

Community Food Project Evaluation Toolkit

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Chapter 8. Evaluating Food Coalitions, Networks and Councils

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14

Introduction and Terms

Community food projects contribute to the development of empowered and competent communities that work to improve community quality of life. Because community food projects work on complex and interwoven issues, their work is often accomplished through people and organizations working together in strategic partnership.

Various terms are used to describe different models for working together, including networks, partnerships, collaboratives, coalitions and others. Figure 1 provides one example of how these terms are defined, although it is common to see these same terms defined in different ways. The organizational model that is appropriate for any given situation will depend on the community context, the culture(s) of participants, the goals for the collaboration, and other factors. Rusmore and Mavrolas (2005) provide a useful guide to forming collaboratives which describes the benefits of various models for structuring cooperative work.

For the purposes of this chapter, we focus on approaches that will be appropriate for groups working together in a more formal way, and on the organizational model of the “coalition,” defining it as follows:

“Organizations of diverse interest groups that combine their human and material resources to effect a specific change the members are unable to bring about independently” (Brown, 1984, p. 3).

Whatever their scale and focus, coalitions tend to have much in common. They often work to solve health and social problems through developing the community’s planning capacity, increasing collaborative problem solving, promoting cooperation, developing advocacy capacity and increasing information access (Wolff, 1992). Coalition building has been a primary focus for many community food projects, because it can be a powerful way to engage diverse organizations and individuals in working together to create positive change in their community.

Figure 1. One Framework of Organizational Relationships

(Abi-Nader, Dunningan, & Markley, 2001)

A coalition is a formalized structure for organizations working together. Other options for organizational relationships include:

Network: exchange information

Alliance: exchange information and share tasks

Partnership: exchange information, share and/or merge resources, and create activities of mutual benefit

Coalition: exchange information, share and/or merge resources, create activities for mutual interest with formal links and commitment, joint budget and fundraising, formal decision-making structure and shared leadership

Collaboration: all of the above, plus consensus decision-making and formal evaluation process (The goal is building an interdependent system to address issues and opportunities.)

Thomas Wolff (2002), who has studied collaborations extensively, has concluded that effectiveness of the various forms of collaborations, whether large-scale or small-scale, varies widely. Although significant resources have been devoted to coalition building and experienced practitioners may have a keen understanding of what makes coalitions work, formal knowledge about the effectiveness of many of these coalitions is limited (Berkowitz, 2001; Granner & Sharpe, 2004; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). There is relatively little consensus on best practices in coalition work and, thus, no gold-standard evaluation tools for measuring coalition effectiveness or community change outcomes. This may be partly a reflection of the fact that different types of coalitions are appropriate in different contexts.

Given the lack of a framework, unlike other Toolkit chapters that provide a full set of outcome-based evaluation tools, this chapter provides resources to help guide CFP staff through the vast literature and instrumentation work on coalitions as well as a set of worksheets to quantify coalition progress and activities. The following evaluation aids are provided:

- A brief summary of the literature on successful coalition building;
- Characteristics to consider measuring when evaluating community food coalition work;
- A set of worksheets to track outputs of community food coalition work;
- A list of tools CFP staff might use to further evaluate a coalition's process and outcomes.

Common Coalition Activities

There are many ways to build and maintain community coalitions, and many different strategies for addressing food security issues. Community context often plays an important role choosing both organizing models and specific strategies. But there are some activities that are common to many coalitions, including recruitment, establishment of operating structures and processes, community food assessments, and development and implementation of action plans. Evaluation can be used to measure the effectiveness of each one of these activities. Garrett and Feenstra (1999) recommend the activities listed below for coalitions focused on community food security. (Additional recommendations for building food-related networks and coalitions are presented in **Error! Reference source not found.**).

- Strategic planning,
- Community food system assessment,
- Developing project resources,
- Developing organizational infrastructure,
- Integrating policy with projects,
- Project evaluation,
- Celebration of successes.

The activities of a coalition will also vary based on its stage of organizational development. Florin, Mitchell, and Stevenson (1993) categorize the stages of development as initial mobilization, establishing organizational structure, building capacity for action, planning for action, implementation, refinement and institutionalization. Butterfoss and Kegler (2002) have created a simpler framework with three primary stages: formation, maintenance and institutionalization. Evaluation activities will vary based upon which stage a coalition is in. For

example, a coalition might evaluate the diversity of its membership in the formation phase and then measure levels of public awareness related to food security issues later.

