, it becomes easier for them to broaden the agenda or to form new coalitions on other issues.

▶ *Refrain from using charged rhetoric, sloganeering and moral posturing.* Narrow ideological rhetoric hinders the development of programs with broad appeals and alienates potential supporters. Use language that appeals to many different political, philosophical and religious traditions and draws on their strengths.

### Mapping Out Strategy

Having accomplished the formidable task of determining its basic position and agreeing to a set of principles, the coalition must develop a concrete strategy for action. Three basic questions should be considered:

1. What is the ideal?
2. What is the reality?
3. How do they differ, and what must be changed to achieve the ideal?

Answering these questions clarifies the kind of action the coalition should pursue. The desirable changes may have to come in awareness or attitudes about the issue, in policy or legislation, or perhaps in the election of officials.

Different changes call for different strategies. Altering perceptions requires education, while influencing legislation entails research and

*Overcoming obstacles to change*

*Strategies vary*

lobbying. Determining the kind of change that is needed means giving thought to motivation and circumstances. Why doesn't a particular legislator support this bill? What keeps community members from backing a particular policy? These and other questions of this nature help coalitions pinpoint their goals. Goals include outside circumstances affecting individuals and groups, and internal activities that build the coalition, foster unity and train new leadership.

### **Setting Winnable Goals**

*Asking basic questions*

It is important to establish achievable goals and achieve early victories in order to build organizational confidence. But conditions are always in flux, and it is often impossible to predict at the outset what a winnable goal is. Therefore, the basic questions — about initial steps, and what must be done to reach the final goal — must be asked again and again. Each step may reveal new information that calls for revision of the original strategy.

All too often, inexperienced coalitions invest long hours in working out strategic details, and then fail to modify their plans as new conditions arise. Altering an initial plan may seem difficult after a great deal of time, energy and organizational resources have gone into it. It takes courage to acknowledge that early strategic errors may have contributed to a coalition's present difficulties. Yet flexibility in the capacity to modify, revise or even give up a particular strategy determines a coalition's ultimate effectiveness.

### **Selecting a Course of Action**

After setting goal priorities, coalition leaders can proceed to brainstorm about ways for realizing them. In the initial stages of brainstorming, members are invited to come up with "crazy" ideas and to be as original, bold and creative as the situation warrants. As suggestions emerge, each new realistic possibility should be reviewed and evaluated in terms of its probable positive and negative consequences.

*Gaining the most at the least cost*

A rule of thumb in determining and assessing action plans is to choose one that gains the most for the coalition at the least cost. The whole range of goals should be evaluated, including building and maintaining membership, influencing sympathetic non-members, changing external policies, and so on, to avoid emotional and impulsive reactions or getting bogged down in unnecessary internal debate. Again, effective strategy planning focuses on what is achievable, and on moving toward long-term goals step by step.

After an action plan has been carried out, it makes sense to review its effectiveness. Did the various programs help the coalition reach its original goals? If not, were the goals unrealistic or were the programs

ineffective? In time, coalition leaders become more adept at selecting attainable goals and action plans that will make them possible.

### **Choosing Allies**

Having established its positions, a coalition needs to reach out to all those who may be interested in working on the issue. In practice, this means learning about the constituencies connected with the issue and determining who agrees with the coalition's concerns, who disagrees, and who may well agree if further information or encouragement is provided.

Some coalitions tend to target their activities toward the already converted or the hardest to reach. To build their constituencies more effectively, they should also appeal to the vast majority "somewhere in the middle," who may join if access to facts and to people of similar views is readily available.

It is important, however, to be selective. Many coalition builders assume that adherence to democratic principles means inviting any group that is willing to join; but trying to appear democratic may conceal poor planning and insufficient attention to strategy. Instead, it is wiser to decide on several key organizations that can be brought together to make an early commitment. Uniting a few groups that are already cooperating with one another provides the basis for future expansion.

*Being selective*

### **Dealing With Controversial Issues**

One of the best ways to handle sensitive issues is to hold educational forums rather than come out with policy statements. People are more amenable to exploring difficult issues when asked to do so in an open atmosphere where ideas are exchanged, shared and grappled with; they are more reticent when called on to enact policy. Forcing them to commit themselves to positions before they are ready only prolongs the process of reaching agreement.

Another way to handle internal controversy is to add non-binding statements to a coalition's platform. In this way, the constituent groups are exposed to new ideas without being obliged to accept them or to withdraw from the coalition. The basic position paper, then, may include statements on which there is broad agreement, and a non-binding supplement on more controversial positions.

### **Single-Issue or Multi-Issue Coalitions: Which Are More Effective?**

A choice facing all groups working for social change is whether to form coalitions committed to one particular cause or coalitions devoted to many issues. Proponents of single-issue coalitions argue that they are

more effective in attracting a broad-based constituency, whereas more comprehensive programs tend to diffuse issues and limit support.

Advocates of multi-issue coalitions, on the other hand, counter that they raise people's consciousness about the interconnection of many issues, even if they do not attract large numbers of supporters at first. Single-issue programs, they contend, sacrifice political depth for numerical strength. Ultimately, both kinds of coalitions are needed to effect change; one educates masses of people and the other analyzes in depth the underlying causes of a problem.

*Some pros and cons*

There is no simple formula for deciding what kind of coalition to form. One guideline may be: If a coalition has formed on the basis of a single issue, it should stay that way. If certain groups threaten to withdraw unless their concerns are adopted, they should be helped to find another platform to articulate their views. In no way should the coalition be compelled to add planks to its platform. Devoting a session to letting member groups present their key agenda items gives them an opportunity to attract new members to their cause without broadening the coalition program. An astute organizer may suggest that some new coalitions be formed around these very agenda items. In other words, it is possible to avoid internal dissension by allowing groups to voice their concerns and forge new alliances without jeopardizing the coalition's fragile balance. An organizer may also include on the single-issue coalition platform a speaker from a dissenting organization or place one of its members on a coalition steering committee or other decision-making body.

It is useful to remember that a single-issue coalition allows diverse groups to feel their way in working together and prepares the ground for long-term collaboration. For individuals and groups new to coalition work, it may be the best way to raise their consciousness and build trust for more complex coalition efforts later.

## Developing Effective Leadership Skills



**A** COALITION LEADER PLAYS MANY ROLES: organizer, teacher, counselor, confidence builder, politician, negotiator, information gatherer and researcher, conflict resolver, peacemaker, healer, influencer, trainer, organizational expert, group identity specialist, lobbyist, secretary, welcoming committee, constituency builder, schemer and visionary. Functioning in these numerous roles calls for effective personal skills, all of which spell the difference between a good coalition builder and an excellent one.

