This paper presents research results from evaluations of the effectiveness of coalitions, and also presents a discussion of the identified characteristics of effective coalitions, a measurement tool developed to assess coalition effectiveness, and the application of this tool. Characteristics of successful coalitions and partnerships that have been identified are: (1) positive transfer of authority; (2) open and direct communication; (3) open decision making; (4) shared influence over decision making; and (5) participant involvement. The exploration of the relationships among objectives, characteristics, long term outcomes, and indicators of success had resulted in the development of a framework for evaluation. This framework was used to construct a survey instrument that scores the presence of the identified characteristics of coalition effectiveness that is to be completed by managers of the partner agencies. Scores are used to determine the strength of the coalition at the outset of an evaluation and throughout to monitor changes. The approach has been used in three evaluations, one of which is reported as a case study of the use of the instrument. The case coalition is a partnership of four agencies: a large metropolitan hospital, a small drop-in center with a voluntary board, a public health department, and a women's health center. Focus group discussions showed why the changes documented by the survey instrument occurred. Other factors related to the success of a coalition may be incorporated into the instrument. These include a common philosophical base, the role and accountability of the coordinator, an understanding of differences in partner contributions, control of project structure, and control of project space. (SLD)
Measuring Success in Coalitions
by Mary Thelander and Beth Hoen

Introduction

In evaluating community based programs, we have been asked to determine the effectiveness of coalitions and partnerships. We assisted agency partnerships to identify the management characteristics that enable organizations, communities and program participants to work together in the planning and delivery of community services and to achieve their mutual goals. As well, agencies wanted to know the barriers to working together and how to overcome them, and the strengths of the partnership that were critical to continuing joint programming.

The coalitions we have evaluated are community-based and have as a long-term goal to improve child and/or family health and functioning. The programs target people who are disenfranchised, for example because of poverty, housing, citizenship status, and are isolated by culture and language. The agencies are committed to program participant involvement in the coalitions and are primarily in the health and social services sectors. The coalitions vary in size: an eleven agency coalition, an eight agency coalition and a four agency coalition. The resources available to the coalitions to support the coalition itself and its programming also vary.

In this paper, we present the results of our work with coalitions to measure their effectiveness. The identified characteristics, their definitions, a measurement tool and its application are outlined. As well we present additional factors contributing to successful partnerships that are emerging in our continuing work.
Development of Characteristics

The characteristics were first developed in 1994 with a coalition of agencies that wanted to understand the development and change in their partnership over time. Working with the managers from each of the partner agencies and the coalition coordinator, we identified and defined characteristics the group hypothesized were critical or essential to a coalition’s success.

The characteristics or determinants of success the group identified are consistent with the management philosophy and values of community-based organizations. The characteristics are:

Positive transfer of authority: the successful sharing of control and authority over management and programming of the project by all partners, thus establishing and maintaining the partnership.

Open and direct communication: describes the attitude and behavior of members of the partnership in sharing information. Communication occurs “in the open” at meetings with full participation of the partnership and not secretly outside of meetings.

Open decision-making: describes the way in which all members of the partnership participate in decisions. Decisions are not taken outside of the partnership and imposed.

Shared influence over decision-making: means that all partners are equally respected and involved in decision-making. No partner has greater influence than another.

Participant involvement: means that participants of the programs offered are involved in the decision-making of the partnership and are represented on the partnership committee.

The evaluation framework on the next page is an example of the relationships we have explored between the objectives, characteristics, long term outcomes and indicators of success. The indicators are provided only as examples. They could be used as the basis for information collection in addition to the tool described below which measures the characteristics themselves. In some evaluations, we have added questions about the expected outcomes for the coalition—new networks, coalitions and programs.
Evaluation Framework:
Effective Coalitions

### Objective
To operate the coalition in a way that supports the effective delivery of programs and achieves the coalition’s goals.

