



National Center for State & Tribal
Elder Justice Coalitions

Elder Justice Coalitions: **The STAR Framework** Sustainability Strategies for State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions

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Introduction

In March 2025, the [National Center for State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions](#), in partnership with the [Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services \(OCAPS\)](#), published the first of a two-part resource guide series, [Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions](#). The guide provides a toolbox of resources to support emerging and existing elder justice coalitions in building, maintaining, and sustaining their coalitions with impact and integrity. It covers topics from building membership, assessing capacity, conducting needs assessments, facilitation strategies, community engagement tools, and resources for finding diverse funding sources. During the development of the first guide, a need emerged for guidance on designing and implementing sustainable coalition initiatives that enable a coalition to have impact and stability over time.

The first guide provides a solid foundation for building and operating a coalition; this second guide, *The STAR Framework: Sustainability Strategies for State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions*, complements the first and focuses on the work of a coalition through the lens of sustainability, drawing on experiences and stories from the field. Using the STAR Framework (Strategic Resilience, Trust, Adaptability, and Responsiveness), this guide offers strategies for emerging and existing State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions to develop lasting, impactful coalitions and collaborative relationships. This guide aims to provide a roadmap for integrated sustainability planning, a library of resources and tools to learn more and streamline processes, and opportunities for internal analysis and reflection.

The STAR Framework

Sustainability planning is integral to the success of any Elder Justice Coalition (EJC). In this guide, we approach sustainability as an active process that enables your coalition to be **Strategically Resilient, Trustworthy, Adaptable, and Responsive (STAR) over time**. Drawing on stories and experiences from the field, the STAR Framework uses strategic resilience, trust, adaptability, and responsiveness as pillars for building effective and sustainable coalitions. Through this framework, we have provided strategies and resources to increase your capacity in each of these pillars, along with reflection questions to help coalition leaders and partners meet your goals and develop a roadmap for your coalition's future work.

How to Use this Guide

This guide is divided into four (4) main sections, each covering a different pillar of the STAR Framework (Strategic Resilience, Trust, Adaptability, and Responsiveness).

In every section, you will find recommended strategies for building each pillar. For each strategy, we have provided several approaches and tips to help you implement it.

Each section also includes links and a list of additional resources and tools for further learning and support.

Throughout the sections, you will find “Questions to Consider” to help you apply the recommended strategies and approaches to your coalition or collaboratives work. These questions are designed to be reflective and are intended to be done in collaboration with your coalition members and partners.

The STAR Framework is designed to provide a structure for a coalition to be strategic about sustainability and is not prescriptive. The pillars and strategies do not need to

be read in order if that does not serve your process. At the beginning of each section, we have provided links to the recommended strategies within, enabling you to easily skip to the most relevant information to meet your current needs.

Lastly, throughout this guide, we have identified sections of [Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions](#) that provide additional resources and tools to support the recommended strategies and approaches.

Additional Sustainability Guides and Tools:

The STAR Framework and the resources provided in this guide are one approach among many in sustainability planning and coalition building. While intended to provide direction, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to sustainability or effective coalition work.



WE HAVE PROVIDED A LIST OF ADDITIONAL SUSTAINABILITY AND COLLABORATION-BUILDING RESOURCE GUIDES TO ADD TO YOUR TOOLBOX FOR FURTHER SUPPORT:

- [Office for Victims of Crime Sustainability Toolkit](#)
- [Program Sustainability Assessment Tool](#)
- [Tamarack Institute: Guide for Building a Sustainable and Resilient Collaboration](#)
- [Fundamentals of Nonprofit Financial Sustainability](#)
- [A Sustainability Guide for Healthy Communities](#)
- [Community Toolbox: Planning for Sustainability](#)
- [The Nonprofit Sustainability Field Manual](#)

The STAR Framework



In this guide, we define sustainability as **the active process that enables your coalition to be Strategically Resilient, Trustworthy, Adaptable, and Responsive over time**. With this definition, we aim to highlight a process that views sustainability as a web of actionable strategies integrated into your coalition's work, rather than as an approach or practice called upon from time to time.

A well-rounded sustainability approach requires your coalition to consider how it operates, its values, culture, reputation, connections to external systems and organizations, current and potential relationships, leadership, and capacity. Using

our definition, we have outlined the **STAR Framework**, placing Strategic Resilience, Trust, Adaptability, and Responsiveness as the pillars for growing a sustainable EJC, and integrating sustainability strategies into a coalition's everyday work. With this framework, we hope to support coalitions in meeting their financial goals and to elicit the greatest impact for older adults, communities, and coalition members.

The STAR Framework and the strategies suggested within it were developed based on examples shared from the elder justice field and existing EJCs, best practices from organizational development and social justice experts, and on integrated concepts derived from Indigenous Systems Thinking and the Indigenous philosophy of relationality, first conceptualized by Cree scholar Shawn Wilson.

Relationality is “the acknowledgement that we all exist in relationship to each other, the natural world, ideas, the cosmos, objects, ancestors, and future generations, and furthermore, that we are accountable to those relationships.”¹

Indigenous Systems Thinking provides a framework built on five pillars:²

- **Relational Accountability** asks who we are accountable to in our system-building (family, friends, community, etc.).
- **Interdependence** asks how our choices affect people, communities, land, and the systems around us.
- **Long-View Thinking** asks how we are creating plans with future generations in mind.
- **Sovereignty as Structure** asks how we are setting our own rules and ways of working together that are authentic and meet the group's needs.
- **Healing Centered Design** asks how we are creating and building in ways that center well-being and focus on repair from harm.