### Interpersonal Skills

▶ *A leader should be willing to reach out personally to every individual.* In any coalition, particularly when it is large and diversified, people like to be welcomed and appreciated as individuals who have a special contribution to make to the cooperative effort. A leader should develop a one-to-one relationship with each group member and respond to his or her personal concerns.

▶ *A leader should train people to assume responsibility for resolving their conflicts.* Individuals who feel they are not treated with dignity or respect often come to the coalition leader to air their grievances. Instead of listening passively to endless complaints, the leader should help the dissatisfied party work things out by asking such questions as, "How can you resolve your difficulties with X?" or, "What would you do if you were completely powerful?" Questions of this kind help the troubled party work to set things right instead of feeling and acting victimized.

▶ *A leader must enlist members' active support.* Leadership stereotypes suggest that asking for assistance is a sign of weakness or ineffi-

ciency, so many leaders are reluctant to turn to members for help. As a result, they are often isolated — either idealized or sharply criticized. One way to develop support is through “self-estimation.” At special annual meetings of representatives, the leader outlines his or her major strengths and weaknesses, and plans for improvement. Members then express their perceptions of the leader’s skills and offer suggestions. Finally, and most critically, each member assumes personal responsibility and offers concrete assistance in areas where the leader is “stuck.” Following this procedure can counteract the too-prevalent notion that leaders should evaluate their performance by themselves.

### Communication Skills

► *A leader should be able to understand each group’s self-interests and help translate them into concrete programs.* Individual organizations usually bring great enthusiasm to promoting an issue, but often falter in converting their commitment to practical terms. The leader must be well informed about each member organization’s concerns, its past activities regarding them, and its expectations of how the coalition can address them. These concerns must be integrated into the larger context of the coalition’s goals to ensure the partners’ continued commitment and cooperation.

► *A leader should communicate positions on difficult, controversial issues without arousing fear, guilt, undue urgency or other forms of emotionalism.* The idea that a “good” leader inspires others is often misinterpreted to mean that he or she must speak emotionally and encourage immediate action. Communicating in a relaxed, hopeful manner will produce more confident, knowledgeable support for the coalition’s objectives and reduce the need for frightened, powerless responses.

### Organizational Skills

► *A leader should elicit recommendations from every member and unify them into an overall program the group can agree to.* This process requires attentive listening, critical analysis, and the integration of various ideas and approaches into a coherent draft program, which is then presented to the group for its final approval. Circumventing the process and making decisions for the group without consultation may bring quick results, but it will be counterproductive of the coalition’s long-term unity and effectiveness. A “golden mean,” then, might be that leadership should neither abdicate the role of formulating proposals nor do the thinking for the group.

► *A leader should acknowledge mistakes and seek to correct them.* In trying to bring many organizations together, negotiate among them, and deal with complex tactical questions, a leader is likely to make some

*Harmonizing  
individual and  
coalition goals, and  
avoiding emotionalism*

blunders. It is important to realize that if mistakes are acknowledged and corrected, they can lead to growth and new options. Many coalitionists give lip-service to this concept, but few act on it; they think that admitting mistakes will discredit them. The only way a leader can escape this double-bind is to create an environment that encourages the acknowledgment and correction of error, and to insist that this is essential to the effective functioning of the coalition.

▶ *A leader should make every effort to maintain the forward momentum of the coalition, even after a defeat.* Broad and long-term criteria for success must be stressed again and again. At times of discouragement, the leader should remind coalition members of past and current achievements and refocus them on setting new, realistic, achievable goals.

▶ *A leader should train successors.* Immediately upon assuming their positions, leaders must begin systematically to select and train those who will eventually replace them. Continuity is assured only when future leaders are trained on the job through observing, interacting with, and jointly carrying out certain programs with the present incumbents. Many leaders fail to train replacements because they are afraid of losing power; but, in fact, training new people permits veteran coalitionists to move on to more challenging jobs.

### **What Are Some Special Difficulties Coalition Leaders Face?**

In trying to manage diverse groups, promote the coalition agenda, and subordinate a variety of self-interests to the coalition's broader objectives, a leader almost inevitably attracts sharp criticism. Groups join coalitions precisely because they lack the power for effective independent action, so they may inadvertently attempt to compensate for their sense of powerlessness by launching out against their own leaders. A skilled coalition builder need not avoid personal attacks and criticism, but should deal with them directly and depersonalize them.

Criticism often indicates that members feel powerless and need some help in setting realistic, attainable goals. Whether the criticism is petty and carping, or comes in the guise of "helpful suggestions" or "constructive proposals," it must be dealt with in a manner that alleviates the member's feeling of powerlessness.

When facing attacks, two common pitfalls should be avoided. The first is to give in and surrender the leadership; no coalition can succeed if the leader is replaced every time there is serious disagreement. The other is to be on the defensive, ignore valid criticism and dismiss it. A skillful leader not only responds to criticism but tries to anticipate it and acknowledge the legitimate concerns that may prompt it. He or she should understand and learn to interrupt the "divisive phenomenon," in which people accustomed to dealing with an "opposition" constantly reach for areas of disagreement even with those who share most of their

*Dealing with criticism*

*Celebrating daily  
victories*

views. Asking such persons to consider the areas of agreement is very helpful in reducing tension.

Some leaders are reluctant to recognize that coalitions are temporary and usually are created for specific, limited purposes. When it becomes clear that a coalition has outlived its usefulness or is no longer the best vehicle for achieving further gains on a given issue, the leader should initiate the disbanding process — no matter how safe or comfortable the group has become.

If leaders take on too many responsibilities and do not know how to ask for help, the sense of isolation they may experience often produces burnout. Frequent turnovers in leadership may result and cause a serious diminution of the coalition's power to achieve its goals. It is essential that there be clear agreement between the members and the leadership to provide mutual resources and support so that the work load is reasonably distributed. Reserving a specific time for personal support, for appreciating each other at the end of every meeting or giving each person the opportunity to share an accomplishment with the group, will alleviate isolation and be well worth the time and effort. Many leaders, caught up in deadlines, shrinking budgets, and other major problems, fail to remember the benefits of taking time to appreciate and celebrate daily victories.

#### **What Are the Rewards of a Coalition Builder?**

The price of being a coalition builder may be public criticism and possible isolation. But there are enormous rewards, perhaps the foremost of which is knowing that it is meaningful to help people fight for a cause or goal they believe in, and that the effective use of power empowers others.

Coalition leadership also offers tremendous opportunities for individual growth. It teaches how to negotiate conflicting interests, cooperate with very different kinds of people and inspire renewed effort when everyone else is losing the strength to pursue the struggle. It helps develop fortitude in the face of unfair criticism, as well as the ability to assess the need for help, ask for it, and create effective support.