There are a variety of models and promising practices promoted for coalition building. A summary of the models from the literature on coalition functioning and specifically from community food security advocates is presented in Appendix IX. The tables within this appendix also list suggested activities and outcome measures for coalitions. Although not everyone agrees on the most important components of successful coalitions, some practices receive stronger support than others (see Figure 2). For a more detailed look at various ideas on components of successful coalitions, see Appendix IX.

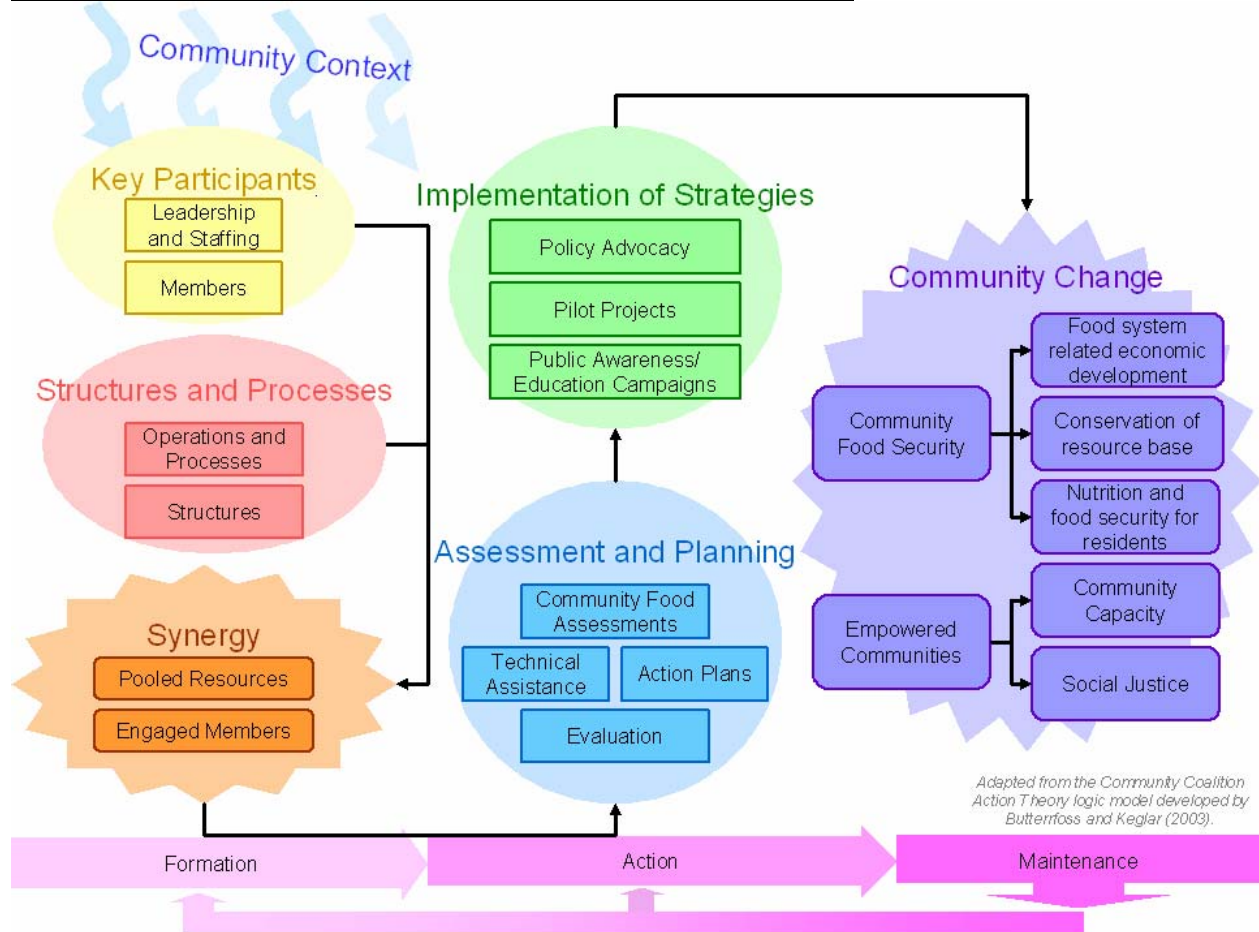
Figure 2. Components of Successful Coalitions

- Strong leadership
- Paid staffing
- Broad community representation
- Formalized mission and structures for coalition functioning
- Frequent communication and information exchange
- Shared decision-making
- Conflict management