Using these as inspiration, the STAR Framework is designed to highlight the interconnected pieces of coalition work that can build on one another to create an impactful and sustainable coalition over time. The framework includes four (4)

pillars to help you identify where your coalition is in the process of thinking strategically about sustainability, and to aid you in identifying priority areas and next steps.

	Strategic Resilience
	Trust
	Adaptability
	Responsiveness

This guide will provide information on each pillar along with strategies, resources for further learning, and reflection questions to support existing and emerging EJs in developing well-rounded sustainability roadmaps.

Chapter 1

Strategic Resilience



Strategies for Building Strategic Resilience:

1. Develop reliable and adaptable leadership.	12
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Building strategic resilience involves deliberately designing practices that better enable an EJC to weather oncoming storms and plan with confidence for the future. Resilience, often considered an organic cultural element of many coalitions, can be cultivated intentionally. By putting foundational building blocks in place, a coalition sets itself up for better success over time and is better able to respond to external forces, thereby supporting long-term sustainability.³

Strategic resilience requires putting systems and processes in place that create a solid organizational infrastructure and allow your coalition to maintain a trustworthy, steady voice amid the sea of voices. This infrastructure and steady voice will enable a coalition to withstand challenges, adapt to growing needs, and serve as an ongoing source of leadership.

Strategies for Building Strategic Resilience:

1. Develop reliable and adaptable leadership.

Reliable, strong leadership is critical across all stages of a coalition's development and is a cornerstone of building strategic resilience.⁴ Leadership sets the tone of a coalition, steers strategic direction, builds coalition culture, establishes organizational structures, and plans for a sustainable future. Strategic resilience can stem from intentionally identifying the leadership model that best fits the coalition and from investing in current and emerging leadership development.

Approach: Identify the right leadership model for your coalition.

Dedicate time to identify the most aligned leadership model for the mission, goals, and culture of your EJC. Being strategic about the leadership approach your coalition uses will go a long way toward developing a steady infrastructure and, over time, will increase your capacity to choose leaders who are the right fit for your coalition's goals.



Common and effective leadership styles for coalitions include:

- [Systems Leadership](#)
- [Adaptive Leadership](#)
- [Collaborative Leadership](#)
- [Participative Leadership](#)
- [Transformational Leadership](#)



FROM THE FIELD:

Leadership Approaches

The Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services (OCAPS), the oldest EJC in the United States, was founded in 1984 with a singular, compelling purpose: to establish state funding for Adult Protective Services (APS), despite no funding having been allocated since the state APS law was passed in 1981. The longstanding lack of momentum around funding APS made it clear to founding member, Georgia Anetzberger, and her colleagues that they were committing to a long-term advocacy initiative with limited resources. They did, however, have a great deal of passion, a deep understanding of the issues, and a diverse network to accomplish the task. Through this work and over time, OCAPS grew to be well-positioned to address elder abuse more broadly and to establish itself as an entity that advocates for statewide change, supporting the capacity-building of agencies and organizations to develop a networked approach to elder justice across Ohio.

“OCAPS has changed over time,” shared Georgia, “any organization would die if it did not change when compelled. OCAPS was able to respond to change effectively because of the foundation it established and the benefits of good leadership throughout its history. Many OCAPS leaders have understood that a fundamental requirement of good leadership is for a leader not to make the work about themselves.” Georgia went on to highlight the importance of spreading responsibility across a coalition and to have leadership change and succession planning as an integral part of your leadership strategy. Like many coalitions, OCAPS is volunteer-run, which

has enabled it to sustain itself for as long as it has, but can also come with challenges. “Volunteer leaders can become overwhelmed because they have their day jobs or other commitments to contend with. When this happens, OCAPS suffers,” continued Georgia. Developing a leadership structure that is supportive, transparent, and allows for work to be spread across members can help mitigate this overwhelm. “I also believe that leaders should not stay in their positions for too long. OCAPS has changed leadership every 2-5 years to keep innovation flowing and stay on top of current needs across the state.”

Approach: Commit to developing emerging leaders:

Leadership development is a forward-thinking sustainability strategy that helps to ensure coalition initiatives do not stall during leadership transitions. Additionally, active and ongoing leadership development and mentorship support membership engagement and morale and create an environment that elicits a diversity of perspectives. Building up new leaders can enable a coalition to have a broader reach, with more people empowered to make decisions, build relationships, and connect more effectively with policymakers, administrators, and community members.

Leadership development does not always aim to advance a person into a formal leadership role. Mentorship and professional development initiatives can help better position more coalition members to take on higher-level strategies, ultimately better equipping the field to address elder justice issues on multiple fronts. This sustainability strategy is not just about ensuring the presence of new leaders when needed, but also about fostering relationships and trust between existing members and external partners, including decision-makers, organizations, and community members.



FROM THE FIELD:

Mentorship as a sustainability strategy

Outgoing OCAPS Chair Deanna Green credits much of her professional development to OCAPS. During her tenure, the OCAPS leadership transition process was a six-year tiered approach. Each current Chair held the position for two years. During that time,

they mentor an Incoming Chair, and they are supported by an Outgoing Chair. They also have eight (8) subcommittees with Committee Leads, who support members to increase their capacities. “Being a part of OCAPS made me get outside of my comfort zone,” shared Deanna. “I don’t like politics, but through my work with OCAPS, I learned that politics drive funding for services, so I need to be involved, to testify, network, and connect with policy makers. Maridell Courture, OCAPS Public Policy Chair, was an amazing support in helping me learn these skills. She has helped me draft testimony and provided valuable insights into designing effective advocacy campaigns. And Sylvia Pla-Raith, former OCAPS Chair, truly mentored me as I grew into my role. I wouldn’t have had access to this knowledge if I weren’t connected to OCAPS.” In thinking about sustainability, Sylvia shared, “Deanna and people like her represent the future of OCAPS. It is my job to help support her and other members as they do the work to keep the coalition and its goals moving forward.”



