

## Strengthening partnerships to influence evaluation policies and systems

### Key messages:

- When partners are selected carefully, they can bring new perspective, skills, strengths and resources to evaluation advocacy efforts.
- If partnerships are not well organized, they can drain resources and undermine members' advocacy efforts. Careful analysis and deliberation is required to determine what opportunities can be created or lost by building partnerships for evaluation advocacy.
- Partnerships assume many forms and can be formal and informal, temporary or permanent. Many terms are used, such as alliances, coalitions, and networks to describe partnerships.
- There is no one specific way to structure an effective partnership for evaluation advocacy. What kind of partnership will be most effective for a CSO/VOPE depends on the nature of the organization, its context and the advocacy goals.
- Building and managing partnerships requires being clear about the evaluation advocacy issue, defining membership criterion, its scope, purpose and priorities in advocacy, articulating clear roles and responsibilities and a code of conduct. It also requires assessing progress made by the partnership and making changes to the modalities of the partnership accordingly.

### Types of partnerships <sup>1</sup>

Partnerships can take the form of networks, alliances or coalitions. While in theory they may be considered distinct, in practice, these terms are used flexibly.

**Networks** tend to be loose, flexible associations of people or groups brought together by a common concern or interest to share information and ideas.

**Alliances** generally involve shorter-term relationships among members and are focused on a specific objective. Being limited in time and goal, alliances tend to be less demanding on members.

**Coalition** is a group of organizations working together in a coordinated fashion toward a common goal. They generally have a formalized structure. The long-term relationships among the members gives them permanence, clout and leverage. Coalitions require far more work than networks, but the results can also be much greater. Coalition building should augment, not replace your existing networks.

**EvalPartners** is a platform that brings together the VOPEs, leaders in evaluation, academic institutions and international development partners and the UN to promote partnerships. It is an effort to bring about synergies in evaluation practice that can promote good practice internationally and to harmonize the efforts of VOPEs. In this way partnering, involving a range of specific activities, is an example of a theory of change. Its aim is to bring about the increased effectiveness of VOPEs to contribute to evaluation in national, regional and global contexts. For more information go to [mymande.org/evalpartners](http://mymande.org/evalpartners)

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from VeneKlasen L., Miller V. (2002). *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Just Associates. Washington, DC

VOPEs are examples of successful coalitions. The work of national VOPEs is often augmented by partnerships that are supported by governments, parliamentarians, monitoring and evaluation experts, CSOs, academia, think tanks, private sector and the media. Partnerships at the regional and global levels include other VOPEs and stakeholders such as the UN, and bilateral and multi-lateral development partners.<sup>2</sup> Being organized in a partnership provide CSOs, VOPEs and stakeholders with the following advocacy specific advantages:

- Partnerships provide a **stronger political voice and power** to influence the culture of evaluation. Being in a partnership often facilitates enhanced access to decision-makers who CSOs, VOPEs might not otherwise have access to. Partnerships widen networks and contacts of policy-makers, and those who can influence them.
- Partnerships provide greater **credibility and visibility**. Decision-makers and the broader public are more likely to pay attention to a group of organizations advocating for evaluation than just one or two.
- Being in a partnership ensures a **consistent message** and ability to widen the coverage of their advocacy.
- Members in a partnership benefit from **learning** from good practices, mutual cooperation and knowledge exchange opportunities. Peer to peer collaborations, for example, offer opportunities to expand the scope and sphere of influence of individual VOPEs through south-south and north-south partnerships.
- Partnerships can generate greater **human and material resources** to achieve their advocacy goal. Larger organizations can benefit from specific expertise of smaller organizations and smaller organizations can benefit from profile, capacity and reach of larger organizations.
- Partnerships contribute to the long-term strength of civil society and a **democratic culture**.

The extent to which collaboration is fruitful or not depends greatly on the personalities and relationships involved. Trust and honesty between organizations are important when advocating with policy-makers. Many successful collaborations are built on a previous history of understanding and shared aims.<sup>3</sup>

However there may be certain challenges in being in a partnership that may need to be overcome for effectively working together.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the demands of the coalition can lead to neglect of other organizational priorities that the individual members represent. All partners may not be involved in all aspects of advocacy. Often, the best partners are ones that have been engaged right from the beginning, during the situation analysis, as they share the responsibility for identifying the problem and the development of solutions to address the problem. Some partners will be active partners in advocacy work. Others need to be 'cultivated' before they become active partners and true resources. How these partnerships are approached must be planned strategically.

