HOW-TO DRAFT:
BUILDING NETWORKED COALITIONS

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Disclaimer / request for your help

This is a work in progress that is meant to evolve over time with input from campaigners. At the moment, the tips and ideas here reflect the voices of the contributors/reviewers listed below. We are always looking to add more voices of campaigners that have knowledge and experience on this topic. If this is you, please contact us here: blueprintsfc@gmail.com.

Summary

When multiple groups and organisations come together to work on a campaign, they often opt to collaborate together in a coalition. Coalitions, however, have garnered a reputation for causing campaigners headaches due to their frequently slow, bureaucratic and top-down decision-making processes. In this guide, we look at an alternative way of building powerful collaborative campaigns. Networked coalitions, also called "networked campaigns", harness the power of networks to develop more agile, dynamic and distributed campaigning coalitions that have proven themselves to be remarkably effective at building and channelling collective power.

Why do we need to do coalitions differently?

Traditional coalitions are heavily focused on building consensus among members, most often on very specific policy goals. Getting a set of diverse groups, who may align around a broader shared purpose, to align on specific asks and plans leads to slow and often exasperating decision-making processes. Focusing on narrowly defined issues also means that traditional coalitions have a tendency to fizzle out once the issue is out of the media or policy cycle.

Traditional coalitions are often characterised by top-down, centralised planning processes, in which a core group of coalition partners develop a joint strategy that members are then expected to adhere to. This means that coalitions can be slow to adapt to the dynamic contexts in which they operate and their plans can quickly become obsolete when these contexts change. Focusing on rigid operational plans also limits the abilities of coalition members to innovate on the ground.

Who's doing networked coalitions well?

Re-Amp brings together over 130 nonprofits and foundations working on climate change and energy policy across eight Midwestern states in the U.S. with the goal of reducing global-warming pollution. Halt the Harm has built a network of 1,300 group leaders and 14,000 members across the U.S. to halt the harms of fracking in their communities. The Power Shift network is a national community of organizations who work with young leaders to campaign for climate justice.

In Australia, the Lock the Gate Alliance brings together people from across the country to protect the land, water and communities from risky coal mining, coal seam gas and fracking. The Gasfield Free Northern Rivers movement brings people together to protect the biodiversity, water resources, agricultural lands and sustainable industries of the Northern Rivers from the impacts of coal seam gas and other forms of unconventional gas mining.

Several campaigns focused on privacy, censorship and surveillance in the tech world have been operating in networked coalitions including Team Internet, which brings together nonprofits, companies and individuals to lead the Battle for the Net campaign for net neutrality, and SaveTheLink which campaigns against link censorship. Similarly, the Canadian-led Stop Stingray Surveillance campaign brings together NGOs and companies from multiple countries to put a stop to invasive Stingray cellphone surveillance.

Change the Terms, a U.S. based coalition that spans human rights, civil rights, consumer protection, and technology organizations, is fighting to reduce hateful activities online.

At the city level, three inspiring networked coalitions are The Sydney Alliance, which brings together over 40 religious, union and community organisations to use community organising to make Sydney a better place to live. Its global network - the Industrial Areas Foundation - does similar work in over 80 cities around the world. Reclaim the City is a loose network of leaders and partner organisations dedicated to desegregating inner city Cape Town through radical strategies like occupations, in order to campaign for affordable housing. Finally, the Moscow City Alliance, and associated city based networks in Moscow, have campaigned in defence of green space and against

demolitions, relying on the support of formal NGOs and informal local groups scattered across the city.

What do networked coalitions look like and how can they benefit a campaign?

Rather than aligning around a specific policy goal and a joint operational plan to achieve it, members of networked coalition **coalesce around a broader cause or purpose**. For example, the [Halt the Harm](#) network brings together groups across the United States under the banner of "halting the harms of fracking" in their communities. The [Environmental Law Reform Coalition](#) is another example. The scope and scale of this coalition derives from the clear and succinct way an entire suite of environmental laws is encapsulated in the "Let's Get it Right" frame. Conversely, networked coalitions can come together around a shared commitment to a social change strategy. We see this in Sydney Alliance's commitment to community organising, or Lock the Gate's commitment to literally "locking the gate" - a form of civil disobedience that prevents mining companies from accessing the land.

Focusing on broader missions like this make networked coalitions more suited to working on longer-term, systemic change, whilst also providing more latitude so that a **larger diversity of members** can get behind the cause (sometimes leading to "unlikely alliances").