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Leadership Development

The following questions are adapted from [The Bridgespan Group](#) to help guide a strategy for leadership development and establish how your coalition can intentionally incorporate leadership development into an ongoing work plan.⁵

1. What are the most significant assets of leaders in your coalition today?
Consider the values, skills, or [core competencies](#) that have enabled leaders to excel in their roles and advance the coalition's goals.
2. How might future leaders be different from leaders today or in the past?
Consider how your operating context, organizational strategy, current political climate, and goals may shift over time.
3. What core competencies need to be developed to ensure the team has the skills needed to move work forward?
4. What are your coalition’s values, commitments, and goals related to creating a diverse membership?
5. How do your core competencies help in furthering those goals and identifying a diverse set of leaders?



RESOURCES:

- [Nonprofit Leadership Development Toolkit](#)
- [Nonprofit Leadership Development: Competency Bank](#)
- [Role Expectations Template](#)

2. Clarify your purpose, define your goals, and assess your capacity.

Elder justice is a broad topic, encompassing many issues with even more nuances. A common pitfall for many people organizing for social justice is the urge to do everything and be everything for everyone. However, this approach is not strategic and will set your coalition up for failure when facing challenging times. Clarity of purpose, a well-formulated mission statement, clear values, and well-defined goals can support a coalition by providing the framework for making informed decisions over time. Additionally, having a clear understanding of your coalition's capacity enables you to be realistic about available resources, identify appropriate priorities, and anticipate outcomes.

Each of these elements, when combined, can create a set of boundaries from which a coalition can successfully navigate challenges. In turn, they also support the development of fundraising plans, advocacy initiatives, education and training campaigns, and communications strategies.

Approach: Use your mission statement, organizational values, and well-defined goals as guideposts.

Your mission, values, and goals are helpful guideposts for identifying coalition priorities and assessing alignment when fundraising, advocating, and creating internal processes. As guideposts, they help to establish boundaries when developing programs and prioritizing projects. These boundaries will mitigate mission creep and strengthen your coalition's capacity to find funding that supports your goals, rather than shifting your goals to access funding.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:](#)

- Developing your mission, vision, and values: pages 58-60
- Goal setting and strategy building: pages 77-80

From the Field: Build from your strengths

In 2012, the Minnesota S.A.F.E. Elders Initiative brought Amanda Vickstrom and Iris Freeman together to collaborate on a video-based educational campaign to spot and reduce elder abuse. Amanda, at the time, was working at the Anoka County Attorney's Office, and Iris was leading the Vulnerable Adult Justice Project.

Together with a multidisciplinary group, they created the [Elder Victims: Abused, Exploited, Alone video](#), the success of which quickly highlighted a significant service gap in Minnesota: there was nowhere for older adults needing support to call for help. With this need identified, and driven by the momentum of the video, work began to establish the [Minnesota Elder Justice Center \(MEJC\)](#), with Amanda serving as Executive Director and Iris as Board Chair. "As leaders, Iris and I complemented each other; we worked well together, and we knew how to set boundaries with one another," shared Amanda. Amanda came to this partnership with a background in victim services, non-profit management, and fundraising. Iris joined with extensive experience and success in coalition building, policy, and advocacy work. They both had ideas for what MEJC could do, rooted in the strengths they brought to the table individually. "From the start, I wanted to create a victim services program, and Iris wanted us to focus on policy work and education. So, we set out a plan to do all three, and those three areas have remained the pillars of our work ever since."

Creating clear boundaries around the work has helped MEJC stay true to its mission over the last decade, identify projects within its scope, and strategically and sustainably narrow fundraising initiatives. Amanda credits MEJC's sustainability to its clarity of mission and goals.





QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

How to best use your mission, vision, and values

1. In what ways are your current projects aligned with your coalition's values?
2. Does your mission continue to align with the needs your coalition is best positioned to address?
3. What is your process for making sure decisions are aligned with your coalition's values?
4. What skills and assets do you need to accomplish your current goals?
5. What gaps in membership can be filled to better position your coalition to meet its goals?
6. In what way are prospective grants aligned with your mission, values, and goals?

Approach: Assess coalition capacity and set realistic expectations.

A coalition's capacity is defined by the set of skills and resources available to meet its goals effectively.⁶ To assess and identify coalition capacity, you must examine your membership, staff, leadership, network, partners, and current funding. Once you know what resources are available in terms of skills, infrastructure, and funding, you can decide what your coalition is best suited to accomplish and set realistic expectations for achieving that success.

This approach enables your coalition to fundraise strategically and helps position it as an expert-led, trusted, and reliable resource for partners, policymakers, and community members. Particularly in challenging economic times, setting realistic expectations based on the skills and resources you have available ensures that, despite funding, your coalition can have an impact where it is most needed.



FROM THE FIELD:

Working with What We Have



Resourcefulness and collaboration are cornerstone values in many Indigenous cultures, which have served as strengths as Tribal communities work to build coalitions to serve elders and families. Resourcefulness became a survival mechanism for many Native Nations who have had to adapt to anti-Indigenous policies and practices, leaving them with limited resources to meet community needs. This has also meant that many American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) professionals working in aging are well-practiced at identifying the skills and resources needed to accomplish a goal. “We think a lot about how to do things without much funding,” shared Dr. Jacque Gray, Choctaw/Cherokee descendant and Tribal Consultant. “We think about what’s already in existence and how we can make that work to address the problem. You think about what you have and go from there.” Over the years, Dr. Gray has cultivated what she described as a network of rich human resources among Tribal communities. She has built strong relationships and worked to share her connections to support creative problem-solving, particularly when gaps in services or limited resources are present.

