

Why Collaboration Matters Today

Collaborating with Coalitions

By virtue of the breadth of members they contain, coalitions are often powerful engines of broad-based, holistic, and systemic community change – especially when they are appropriately resourced and supported.

Coalitions can pool resources, increase communication among groups, break down stereotypes, develop and use political clout to gain services and other benefits for the community, eliminate unnecessary duplication of effort, and empower the community as a whole¹. They connect multiple sectors of the community – including businesses, parents, media, law enforcement, schools, faith organizations, health providers, social service agencies and government – to collaborate and develop plans, policies, and strategies². As ideas about representation and inclusion have become more common in administrative practice, coalitions allow people with varied lived experience to have their voices added to important conversations. Most of all, these diverse perspectives can address urgent situations and create systemic change.

Suzanne Pfister, CEO of Vitalyst Health Foundation, explains the value of working with coalitions: “When Vitalyst started nearly 25 years ago, we usually made grants to individual nonprofits to work on specific projects. We saw that had limited impact, so we evolved to working with coalitions of nonprofits that were trying to achieve broader systems change. We still provide technical assistance to individual nonprofits, but our major grants are focused on coalitions because we believe we can achieve the most impact from accelerating this work.”

Work with numerous coalitions has happened since Vitalyst Health Foundation was founded. These collaborations have enabled transformative growth with enormous benefit to the people of Arizona.

1 <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/promotion-strategies/start-a-coalition/main>

2 <https://www.cadca.org/why-community-coalitions>



Philosophy of Why

Community capacity building is crucial as coalitions pursue health and well-being goals. Funders can see more community change by collaborating with coalitions made up of a breadth of experience, relationships, and capacity to help meet community needs. Here are the main benefits of this kind of work:

- 1. Expert Perspectives.** Coalitions are inclusive of vast community experience. Through them, the needs of a community can be learned and addressed more effectively.
- 2. Sustainability.** Coalitions that are given the training and knowledge to handle internal operations as well as mission objectives can become stable champions of systemic change in the community.
- 3. Innovation.** Coalitions can have incredibly transformative ideas. When connections occur that enable other

stakeholders to collaborate with coalitions, innovation is multiplied by the vast amount of experience and knowledge being shared, leading to breakthroughs that can create powerful change not seen on individual levels.

- 4. Connection.** Coalitions can be amazing catalysts for community input. This can elevate the voices of those in need and can cause new collaborations and partnerships to flourish. This healthy network can scale to more and more change as communities are empowered.

In Arizona, some of our most impactful coalitions have benefited from technical support and professional facilitation that has guided their success from initial convening through to later development. That is why Vitalyst is offering access to the following portfolio of options that strengthen community-based leaders, organizations, and coalitions across the state.

Technical Assistance Partnership (TAP) Tools

TAP AZ Fiscal Sponsorship

Coalitions are often organically formed by good people doing great work together but without a centralized legal entity to stand behind the coalition. When a group of existing nonprofit organizations work together, it can be difficult for one organization to lead from a legal standpoint. Additionally, a group of people may simply agree to work together, but there is no way for them to secure funding without a legal structure. TAP AZ solves these challenges, offering fiscal management support and helping to build organizational capacity. Multiple coalitions such as the Arizona Partnership for Healthy Communities, the Maricopa County Food Coalition, and the Arizona Coalition for Military Families have found solutions and increased strength through TAP AZ.

TAP Team Consultants and Coaches

Vitalyst convenes and builds the capacity of a team of consultants and coaches who are then mobilized with Vitalyst support for partners. They have been essential in helping new coalitions, like the Migration Justice and Relief Coalition, to come together and strategize for their future success.

TAP Talks Professional Development

Offered each year as professional development sessions, participants gain knowledge, skills, and practices in an interactive workshop format about timely issues facing the non-profit community. Attendees meet colleagues with common challenges and successes and build relationships with one another for support. Each TAP Talk includes a presentation on a key topic impacting organizations, where attendees are encouraged to share their experiences and learn with – and from – each other.



