

## DEVELOPING A STRUCTURE TO SUPPORT COALITION WORK

### **Role of Committees / Work Groups: Form Follows Function**

Most Coalitions, Boards and Partnerships implement their work through some system of committees or work groups. There are two common kinds of committees: standing committees, and ad hoc committees. *Standing Committees* are created by the rules, by-laws, or other committee of an organization. They exist and function more or less on a permanent basis, though a review of the Standing Committees on an annual or other semi-regular basis is encouraged. *Ad Hoc* committees are appointed for a particular purpose on a temporary basis.

### ***What Committees are Needed?***

Unless the purpose of a committee can be stated in writing, the committee is probably unnecessary. The following questions should be answered in reference to any proposed committee:

1. What is the purpose of the committee?
2. What are the committee's:
  - Responsibilities
  - Limitations
  - Authority
3. What are the specific tasks?
4. What is the timeline for the completion of tasks?
5. What type of report is expected?
6. What is the role of chairs and how is the membership decided?
7. What is the term of office for members, methods of filling vacancies and appointment of the chair?
8. What resources are needed? What resources are already available?

It is the responsibility of the larger organization (the Coalition), usually through the executive or executive committee, to define committee purpose, limitations and responsibilities. These should be included in the by-laws or recorded in minutes via the motion that created the committee. Names of members of standing committees should also be documented. All written reference to committees is then made available to members and readily accessed by the organization.

The larger organization delegates work to the committees, and the committees are directly responsible to the organization that created them. The authority of the committee can be only that which is delegated by the larger organization.

### ***Committee Descriptions***

These are like job descriptions. They state why the job has been created, who can fill the job, the means and resources to be used to accomplish the task and the time limit for the task.

### Format for committee descriptions

**Name:** Nothing conveys the purpose of a committee better than the name. The name should convey the importance of, and suggest the function of the committee.

**Purpose/Role:** This section identifies the need for the committee. It describes the intention of the organization that formed the committee, reviews the scope of action, and acts as mission statement for the members. It can also make clear how this committee operates in relation to other committees.

**Type / Duration:** Standing or Ad Hoc. Ad hoc committees should be task and time defined. It must be clear when each committee is expected to provide interim and final reports.

**Authority to Act:** It must be clear if the committee is to act merely in an advisory role, or if it is expected to take action to achieve its objectives. The authority of the committee can be only that which is delegated by the larger organization.

**Specific Objectives and Tasks:** Precise and achievable objectives are the key to ensuring that the work of the committee will be focused on the intended tasks. These can be stated in a series of concise bulleted statements.

**Membership:** This section should discuss the possible make-up of the committee. Sometimes the larger organization chooses only the original chairperson, who then recruits members to assist with the task. Members of a committee are drawn from the Coalition, or from the community or other organizations. In a small, short-term committee, the only officer is the chair. In the case of the Executive Committee, there is a full slate of officers.

**Leadership:** Whether the chairperson is selected by the Coalition or elected by members, the process for selection and expected term should be spelled out. The chair may retain their position throughout the life of the committee or on a time-limited basis.

**Resources:** Committees should be viewed as valuable and they may be expensive in their operation, even if the resources are supplied without a charge (in kind: volunteered time, facilities, services, supplies). The time of the people sitting on committee is the greatest resource. The meeting rooms, food, office supplies, and office support, as well as any direct budgeted expenses are all part of the cost. It should be clear to the committee what resources are available to the members to carry out their work. The resources, other than those reflected in the budget, are described in this section.

**Budget:** The method by which a committee obtains a budget, approves expenditures, accounts for the budget, and reports on the use of the budget is described in this section. If there are to be no monetary resources, this section may be omitted. A budget may include revenues as well as expenses. It should in any case where the committee is receiving funds or payment for services.