Dr. Gray worked as a TA provider to support Tribal [Elder Abuse Multidisciplinary Teams \(E-MDTs\)](#) in their efforts to gain access to needed resources and skills. E-MDTs benefit greatly from including specialized professionals in their collaboration, such as forensic accountants or neuropsychologists; however, for many Tribal communities, there is limited local access to those professions. “A person from Nebraska reached out to me to help connect them with a neuropsychologist,” she shared. “We assessed how far she was from the University of South Dakota, and I was able to connect her with a Native psychologist in the clinical psychology program. From there, they connected with a cohort of students who could help with supervised assessments. That connection was also able to lead to additional referrals and went from there.” Dr. Gray emphasized the significant benefits of a centralized resource center, which can facilitate connections across Tribal communities, meet community needs while keeping



costs low, and build a process for creative problem-solving while working around systemic restrictions.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:

- Conducting a capacity assessment: page 44
- Tools for network building and tracking relationships: page 50
- Creating SMARTIE goals and setting realistic expectations: page 78
- Developing a logic model or theory of change: pages 80-81

3. Develop a strategic and diversified funding plan.

Funding is a forever challenge for any mission-focused organization or coalition. EJs face a particular challenge as the ever-changing financial landscape in the United States has led to a reduction in funds available for aging services. This is particularly true for organizations that do not provide direct services but instead focus on system-level interventions, like many coalitions. In 2025, we witnessed a significant decline in available state and federal funding for elder justice, elder abuse, and aging-centered projects, underscoring the need for the field to reassess its approach to financial stability and to critically consider additional strategies to diversify funding streams.

Creating a diversified funding strategy can help a coalition weather the unpredictability of the funding landscape, fill funding gaps when they emerge, and prioritize its goals and values rather than rely on funding that may not align with either.

Sources of funding can include:

- Indigenous-led funds
- State, federal, and local government grants

- Private, community, family, or corporate foundations
- Individual donations
- Corporate sponsorships or partnerships
- Membership fees
- Events
- Fee-for-service programs
- Investments from unrestricted funding sources

Approach: Focus on relationship building before applying for funding.

Developing a connection with a funder can make or break whether a coalition is considered for funding. Reach out to funders to:

- Discuss alignment between their goals and yours
- Pitch your ideas before spending time and resources on writing a proposal
- Spark interest and support for future funding opportunities as they arise

Tips For Building Relationships with Potential Funders:⁷

- **Do your research first.** Know a funder's priorities and values prior to connecting with them. Be prepared to communicate how your coalition can support their values and advance their mission and vision.
- **Plan for a long-term relationship, not a one-off transaction.** Building a sincere connection helps create champions for your coalition. Personal connection is a key driver of giving, applying to foundation administrators, corporate sponsors, and individual donors alike.
- **Interact with the funders' content online.** Follow, like, and share funders' social media posts. Dive deeper by engaging in comments, ask interesting questions related to their posts, and provide helpful feedback.
- **Make personal connections on LinkedIn that move to a live conversation.** Send funding decision-makers personalized messages about posts they have shared that resonate with you. Continue the conversation until you can move it offline and connect with them about your work and shared goals.

- **Attend conferences, webinars, and events hosted by funders.** Funders are looking for organizations to fund, just as you are looking for funding. In-person engagement is often the most effective way to establish a lasting relationship that can be mutually beneficial.

Approach: Be discerning about what funding opportunities you apply for.

With limited resources, time, and energy, coalitions should be tactical about where and why they solicit funding. Ensure that each funding opportunity you pursue aligns with your coalition's mission, goals, and values. Additionally, assess your capacity to connect with the funder, write a strong proposal, and ultimately meet the funding requirements and deliverables.

Tips For Locating Funding Sources:

- Utilize funding databases: [Candid](#), [Instrumentl](#), [GrantStation](#)
 - Access Candid for free through your local library
 - Pool resources from coalition member organizations or peer coalitions to purchase memberships together.
- Research nonprofits that are similarly positioned to your coalition to identify where they receive funding. Examine their IRS Form 990, websites, and social media to identify potential funders: [ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer](#), [GuideStar](#), [CausalQ](#)
- Sign up for funder directory newsletters to get up-to-date alerts on potential funding opportunities: [GrantStation Newsletters](#)
- Utilize free and pro bono resources
 - [Givebutter](#) – fundraising platform
 - [Taproot Foundation](#) or [Common Impact](#) — Connect with pro bono fundraising professionals and other skilled non-profit consultants for one-to-one support
 - [State Association of Nonprofits](#)
 - [Regional Association of Grantmakers](#)

Funding Opportunity Decision-Making Chart:⁸

	1 - LOW	2 - MODERATE	3 - HIGH	SCORE
Mission Agreement	Sort of aligns with our mission	Aligns with our mission well	Is exactly aligned with what we do	
Funding Flexibility	Very specific on what we can and can't spend on	Some restrictions, but not too many	Totally flexible funding we can use anywhere	+
Scale of Impact	Won't have a huge impact on us, our members, or community	Will have a moderate impact	Will have a significant impact	+
Organizational Capacity	We don't have time or people to apply	We are strapped but can still make it work	We have the time and people to apply	+
Timeframe	Quick turnaround	We have some time	Well in advance	+
TOTAL=				
SCORING: ● 5 Not worth it. ● 6-10 Worth a shot. ● 11-15 Go for it!				