A Model for Coalitions

One model for coalition building is the Community Coalition Action Theory developed by Butterfoss and Kegler (2002). This model identifies 23 characteristics related to successful coalition functioning, based on the evaluations of many community coalitions formed to tackle issues such as alcohol and drug dependence, AIDS, teen pregnancy and more. The model is based on a more formalized coalition with significant resources, so it may be less relevant to CFPs that are in the early stages of coalition formation, or that have more limited resources. Still, it provides the best information available from the literature on coalition functioning on how successful coalitions function. The Community Coalition Action Theory was modified for community food security work by NRC, Inc. and is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: A Model of Community Food Coalition Functioning



This adapted model is broken into three developmental stages: formation, action and maintenance. In reality, the development of a coalition is not a linear process. Some of these stages will be ongoing or revisited at various points in the development of the coalition (e.g., new partners may be recruited and/or operations and processes change because of a new project or campaign).

Formation Stage

Key participants of a community food coalition, including leaders and members, must all be involved in the formation stage. Together, they determine collaboration structures such as shared mission statements and objectives, and the establishment of group functioning processes such as decision-making and communication. With the right combination of participants, structures and processes, a coalition produces synergy whereby members are all engaged and willing to pool resources.

Action Stage

Once the coalition is formed, the members pool resources to plan their strategies for action and implementation. A community food coalition might work on activities such as community food assessments, strategic planning, technical assistance to coalition members and the community and evaluation planning. After assessing both the community's and the coalition's current status and planning for the future, coalitions might focus on implementing more externally focused strategies, such as policy advocacy, public education and pilot programs in the community. Some coalitions work on a specific project or campaign to build interest and momentum before going through broader assessment and planning.

Maintenance Stage

A coalition's ultimate goal is usually to create positive changes in the community. As community change is a long-term goal; it is usually detected in the later stages of the coalition. In the arena of community food security, community change might mean improved community food security so that (1) economic development related to food systems increases, (2) resources are better conserved, and (3) overall nutrition and food security for community residents is developed. Community change might also include the empowerment of communities as a result of work toward building social justice and improving community capacities. However, while a coalition's work may contribute to important changes like these, it can be difficult to measure community change over a short period of time or demonstrate that it has resulted from the coalition's work.

Measuring the Quality of Coalition Work

A large number of tools have been developed to evaluate coalition work at various stages of the model, yet CFP staff may find that no single existing tool will be adequate to evaluate their many activities. After reviewing 26 articles and 146 measurement scales/indexes on coalitions, Granner and Sharpe (2004) concluded that the literature in coalition functioning depicts a "diverse array of concepts" and a "fragmented collection of tools" (p. 517). They recommend selecting an overarching framework, such as our Model of Community Food Coalition Functioning. Once a framework is chosen, then the CFP staff can select the measures that match their community context, stakeholder expectations, evaluation resources and developmental phase. The following tables list coalition characteristics that might be included in an evaluation of coalition or network functioning. The categories in the following tables are linked to the Model of Community Food Coalition Functioning presented in Figure 3. The first table lists process characteristics (e.g., key participants, implementation of strategies), while the second shows the outcomes of coalition functioning (e.g., engaged members, pooled resources as well as longer-term community change outcomes).

Table 1. Process Characteristics to Consider When Measuring the Quality of Coalitions¹⁵

Characteristic	Description
KEY PARTICIPANTS	
Leadership and Staffing	
Convening group	Supports provided to group: financial or material support, technical assistance, valuable contacts and networks
Leadership	Support style, decision style, effectiveness, skills, incentive and cost management
Staff performance	Staff time devoted to coalition, capacity building, staff skills, staff-committee relationship
Coalition Membership	
Representation	Sectoral representation, member diversity, community representation
Skills and experience	Member experience, expertise, competence
Participation	Attendance, participation type (voluntary versus paid), length of group participation, level of membership (active/inactive), hours of participation, roles and contributions of each participant
Recruitment	Recruitment pattern, success, steps to ensure representation
STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES	
Structures	
Organizational structure	Formalized rules and operating procedures
Role clarity	Role clarity, operational understanding (members' understanding of role, mission, structure and operations)
Operations and processes	
Community cohesion	Sense of community connection, support and collective problem solving
Purposeful meetings	Task focus of meetings, meeting effectiveness
Communication	Quality and frequency of member communications, quality and frequency of staff/member communications
Conflict management	Conflict management and tension reduction strategies
Decision-making	Coalition influence, involvement/inclusion
Assessment and Planning	
Community food assessment	Comprehensiveness, target group reached
Action plan	Clarity, scope, comprehensiveness
Technical assistance	Quality and frequency of communications/aids, quality of assistance, impact on recipients' work
Evaluation	Planning and activities
Implementation of Strategies	
Pilot food projects	Number launched, funds generated, quality of technical assistance provided
Policy advocacy	Number and types initiated
Education/awareness campaigns	Number and types initiated

