

**Key Considerations for Coalition Operating Guidelines**

In order to promote healthy functioning, efficiency, trust, and transparency, it is important that coalitions have an agreed upon set of operating guidelines. These can take several forms – bylaws, a memorandum of understanding signed by each coalition member, or a simple one-pager. Operating guidelines should never prevent effective, forward movement – if you find yourselves frequently or at key times lamenting “The bylaws say we can’t do that,” it might be time to think about changing the bylaws. However, having an agreed upon set of guidelines for how the coalition is structured, how decisions will be made, and how communications will be handled will increase efficiency *and, equally important,* prevent problems that can arise when coalition members are caught off-guard by coalition process or decisions.

The process for developing your coalition’s operating guidelines can be pretty simple – while you can appoint a committee or task force to work together to create a draft to present to the coalition membership, the process can also be fast-tracked by having the coalition manager draft guidelines to present to the coalition for feedback.

It is recommended that a coalition’s operating guidelines be shared with all members when they join the coalition and then again at least every year thereafter – and that they be reviewed at least annually by the coalition to identify any areas that need changes.

So… what should be part of coalition operating guidelines? Here’s a good list for a starting point:

**Coalition leadership**:

* Who is on the leadership team?
* How are they selected?
* What are their terms?
* What are their roles and responsibilities? (Note that a job description is an excellent addition to the operating guidelines.)
* What authority does leadership have?

**Coalition structure**:

* How often, when, and where will the coalition meet?
* Are there subcommittees or task forces?
* If so, how often will they meet?
* Who are the members of the subcommittees?
* What are their roles and responsibilities?

**Membership**:

* What are the roles and responsibilities of coalition members? (Note that job descriptions are an excellent addition to the operating guidelines.)
* How are new members recruited and on-boarded/oriented?
* How will communities and community members directly impacted by the policy goal be engaged?
* What will members give to the coalition?
* What will members get for being a member of the coalition?

**Policy Priorities:**

* What is the process for selecting policy priorities?
* How will the community most impacted by the issue you are trying to change have a say in the policy prioritization?
* Who has a role in making the decision?

**Decision-Making:**

* What is the process for general decision-making? (Who makes the decisions and how are they made?)
* What is the process for rapid response decision-making?
* What decisions will go to the full coalition membership and which will be made by the leadership team?
* How will rapid response decisions be communicated to the full coalition?

**Communications:**

* What is the structure and process for internal communications?
* How frequently will there be communications with the members?
* What types of external communications need approval/review by the coalition?
* When will the coalition use an “opt in” provision for external communications?
* When will the coalition use an “opt out” provision for external communications?
* Who is empowered to speak on behalf of the coalition/represent the coalition in external communications?

**Conflict Resolution:**

* What is the process for dealing with grievances and conflict within the coalition?
* How will conflicts be handled and by whom?

**Sample Memorandum of Understanding**

**Mission:**

[NAME OF COALITION] is a statewide network of individuals and organizations working together to reduce death and disability from tobacco use in [STATE].

**Policy Agenda:**

The COALITION supports data-driven tobacco control policies but maintains a very narrow agenda. In addition to its annual policy priorities, the COALITION reviews other tobacco-related legislation and makes decisions as to when to weigh in with support or opposition. This legislation is reviewed by the lobbying committee, and COALITION members are offered an opportunity to “opt in” to participate.

**Membership:**

Organizations and institutions in STATE that support tobacco prevention and cessation policy advocacy are invited to join the COALITION. Financial support is not a condition of membership, but member organizations are expected to contribute a meaningful level of in-kind support to help support the COALITION agenda.

**Values:**

The COALITION adheres to the following organizational values.

* Transparency
* Information to all in a timely fashion
* “Do no harm” – if other COALITION members support something that a particular organization cannot support, that organization will step out – physically remove themselves so as not to inadvertently send a message with their silent presence
* Respect for each individual organizations’ ability to take on tobacco policies that are data-driven but may not be a fit for all

**Structure:**

COALITION is Chaired by NAME and coordinated by NAME.

COALITION is guided by a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is charged with setting the statewide policy agenda for COALITION and advocating for its advancement. This agenda is based on evidence-based practices for tobacco control, as established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The agenda strives to realistically reflect the available resources available to COALITION member organizations and the political climate. When setting the proactive agenda, members are mindful of the need to reserve resources for defensive campaigns to protect STATE’S existing tobacco control policies and funding.

There will be four standing subcommittees of COALITION:

1. Grassroots & Grasstops;
2. State House (lobbyists);
3. Communications; and
4. Sustainability.

Working subcommittees will each be led by a member of the COALITION Steering Committee, but can be populated by adults and youth who are not members of the COALITION Steering Committee. Committee Chairs will be responsible for serving as content experts and strategic liaisons between the committee and the Steering Committee. As needed, other subcommittees may be developed to serve specific functions of COALITION. Each subcommittee will be responsible for managing its communications with the Steering Committee and general membership with openness, transparency, inclusivity, and timeliness.