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Assessing funders

[International Funders for Indigenous Peoples](#) provides helpful questions to assess whether a funding partnership is the right fit:⁹

1. How much power and control will the funder seek to maintain?
2. What strings are attached to the funding that will impact your strategies and priorities?

- 
3. What is the funder's source of wealth?
 4. Who else have they funded?
 5. What are their internal commitments to learning and growing?
 6. What are the administrative and bureaucratic burdens that will be attached to managing the funding agreement and relationship to the funder?



RESOURCES FOR BUILDING A DIVERSIFIED FUNDING STRATEGY:

- [Building a Collaborative Impact Story](#)
- [Corporate Partnership Toolkit for Nonprofits](#)
- [Finding Your Nonprofit's Funding Strategy](#)

4. Create an infrastructure with thoughtfully designed processes that support the needs of members, staff, and coalition goals.

A resilient coalition has thoughtful internal processes and infrastructure designed to support staff and members, allowing more energy to be devoted to its work rather than to managing operations. By optimizing your infrastructure, you are creating a strong foundation that is more likely to support the coalition's work as shifts occur over time.

Approach: Develop governance and administrative processes:

Ideally, in the early phases of coalition development, time is spent establishing cohesive administrative and structural practices. However, coalitions often begin as a response to an emergent problem, with administrative needs prioritized later when time allows. No matter where your coalition is in its lifecycle, conduct a regular assessment of your administrative processes to identify whether they continue to meet the needs of coalition members and staff, and serve as systems that enable the coalition's work to be successful.



Governance and Administrative Processes Include:¹⁰

- Clear, accessible, and equitable bylaws
- Defined roles and responsibilities for leadership, board, staff, volunteers, committees, and workgroups
- Well-organized meeting agendas and minutes
- Transparent process for communication and document management among all internal players (i.e., email, shared document drive, list serve, facilitated meetings, etc.)
- Efficient and accessible workflow management systems
- Transparent financial management processes and systems
- Clear and transparent data collection strategies

Approach: Develop problem-solving and facilitation processes:

Collective decision-making, issue debates, conflict navigation, and finding creative solutions to difficult problems are at the heart of coalition work. Developing a clear yet nimble facilitation process for coalition meetings can help guide this work toward success and help your coalition navigate challenges as they arise.

Problem-Solving and Facilitation Processes Include:

- Lead with ceremony to bring people together and to set the tone.
- Create a process for including elders and community members in problem-solving and decision-making.
- Account for accessibility needs so all can participate fully without unnecessary extra effort.
- Establish and communicate the clear purpose and structure of collaborative meetings.
- Establish a process for information sharing and level-setting so all participants can make informed decisions.
- Clearly define a decision-making process (i.e., executive leadership as the final decider, majority rule, consent-based, consensus-based, etc.)

- Create and commit to a plan that allows everyone to voice their perspectives and opinions without judgment.
- Create dedicated time for debate.
- Create a narrowing discussion process that allows for the examination of perspectives and the finding of common ground.
- Have and communicate a plan for [conflict resolution](#), and a process for learning from conflicts as they arise.

“In Indigenous governance, Elders are infrastructure—the architecture that anchors a system in time, stabilizing rhythm, enforcing accountability across generations. Their authority comes through protocol lived in practice and continuity carried across decades...Indigenous systems center Elders because memory is the operating system. Elders are activated and situated at the core of decision-making because they carry the thread that keeps a structure from unraveling under the pressure of novelty. Without them, governance becomes brittle...Elders do more than transmit knowledge. They regulate timing. They govern the system through rhythm. A story offered before harm repeats is recalibration. A teaching introduced in council is governance restoring itself. In Indigenous logic, memory is repair. It repositions the person within an ecology of obligation, reminding them who they are, what roles they hold, and to whom they remain accountable across generations...When Elders are excluded from planning tables, policy design, or technology frameworks, the loss is systemic. It erases the feedback loop that prevents system collapse. Without Elders, the structure fails to return to coherence after rupture. It loses its way back.”
— Jesse Grey Eagle¹¹

Approach: Develop innovation and creativity processes:

Often, creativity can spark at unexpected times. We all process information in the background as we perform other tasks, and suddenly, when we are at the grocery store or at home, a creative solution to a complex problem comes to us. Creativity and innovation, however, can and should be intentionally incorporated into your coalition. In doing so, you are creating a sustainability strand that supports your coalition's capacity to develop unique and replicable programs, stay ahead of the curve, and respond to societal changes.

Approach: Use design thinking as a process for problem-solving and innovation:

Design thinking is a human-centered approach rooted in the idea that all person-made things or ideas are designed; therefore, they can be redesigned.¹² This perspective can support coalitions in discovering and accounting for complexities that may otherwise be overlooked.

Design thinking asks us to view a problem from the vantage point of the people most proximate to it, in order to build solutions that actually fit into the broader spectrum of people's lives. Traditional design thinking processes are non-linear and happen during intersecting phases that you can adapt to meet your needs:

- **Inspiration Phase:** Create a knowledge brief that provides the necessary information for people to understand the problem. Observe and include those most proximate to the problem to better understand needs, culture, and constraints.
- **Ideation Phase:** Identify insights from the inspiration phase to fine-tune pieces of the problem that require intervention. Create a process that allows all potential solutions to be offered and tested against each other to determine the most effective one. Coalitions are best suited for this because multidisciplinary teams can ideate from various perspectives. Be careful not to dismiss ideas too early, so the group has permission to think outside the box. Narrowing down to the right idea can come after everything is put on the table.

- **Implementation Phase:** Create an action plan to develop your solution, prototype, and test it to identify problems or missed perspectives, and then implement your plan.