Table 2. Outcomes to Consider When Measuring the Quality of Coalitions

Outcome	Description
SYNERGY (Coalition-Level Outcomes)	
Pooled Resources	
Resources	Resource mobilization, financial resources
Engaged Members	
Satisfaction	Satisfaction with accomplishments, organization, specific aspects of group, membership
Commitment	Strength of commitment, endorsement of mission, sense of pride
Participation benefits/costs	Benefits to participation, perceived knowledge and skill development, participation costs (time commitment, lack of need for immediate gratification)
Sense of ownership	Commitment, sense of pride, cares about future of organization
COMMUNITY CHANGE (Community-Level Outcomes)	
Community Food Security (Intermediate Outcomes)	
Public awareness	Raised awareness of residents and public leaders
Public policy change	Policies initiated and institutionalized, reach of policies
Community Food Security (Long-term Outcomes)	
Food system related economic development	Increased food system related economic development
Conservation of resource base	Resources sustained
Nutrition and food security for residents	Prevalence of health and social problems or strengths
Community Empowerment	
Social capital and social justice	Collaboration, cooperation and networking of agencies, community linkages

Tools for Evaluating Coalitions

In the remainder of this chapter, we provide 12 tools to track the many outputs of community food coalition work, as well as references for additional tools to measure coalition processes and outcomes. Many of the characteristics listed in this chapter and included in the tools are most relevant to a formal coalition with significant resources. Still, some of the tools will be useful for CFP staff involved in informal collaborative activities as well. CFP staff are encouraged to review the model and tracking forms and determine which, if any, of the tools are appropriate to use as part of their evaluation.

Although there is no perfect tool for evaluating the coalition-level and community-level outcomes of food coalitions, tools developed by others may still be quite useful. Many tools have been created to assess such group processes as communication, decision-making, conflict resolution, as well as the quality of leadership and staffing. The synergy of pooled resources and member engagement is also addressed in some coalition evaluation instruments. Appendix X provides a listing of tools that measure the opinions of coalition members and staff in regard to group cohesion and coalition effectiveness.

Beyond evaluation tools, much has been written about building and evaluating successful coalitions. Appendix XI provides a list of resources that might be helpful to CFP staff working on forming, maintaining or sustaining a community food coalition or network.

Summary of Tools Included in this Chapter

This chapter of the Toolkit provides a set of tracking tools that may be used to assemble information on the activities and accomplishments of food coalitions and networks. The tools are intended to measure many aspects of collaboration and will be most relevant for more established and formal coalitions with significant resources. As with all of the tools included in the Toolkit, CFP staff should select the tools that are relevant to their particular program and modify them as needed.

There are 12 coalition tracking forms provided in this chapter. They are designed to help CFP staff track attendance and participation, community representation, structures put in place for organizational development, the hours and activities of the network and the reach of these activities. Most of the information to be completed on these forms should be available from coalition records or “off the top of your head” by coalition staff. How often you complete the forms will depend on the how often the characteristics of your coalition change during the reporting period. The Coalition Member Participation Tracking Form is the only form that is distributed to group members. The remaining forms can be completed by a coalition staff person or coordinator.

The following tools are provided in this chapter to present an overview of the coalition participation, membership, structures and activities:

Coalition Data Collection Worksheets:

- a) *Worksheet #1: Key Participants*: summary descriptions of the data to collect on key participants and how it will be obtained through the coalition tracking forms.
- b) *Worksheet #2: Structures and Processes*: summary descriptions of the data to collect on structures and processes and how it will be obtained through the coalition tracking forms.
- c) *Worksheet #3: Assessment and Planning*: summary descriptions of the data to collect assessment and planning efforts and how it will be obtained through the coalition tracking forms.
- d) *Worksheet #4: Implementation of Strategies*: summary descriptions of the data to collect on implementation of strategies and how it will be obtained through the coalition tracking forms.
- e) *Worksheet #5: Synergy*: summary descriptions of the data to collect on synergy of coalition efforts and how it will be obtained through the coalition tracking forms.
- f) *Worksheet #6: Community Change*: summary descriptions of the data to collect on community change and how it will be obtained through the coalition tracking forms.