## How a Coalition Functions Internally



**A** COALITION HAS THE SAME ADMINISTRATIVE concerns as any other organization: building staff and membership, initiating decision-making procedures, raising funds and maintaining commitment. However, since a coalition is made up of organizations rather than individuals, it must deal with such special questions as:

- ▶ What is the role of a coalition staff, and how should it be held accountable to the member organizations?
- ▶ How should the coalition make decisions, given the diversity of decision-making procedures among member groups?
- ▶ How can a coalition raise money without competing with its member organizations?
- ▶ What kind of commitments may a coalition expect of its members, and how can these be assured?

### Staff Recruitment

A coalition needs a staff to get its day-to-day work done. The size of the staff depends on the size, goals and funds of the coalition. A single-event coalition, organized to sponsor a rally, for example, may need only one staff person; an ongoing coalition involved in numerous activities may require several persons.

Leaders should learn to tap existing personnel in each of the participating organizations. Thus, the coalition committee responsible for the financing of its programs and activities would very likely be composed of fundraisers from the member groups.

Should member organizations that provide staff to the coalition have more to say than the others? In many cases, organizations donate staff

*Setting policy about  
functions and  
responsibilities*

time with the unstated expectation that they will have major control over the coalition's direction. It is important that the coalition set an explicit policy about this at the outset; otherwise, misunderstandings will arise between the "donor" and the other organizations.

Desirable as shared leadership is, coalitions should be realistic about the time commitments and responsibilities of the participating groups; they need to assess who, in fact, can *do* the necessary work. Often, the staff person assigned the duty is the natural choice.

A coalition staff often makes ongoing decisions, particularly when the staffs of member organizations are overworked. Indeed, some organizations lack the time and personnel to deal adequately even with their own organizational concerns. The staff may find itself in a double-bind — expected to insure the smooth functioning of the coalition but not allowed to make key decisions. At times, however, it is forced into such a situation, and member groups then may feel that staff has usurped too much decision-making power and come to resent it. Regardless of the coalition's decision-making structure, staff must be given enough flexibility to carry out day-to-day tasks unhampered.

To avoid tension, coalition partners should spell out what they expect of the staff and what staff may expect from them. A clear description of the tasks staff is responsible for and an understanding of which tasks it does *not* perform become particularly important when the staff is small and overworked.

Another source of tension between members and staff is designation of the coalition's public representatives, a choice that depends on the nature of the function. When a coalition consists of organizations with political clout, its organization leaders, rather than staff, often become the coalition's spokespersons. Otherwise, a coalition's staff can double as its public representatives. Again, it is most important to discuss such issues when the coalition is being formed.

**Who Sets Coalition Policy and Makes Decisions?**

*Consulting with key  
members*

Who sets basic coalition policy depends upon whether member groups want to operate formally or informally, and partially on whether they insist on the power to make final decisions or are willing to rely on a decision-making process within the coalition. Sometimes mistrust surfaces after decisions have been made, so it is most important to rely heavily on prior consultations with key member groups and thus avoid hasty decisions they may refuse to abide by.

What makes a viable governing structure? One possibility is a small executive committee advised by, and working closely with, a well-functioning staff. On the other hand, a coalition made up of many grassroots organizations may function better with a larger, democratically elected body of delegates that meets on a regular basis. What

matters is that a coalition's governing structure reflects its goals and those of its member organizations.

How are decisions reached? Some coalition organizers adopt the decision-by-consensus method, which often works for small, single-issue coalitions. In larger, multi-issue coalitions whose member organizations have a history of isolation and mistrust, attempting to reach a consensus on every issue can be unwieldy, even paralyzing. Yet, a system of majority rule may stifle important dissent and minority opinion, especially in multicultural coalitions.

A good middle-ground procedure is to aim for a working consensus. At first, the coalition may try to arrive at consensus on major issues, which allows for extensive presentation of information and discussion on a variety of viewpoints. If it turns out that consensus cannot be reached within a specified time, the coalition seeks a two-thirds majority approval for decisions. This procedure combines some advantages of decision-making by both consensus and voting, and does not take up too much time.

Coalitions that follow either consensus or majority-rule procedures should be aware of the danger of a "sabotaged" decision. This problem arises when groups who may not agree with a policy refrain from voicing their objections, but then fail to send representatives to legislative hearings or other meetings the coalition has promised to attend. The situation is fairly widespread, particularly in coalitions where member organizations are only loosely affiliated to each other. It may be averted if coalition leaders devise procedures that encourage genuinely open discussions, in which differences are aired and all member organizations are urged to take part in decision-making.

Some coalitions provide veto rights or allocate unequal — sometimes called weighted — votes to certain groups to encourage their participation. A variant of weighted voting is offering one or more groups limited participation. In some circumstances, organizations with related interests may be invited to take part, but they are not given equal voting rights.

Sometimes large organizations attempt to flood coalition meetings in order to determine policies. One way to neutralize overrepresentation by any one organization is to set a maximum number of votes for each.

### **Avoiding Competition in Fundraising**

All organizations need fundraising strategies, but coalitions must be particularly alert to unnecessary competition with their member organizations for financial support. When there is vying for funds, groups are far less likely to become significantly involved in coalition work.

Many coalitions raise funds through membership dues from affiliated groups, thus eliminating the problem of competition for outside funding. In cases where both individual and organizational members participate

*Encouraging open discussions*

*Tapping diverse sources*

in a coalition, dues are often lower for individuals who are members of the affiliate organizations; thus, their financial burden is reduced.

Some coalitions try to minimize fundraising competition among their members by seeking grants only from non-local sources and leaving grassroots fundraising to the organizations themselves. The coalition may also ask its member groups to refrain from submitting a proposal to a funding source that has already been approached by another coalition partner, or to develop a joint proposal with that group.

Finally, coalitions can use their power to intervene and mediate in cases where member groups are victims of funding inequity. When internal fighting over these inequities occurs, the coalition leadership should try to transform the energy invested in the quarrel into a challenge to the source of inequities.

As the scarcity of funding affects all groups, it is particularly important that coalition leaders address the issue of competition. In doing so they will be more likely to foster trust and encourage cooperation among their members.

**Maintaining Commitment**

Coalitions must be aware that their member groups have different levels of commitment. These differences are manifested in the degree of time, effort and resources they invest in the common effort. The more opportunities offered for multiple levels of commitment, the greater the variety of organizations able to take part. It is important, therefore, to have an approved system of formal accountability and to establish criteria for deciding whether a commitment has been honored.

*Providing resources to members*

Organizations often hesitate to join a coalition because it usually demands such resources as staff, time and money *from* its members long before it can provide resources *to* them. Coalitions should remember that nurturing their members builds morale and maintains commitment. As soon as possible, they should develop resources — newsletters, information packets, study or discussion guides and other services — to facilitate the work of member organizations and assure them that their help is not taken for granted. In addition, special events, conferences and briefings are very useful for sharing information, comparing notes and building unity.