Existing bias can be a significant roadblock for innovative problem-solving. Including and observing those impacted by a problem, as well as understanding the historical and systemic landscape in which it exists, are critical for creating right-fit solutions. [Equity Meets Design](#) offers a free [workbook](#) and [course](#) on mitigating bias and incorporating equity into your design thinking process.

Approach: Track and learn from your failures.

When we attempt creative solutions, our failures often provide the best lessons. Failures allow coalitions to assess which internal factors may have impeded their success. Additionally, failures allow us to be curious about which external elements were missed or inaccurately addressed in the design or innovation process. Testing, tracking, and reassessment may feel cumbersome, but they are essential for supporting your coalition in developing a usable innovation process.



RESOURCES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN:

- [Coalition Conditions for Success](#)
- [Factors that Support Coalition Formation](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:

- Decision-making structures: pages 63-65
- Facilitation techniques: pages 81-86

Chapter 2

Trust



Strategies for Building Internal Trust:

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Coalitions thrive when they are a trusted resource to community members, policymakers, and allied organizations. Building trust can establish a sustainable coalition over time by proving itself a reliable and effective partner within the aging and elder justice ecosystem. Furthermore, building internal trust among coalition members and leadership can support longevity, foster cohesive teamwork, increase the capacity to solve complex problems, facilitate effective change, and navigate challenges as they emerge. Demonstrable internal and external trust shows funders that they can be confident in your coalition's capacity to be good stewards of their funding and missions, increasing your likelihood of accessing available funds.

Strategies for building internal trust include:

1. Understand and address the needs of coalition members.
2. Design a coalition culture that reflects its values and fosters a sense of belonging among participants.

Strategies for building external trust include:

1. Develop comprehensive awareness campaigns responsive to current needs.
2. Develop a streamlined and person-centered communications strategy.
3. Develop compelling and relevant professional training opportunities.

Strategies for Building Internal Trust:

1. Understand and address the needs of coalition members.

A coalition is the sum of its parts. Your members are your greatest strength, and a coalition can be your members' greatest asset. Take the time to understand why your members may or may not choose to participate in the coalition's work. Additionally, have a process for assessing members' levels of engagement to identify challenges or opportunities for change. Be attuned to their needs and

build a coalition invested in uplifting the capacity and missions of partner and member organizations. This attunement strengthens bonds between members and leadership, setting the coalition up for sustainable success.



Approach: Assess and realign your coalition infrastructure when needed.

Coalition and community needs may change over time. Leadership's willingness to assess internal infrastructure and make changes when needed demonstrates to members that the coalition is flexible and organized enough to pivot for the betterment of the group and its goals. This builds confidence and shows a coalition's capacity to prioritize members, making it easier for them to participate and ensuring the work continues to run smoothly.

From the Field: Supporting Member Projects

With funding from a seed grant, the [Virginia Coalition for the Prevention of Elder Abuse \(VCPEA\)](#) became financially secure. With this stability, it sought to provide members with small grants to support awareness projects in their communities. While the intention was good, the program primarily benefited Board members who were already closely connected to decision-makers. So, the coalition assessed and pivoted. "Our original goal was to help get additional money into South West Virginia to support under-resourced programming," shared Lisa Furr, former VCPEA Board Chair. "But when it was just other Board members accessing the opportunity, we knew we had to shift our approach. We developed an easy one-page RFP process that allowed anyone to request money from the board with a cap of \$3,000." This shift marked the launch of the [Training and Professional Awareness Support \(TAPAS\) Grant Program](#), which the coalition continues to operate today.

By pausing, reassessing, and adjusting their process, VCPEA demonstrated tangible ways in which the coalition supports its members and the work of building elder abuse awareness across the state. They also showed members that they are paying attention to their needs and taking their partnerships seriously. "Trust and the reliability of the coalition's work really made us sustainable," continued Lisa. "Coalitions are an equalizer that bring folks together from the wealthier parts of

the state and those with fewer resources. The grants were part of our strategy for getting more people involved and raising more awareness throughout the state. The coalition became seen as a really cool and worthwhile thing to be a part of, with some notoriety attached to it. That comes from building trust.”

2. Design a coalition culture that reflects its values and fosters a sense of belonging among participants.

Shared beliefs, expectations, norms, values, and perspectives converge to form a culture. Setting the stage for how members work together, a coalition’s culture is experienced through communication practices, meeting facilitation norms, rituals, symbols, shared stories, and accountability practices, among other elements.¹³ Culture is also reflected in how power is situated among members and leadership, how priorities are established, and who is included or excluded from processes or decision-making.

“Culture shapes everything from decision-making norms to employee engagement, brand perception to risk tolerance. When it’s mismanaged, organizations don’t just lose trust, they lose traction.”¹⁴

Formed over time, culture has a significant impact on behaviors, communication, and relationships. Once established, culture can be complicated to change; therefore, thinking critically about how you want your organizational culture to be shaped is critical when forming a coalition and planning for long-term sustainability.¹⁵

Approach: Be actionable with your values.