TAP Discovery

If coalitions are not sure of their areas of growth, funding may not necessarily help. Instead, it is important to discover where those areas are first. The TAP Discovery process was created to help connect partners with Vitalyst’s TAP Tools.

The Tap Discovery Survey for Coalitions was a collaborative effort with Community Wealth Partners (CWP). Sixty-seven

total respondents from ten coalitions (on average each coalition provided 6-7 responses) assessed where they felt their coalition was in regards to CWP’s Transformation Insights. The resulting heat map with rich data was provided to the respondents for their own better self-understanding and is being used by Vitalyst to inform specific capacity building support for coalition partners going forward.

Community Wealth Partners

Community Wealth Partners is a social sector consulting firm that has created meaningful social change with 500+ partners across the country for more than two decades. In Arizona specifically, they have helped organizations such as the Helios Education Foundation, with their Arizona Early Childhood Alliance collaborative and organizational culture, and the Arizona Community Foundation in creating a new model for articulating the foundation’s impact.

CWP found that transformational efforts often progress through a common set of stages, depicted in the Social Transformation Lifecycle below. In each stage, there are critical questions to consider. Visit communitywealth.com to learn more and view the lifecycle at a larger size.

A tool to help you ask the powerful questions necessary for gauging and advancing your progress toward transformational change.

At Community Wealth Partners we are focused on one powerful question: Why do some social change efforts achieve transformational results while others only make incremental progress? Drawing on lessons from our client work and in-depth research on efforts that have tackled social problems at the magnitude they exist, we’ve identified four broad stages along which transformational efforts generally evolve.

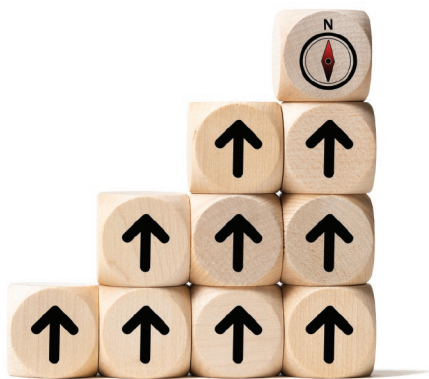
Acknowledging that all such efforts are unique and none progress in a linear fashion, we would encourage you to ask the following questions:

- 1 Into which stage(s) does your effort seem to fit?
- 2 Around which questions have you established clear answers?
- 3 What questions are holding you back?
- 4 What questions do you need to address before progressing to the next stage?

	STAGE 1: Framing the Effort	STAGE 2: Proving the Solution(s)	STAGE 3: Reaching Dramatic Improvement	STAGE 4: Reinvigorating the Effort
BOLD GOAL & STRATEGY	What is our bold goal? What is our role in achieving this goal?	What is our approach to realizing our bold goal?	How will we scale our approach to reach our bold goal?	How do we need to change our approach, if at all, to realize our bold goal?
SHARED LEADERSHIP	Who are the founding leaders of this effort? How do we organize ourselves to be most effective?	What does it mean to lead? How will this leadership structure be sustained over time?	What changes, if any, do we need to make to the leadership structure as we scale?	How must our leadership structure adapt to sustain the effort needed to realize our bold goal?
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	“Who should be engaged? (*key influencers, shared leaders, early adopters, people affected)”	How do we engage early adopters?	What key stakeholders are necessary to achieve scale? How do we convert the “maybes”?	How do we sustain interest? Are there stakeholders critical to realizing our bold goal who we have failed to engage so far?
ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT	What is the micro and macro context?	How will certain environmental factors affect our effort? What factors might help propel the effort forward?	What new micro or macro factors must we consider as we scale? Do we have an opportunity to influence the environment?	How has the micro and macro context changed? What are the implications?
DISCIPLINED EXECUTION	Where do we start? What early wins should we target?	What actions do we need to take to prove the concept? Can we get closer to our goal by narrowing our focus?	What actions must we take to scale? What must we stop doing in order to scale?	What new actions must we take to realize our bold goal?
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	How do we envision financially supporting the work in the long term?	How will our efforts be financially sustained?	How do we maintain financial sustainability as we scale?	How will we adapt our funding/revenue streams to reflect internal and external changes?
ADVOCACY/ PUBLIC POLICY	What is the regulatory or legislative environment surrounding this issue?	What are the short-term opportunities to influence policy and systems?	What is the long-term systems change necessary to make dramatic improvement?	How do we achieve the long-term systems change given the current political and cultural environment?
COMMUNICATION	What messages and channels will help build awareness among key stakeholders?	What messages and channels will build engagement, inspire action and contribute to behavior change?	How do we create contagious ideas and equip others to “own” the message(s) and the solution(s)?	How should we adapt our communication strategy, messages and actions?
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT & LEARNING	What does success look like?	How do we know if our approach is working? What changes need to be made if we’re not achieving the desired results?	How do we know if our approach continues to work as we scale? What changes need to be made if we’re not achieving the desired results?	How close are we to our bold goal and what do we need to learn to get closer?
CULTURE (VALUES, NORMS, BEHAVIORS)	How do we establish an intentional culture across the effort? (*roles, ground rules, expectations, decision-making)	How do we ensure that we are living what we believe?	How do we maintain our culture as we grow?	How must we adapt our culture to the new context?