Because it is difficult to make a personal commitment to a coalition (which is, after all, only an organization of organizations) coalition-wide activities such as evenings of cultural sharing, parties, picnics and other social events are important reinforcements. They also offer exposure to a variety of individuals, groups and constituencies otherwise inaccessible to member organizations. Even when coalitions handle large, sometimes urgent, survival issues that individual organizations cannot take up on their own, they should not focus so exclusively on “getting the work

done” that they fail to offer such personal and cultural experiences. And they should allot some time to celebrating coalition achievements because it boosts morale and strengthens individual and organizational participation.

In sum, maintaining a coalition requires special sensitivity to all levels of commitment, problems of fundraising, a variety of decision-making procedures, and other issues of power and control. The more a coalition anticipates difficulties in these areas and works out procedures to resolve them, the better it will be able to focus on its goals and tasks.



## How to Negotiate and Resolve Conflicts



**A**LTHOUGH “NEGOTIATION,” like “coalition building,” may suggest the image of a highly specialized, rather esoteric science, it is, in fact, part of everyday life. Family members, friends, employers and employees routinely negotiate such issues as who does the dishes, cooks or cleans; which movies to see; what a job definition and salary should be. Demystifying negotiation, seeing it as a process both necessary and exciting, and placing it with all the other skills that make coalitions work, will help members overcome feelings of powerlessness.

Despite its being simple and commonsensical, negotiation will be more effective if its process is understood and certain “do’s and don’ts” are kept in mind. Training coalition members in the art of negotiation takes considerable time, but it is well worth the effort. Knowing how to negotiate successfully is one key to running smoother meetings, influencing others and developing winning programs.

Coalition work calls for negotiation on two levels. Internally, the coalition as a whole attempts to reconcile the diverse positions of its members in order to present a coherent program. Externally, the coalition must deal with other factors it seeks to influence in the community. Almost every decision by an existing coalition, or one in the process of formation, necessitates negotiation.

*Almost every decision entails negotiating*

### What Negotiation Involves

► *Negotiating requires assessing conflicting positions to find underlying, compatible interests.* The usual approach, what labor/management experts call distributive bargaining, simply means that what one side gains the other loses, so the goal is to maximize gains and minimize

losses. A more constructive approach, geared to produce gains for both parties in the conflict, is to explore seemingly intransigent positions for compatible interests. Underlying compatibility exists in almost every negotiation; in fact, that is what makes it possible at all.

Conflicts should not be suppressed; their outcome can bring achievements that neither side can win alone. An apparently irreconcilable conflict of interests may be a signal to probe the deeper reasons for an impasse. In many instances, conflicts are energizing; they force both sides to think of new options and new ways of working together. The result is increased awareness and creative responses to the diversity of the negotiating parties.

► *Negotiating parties must develop sufficient, demonstrable power to compel others to deal with them and respond to their terms.* Imbalances of power frustrate the best skills in the world; no party will negotiate with one that has no real power and cannot exert influence on its behalf. For example, in negotiating with a coalition, a public official will want to make sure that it can deliver votes, increase visibility, and so on. Therefore, especially before and during negotiations, it is important for a coalition to increase its power.

► *Negotiations usually do not involve one-time contacts, but relationships developed and maintained over time.* In most cases, the negotiating parties are dependent on each other and require a continuing relationship. To pursue the example of the coalition and the elected official, the coalition needs the official's access to the city bureaucracy, and the official may need the coalition's support to remain in office. Therefore, their negotiations must proceed in a manner that facilitates future interaction. A coalition should take into account this mutual dependency when working out its negotiating tactics.

► *Negotiations may be either formal or informal.* Although both types make use of similar principles and skills, there are important differences. Formal negotiations entail a deliberate, conscious process of resolving disagreement. This may include negotiating committees and written agreements, contracts outlining issues that have been agreed upon and those still unresolved, procedures for ratifying an agreement (e.g., the percentage of members in each organization who need to approve a coalition decision), and so on. Informal negotiations are part of a coalition's continuing internal business and deal with such less structured matters as deciding on a specific agenda or strategy, what groups should or should not be invited to join, agreeing on whose "turf" meetings will be held, and so on.

### **Preparatory Steps**

► *Acknowledge the existence of a conflict and enlist everyone's cooperation to resolve it.* A simple, effective device is a written display

*Compatibility,  
bargaining power  
and long-term  
relationships*

of the elements of disagreement on a chalk board or large sheets of butcher paper. Having all parties to a conflict face the same board focuses attention, presents the problem as an interesting challenge, and invites a joint commitment to developing a viable solution.

▶ *Determine the “bottom line” before negotiation begins.* The initial demand to the other side or sides may be well above the point from which neither side will retreat, to allow room for discussion without compromising the organization’s basic position.

▶ *Study in advance the interests, goals and positions of the other parties.* If both sides are well informed about the other’s needs and sensitive to areas where conflict may arise, each can point out to the other the benefits of compromise and mutual support for an issue. Unfortunately, coalitions often concentrate so exclusively on their political or moral “correctness” that they do not plan for winning others to their point of view.

▶ *Designate role-playing assignments to persons who will take part in the negotiating process.* By simulating the negotiating process, role-playing is a good way to prepare strategy. It can expose false assumptions about the opposing side and facilitate the development of appropriate tactics to deal with valid ones. In delineating roles, it is usually best to have one person speak for the coalition, another to follow up on issues already agreed upon and those still unresolved, and another to act as unofficial mediator. When the negotiating partners reach an impasse, the mediator may suggest brainstorming or caucusing to clear the air and get back to basics.\* Even in a conflict between two individuals, a third person can help each or both to role-play possible ways to resolve their differences. This technique is very effective because it provides an uncharged atmosphere for developing new, workable strategies.

### Stages in Conflict Resolution

In conflict resolution, predictive models enable opposing parties to determine, with reasonable accuracy, an effective course of action. Coalition members are likely to be more effective bargainers if they guide themselves by these stages.\*\*

1. *Rhetoric:* This is the language of the parties’ initial statements of position. Often it is ambiguous, or couched in ideological terms, rather than clear and concrete.

2. *Issue definition:* This is a critical stage, when each party goes

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\*Caucusing means breaking up into small, problem-solving groups. When the atmosphere is less charged, people think more clearly. They can then return to the talks to develop new proposals without the “emotional baggage” that impeded them earlier.

\*\*Adapted from David Kuechle, “The Art of Negotiation — An Essential Management Skill,” *Business Quarterly* (Summer 1980), pp. 19-32.

beyond rhetoric to define issues that really matter. The goal is to reach agreement about crucial points in dispute.

3. *Exploring positions:* Having agreed on what the major issues are, the negotiating parties state their positions on them. Initially, these may be rigid, but it is important that each side have time to articulate a position fully; only when each feels it has been heard and understood can the talks move ahead.