Networked coalitions start from the premise that within every coalition there is a network of people (staff, members of groups, activists, supporters, etc.) and this network can either be functional or dysfunctional. How functional this network is in practice is not necessarily dependent on the strength or degree of organisational alignment - coalitions can achieve high degrees of alignment at the organisational level but fail to foster connections and synergies among their members at the individual level. Networked coalitions therefore **focus on building and strengthening the relationships between the people** that belong to them. This is why, for instance, the [Industrial Areas Foundation network](#) focuses on the practice of relational meetings: when coalitions are not building trusted 1-1 connections, then those networks are dying.

Networked coalitions can **operate at a variety of scales** - but importantly they include the local neighbourhood scale. There is a recognition that power comes from the

ownership, meaningful activity and participation of people - and that the most accessible space for this is locally. That said, networked coalitions can operate across multiple scales from the local to the global. The most powerful are multi-scaled, capable of simultaneous activity in multiple sites. Thus the Sydney Alliance has both a local structure of districts in neighborhoods alongside a citywide structure. Similarly the Ontario Health Coalition has dozens of local health chapters alongside a provincial structure.

Members of networked coalitions (at both the individual and organisational / group level) have higher degrees of autonomy to implement their own campaign tactics - there does not have to be consensus among all of the coalition's members for one to pursue a particular strategy to advance the coalition's cause. **Distributed leadership and decision-making** is thus a key feature of networked coalitions, leading to an array of self-initiated, localised actions that are implemented by their members, as well as new community leaders emerging from the grassroots.

However, another crucial feature is that members' self-initiated actions are supported and amplified by the network, allowing them to achieve greater impact than they could have otherwise could have accomplished. The stronger the network becomes, the more iterations of self-initiated actions appear and the more powerful these individual actions become as they are supported and amplified by the network. Localised actions are also complemented by larger **moments of convergence** that involve all of the members in order to focus community power and scale impact. In these ways, the coalition **provides tangible value and concrete services** to its members.

The Gasfield Free Northern Rivers (GFNR) provides a good illustration of this kind of distributed structure in which members also receive support from across the network. The alliance functions as a system of distributed leadership, comprised of around 20 location-based action groups. While these groups have autonomy, they collaborate by sending a representative to regular GFNR meetings, where a high degree of cooperation ensures that vulnerable districts are supported by the whole region (for more on this listen to ChangeMakers Series 1, Ep 2).

Similarly, Re-Amp focused on designing a network with decentralized structures, many hubs, shared leadership, and multiple platforms for connecting and communicating. But it also holds an annual conference that brings the entire network together to build relationships and develop collective strategy.

By giving their members greater degrees of autonomy and the freedom to self-organise, networked coalitions can liberate the creativity of their members, facilitating a larger diversity of campaigning tactics and actions on the ground. This makes them ideal spaces to **foster experimentation and innovation,** which, if successful, can then be quickly spread across the network for other members to learn from.

When this might not work for you

More traditional coalitions may be more beneficial when the objective is to achieve a very concrete policy or legislative change, which requires a high degree of coordination and harmonisation among partners to drive lobbying and awareness-raising activities.

Big-brand NGOs can face difficulties participating in networked coalitions as their desire to promote and maintain control of their brands can find itself at odds with a networked coalition's decentralised and distributed structure, in which no single member has control over all of the tactics and messaging that are utilised across the network. Networked coalitions may therefore not work for organisations that do not like the idea of participating in spaces where fellow members can implement campaigning actions or disseminate messages that they may not fully agree with.
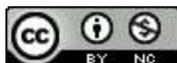
Similarly, networked coalitions' focus on facilitating broad, inclusive alliances can lead to NGOs having to participate in shared spaces with organisations that they may not agree with on other issues.

What this requires (people, resources, etc.)

Operating Principles

An effective networked coalition functions according to a set of **core operating principles** (adapted from New/Mode's "Embracing Networks" guide):

1. **Dynamic:** Loosely coordinated by a dynamic network of organisations, groups and people but potentially operating with its own shared approach to organising or social change

2. **Decentralized:** Autonomous engagement is encouraged within the boundaries of a high-level vision or network purpose. Working in such a decentralised leadership structure requires awareness of what helps self-organisation, what hinders it, and what enables coherence.