“WE NEED TO HAVE A MORE CLEAR DELINEATION OF OUR ROLES AS IT APPLIES TO THE END GAME STRATEGY.”

Survey Respondent



“COALITION MEMBERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WORKING MOST DIRECTLY WITH COMMUNITIES SERVED, EASILY BECOME OVER-WORKED AND STRESSED - WE DO NOT YET HAVE NORMS OR PRACTICES FOR MANAGING BURN-OUT.”

Survey Respondent

Outcomes of TAP Discovery for Coalitions

The results of the survey were meant to be a starting point to better understand where opportunities exist for the foundation to build capacity and increase impact.

Bold Goal and Strategy/Disciplined Execution: Coalitions expressed a need to set clear end goals and strategic action plans to achieve those goals.

- Coalition respondents identified two key areas for growth within “Bold Goal and Strategy:” a) a bold, measurable end-goal; and b) clear coalition strategies – and one core area in Disciplined Execution – action planning.
- Coalitions struggle to set clear, measurable, focused end goals.

Shared Leadership: To better move forward strategic action plans, the majority of coalitions identified a desire to clarify concrete roles for all members/volunteers, especially leadership roles and roles for culturally diverse members.

- Shared leadership was strong overall across coalitions, with the one gap being the “clarity of roles and responsibilities” competency.
- In stakeholder engagement, “cultivating volunteers” was an area of growth.
- Desire to increase broader membership to address cultural diversity and under-served populations.

Continuous Learning and Improvement and Race, Equity, Inclusion: Track data and then analyze it to address disparities/adjust programs.

- Respondents indicated that there was room for growth both in creating better systems to track data and adapt work based on it.
- Data analysis only sometimes is focused on decreasing disparities by explicitly considering race and culture.

Culture (burnout): Group trust and commitment is strong overall, but burnout is a potential issue, especially for those working on high-stress issues.

- Respondents indicated that “coalition members, especially those working most directly with communities served, are at risk of burn-out, but our coalition has an intention and some informal practices to help manage stress.”
- Potential supports to address this could include creating more opportunities to connect members with counselors/mental health practitioners, working with professionals to institute new well-being norms in coalitions (e.g., meditation time, check-ins, safe space training), and many others.

Vitalyst is committed to growing coalitions and meeting their capacity-building needs, and other community partners are invited to help do the same. Systemic change is possible, with community members leading that change. By collaborating with coalitions in the ways that help them best, sustainable transformation can become the reality of every community.

Author: Georgie Hinojosa; **Collaborator:** David Martinez III, Director, Capacity Building & Community Engagement