4. *Broadening issues by exploring underlying interests:* This is brainstorming time, when all sides come up with possible ways to look at the conflict. The goal is not only to suggest new solutions, but to explore broader ways of framing the issues so that both sides' real interests are taken into account.

5. *Narrowing alternatives to develop the parameters of a settlement:* At this stage, each side distinguishes between stands it is willing to compromise on or drop, and those it views as essential and from which it will not retreat. It is here that seemingly unimportant issues turn out to be critical.

6. *Formalized agreement:* Negotiation should culminate in a written agreement. This step is as necessary for coalitions as it is for labor or diplomatic negotiation. Without it, some coalitions have run into trouble, for when doubts arise, there is no written document to verify what has actually been agreed to.

### **“Red Flags”: Signals That Something Is Not Going Right**

By using this six-stage model, coalition partners can examine any aspect of a conflict, recognize and prepare for the next stage and, very important, be alert to possible “red flags.” If member organizations are unable to move on, perhaps they are reverting to an earlier stage, to rhetoric, for example. These red flags signal that an organization has passed over a stage of negotiation, become bogged down or regressed.

▶ *Reverting to rhetoric:* When a coalition faces a new problem after having agreed upon certain key issues, reverting to rhetoric can be a tactic to avoid going on to new, more touchy issues.

▶ *Obscuring principal issues:* If an overwhelming range of issues appears to claim attention and impede action, it may be that the key issue has not been adequately spelled out, and that time should be devoted to clarifying it.

▶ *Rejecting a solution:* Opposition from members to a coalition agreement may suggest that insufficient time was taken at the outset to hear viewpoints adequately and establish support for everyone's right to an initial position.

▶ *Returning to rigid positions:* Even after there has been definite progress toward agreement, some people revert to rhetoric and rigidity. Sometimes one side does not realize that the negotiating process is

*Recognizing the stages of a conflict*

extremely delicate. If one negotiating partner reaches a tentative compromise on a previously firm position, utmost sensitivity and confidentiality are needed on all sides to keep the talks going. If someone leaks the content of the discussions to the media or otherwise attracts public attention, negotiations will in all likelihood be stalled and original positions hardened.

► *Refusing to heed the formal agreement:* If some coalition members refuse to abide by the terms of the formal agreement, something may be wrong about the way it was reached. This process must be truly democratic and actively engage the constituents in clarifying and developing consensus on all clauses in the agreement. To ensure compliance, there must be a written document that has been reviewed and approved by a majority of the coalition's membership.

### **Other Roadblocks**

Aside from failure to fulfill tasks at each stage of negotiation, there are fundamental problems with image and ideology that can impair the process. Sometimes the distinctive cultural characteristics of the participating organizations are overlooked. Different styles of rhetoric, for example, may be misunderstood; what is expressive for one group may seem hostile to another. Or one participant may be so intractably ideological that effective negotiation becomes impossible. It is important to distinguish between persistent advocacy of issues that are substantively important to an organization and a rigidly ideological stance that rejects any opposing facts or feelings.

### **How Can "Red Flags" and Roadblocks Be Managed?**

Several approaches are possible in dealing with obstacles to smooth and effective negotiation:

► *Identifying overlapping objectives.* This process consists of four stages:

1. Each negotiating party identifies its major objectives;
2. each party defines its objectives as either essential or desirable;
3. the parties study one another's categories and identify objectives that are shared by more than one;
4. the parties jointly explore ways to increase the number of shared objectives.

► *Trying to avoid defensiveness and seeing the other as an ally.* In any stormy dialogue, a key goal should be to minimize blame, criticism or attack, which only provoke defensiveness. Negotiating parties should try to voice objections in a way that encourages alliance building, communicates a will to understand, acknowledges the validity of the other party's viewpoint and invites further clarification. "Here's what I

agree with,” or “You may be right, but let me tell you how I see things,” are examples of constructive comments.

▶ *Helping the other side meet its needs.* A negotiating group is sometimes so anxious to win its point that it cannot see the other point of view at all. It is far more constructive to ask: “What do you need in order to move toward a compromise and how can I make it easier for you to get your needs met?”

▶ *Offering rational, logical arguments to persuade and to settle disagreements, rather than emotional rhetoric and posturing.* Strong emotions do not lend themselves to compromise. Subjective thinking often blocks the search for overlapping goals that can lead to a solution. Searching for more objective ways to deal with disputes — logic, merit, empirical evidence, or some other mutually agreed-upon standards — helps keep talks on target. Of course, a call for rationality can come only after all parties have been given adequate time to express pent-up emotions and articulate concerns fully.

▶ *Knowing that some issues can be resolved quickly, whereas others hinge on the development of trust and cooperation.* In complicated negotiations about a variety of issues, it is best to deal first with those that are more manageable and resolvable. By the time the parties reach the more difficult issues, they will have generated enough good will and trust to make effective compromise easier.

### **Who Can Mediate?**

In formal negotiations, each side chooses someone to explore issues, suggest solutions and otherwise facilitate the process. Although most coalition activities do not require official mediation, successful negotiations usually include someone who assumes the role of mediator to bridge different viewpoints. The mediator can help distinguish between issues already agreed upon and those requiring further action, concentrate on the more important issues and positions, and suggest measures to resolve a conflict.

Someone, even a party to the dispute, can decide to play the role of mediator and help both sides move forward in the negotiations. That person tries to transcend personal or organizational interests to think about all the broader issues, to indicate areas of agreement, and to suggest temporary deferral of a thorny issue.

*Even a party to the dispute can mediate*

### **Coping With “Difficult” Individuals**

Managing negotiation calls for resolving interpersonal as well as interorganizational conflicts. In dealing with troublesome individuals at a coalition meeting, it is helpful to remember the following:

▶ *Disruptive individuals may play a constructive role by forcing a*

*group to concentrate on the main issues.* It is important to distinguish between persons who simply inject irrelevant comments and those who stimulate a group to focus its thinking. Taking the time to appreciate the contributions of the latter may allay divisiveness.

► *Sometimes disruptive persons manage to divert attention to their own agenda.* It should not be assumed, however, that the others agree with it. To prevent such diversion, ground rules must be established to keep the discussion on track. A useful rule is that people who have spoken once will not be recognized again until others who wish to have addressed the group.

► *Disruptive coalition members often harp on a few points with which they disagree.* To minimize the negative effect of their disruption it is best to listen to what they have to say and then ask them to identify a point on which they agree. This approach trains people to look first for areas of agreement.

#### **Leaving the Door Open**

Some conflicts persist even after extensive negotiations, no matter how diligently each side tries to identify the other's interests and to maintain the momentum of the dialogue. In such cases, it is at least possible for the opponents to "agree to disagree" and to relegate the thorny problems to the back burner in order to safeguard the agreements already established.