Key Participant Tracking Forms:

- a) *Coalition Leadership and Staff Tracking Form*: to track the supports and staffing provided to the coalition.
- b) *Coalition Member Participation Form*: to track community representation and skills and contributions of members.
- c) *Coalition Participation Tracking Form*: to track the number of coalition meetings, attendance and recruiting.

Structures and Processes Tracking Forms:

- a) *Coalition Structure Tracking Form*: to track activities related to coalition structure and processes completed in the reporting period.

Assessment and Planning Tracking Forms:

- a) *Community Food Assessment Tracking Form*: to track activities related to community food assessment for the reporting period.
- b) *Coalition Action Plan Tracking Form*: to track activities related to action planning for the reporting period.
- c) *Coalition Technical Assistance Tracking Form*: to track activities related to technical assistance for the reporting period.
- d) *Coalition Evaluation Tracking Form*: to track activities related to evaluation for the reporting period.

Implementation of Strategies Tracking Forms:

- a) *Coalition Pilot Project Tracking Form*: to track activities related to pilot projects for the reporting period.
- b) *Coalition Policy Advocacy Tracking Form*: to track activities related to policy advocacy for the reporting period.
- c) *Coalition Media and Education Tracking Form*: to track activities related to media and education for the reporting period.

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- d) *Coalition Community Profile Tracking Form*: to track the reach of activities conducted by the coalition in the community
- e) *Coalition Resource Mobilization Tracking Form*: to track financial and in-kind support as well as valuable contacts obtained by coalition.
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⁴ Brown, C. (1984). *The art of coalition building: A guide for community leaders*. New York: American Jewish Committee.

⁵ Butterfoss, F. D., & Kegler, M.C. (2002) Toward a comprehensive understanding of community coalitions: Moving from practice to theory. In R. Di Clemente, L. Crosby, & M. C. Kegler. (Eds.) *Emerging theories in health promotion practice and research (157-193)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

⁶ Dahlberg, K. A., Clancy, K., Wilson, R. L., & O'Donnell, J. (2002) *Strategies, policy approaches, and resources for local food system planning and organizing: A resource guide prepared by the Local Food System Project Team (chap. F-4)*. Retrieved September 29, 2005, from: <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~dahlberg/Resource-Guide.html>

⁷ Florin, P., Mitchell, R., & Stevenson, J. (1993). Identifying training and technical assistance needs in community coalitions: A developmental approach. *Health Education Research*, 8, 417-432.

⁸ Garrett, S., & Feenstra, G. (n.d.) *Growing a community food system. Partnerships in education and research*. Retrieved September 30, 2005, from Washington State University, Small Farm Connection Web site: <http://smallfarms.wsu.edu/publications/PublicationsFoodFarmTeam.html>

⁹ Granner, M. L., & Sharpe, P. A. (2004). Evaluating community coalition characteristics and functioning: a summary of measurement tools. *Health Education Research*, 19(5), 514-532.

¹⁰ Hays, C. E., Hays, S. P., DeVille, J. O., & Mulhall, P.F. (2000). Capacity for effectiveness: The relationship between coalition structure and community impact. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 23, 373-379.

¹¹ Rusmore B. and Mavrolas P. (2005). *When Groups Work Together: A Toolkit for Activists Working in Cooperative Efforts*. Institute for Conservation Leadership, Takoma Park MD.

¹² Roussos, S. T., & Fawcett, S. B. (2000). A review of collaborative partnerships and a strategy for improving community health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 21, 369-402.

¹³ Wolff, T. (1992). *Coalition building: One path to empowered communities*. Amherst MA: AHEC Community Partners.

¹⁴ Wolff, T. (2002). A practical approach to evaluating coalitions. In T. Backer (Ed.) *Evaluating community collaborations (pp. 95-165)*. Springer Publishing

¹⁵ The table is based on the Coalition Action Theory Model, Granner and Sharpe's (2004) review of 146 coalition characteristics as well as other published literature on coalitions to produce a list of important characteristics that CFP staff might consider when evaluating coalition work (for review see Boydell, 2003, and Hays, Hays, Deville, & Mulhall, 2001).