3. **Inclusive:** Anyone can join if they support the campaign's overall vision or purpose. Coalitions thrive when they share a sense of interdependence and a recognition that we need each other. This can emerge out of a crisis (where the resolution is that we need to collaborate) or it can come from the style/practice of the organisational leader (whose own experience means that they know that collaboration is possible).

   For instance, the Sydney Alliance formed following two major social attacks on civil society - one was the Workchoices / Your Rights at Work campaign that saw unions struggle for their lives - and become very open to new ways of collaborating. The second was the Cronulla Riots that saw many migrant communities, especially the Arab community, seek to reach out to others. Those social movements created an environment for leadership engagement that was critically important for building a coalition that was very different to ones that had come before.

4. **Amplifying:** The network exists to support and give power to its members' actions. Members are encouraged to share each other's materials (give recognition) and support each other's campaigning actions. The network's identity is more important than the brand of any single organization.

5. **Respect a diversity of tactics:** Appreciate that network members serve different communities and thus use different engagement techniques and communications styles.

6. **Use care:** Invoking the work of the network and its members is encouraged. Members should, however, use care when speaking on behalf of the network.

7. **Own your voice:** While all members agree to furthering the cause laid out in the network's vision or purpose, individual organisations are not expected to cross-endorse the specific positions of others.

Resources and infrastructure

An effective networked coalition requires putting in place certain **core elements** which form the basis of its infrastructure. NetCentric Campaigns' *Field Guide for Network Managers* list the following seven elements as being critical to a campaigning network's success:

1. **Clear vision**: a clear vision, or purpose, should set out, in broad terms, where the network wants to get to, without laying out all the specifics of how it intends to get there. The aim of the vision is not to create agreement on all of the member's diverse viewpoints on the issue but rather to clearly state what the network's reason for existence is.

   As an example, Re-Amp's vision is: "RE-AMP brings environmental, labour, faith, youth, energy, conservation and other groups together to share one audacious goal: to reduce regional global warming emissions 80 percent (from 2005 levels) by 2050"

   The purpose therefore lies at the heart of the network, acting a *statement of unity* which brings together its members. Once the vision has been set out, the rest of the elements of the network will flow from it.

2. **Leaders:** Leaders are responsible for driving and coordinating the activities of the network. Leadership in successful networked coalitions is shared and distributed across the network. For example, the Environmental Law Reform Coalition used a steering committee that participated in weekly conference calls to build trust, establish clear leadership roles, and foster accountability.

   There are multiple leadership *roles and responsibilities* required for a network to operate effectively (detailed below).

3. **Common language:** A common language helps members to develop a shared understanding of the cause the network is working to further, helping to build a distinct identity for the network. This can go as far as a shared "organising approach" and training program that comes from this work. For instance, the Sydney Alliance, and the IAF broadly, rely on the principles of community organising to build their coalitions and actively train thousands of leaders in these approaches.

4. **Communications grid:** A communications grid is essential for ensuring free-flowing conversations between members so that they can plan activities, share successes and lessons learned and build relationships with one another.

5. **Shared resources:** Networked coalitions create impact by pooling their members' skills, expertise, experiences, services and other resources. This allows individuals members to mobilise resources they would have otherwise been unable to access if they were operating alone, whilst also saving the overall network time and money. Networked coalitions therefore need systems in place for identifying the resources, assets and capacities that reside within them, tapping these existing capabilities and filling any gaps that may exist. The most successful 'system' is a highly interdependent set of relational connections that allows organisations to know each other and their assets.

6. **Social ties:** As previously mentioned, networked coalitions focus on building healthy relationships between their members. Such social ties need to be actively cultivated in order to promote trust amongst participants and facilitate collaboration. For example, the communication subcommittee for the Environmental Law Reform Coalition developed social ties as members from the founding organizations worked together to test different frames for the coalition's work. Once they landed on the "Let's get it right" frame they mapped the environmental community to identify potential organizations to expand the coalition.

7. **Feedback mechanisms:** In order to be able to drive a networked coalition forward, leaders need to be able to understand key trends that are manifesting across the network: needs, resources, emerging opportunities and challenges, and so on. Such feedback loops facilitate continuous learning and enable networked coalitions to continuously adapt to the dynamic contexts in which they operate, based on the knowledge they are constantly generating.