Even if negotiations break off, the two sides can and should try to maintain civil relations; if they have failed to reach agreement on one issue, they may have other occasions to work together. It is extremely important to leave the lines of communication open for future exchanges with adversaries as well as with like-minded persons.

*Maintaining relations  
for the future*

## Building Unity Across Ethnic, Religious and Class Divisions



**O**NE OF THE MOST REWARDING ASPECTS of coalition work is learning about the traditions, cultures and concerns of others. It provides opportunities for deep and lasting relations with individuals from many diverse backgrounds and confronts the isolation in which ethnic groups often find themselves. Many of these groups have a history of courage and dignity in the face of persecution that can inspire and strengthen coalition builders when a situation appears discouraging.

Inadequate understanding of ethnic, religious and class differences hampers multicultural coalition work. To avoid clashes, it is important to remember that members belong not only to different organizations but also to different cultural groups whose values and mores are reflected in their behavior. Blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Irish or others bring to a coalition their distinctive patterns of interaction, some of them self-defeating and counterproductive to coalition work, others valuable for inspiration and for illuminating problems. Groups will make a unique contribution when their strengths are taken seriously and their weaknesses are corrected.

*Many groups have a history of courage and dignity*

### The Best Way to View Cultural Differences

Much of American history has either minimized or denied cultural differences. The old melting pot theory hypothesized that ethnic, religious, racial, class and geographic differences could be subsumed under the inclusive, specific identity, "American." Although that theory has proven untenable, its assumptions continue to exercise influence, and many of the best training manuals on community organizing say next to nothing about cultural differences and their importance.

**Challenging  
separatism**

Similarly, many training programs in education, health care and other human services offer very little information on diversity. Research has shown that mental health is correlated to strong ethnic identification, but many practitioners fail to incorporate this knowledge into their work.

In recent years an opposite tendency has emerged — to claim that everything is determined by cultural differences and that coalition work cannot succeed without organizing each ethnic group separately. This approach does try to reverse a long-standing silence about cultural issues, but it can romanticize group differences, reinforce negative stereotypes and, unintentionally, encourage each group to defend its isolation.

The challenge to coalition organizers today is, on the one hand, to value distinctive ethnic and class characteristics, and on the other, to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and isolation. To put it another way, the positive contributions of groups to coalitions should be welcomed, and intense separatist strategies should be constructively challenged, with the intent to elicit cooperation.

**Characteristics Coalition Builders Need to Understand**

► *People belong to different groups that help shape their identities.* Individuals are deeply affected by their group identities whether or not they consciously identify with them. They are Jews, Catholics or Protestants; Blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans or Native Americans; working- middle- or upper-class; male or female; English, Irish, Russian, Greek, Chinese or Mexican. They not only have different languages and various cultural and religious symbols, but different styles and ways of functioning within organizations.

Groups provide their members with a common culture and a sense of historical continuity, a refuge from loneliness or despair, a home where they can be nourished and nourish others. Coalitions should not compete with these group commitments; they should acknowledge and nurture them to benefit from the strong sense of loyalty they engender.

Indeed, ethnic groups can bring distinctive expertise and wisdom to a coalition. For example, Native American culture, which is profoundly sensitive to such issues as the environment and the elderly, can serve as a model for many groups. Similarly, many ethnic groups that have to deal with the absorption of immigrants are learning from the Jewish community's experience in settling Russian Jewish immigrants during the past century.

► *Despite conflict today, a history of cooperation between certain groups may be the basis for collective action.* Often, this history of past agreement is buried under years of misinformation and distortion. Investigating and reclaiming it can allay mistrust and facilitate the development of a mutually acceptable agenda for the present.

► *It is sometimes difficult for one group to believe that others will*

**Appreciating group  
loyalties**

*support its agenda.* Some differences among groups have been used to justify a group's inhumane treatment and persecution of others. Those who have inherited such a history naturally approach another group's organizations and coalitions with suspicion, sometimes even fear. Believing that negative stereotypes about them persist, they often cannot realize that some groups are willing to support them in the present. They should be helped to correct existing misperceptions, express their needs and actively seek out allies.

▶ *Some groups suffer internal fragmentation and friction.* Many coalition workers tend to think that groups compete only with one another to advance their respective self-interests, but that is only half the story. Groups may also be fragmented internally: a history of persecution may cause members to vent their resentment on each other. Coalition organizers should learn not only to reconcile diverse groups, but also to understand the special differences and struggles within groups.

▶ *Some groups find an excuse to repeat their isolation even in the coalition.* Because isolation is familiar and therefore seems "safe," some groups join a coalition that offers the hope of ending it, only to find a small point of difference to justify their splitting into subgroups or even their withdrawing from the coalition.

▶ *Groups may unintentionally frustrate their best allies.* Even after trying very hard to ally themselves with another group, a group or individual occasionally becomes a target of the other's resentment for past years of disappointment and mistreatment. Under such circumstances, many coalition builders need to be reminded that they are given a hard time precisely because they are, in fact, effective allies and safe targets for the rehearsal of past resentments!

*Allies sometimes are targets for resentments*

### **Fostering Intergroup Sharing**

Coalition leaders should arrange forums where each group can talk about its history, customs, music and rituals, as well as struggles and present concerns. By exposing groups to each other, these forums are effective in blunting intergroup rivalries. Another device for reducing tension is to present special programs drawing on each ethnic group's history. A coalition working on immigration reform, for example, may want to organize a session featuring skits that illustrate the experience of various groups in adapting to this country.

Some members will resent these forums, feeling they dull the group's political edge, but cultural sharing is an important coalition building tool. There is no way to bring together isolated groups with conflicting interests without weaving at least some of their most vital, life-sustaining customs into the fabric of the coalition.

Ultimately, ethnic groups participate in a multiethnic coalition only to the extent that they can be encouraged to be proud of their history and

achievements, and to commit themselves to continue to build their traditions. By actively programming cultural diversity into coalition activities, a leader can deepen each ethnic group's commitment to the common cause.

### **Respecting the Cultural and Religious Practices of Others**

Coalitions should be knowledgeable about and sensitive to the laws and customs of participating ethnic or religious groups. Some coalitions schedule key meetings or programs on religious holidays, and then are disappointed because individuals who might be interested do not attend. Special attention should be paid to such matters as meeting time, location, food that will be served, and so on. Making all groups feel welcome requires that coalition leaders anticipate reactions, rather than having to deal with angry complaints of insensitivity after the damage is done.

