This fact sheet is the eighth in the *Racial Equity in Advocacy* series for social policy advocates addressing unequal opportunities by race. Each fact sheet will provide information equipping advocates to embed a racial equity lens into their work to close gaps and improve outcomes for communities of color. Please see the first fact sheet in the series for a review of key terms and concepts.

Though a robust social safety net, quality education, youth development programs, and job training are among the structures and systems required for communities of color to recover and heal from dehumanization and racial trauma, they are just part of the equation. It is important to share power with communities accustomed to decisions being made about them, without them. It can be very healing for communities of color to learn about—and take part in changing—the structures, systems, policies, and practices that have contributed to their disenfranchisement and oppression. It puts the focus where it belongs and allows them to release possible internalized negative feelings about their identities, abilities, and environments.[i]

Coalition Partners

We work in coalitions with the recognition that we cannot singlehandedly solve racial inequality. There is strength in numbers and each organization brings a different asset, resource, network, and expertise to advocacy campaigns. Community leaders are key to any solution being positively received and used by community residents. They are best suited to galvanize the community around effective services and activities and engender trust that bureaucratic systems do not.

Community-based organizations (churches, employers, professional organizations, fraternities, sororities, schools, etc.) can have strong connections to impacted communities. Ask your partners and allies with stronger connections to the community to identify and introduce you to the trusted individuals and community groups sharing a common concern for your core issues (i.e. the social safety net). It is not always necessary to include well-known entities. They may have significant obligations and inadequate time to devote to your coalition. Lesser known

groups bringing interest and commitment to the coalition is even more impactful. National policy organizations with little to no connections to communities of color should also consider expanding their networking opportunities beyond their traditional engagements. Attending events and conferences with a social justice and racial equity focus increases knowledge about these topics while building a network of community-based organizations who share your social policy concerns.

Principles for Sharing Power

Sharing power can be uncomfortable because, as the phrase implies, it means giving up some power in order to share it with others. To move from the status quo to equity, accept that there will be an adjustment period as the coalition partners learn to share power toward shared goals. Use the following principles to begin sharing power in your groups.

1. **Foster public will**. Because the coalition is working on behalf of a constituency, the community must be heavily involved in defining the goals and parameters for initiatives that impact them. Power is shared when this type of collaboration is sought at the outset. Once the coalition has begun its work, consider ways of communicating progress with the broader community. Invite their reactions and input on the coalition's work for further discussion and action.

2. **Ensure community leadership**: Though the process of sharing power begins with who is at the table, social policy advocates should avoid symbolic representation like inviting one or two community members to participate in the coalition where they have little impact. Once adequate representation is obtained, think about the elements of the strategy and specific functions community members can lead so that their voices are authentically heard in the work. Subcommittees are a valuable tactic for accomplishing the work of the coalition and presents community leaders with opportunities to hold positions of power. Regular subcommittee meetings that involve everyone with specific responsibilities keep community members engaged and at the table.

3. **Formalize partnerships**: Too often, partnerships between organizations or systems are predicated upon personal relationships between the individuals who brokered the partnerships. In these instances, when someone retires or moves to another position, the partnership often falls apart. Formalize all relationships to ensure that power is sustainably shared with the community. For example, write into the coalition's charter a specific number or percentage of the membership should represent impacted communities.

4. **Build trusting relationships**: Inviting new members and making new connections is as easy as sending a letter or making a phone call; however, building a trusting relationship with them will require more effort. Organize informal meetings to get to know their work and vice versa. Visit community organizations and members at their location to demonstrate that the community has value. Taking these necessary steps will signify the

desire to share power with the community and will begin cultivating the safe space in which to do so.

5. **Eliminate barriers to participation:** For power to be shared, social policy advocates but be willing to accommodate the needs of community representatives. Consult with community members to identify and eliminate barriers to participation. For example, schedule and locate meetings based on their availability and convenience and compensate them for their time. Offer childcare or find resources to cover that cost.

6. **Acknowledge and honor culture and customs:** Demonstrate a willingness to share power by asking coalition partners to lead incorporating the community's cultures and customs into coalition meetings. ii Ask (and educate yourself) about societal norms and practices. Do men and women meet together? Do elders speak first?

7. **Rotate meeting location:** The setting can also contribute to increased comfort. One way to build commitment and comfort is to rotate meeting locations and responsibility for meeting planning among the various partners. Hosting coalition meetings in the community (away from corporate offices) may contribute to greater comfort for community members and foster open dialogue. This will help both existing coalition members and new members adjust and build a combined "team" meeting culture.

8. **Talk Less; listen more:** Social policy experts possess specific areas of expertise which are valuable to communities of color; however, It is important to remember that social policy work exists in service to the community. Members of the community are the best equipped to define community issues and needs; therefore, voices representing the community must be amplified. Power is shared when the platform is shared. To that end, ensure that community advocates are comfortable making their voices heard and avoid talking down to them. Actively listen to and accept their insights for the expertise they possess. If community members are uncomfortable and unwilling to share their expertise, the outcome of goal setting and decision-making will always result in an imbalance of power.

9. **Promote equitable decision-making**: Think about the ways in which mechanisms of decision-making assign power to (or strip power from) community members. For example, if community members comprise 25% of the coalition, they can be easily outvoted by administrators of systems. The coalition can create equitable decision-making mechanisms by increasing the number of seats allotted for community representation to 50% or assigning more weight to the votes of community members.

10. **Manage conflict:** Conflict can happen even in established partnerships; however, it can be tempting to abandon the partnership when conflict arises in new and diverse groups. Consider engaging a facilitator skilled in working with impacted communities. The facilitator can help the group to share power by keeping their goals at the forefront of

the interactions, allowing ample time for processing, and ensuring that everyone is involved in the conversation.

Further Reading

Below are several examples of agreements to formalize a relationship in a coalition.

- Epiphany Community Services, Coalition Members Coalition Involvement Agreement
- Bolder Advocacy, Coalition Checklist, Appendix III and IV
- CoalitionsWork, Model Commitment Letter: Coalition Organizations
- Lake Superior Quality Innovation Network, Building a Successful Coalition: A Toolkit of Resources, Appendix A-7
- United Way Toronto, Participating Effectively as a Collaborative Partner: A United Way Toronto Toolkit, Tool 5 and 6

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[i] Ginwright, S. (2018). "The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement." *Medium.* Retrieved from https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c

[ii] The Praxis Project. *Building Diverse Community Based Coalitions*. Retrieved from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bf21032b98a7888bf3b6e21/t/5c8132b0ec212d711745b0a8/1551970994355/Publications_Coalition+Building.pdf