In terms of resources, running networked coalitions requires certain **operational costs**:

● **Communications infrastructure** – as mentioned above, an effective network requires putting in place suitable communications tools that allow members to engage with each other and with the network as a whole. The communications infrastructure can also be used to provide new members with the core training they need to be able to effectively participate in the network.

Microsites were a specific aspect of the communications infrastructure that was essential to the work of the Environmental Law Reform Coalition. Through easily replicable and customizable content, Capulet, the firm that created the digital marketing campaign, was able to clone 55 sites for 26 different organizations. Capulet created generic landing pages, built a modular infrastructure, and then cloned the pages each coalition member wanted to use. This digital campaign not only addressed anxieties surrounding shared lists and assets, it also allowed each coalition organization to promote a unique URL across all their communication channels via a customizable landing page (read the full article about this digital campaign here: "Give each cook their own kitchen: Beating classic coalition challenges").

Halt the Harm opted for a more centralised approach to its communications infrastructure with its website, which acts as a central hub for resources, communications and collaboration. Its website provides an array of services, created by members and shared across the network, including: a leader directory, which members can use to connect with others based on shared interests, a needed skill, or geographic location; an alliance map, which features the hundreds of Halt the Harm members and others actively working on oil and gas drilling issues around the country; toolkits and support on campaigning and crowdfunding; a fracking help centre; a litigation map; as well as webinars and podcasts.

- **Convening costs** – bringing members together in person helps to build social ties, whilst facilitating collaboration, collective learning together and planning for the future. Members can often absorb some, or all, of the costs of bringing people together (travel expenses, meeting space, facilitation, materials, etc.) if they see a clear value from collaboration.

- **Staffing** - as a network grows, staffing is required to coordinate and support the campaigning activities of members. These staff model the new culture that the coalition is seeking to cultivate across the partner organisations. Coalitions are stronger if the staff are organisers, rather than simply logistics people.

Roles

Finally, an effective network coalition requires certain **roles** to be fulfilled by its leaders and members. In smaller or nascent coalitions, a single member can fulfil multiple

functions roles but it is still important to keep all of these roles in mind in order to ensure they are all covered by at least one member:

- **Principals (or lead organisers):** these are the coalition's lead organisers who serve as the catalysts for shaping the network and provide the initial magnetism that drives people to connect with each other. A key role of principals is to provide the network with a powerful unifying narrative.

- **Drivers (or coordinators):** these are the lead campaigners within the network's member organisations - the people who the network serves and who are responsible for championing individual campaigning actions on the ground to further the network's cause.

- **Supporters (or participants):** represent the larger pool of network members who self-organise to participate in and implement the campaigning actions led by the network drivers, thereby determining if they succeed and setting lessons for future actions. Supporters should also be promoters of the network by sharing their experiences with others outside of the network and bringing in those who show interest in participating.

- **Weavers (or bridge-builders):** are the matchmakers of a network, working to build synergies by connecting members and forging mutually beneficial relationships between them, for example by looping relevant parties into conversations or by brokering introductions between members who are working in similar areas and who could benefit from each other's skills or expertise. These people actively translate organisational cultures - speaking to (say) both unions and NGOs - allowing different cultural practices to be better understood.

  A key role of weavers is also identifying undeveloped areas within the network and working, often with operators, to strengthen them.

- **Operators (or guardians):** are the people responsible for establishing and administering a healthy network infrastructure, in particular the communications grid and feedback mechanisms. Operators focus largely on solving problems for others — identifying where the energy and needs are. They therefore need a "birds-eye" view of the network so that they can see what the whole network (or certain parts of it) needs to function more effectively and use this information to constantly tune-up the network systems accordingly. Operators ensure adequate processes for clear and effective communication amongst coalition members (for

example, by setting up a process for coalition members to report on campaign outcomes).

Setup steps/ stages

[Connecting to Change the World](#) identifies a flexible "pathway to success" for building any kind of social impact network, known as the Connect-Align-Produce sequence. This is useful framework for building networked coalitions because each phase builds on and strengthens the connections forged between the members in the previous stage. Having said this, it shouldn't be seen as a completely linear sequence: for example, whilst some members are moving onto the produce phase, others may only be just beginning to connect to the network.

1. Connect

The first stage involves bringing together key organisations, groups and people with a stake or interest in the cause you want to work on. In this phase, the "weaver" role is key and requires identifying which organisations need to be brought together and what connections need to be forged in order to do so.