Research shows that translating coalition values into action results in staff, members, and partners feeling they are part of a cohesive and trust-based culture. Conversely, if leadership claims to value something, like transparency, for example, but continually makes decisions behind closed doors or fails to communicate effectively,

trust is quickly eroded. Staff and members may then feel as though the coalition's values are meaningless, undermining the structure of the coalition's culture. When it comes to culture building, actions speak louder than words, and actions rooted in shared values speak the loudest.¹⁶



FROM THE FIELD:

Paving the path forward with values

When Lisa Nerenberg, founder and former Executive Director of the [California Elder Justice Coalition](#) (CEJC), decided it was time to transition from her role, an initial step was developing a job description for a new ED. The CEJC Steering Committee initiated a process that opened unexpected opportunities for the coalition to self-assess and identify the type of leadership and culture it wanted to move forward with. As discussions on leadership progressed, valuable elements of the coalition's culture emerged, and they sought a process to maintain these aspects through and beyond the leadership transition. "This surprised me," shared Lisa. "I knew they liked our meetings, which were not stressful but supportive, and we were able to get work done. But our culture had grown organically. This was the first time I can remember that the group actively thought about leadership and culture intentionally." Values became central to their discussions, helping the committee frame a purposeful approach to the leadership transition and setting the group up to envision the future. "They liked that they had permission to be bold," continued Lisa. "They wanted to ensure that boldness and leading with their values, particularly when external challenges emerge, were fundamental pieces of any future strategic planning."

Lisa credits many of the coalition's successes to their willingness to be bold and lead with their values. "The group is not afraid to think outside of the box or use unconventional approaches. Many people say choose your top priorities — don't get distracted — but we developed a comprehensive plan that prioritizes relationships, leaves nobody out, and that allowed us to be responsive to new opportunities which we couldn't have predicted." This values-centered approach



enabled CEJC to prioritize the needs of underserved communities, invest in [restorative justice initiatives](#), and develop a multifaceted advocacy strategy.

“Legislative change is very hard in California, so we had to find the right places to have an impact. We called for a legislative analyst’s report, spearheaded a state study on guardianship that will include reform recommendations, and are active in the state’s Elder and Disability Justice Coordinating Council. As the group thought about what the next chapter of the coalition could be, ensuring our capacity to continue in that way became important and exciting.”

Reflecting on and identifying the group’s values reinforced the CEJC Steering Committee’s commitment, allowing them to learn from the type of leadership Lisa provided and to set a path for welcoming in new leadership with confidence.

Approach: Prioritize transparency.

Clear and transparent processes for decision-making, communication, and financial management help build a culture that is mindful of power dynamics and fosters trust in leadership. This builds confidence across the coalition and establishes an organizational culture in which leadership, members, volunteers, and staff can work together. Transparency also helps create a culture in which people can step up when others need to step back, which can be crucial for coalitions whose participation may be in flux due to conflicting priorities among volunteer members.

Approach: Create a framework for accountability.

Transparency can be a building block for accountability. With clear, transparent systems and communication, coalition members understand what to expect from one another and, in turn, can hold each other accountable. Accountability practices that are normalized within a coalition’s processes help establish mutual respect and trust among participants in their capacity to meet goals and work in alignment with the coalition’s values and mission.



“Building trust with colleagues is often about follow-through. When you say you want to do something, you need to do it. Show others that you care and that you will give the collective your time and energy. Small things go a long way.”

— Anna Thomas, Executive Director, NCSTEJC.



Accountability practices can include:

- Create group agreements
- Utilize a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or a group charter
- Establish clear expectations and realistic deadlines
- Establish a process for transparent communication that enables flexibility when plans need to be adjusted.
- Utilize a skilled facilitator who is practiced at navigating conflict productively.



RESOURCES FOR BUILDING ACCOUNTABILITY

- [Framework for Developing Community/Group Agreements](#)
- [Basic MOU Template](#)
- [Indigenous-centered Ethical MOU generator](#)
- [Coalition Charter Template](#)

Approach: Be attuned to positionality and power.

Positionality refers to a person’s understanding of themselves in the context of their identities, lived experiences, roles, behaviors, and how they are perceived and treated by systems and others. Leaders with a clear understanding of their own positionality can help engage various perspectives around the table, mitigate biases, identify strengths and growth opportunities, recognize power dynamics, and contribute to building consensus on values. Additionally, an awareness of power dynamics can have a significant impact on culture. Coalitions may have uneven distributions of power, often rooted in the institutional power of individual



organizations. This creates an environment for diminished member engagement, a narrowing of perspectives, and an inability to adapt when needed. Coalitions are well-positioned to equalize institutional power dynamics by creating a culture where power and respect are shared across organizations and the people representing them. Assess where and how power is located and determine who may need support in better utilizing their power to meet coalition goals.

Tips for protecting against unhealthy power dynamics include:

- Utilize a consent model for decision-making
- Rotate and share responsibility for facilitating and agenda planning among organizations
- Provide opportunities for members to suggest agenda items before coalition meetings
- Utilize facilitation models, such as generative dialogue, that are designed to ensure each person's voice is heard.
- Utilize a facilitator who is skilled at keeping the group accountable to one another.
- Prioritize information sharing between organizations.
- Embrace conflict as a productive way to problem solve, rather than an inherently divisive outcome.

Attention to positionality and power helps to incorporate authenticity and trust into a coalition's culture. In turn, authenticity and trustworthiness are building blocks for a sustainable organization. These qualities demonstrate reliability and integrity, fostering strong connections with members, partners, communities, and funders, regardless of their position within the broader systemic context.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:

- Positionality and power: pages 71-75





Approach: Be culturally responsive and build a sense of belonging.

Multidisciplinary in nature, coalitions bring together a diverse group of people from varied perspectives and lived experiences to achieve a common goal. It is the job of coalition leadership to create a space where all members can participate fully, feel safe being themselves, and have a sense of belonging within the group.

This includes incorporating practices that:

- Give time for learning and sharing about cultural differences and perspectives.
- Not centering one group's needs or voice over another.
- Utilizing facilitation practices that are designed to include all voices meaningfully.
- Setting examples for receiving and incorporating feedback respectfully and without unnecessary tension.