### **Dealing With Stereotypes and Group Resentments**

Groups that have suffered mistreatment and persecution understandably may find it difficult to trust others. Blacks may blame whites, women may blame men, Jews may blame non-Jews, the disabled may blame the able-bodied. These attitudes, however comprehensible, not only hamper the coalition, but condemn the formerly mistreated group to continued ineffectiveness, perhaps even powerlessness. Real change occurs only when each group reconciles itself with past and present mistreatment and decides to transform its anger into a force for positive action.

There are various ways coalition leaders can deal with intergroup tensions and hostilities:

▷ *By seeking to help groups separate anger and resentment from their consideration of proposals.* The coalition should be willing to hear out a particular group's resentments. Expressing feelings can be liberating, particularly if members have been used to hiding them. Nevertheless, voicing resentment is merely the first step beyond being a victim. Coalition leaders should interrupt repetitive airing of grievances and help groups reach out to the sources of real power — to allies and effective programs.

▷ *By allowing time for every group to share the personal life stories and emotions that have formed its views.* During these speakouts, other participating members should be encouraged to listen carefully and respectfully, and to refrain from comment or disagreement. Facts and figures can be argued or even refuted, but personal stories are compelling — they defy rejection. They oblige people to see the real human needs, feelings and concerns behind the conflicts between them.

▷ *By developing ways to modify stereotypes.* Patience may be the most important quality of a coalition leader who works with diverse

*Transforming anger  
into a positive force*

ethnic groups. Group tensions and stereotypes have been around for a long time; knee-jerk reactions to disruptive, prejudicial remarks may satisfy an emotional need, but they will not effectively change attitudes. Ethnic, racial, gender-related or other slurs are best handled by calmly challenging the misinformation on which they are based, while communicating respect for the person making the remarks.

► *By refraining from inducing guilt.* Many people who belong to “oppressor” groups really want to be allies; they may just need to know more about the history and needs of victimized groups. Stimulating guilt in groups that at one time mistreated others tends to make them defensive or apt to withdraw. It is better to help such a group reclaim positive aspects of its own identity and to seek out areas where it has been cooperative.

► *By seeking symbols, precepts and traditions from different ethnic and religious communities.* Many potential coalition members have deep roots in synagogue and church life, and can be reached best by understanding, respecting and communicating with the symbols and languages they understand.

► *By encouraging caucusing.* Coalitions trying to resolve a difficult issue generally spend a great deal of time at full group meetings; these are particularly unproductive when there is a history of intergroup rivalries. An alternative worth considering is to let the constituent groups caucus, or meet only with their own members at first, to reach agreement on their position. Most groups need a private, undisturbed environment to vent their disappointments and air their negative stereotypes, even their prejudices, about other groups, without hurting anyone else. After having blown off steam, groups will be more flexible about adapting their agendas to that of the coalition. They can then join the others and report their concerns.

*Using diversity to  
build unity*

## In Conclusion



**G**ROUPS NEED TO WORK TOGETHER if they want the larger community to take their concerns seriously. Increasingly they have come to realize that coalitions are the most effective vehicle for achieving their aims.

As we have seen, coalition building demands some very unique skills: learning how to reconcile the differing needs of special-interest groups, each of which has its own “urgent” agenda; framing issues in ways broad enough to bridge the many barriers separating groups; and helping groups move beyond the mistrust, suspicions and rivalries that have all too often characterized their relations in the past. These skills need to become part of the training of every community, government and religious leader.

This manual is an effort to set down, for the first time, some systematic guidelines to coalition building. It is hoped that practitioners will find it helpful in resolving conflicts and improving multiethnic and multicultural relations, and that it will inspire other, more ambitious and more refined methodological undertakings in the field.

## Coalition Checklist

# AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

### Getting Started

1. Has at least one of these catalysts generated interest in forming a coalition:
  - a significantly committed individual  Yes  No
  - a disturbing or dramatic event  Yes  No
  - detailed, timely information about the issue  Yes  No
2. Is there enough time to decisively affect policies related to the issue chosen by the coalition?  Yes  No
3. Will a coalition help potential members achieve goals they cannot achieve alone?  Yes  No
4. Is each potential member adequately organized?  Yes  No
5. Are there adequate leadership links between potential coalition members?  Yes  No
6. Is there adequate funding?  Yes  No

### Building a Constituency

1. Has a list been made up of who is affected by the issue?  Yes  No
2. Has it been determined which groups have already done work on the issue?  Yes  No
3. Is it known which groups will benefit from action on the issue?  Yes  No
4. Is there an outline of separate strategies to attract each group to join the coalition?  Yes  No

5. Does each group that is considering joining the coalition have an acceptable image in the community?  Yes  No
6. Is there an outline of resources (e.g., staff time, money, publicity) expected from each member organization?  Yes  No
7. Do the by-laws of each member group permit participation in the work of the coalition?  Yes  No
8. Does the person representing each organization have the power to act on behalf of that organization?  Yes  No
9. Will certain organizations need incentives (e.g., veto rights) to join the coalition?  Yes  No
10. Has it been determined who agrees with the issue, who disagrees, and who might agree if more information were provided?  Yes  No

#### Joining a Coalition: What Groups Should Consider

1. Will the member organization gain visibility?  Yes  No
2. Will membership potential be increased?  Yes  No
3. Will links be created with other important organizations?  Yes  No
4. Does the potential member have the resources to contribute:
  - staff time  Yes  No
  - money  Yes  No
  - office space  Yes  No
  - new allies  Yes  No
  - research capabilities  Yes  No
  - a better reputation in the community  Yes  No
  - media and press coverage  Yes  No
  - a broader constituency  Yes  No
5. Do the individual member's decision-making processes fit in with the coalition's decision-making structure?  Yes  No
6. Are the member organization's ideological principles compatible with those of the coalition?  Yes  No

#### Mapping Out Coalition Strategy

1. Are invitations to join the coalition being extended to concerned organizations early enough for them to contribute to the formulation of strategy?  Yes  No

2. Is the issue broad enough to include the larger human needs of all the member groups?  Yes  No
3. Have inflammatory rhetoric and moral posturing been excluded from the coalition's statements and slogans?  Yes  No
4. Have the positions of groups that may be reluctant to join the coalition been carefully checked to see if differences of opinion can be bridged?  Yes  No
5. Is there an arrangement for groups that might come to the coalition with other urgent issues to find a forum for those issues?  Yes  No
6. Is there an agreement to focus on the key issue around which the coalition was formed and to refrain from adding other issues that may be important to other member groups?  Yes  No
7. Have controversial positions on which there is no consensus been put into non-binding statements rather than trying to force an agreement?  Yes  No
8. Has a special evening been arranged at which each member organization can present its agenda and attract new support in the community?  Yes  No

### Determining Coalition Goals

1. Have the following been determined:
  - the ideal situation  Yes  No
  - the present reality  Yes  No
  - the differences between the ideal and the reality  Yes  No
2. Have the following kinds of changes been considered:
  - changes in consciousness  Yes  No
  - changes in policy  Yes  No