Here, when we say cause we are both referring to the social cause we are wanting to achieve, and the democratic cause or social capital that we need to build in the process. Thus, the Sydney Alliance campaigns for affordable housing by building local district teams across the city - it has a dual set of goals.

A good way to think about this task is to start from your end point: imagine you have just achieved a huge campaign win and you want to throw a celebration - who would you be celebrating with? This cues up an image of the people that need to be collaborating in order to achieve the change you seek (even if you're not 100% clear on exactly what that change will look like yet). This is essentially the vision of what you want your network to look like.

With this vision in mind, you can start comparing it to what the reality looks like today. Are some of these organisations already connected? How can we start to build ties between those that are not? How can we get them to work together? These are the key questions that you should start addressing during the "Connect" phase.

Once you start bringing these groups and organisations together, they can begin to exchange information on what they are already doing and build trust. By sharing such information, participants can start to get an idea of what value a networked coalition could bring to their activities in order to enhance their impact. This will become your network's *value proposition*: the rationale behind why you think organisations or groups would be motivated to join the network and what you think will motivate them to continue participating (i.e. what they would get from the network). To see an example of a concrete value proposition see The Power Shift Network's [FAQ for new members](), in which they outline the specific benefits and services that members can expect to receive from the network.

2. Align

When a core group of organisations come together with both a stake in the cause and a desire to work together to achieve greater impact, the next stage is *align around a shared vision or purpose*.

However, before moving on to developing a shared vision it may be necessary to spend some time building and aligning around a shared understanding of the situation you want to change. This was a key lesson learned by Re-Amp, which began with a year-long systems mapping process that helped the network to agree upon its collective goal of reducing energy emissions by 80 percent. The shared map also gave members insight into four key levers necessary to shift the system they sought to change.

With a shared understanding of the situation that needs to change, members will be in a good place to set out their vision for the network. This often takes the form of a *unity statement* that specifies either a vision for the future or an overarching principle that members want to stand up for. For example, [SaveTheLink.org]()'s unity statement is "Linking is the foundation of the Web. We oppose regulations that aim to censor links to content or otherwise penalize services that utilize hyperlinks."

Keeping your vision / unity statement broad but concise makes it easy for new groups to sign on. It is a good idea to test this out by circulating the statement to other groups and organisations that could potentially be interested in joining and getting their feedback before deciding on a final version.

Once existing participants have aligned around a shared purpose, it can then be used a tool to reach out to and recruit new members to join the campaign. A basic form (such
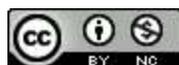
as [this one](#) from Power Shift or [this one](#) from SaveTheLink) and an outreach email ([like this one](#)) can be useful tools for this. Having groups or organisations sign up to a shared purpose or unity statement in this way establishes a clear *boundary* for the network.

In this stage, it is also important for members to not only align around a shared purpose but also around shared protocols or principles for working together. Developing shared protocols make it clear for members what is expected of them and what benefits they can expect to get in return, laying the ground for the next phase. For example, Power Shift complements [its vision with a set of eight principles](#) that its members sign up to and that provide the overarching framework for their collaboration. [Lock the Gate Alliance](#) has a similar set of principles, as well as a policy of peaceful behaviour, that guide all its work. Similarly, Sydney Alliance's community organising approach offers a way of working together that guides alignment and is derived from its purpose to rebuild civil society.

3. Produce

Once members have aligned around what they want to achieve and how they envision working together in order to further this cause, the next step is to develop the necessary network infrastructure and resources (see above) in order to facilitate this. During this stage, it is particularly important to think about how to ***facilitate and amplify members' self-initiated action*s**; how to ***facilitate free-flowing communications and learning*** amongst members; and what kinds of ***moments of convergence*** you should plan together in order to scale-up your impact.

Re-Amp's strategy for this stage was to establish working groups for each of the key levers of change that they had previously identified in their systems map, as well as an additional working group for funders. At a later point they added caucuses in order to provide outreach to specific constituents, such as youth, faith-based communities, rural areas and national environmental organizations. At the centre of their network sits a steering committee, which is responsible for areas such as designing and maintaining the network's infrastructure, identifying gaps in strategy, and distributing learning and information across the network. The steering committee is supported by full-time staff equivalents who work out of the offices of member organisations and provide direct support to members in areas such as media, communications and facilitating connections. See the [Monitor Institute's case study on Re-Amp](#) for a more detailed explanation of its operating structure.