**Meetings:**

* The full membership will meet quarterly
* The Steering Committee will meet monthly
* Subcommittees will meet monthly with conference calls in between as needed

**Decision-Making:**

The Steering Committee makes decisions using a consensus building process. All members of the Steering Committee have an equal opportunity to advocate for the inclusion or exclusion of any priorities on the statewide tobacco control policy agenda. Each organization serving on the Steering Committee has one vote, regardless of how many members of that organization participate in COALITION. Individuals representing more than one organization must be explicit as to which organization(s) they are officially representing in the COALITION. Individuals who do not represent an organization may also participate in the Steering Committee and have one vote each. Voting members help determine and prioritize the statewide tobacco control policy advocacy agenda by consensus; identify and approve Co-Chairs; and assess threats and opportunities related to approved advocacy agenda and determine, by consensus, the best course of action for COALITION.

Whenever possible, decisions are made by the full Steering Committee with input from the full COALITION membership and Subcommittees. However, when rapid response decision-making is required, decisions are made by a small group for whom tobacco control is central to their mission and who are empowered by the COALITION to speak for the COALITION – at least 3 of these organizations need to weigh in on the rapid response decision. These organizations are: [NAMES]

**Internal Communications:**

The Coordinator will maintain and disseminate an updated Steering Committee member email distribution list. All communications will be emailed to the entire Steering Committee with addresses listed in the “cc” line. Subcommittee correspondence will be sent to every member of the Subcommittee with addresses listed in the “cc” line.

Meeting minutes will be maintained and distributed to all Steering Committee members following meetings.

All requests for input or “opt in’s” will be made to the entire Steering Committee with addresses listed in the “cc” line with a clear deadline for responses. It will be the responsibility of Steering Committee members to respond promptly to email requests. No email response by members will be interpreted as “no feedback” or “approval” of the proposal presented. In the case of an “opt in” request, no response will be interpreted as a desire not to opt in.

**Public Communications (i.e. policy/position statements, testimony, etc.):**

COALITION members may not speak on behalf of the COALITION unless specifically designated to do so. Members of COALITION agree that only those designated to speak on behalf of the COALITION do so, and these individuals adhere to the agreed-upon messages and talking points. In all instances where an individual or member is contacted by a member of the media, legislature, or general public to speak on behalf of COALITION, that request is referred to the NAME.

When time allows, testimony and other public communications will be shared with the Steering Committee for input and edits, but members understand that rapid response communications will be developed by the Chair, Coordinator, and lobbyists in strict accordance with the COALITION’S policy goals and evidence-based practice.

**Letterhead and use of member names and logos:**

By signing this Memorandum of Understanding, members approve of the policy agenda of COALITION and understand that their names and/or organizational logos may be utilized in written and oral testimony, press releases, correspondence, and other advocacy activities directly related to the COALITION’S current policy goals (specified below). Organizational names and logos of members will not be used to advocate for any other policy goals without a member explicitly “opting in” via written communication such as email.

The COALITION will focus on its annual policy agenda, drafted in the Spring and finalized in the Fall.

**The undersigned acknowledge that they have read this Memorandum of Understanding and agree with the terms outlined herein.**

Name of organizational member: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Names of COALITION Network designee(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Sample Coalition Decision-Making Guidelines**

The desired decision-making process is a consensus decision-making framework.

Formal votes will be taken on matters related to:

* Budget/spending issues
* Personnel, subcontractors, and contracts
* Issue advocacy decisions (such as supporting or opposing legislation; selecting advocacy goals and objectives)
* Identification of organizational priorities and advocacy agenda
* Requests to sign on to position statements, support letters, letters of agreement or other advocacy documents that are outside the scope of the organization’s current, agreed-upon advocacy goals
* Endorsements
* Grant applications and grant letters of support
* Changes to policies, procedures, or operating guidelines
* Appointment or termination of members

When required, the formal voting process will be in accordance with the organization’s bylaws, and all votes will be recorded in the meeting minutes.

From time to time, there may arise a situation that requires a formal vote that must be made too quickly to allow for in-person or email voting per the bylaws process. In these situations, the following protocol will be followed:

* An email will be sent to the entire Steering Committee by one of the Officers about the issue and the need for a rapid response decision, with a clearly noted deadline for feedback.
* An annually appointed Rapid Response Team will meet via conference call to review input from members that has been received and vote to decide the issue.
* The Rapid Response Team will be comprised of Officers and 3 at large-members self-nominated and voted in by the Steering Committee (the 3 highest vote recipients will be elected). Team members each commit to making themselves promptly available for decision-making calls as they arise. At least 5 of the 7 team members must vote in order for the vote to be valid.
* One of the Officers will report back to the full Steering Committee as to the decision made.