### Characteristics/ Determinants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Transfer of Authority</th>
<th>Open Communication</th>
<th>Open Decision Making</th>
<th>Shared Influence Over Decisions about:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- treatment of clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- program/operational policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- monitoring/ evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- financial policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- public relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- linkages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples:</th>
<th>Examples:</th>
<th>Examples:</th>
<th>Examples:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- advisory group role &amp; structure</td>
<td>- local agenda setting</td>
<td>- everyone knows how decisions are made</td>
<td>- participants on decision making groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- decision making processes in place</td>
<td>- shared minutes</td>
<td></td>
<td>- participant, board/ &amp; staff membership from all partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Method

- Source: advisory group members, representatives of partnership
- Tool: questionnaire to assess characteristics; focus group to explore and analyze responses
- Timing: every six months

### Expected Outcomes for Coalition

- New Networks
- New Coalitions
- More Coalition Programs
- New Programs Seeded in the Community
- Growing Participant Leadership

---

Mary Thelander and Beth Hoen, May 1997: CES Conference '97
**Tool**

The survey instrument as shown in the sidebar was developed to score (seven point scale: 1—rarely; 7—usually) the presence of the characteristics. It is to be completed by managers of the partner agencies. Managers score the characteristics at different points in time. The initial scoring serves as the baseline against which change can be shown.

We have used the scores to determine the strength of a coalition at the outset of an evaluation. Focus groups also help a coalition to understand these scores and to determine how they want to change their coalition. Repeat administrations and focus groups help coalitions to monitor the changes occurring.

---

**Partnership Survey**

The following six variables are characteristics of successful partnerships. Please rate how consistently your coalition or partnership has achieved these characteristics over the last six months:

1. **Positive transfer of authority** is the successful sharing of control and authority over management and program of the project by all partners, thus establishing and maintaining the partnership.

   - Rarely
   - Usually

2. **Open communication** describes the attitude and behaviour of members of the partnership in sharing information. Communication occurs "in the open" at meetings with full participation of the partnership, and not secretly outside of meetings.

   - Rarely
   - Usually

3. **Open decision-making** describes the way in which all members of the partnership participate in decisions. Decisions are not taken outside of the partnership and imposed.

   - Rarely
   - Usually

4. **Shared influence over decisions** means that all partners are equally respected and involved in decision-making. No partner has greater influence than another.

   - Rarely
   - Usually

5. **Participant involvement** means that participants of the programs offered are involved in the decision-making of the partnership and are represented on the partnership committee.

   - Rarely
   - Usually

---

Mary Thelander & Beth Hoen, May 1997

Please contact us if you plan to use this tool: 416-488-9687, 416-778-4290 or email: bhoen@web.net
Application

We have used the characteristics of successful coalitions in three evaluations. We are reporting here on one as a case example to show the application and usefulness of the instrument, specifically how using it assisted the case coalition in working together.

The case coalition is a partnership of four agencies; the agencies include a large metropolitan hospital, a small drop-in centre with a voluntary board, a public health department and a women's health centre. The group came together to increase the health and well-being of babies born to women at risk.

Figure 1 shows the scores for two administrations of the survey (September 1995 and April 1996) with the case coalition.
All but one of the characteristics were scored higher at the second administration. Using a focus group we were able to determine why this improvement in scores occurred.

The change in positive transfer of authority was a result of clarification of expectations about what authority could and could not be transferred. This clarity of understanding among the partners was helpful in reaching agreement about what partners could decide together and what individual partners decide. It was accepted that control exercised by some partners was necessary to meet the requirements of their own governing bodies and/or their funders.

Likewise shared influence over decisions came to be seen as open but not equal. Some partners had more weight than others. As one member said, “I don’t see that as bad; some have more experience or knowledge than others”. Although decisions were taken by one or another partner, discussion took place about the decision and why it was taken. The characteristic of open communication, undertaken frequently, contributed to the perceived success in decision-making.

Related to communication was participation. The active participation of all partners in the project also meant there was commitment and understanding of the project’s purpose and the partnership’s respective roles. All partners had “doers” at the front-line; consequently many program questions or problems were sorted out “on the spot” with clear knowledge about what was going on.

