

# Actualizing Equity through Coalition Organizing

No single organization has the capacity to create the level of systems and policy change necessary to deliver racial justice to our communities. But coming together and collaborating with other aligned and trusted organizations has resulted in major policy and organizing wins. Building, maintaining, and working in coalitions, across different cultural communities, geographies, and levels of access to resources and power, however, requires great thoughtfulness, heart, and intentionality. What principles and strategies have been key to the successes of coalitions in the Twin Cities – and what common challenges remain barriers to our collective work? We discussed these critical questions at our March 2024 Actualizing Equity event with Denise Butler, Associate Director / Director of Economic & Community Development at African Career, Education & Resources Inc; Owen Duckworth, Director of Organizing and Policy at the Alliance; and Julio Zelaya, Director of Advocacy at the ACLU of Minnesota.

## Why Work in Coalition

### POWER

Working in coalition can create the critical mass necessary to shift entrenched policies and deep narratives by amplifying many distinct but unified voices and organizations – and sustaining the work over the long horizon needed to seize the opportunity when the political and cultural landscapes align.

### RELATIONSHIPS

Working in coalition builds the trusted internal and external connections that can lead to both short-term success on individual issues and nurture a powerful ecosystem of organizations for long-term transformative change.

### CAPACITY

Especially for small organizations or new campaigns, working in coalition adds organizing capacity to manage the many steps and skills needed to successfully create change.

### COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS

Especially when working across a broad geography or issue area, working in coalition can leverage the perspective and expertise necessary to identify and advance effective solutions.

## Key Characteristics

### CLARITY

Powerful coalitions are clear about and united in their shared goal, whether that's passing a specific piece of state legislation or reshaping a narrative at a broader scale over a longer period of time. They also have clarity about the different roles, tasks and expectations within the coalition.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES & VALUES

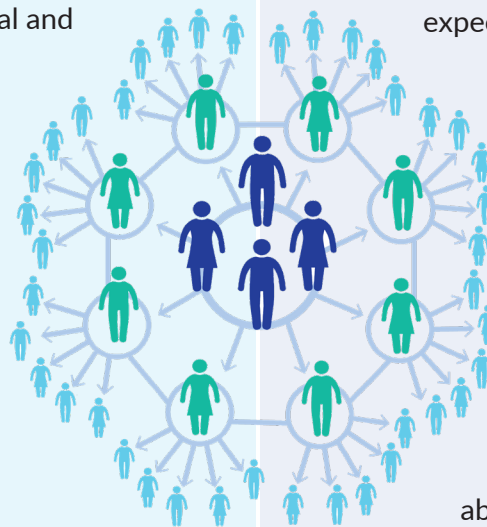
When challenges arise, powerful coalition have articulated values and principles to guide them through tension in generative ways that grow trust and strength, rather than diminish it.

### POWER ANALYSIS

Successful coalitions have explicit conversations and shared understanding about how power -- based on race, gender, organizational resources and more -- show up in the space, and what intentional steps are taken to ensure those most impacted are authentically centered as the leaders and experts in the work.

### DIVERSITY OF SKILL SETS

Powerful coalitions recognize the need for and welcome the contributions of people with different skill sets, from grassroots organizing to lobbying, legal analysis to facilitation.



# Common Challenges

## Navigating conflict

As in any space, people working closely over time on issues that are important them will lead to tension. Whatever is happening in our communities and in ourselves will be brought into the space. It can be challenging to consistently hold space that can identify tension points and navigate both interpersonal and issue-oriented conflicts in generative ways that maintains trust and momentum.

## Evolving over time

Coalitions come together for different reasons and seasons — and it can be challenging to transition or evolve from a short-term campaign orientation to a longer-term movement configuration. It can also be challenging to identify, secure and celebrate short-term wins to maintain the momentum for a multi-year campaign or movement, while also actively fostering a culture that keeps people engaged.

## Making and taking space

Sometimes the best way to support a coalition is recognizing the dynamics of participation and NOT stepping into the space. It can be challenging to be invested in an issue or geography but abstain from a coalitional effort — or abstain from a visible or leadership role in that effort — because of resources or relationships or other considerations.

## Resources and recognition

To move the work, a coalition need to ensure that resources are being secured transparently and allocated equitably so coalition members are compensated for their contributions. Without deep trust and accountability, it can be challenging to navigate funding and recognition — especially after a significant win.

# Alliance Coalition Organizing Principles

To advance our mission to build power across the intersections of geography, race, culture, and issues in the Twin Cities region to eliminate systems of oppression and advance our collective liberation, the Alliance convenes and works in coalition. We also know that collaboration among organizations requires great intentionality and resources. **We do this work with the following principles.**

## Rejecting silos

...we challenge how institutions of power address issues (like housing, transportation and economic development) in isolation, withholding information and power from impacted communities who experience these issues in intertwined ways.

## Leading with a racial justice and power lens

...Because white-led nonprofits have historically been better resourced by foundations and more readily recognized by decision makers, we focus explicitly on racial justice and reciprocal and accountable relationships with BIPOC-led organizations and communities

## Co-creating a liberatory culture and centering reciprocal relationships

...Rejecting the fallacy of individualism, we take an ecosystems approach that builds and holds space for BIPOC organizers and BIPOC-led organizations to lead, collaborate and develop their capacity.

## Building power and shifting narratives

...Our goals are broader than simply “winning” a specific policy. We also measure our impact in the number and depth of our relationships, and the strength of our alignment and power across organizations in our coalition.

## Bridging grassroots and coalition organizing

...We recognize that community organizing has many different styles and pedagogies, and winning change is accelerated by strategic engagement of stakeholders aligned for racial justice.

## [Download the full principles here](#)