As a networked campaign grows, a key lesson learned by the The Gasfield Free Northern Rivers alliance is that it will be necessary to invest increasing amounts into network stewardship. In the case of the GFNR this was fulfilled by a Capacity Building Team which was responsible for providing direct support to members. Re-Amp offers similar services to its members through its Organizing Hub, which seeks to boost campaign excellence by providing members with best-practice guides, skill-building opportunities and hands-on campaign assistance, focused on the core aspects of running strong and effective climate campaigns.

Developing feedback mechanisms through internal and external reporting is another key aspect of this phase and one can easily get overlooked. The ability to share coalition lessons and accomplishments is closely linked to effective reporting practices. The digital marketing firm Capulet managed reporting for The Environmental Law Reform Coalition. Capulet ensured effective internal reporting surrounding campaigning work (e.g., number of letters sent and unique member initiatives) and campaign impact (e.g., what the media and legislators are saying), as well external communications that amplified the impact of the campaign. Effective reporting practices will look different based on the coalition's resources and needs. The important thing is to establish a realistic process that ensures consistent internal and external reporting. Below, we explain in further detail how to achieve this.

What success looks like for a networked coalition

When building a networked coalition it is important to keep in mind how we might measure its success. *Power in Coalition* (2010) argues that any powerful coalition has two measures for success.

The first is about the social change it achieves. Does the coalition stop the mine or win the public education reform? Any social change goal has two elements to it. One is the win itself, and the second is whether (or to what degree) that win shifted the political climate. In Australia, for instance, the political win on the Carbon Tax in 2014 was good, but brief (it was abolished in 2016). In contrast, a win on stopping the Adani mine may turn around coal mining. Both may be wins, but the political climate question adds greater understanding of their success.

The second is about the social power it builds. Coalitions might win policy reforms, but they also must build the democratic engine room that fuels and sustains that social change. This is what this measure is about. Two elements are particularly important. The first is: how has the coalition improved the quality of the relationships between the member organisations? Is this network of relationships stronger having been in coalition (or conversely are they all sick of each other)? The quality of this network speaks to the capacity of the coalition to act in the future. Secondly, how has the coalition developed leadership? This could be in staff, but ideally is also in volunteer leaders distributed across the network.

Table of Coalition success

| Social Change (mobilising power)		Social Power (organising power)	
Wins	Shifting the political climate	Stronger relationships between network partners/organisations	More leaders with more skills

Adapted from Power in Coalition (2010), Tattersall.

Tricky parts/ fixes

<u>Avoiding common pitfalls</u>

As a networked coalition grows, it is important anticipate common pitfalls that can cause a network to become dysfunctional. Below we list three particularly important pitfalls:

1. **Navigation becomes impossible -** This occurs when network leaders or members can no longer fathom the network that they are a part of. They don't know who the members are; where they stand on the issue; what they are doing to further the network's purpose; or how to contact them. Investing in navigation by ensuring the network's communication grid addresses these issues is essential. Members should be able to see who else is a member of the network; where they are located; what campaigning actions they are implementing; and how they can get in touch with them. They should also be able to access resources developed by other members and be able to share their own actions and resources across the network.
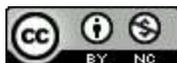
2. **Value flows stop -** One of the reasons why networked coalitions are effective at taking campaigns to scale is that they offer concrete benefits to their members. When members implement campaign actions to further the network's cause, these actions are given support and increased visibility by the network, allowing them to achieve greater impact than they would have done if they had been implemented on their own. If these value flows stop, then members will no longer feel as incentivised and motivated to continue actively participating in the network and it can therefore quickly lose momentum. Investing in a networked coalitions' membership is essential for avoiding this pitfall - members need to be able to reach out to the network and garner support from others when they are leading campaign actions.

3. **Individual actions are not aggregated to create collective impact** - Distributed leadership and decision-making are one of the key characteristics of networked coalitions. But there is a risk that decentralisation can go too far, leading to lots of self-initiated actions by individual members that are not aggregated beyond the local level, limiting the ability of the network to transform its community power into the political power needed to achieve more systemic changes. Overcoming this challenge required integrating a certain degree of centralisation into the network's structure and carefully balancing this with the need for autonomy and distributed ways of working. In the following section, we explore how to achieve this balance in more detail.