Active participation meant active recruitment and involvement of participants in decisions about the program and its administration. The program provided an honorarium to program participants to enable them to be a part of the partnership and to be “economically valued” as were the other members who were employed by partner agencies. Leadership of participants was valued and participants stated their own sense of empowerment: “no one can fire us”.

Mary Thelander and Beth Hoen, May 1997: CES Conference '97
Other Factors Contributing to Successful Coalitions

We have identified other factors through our continuing work in evaluating coalitions. Over time we may revise our tool as we further examine these factors.

Agreement on a common philosophical base contributes to the commitment of a partnership. Partners need to have enough in common or an overlap in their own organizational and sector mandates to support the involvement of their parent organizations. There must be concurrence about why the project is important, what it is achieving and why success is occurring. It is the clarity and agreement about the philosophy, program mandate and program logic model that enables partnerships to be comfortable with transfer of authority, communication and decision-making.

The role and accountability of the coordinator are major contributors to the success of a partnership. A coordinator needs to be hired only to coordinate and lead the coalition. Conflicts arise when coordinators have direct service responsibilities. As well, experience has shown that coordinators who are responsive and flexible can facilitate program changes to meet the changing needs of participants.

The coordinator’s accountability and reporting relationship to the project is critical in enabling the partnership to work. Her accountability needs to be to the project as a whole and not to one of the partners. As one coordinator said, “No (partner’s) voice is any stronger than any other (partner’s) voice.”

In our experience, partners recognize there are differences between them and variations in the resources they bring to a partnership; however over time, partners learn that these differences in contribution do not need to interfere with the functioning of the partnership. For example, in the case presented, the hospital was controller of the funding and a large powerful partner. However, the hospital’s relationship with and attitude toward the coalition was different from its relationship with other hospital programs. The coalition project had more latitude and was less intertwined or linked with the hospital decision-making. The philosophy of the coalition program and its community orientation was respected as different but important to the hospital.

Two factors—control of project structure and control of space—are also seen as essential to the autonomy of a coalition. Some coalitions believe that as long as the project is not seen as an extension of one agency either through staffing or space, it can remain distinct while making use of contributed space and staffing.
Marketing of the coalition and recognition by the community of policy-makers and funders contributes to the identity of the coalition and its stability. Active marketing to governments about what a coalition does and achieves is essential. A coalition has to have enough meaning that if it were to disband there would be a sense of loss.

Creation of communication networks, both computer and personal, are also important to the success of coalitions. Open communication is enhanced by ease of access to partners without constraint by management level or structure. In one coalition, a computer network came to be used and respected as an effective means of communication in addition to meetings, telephone and faxed memos and reports.

**Conclusion**

Our experience with coalitions leads us to conclude that the characteristics of successful coalitions can be measured and are useful to coalitions in making management changes helpful to achieving their goals.

Mary Thelander
95 Inglewood Drive
Toronto, Ontario
M4T 1H4
phone: 416-488-9687
fax: 416-488-6297

Beth Hoen
22 Wrenson Road
Toronto, Ontario
M4L 2G4
phone and fax: 416-778-4290
e-mail: bhoen@web.net
I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Measuring Success in Coalitions

Author(s): Mary Theander and Beth Hoen

Corporate Source: Beth Hoen and Associates

Publication Date: May 97

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following two options and sign at the bottom of the page.

Level 1: Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical) and paper copy.

Level 2: Permitting reproduction in microfiche (4" x 6" film) or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic or optical), but not in paper copy.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: Beth Hoen
Organization/Address: Beth Hoen and Associates
22 Wrenson Road
Toronto, Ontario, M4L 2G4

Printed Name/Position/Title: Beth Hoen
Telephone: 416 778 4290
E-Mail Address: bhoen@web.net
Date: Aug 29, 97
III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
________________________________________________________________________
Address:
________________________________________________________________________
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
________________________________________________________________________
Address:
________________________________________________________________________

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation
210 O'Boyle Hall
The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC 20064

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
1100 West Street, 2d Floor
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598

Telephone: 301-497-4080
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-953-0263
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com