Advocating through a coalition may require organizations to compromise on their position on issues or tactics. Power is not always distributed equally among coalition members; larger or richer organizations can have more say in decisions. In terms of recognition, it is often the coalition as a whole that gets recognition rather than individual members. Well-run coalitions should strive to highlight their members as often as possible. If the coalition's advocacy process breaks down it can harm everyone's position by damaging members' credibility.

Above all, partnerships thrive on good communication. Without ongoing communication, some members will be uninformed and will be excluded from decisions. This involves a well-planned effort to share

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<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, EvalPartners, IOCE in partnership with CLEAR, IEG World Bank, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, OECD Development Assistance Committee Network on Development Evaluation, UNEG and UNWomen. (2013). *Evaluation and Civil Society: Stakeholders' Perspectives on National Evaluation Capacity Development*. Available at [http://www.mymande.org/Evaluation\\_and\\_Civil\\_Society](http://www.mymande.org/Evaluation_and_Civil_Society)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/uploadedFiles/NCVO/What\\_we\\_do/Campaigning\\_Effectiveness/NEW\\_Projects/Campaigning\\_In\\_Collaboration.pdf.pdf](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/uploadedFiles/NCVO/What_we_do/Campaigning_Effectiveness/NEW_Projects/Campaigning_In_Collaboration.pdf.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from the Midwest Academy, Organizing for Social Change and UNICEF. (2010). *Advocacy Toolkit: A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives*. Available at [http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/Advocacy\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/Advocacy_Toolkit.pdf)

information and build knowledge of all partners by using online information tools (portals, listserv, e-discussions), conferences, and seminars among others. *More information on using knowledge in advocacy is available in [Section 7](#).*

## Building and managing coalitions

To overcome challenges faced in working in coalitions (such as a VOPE), here are a few guidelines to build and manage them better:<sup>5</sup>

- **Be clear about the advocacy issue** proposed as the focus of your VOPE. A written issue or a problem statement can be helpful for this purpose.
- **Develop membership criteria and mechanisms** for including new members and sustainability. Mechanisms for sustaining the interest and active involvement of the membership are key for survival.
- **Resolve what the VOPE will and will not do in advocacy.** Invite potential members to come together to determine as a group, the coalition's purpose, scope and priorities in advocacy.
- **For a large VOPE, select an advocacy steering committee** of 5-7 people that are representative of different membership interest or member organizations. Using the steering committee to facilitate advocacy planning and strategy decisions, ensure communication and consultation among members and resolve any conflicts (*see more on participation in advocacy planning in [Section 2.3 Putting together the advocacy strategy using nine questions](#)*). Set up a process for ensuring that the steering committee is accountable to the broader coalition. Avoid designating the steering committee or any single person as the sole advocacy spokesperson. Rotating the opportunities for visible leadership can avoid resentment about who gets credit.
- **Establish task forces to plan and coordinate different advocacy activities** such as advocacy priorities, specific agendas, media work, lobbying, and fundraising. Involve all VOPE members in at least one advocacy committee and encourage development of new leadership. Stay open to partnerships outside the formal coalition structure. A coalition must be able to work with a great diversity of advocacy groups, but all groups need not belong as formal members. Organizations whose goals are more radical, or whose tactics are more extreme, are often more comfortable and effective working outside the formal coalition structure and coordinating their activities more informally.
- **Assess progress periodically and make changes where necessary.** This assessment should examine decision-making structures, the effectiveness of the VOPE in meeting advocacy objectives, and the opportunity for members to take on leadership roles and other areas. This assessment can be a useful opportunity to build a shared understanding and commitment to a coalition's advocacy directions and activities. It also helps to avoid duplication of activities and acrimony caused by misunderstanding of actions and motives.
- **Develop a code of conduct to ensure mutual respect and responsibility.** If this is drawn up collectively, members can more easily be held accountable without finger pointing and resentment. Remember that each member will have different strengths. Ensure that your rules of collaboration acknowledge diversity in capacity and resources.

There is no one optimum approach to structuring a partnership in order to advocate successfully. Context is crucial: what works for one campaign and collaboration may not work for another. Depending on the nature and aims of the organization, collaborations can take different forms, and may agree to change structure as the advocacy progresses.

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