How to achieve scale with networked coalitions

Coalitions always play a difficult dance when it comes to scale - that is - how the coalition traverses large geographies and generates people power across them. Traditional coalitions are often "centralised" with little activity at the base or local level. Yet "localised" coalitions often don't have the political punch to move a political agenda at a state or national level.

One way to think about this is to understand that all coalitions negotiate a tension between 'autonomy' and 'control' - and that each has value. Coalitions need an element of control - a (loose) central plan - it is the reason for working together but it is also the way in which coalitions are able to achieve influence over a wide scale. But too much control turns everyday people into rent-a-crowd. The extreme of control is 'totalitarianism' - not very desirable.

Conversely autonomy is wonderful, to a point. It's where leaders can come together and make meaningful decisions about social change strategy. But pure autonomy is anarchy - it provides no basis for coordinated action.

Coalitions operate across this continuum - verging between being more coordinated and more autonomous depending on the strategic challenges they face at any given moment. The Sydney Alliance went through a phase of "going deep": focusing on building leadership following its 2000 person founding assembly (they wanted to engage all those people in local groups). But then, in the lead up to the State Election, they shifted and focused on coordination to win specific objectives.

There is no "correct" form of coordination - it is a tension that teams need to negotiate based on their purpose.

Pressures from funders

When a networked coalition starts out, its activities and infrastructure can often be self-funded by its members. However, as the network grows in membership, scale and complexity it will most likely be necessary to secure its own sources of funding. This can be achieved by securing external funding through grants exclusively for the network.

However, funders often exert pressures on their grantees for increased centralisation, control and bureaucratisation, under the pretext of ensuring that their funding is managed in an efficient and accountable manner. This can be problematic for networked coalitions, as their strength and effectiveness lies in their loose, decentralised structure in which no single person or organisation has control over the entire network's operations.

Re-Amp's strategy for addressing this tension was to involve both funders and NGOs as equals from the outset of the establishment of the network. They both worked together to agree on collective priorities and then they aligned their campaigning strategies and funding accordingly. This created an opportunity for funders and NGOs to engage as equals in setting shared strategies, even if their roles differed.

Additionally, there is a growing recognition in the funders' community of the potential of networked approaches to campaigns and of their need for different funding mechanisms that are more suited to their distinct characteristics. There are several guides that have

been published for funders on how they can more effectively support networks, including [Engage: How Funders Can Leverage Networks for Social Impact](#) and [Catalysing Networks for Social Change](#) ([Connecting to Change the World](#) also has a chapter on funders' roles in networks) so we encourage help to get these widely disseminated!

Data management and privacy

Rich and open flows of data and information are essential for a networked coalition to operate well. Due to their large number of members and campaigning actions being implemented on the ground, networked coalitions generate a lot of information that needs to be managed effectively and responsibly. Doing so requires establishing clear protocols that set out what information will be gathered from members, how it will be gathered and with whom it will be shared. Specific tools can then be developed in order to manage data collection and dissemination according to these protocols.

An important first step towards developing specific protocols and tools for data collection and sharing is setting out an initial **privacy policy** for the network, which will provide boundaries and inform subsequent protocols. For example, the Halt the Harm Network's privacy policy clearly states what information will be used, what it will be used for, and with whom it will be shared. See [Annex 2 of a Field Guide for Network Managers](#) for the full text which you can use as an inspiration when developing your own policy.

Further resources

Guides:

- [A Field Guide for Network Managers (NetCentric Campaigns)](#)

- [Embracing Networks (New/Mode)](#)

- [Unlocking Networks: A Hub for Community Organisers and Peer Networks](#)

- [Network Weaver Resource Package & Toolkit](#)

- [EEFA Coalition Cookbook](#)

- [Net Gains: A Handbook for Network Builders Seeking Social Change](#)

Books:

- [Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact (Peter Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor & John Clevela)](#)

- [Power in Coalition: Strategies for Strong Unions and Social Change (Amanda Tattersall)](#)

- [Network Weaver Handbook (June Holley)](#)

Articles & Case Studies:

- [Give each cook their own kitchen: Beating classic coalition campaign challenges (MobLab)](#)

- [Transformer: How to build a network to change a system: A Case Study of the RE-AMP Energy Network (Monitor Institute)](#)

- [Changemakers: How to Win (Season 1, Episode 2): Case studies of the Brexit Campaigns and the Gasfield Free Northern Rivers alliance](#)

- [Pioneers In Justice: Building Networks and Movements for Social Change](#)

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