### Building Internal Commitment

1. Have special resources been developed for member groups within the coalition?  Yes  No
2. Have special parties, cultural events, or celebrations been planned to help member groups feel more included?  Yes  No

## Coalition Leadership

1. Has each person been approached by the leader in order to build a one-to-one relationship?  Yes  No
2. Has personal support been built for the leader by:  
encouraging personal responsibility  Yes  No  
arranging time for self-estimation  Yes  No  
arranging time for appreciations  Yes  No
3. Is the leader able to elicit every member's thinking, to consult widely among members and then draw the thinking into a concrete program?  Yes  No
4. Does the leader acknowledge and correct mistakes?  Yes  No
5. Can the leader help the coalition move forward after defeats and, in times of discouragement, recognize the successes it has achieved?  Yes  No
6. Have one or more replacements been selected for leadership training?  Yes  No
7. Does the leader understand the reasons behind attacks and effectively respond to criticism?  Yes  No
8. Is the leader willing to disband the coalition when it has outlived its usefulness?  Yes  No

## The Coalition's Internal Functions

### Staff

1. Is it clear which member organizations will contribute staff or — if none — where the staff will come from?  Yes  No
2. Is there an explicit agreement about the role of staff in coalition decisions?  Yes  No

### Decision-Making

1. Has the coalition decided who will speak for it in public?  Yes  No
2. Have any of these procedures been agreed upon for making coalition decisions:  
consensus  Yes  No  
democratic voting  Yes  No  
working consensus  Yes  No  
organizational vetoes  Yes  No  
weighted decisions  Yes  No  
other  Yes  No

### Fundraising

1. Does the coalition have a procedure that avoids competition for funding among member organizations?  Yes  No

### Maintaining Commitment

1. Does the coalition leadership allow multiple levels of commitment on the part of member organizations?  Yes  No
2. Does the coalition develop resources (e.g., newspapers, position papers, etc.) to nurture coalition members?  Yes  No
3. Have parties, cultural sharing, and coalition celebrations been planned to increase member participation?  Yes  No

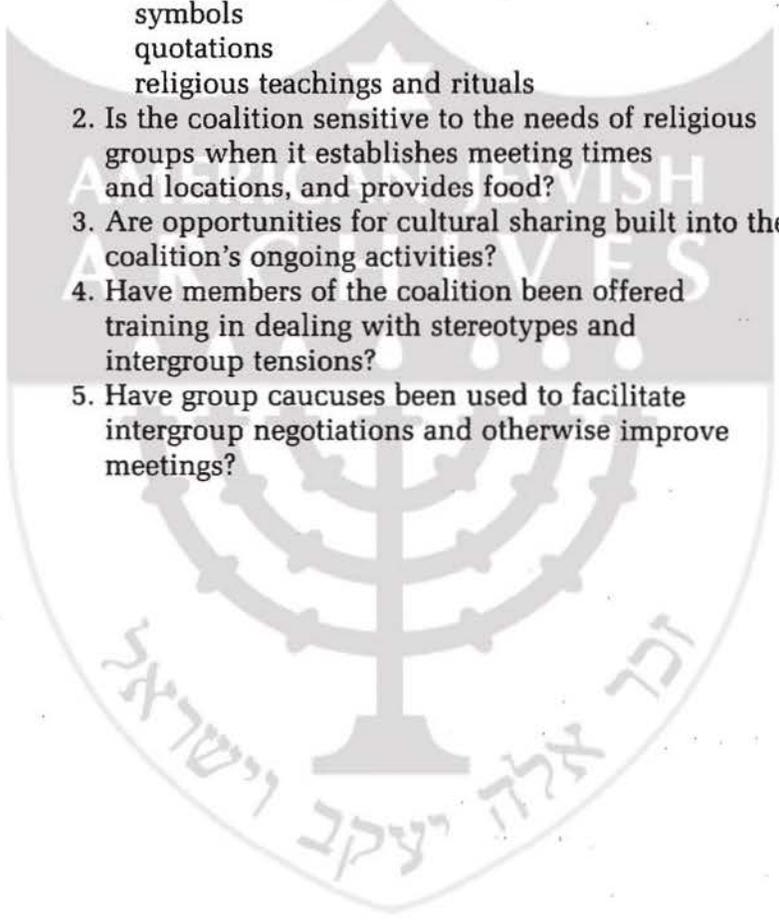
### Managing Negotiations

1. Has the coalition assessed its bargaining power in dealing with a negotiating partner and made plans to increase it?  Yes  No
2. Has the coalition determined its bottom line in negotiation?  Yes  No
3. Has the negotiation team thoroughly studied the interests, goals and positions of the other parties?  Yes  No
4. Have roles been assigned to each person who will participate in the negotiation?  Yes  No
5. Are the negotiating partners proceeding through each of the six stages of negotiations: rhetoric, issue definition, exploring positions, exploring underlying interests, developing parameters for a settlement and formalizing an agreement?  Yes  No
6. Has the negotiating team taken into account cultural differences between itself and the other negotiating team(s)?  Yes  No
7. Have the negotiating partners identified overlapping objectives?  Yes  No
8. Has each side attempted to understand how the other perceives it?  Yes  No
9. Have the issues that can be resolved the most easily been dealt with first?  Yes  No
10. Has someone been chosen to take on the role of mediator?  Yes  No

11. Has each side taken care to adopt a problem-solving attitude in the negotiation?  Yes  No
12. When no compromise is possible, has an attempt been made to "agree to disagree?"  Yes  No

**Bridging Culture, Ethnicity and Class Issues**

1. Have ways been developed to reach out to diverse kinds of groups through  
 symbols  Yes  No  
 quotations  Yes  No  
 religious teachings and rituals  Yes  No
2. Is the coalition sensitive to the needs of religious groups when it establishes meeting times and locations, and provides food?  Yes  No
3. Are opportunities for cultural sharing built into the coalition's ongoing activities?  Yes  No
4. Have members of the coalition been offered training in dealing with stereotypes and intergroup tensions?  Yes  No
5. Have group caucuses been used to facilitate intergroup negotiations and otherwise improve meetings?  Yes  No



# Resources

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Tydemann, Ann. **A Guide To Coalition Building** (1979). Prepared for the National Citizen's Coalition for Nursing Home Reform, 1424 16th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

## Organizations

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### **Citizen Involvement Training Project**

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003.

### **Institute for Human Services**

New Hampshire College, 2500 N. River Rd., Manchester, NH 03104

### **Institute for Pluralism and Group Identity**

American Jewish Committee, 165 East 56th St., New York, NY 10022

### **Midwest Training Academy**

600 W. Fullerton, Chicago IL 60614



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