Building a culture where everyone feels they belong sets a standard that, despite differences, coalition members support each other. It encourages cohesion, improves the group's ability to handle conflict effectively, creates more freedom to share innovative ideas, and boosts a coalition's capacity to drive meaningful systemic change.

“People speak when it’s safe, when it matters, and when speaking leads to change. Culture isn’t built by soliciting feedback — it’s built by how leaders respond when feedback is hard to hear...real alignment starts with acknowledging that people won’t raise the hard stuff unless you actively make room for it — and protect them when they do.”¹⁷

Approach: Create space for relationship building.

Trust is often built when coalition members get to know one another on a more personal level. Plan time during meetings for checking in and set up networking or social events to create space for chatting, sharing food or drinks, and discussing



family, hobbies, and interests. This level of relationship building can become more difficult in a virtual setting, but it is not impossible. Leave time at the beginning of agendas for people to talk casually or use icebreakers that let them share more about themselves than would come up during regular business. Focusing on relationship building creates an equalizing effect across coalition members, who often come from diverse positions and lived experiences, but frequently find common ground and trust beyond the boundaries of work.



FROM THE FIELD:

After the Meeting Chats

During her time at the Vulnerable Adult Project, Iris Freeman learned that there was a direct connection between spending quality time with the group and building effective advocacy strategies. “The process of defining what it is you’re trying to achieve is a very important part of ensuring that your message will be clear and that the disparate voices of the coalition will stick together no matter what. This takes patience. At the Vulnerable Adult Justice Project, our advocacy took time; we laid a lot of groundwork, had debates, allowed for give and take among members...and someone always brought cookies. Good cookies.”

Part of their advocacy success was rooted in the group getting to know each other personally. “In retrospect, it was good to have Friday afternoon meetings. Afterwards, many of us would go out for a bite or something to drink,” continued Iris. “We never talked about work. We talked about our families, our experiences, and the world. This built an undeniable trust that, when we were back in our meetings, it was easier to find consensus among those of us with opposing views because we had cultivated a level of respect with one another. Now I look at facilitating a group like hosting a party. There must be space for people to be themselves and share who they are. The social aspect of a coalition cannot be underestimated. It is often trivialized, but it makes a major difference to know the lives of the people you are working with.”





QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Building coalition culture:¹⁸

1. Who is included in decision-making, and who in the coalition is heard more than others?
2. What are coalition leaders willing to lose or risk in order to act in accordance with the coalition's values?
3. What example-setting or behaviors are demonstrated by coalition leadership?
4. Are current coalition leaders aligned with the coalition's values?
5. Does leadership behavior support the needs of the larger group?



RESOURCES FOR BUILDING INTERNAL TRUST:

- [7 Tips for Building Healthy Culture in Coalitions](#)
- [Training for Change: Online Facilitation Tools](#)

Strategies for Building External Trust:

1. Develop comprehensive awareness campaigns responsive to current needs.

An effective awareness campaign can build trust among coalition and community members, partner organizations, policymakers, and funders alike. Often, a primary goal of many EJC's is to raise awareness of elder justice and elder abuse issues, demonstrating to others that an EJC is committed to providing practical, organized, and timely information that meets tangible needs. Coalitions can showcase their reliability and deepen relationships with their varied audiences by creating strategic awareness campaigns designed for impact.

Approach: Include those most proximate to the problem when identifying needs and potential solutions.

A common pitfall in awareness campaigns is a lack of clarity on the nuances of an issue, which can lead to ineffective communication or solutions. Including those most impacted by the problem, as well as systems closest to addressing (or creating) it, can help mitigate this. Partnering with both those affected by an issue and those who influence it reduces the risk that a coalition will make decisions based on assumptions, one of the quickest ways to lose trust. Starting from a place of curiosity and learning enables a coalition to develop awareness strategies that address the root of an issue, establish priorities, and avoid unengaging, surface-level interventions.



FROM THE FIELD:

Start with Learning

When Anna Thomas, Executive Director of NCSTEJC, led the [Crimes Against Disabled and Elderly Task Force](#) in Georgia, she initiated projects with curiosity, first learning from trusted community members and professionals before taking action. “I would lean on folks who already had trust in the community and see how our group could work with them. I would be curious about how the community is structured and how community members respond to different organizations and systems, and then go from there. My approach was always to ask what I could learn, and what do they need?” shared Anna. This was also true for the community members and systems working to respond to elder abuse. “Coalitions cannot go to any entity, like law enforcement or victim services, and say, ‘this is how you need to do your job.’ If someone isn’t able to do their job, it’s usually because they have a need, so then the coalition’s work can be about raising awareness and addressing their need to create deep-rooted systemic change.”



RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

- [Facilitating Powers Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#)



FROM THE FIELD:

We started at A, but ended at B.

The Rhode Island Coalition for Elder Justice aimed to raise awareness of issues affecting older adults' ability to live safely in their homes. Robin Covington, former Coalition Director, began with a meeting among the coalition, the Deputy Director of the RI Medicaid Program, and the Associate Director of Medicaid and Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) Programs, Eligibility and Operations. "We went into this meeting with a specific goal," shared Robin. "We wanted to gather information for a letter to state legislators to raise awareness on CNA staffing shortages and their impact on home-dwelling independence."

As they unpacked the issue together, other issues emerged from their conversation. In addition to CNA shortages, a significant bottleneck was occurring with LTSS case management approvals. "There were 900 pending LTSS cases that would take at least 90 days to approve, and a couple thousand cases waiting for conflict-free case management," continued Robin. "We went in thinking we had a staffing issue, which we do, but walked away knowing that there is also a serious systems issue creating a real roadblock for older adults to access the care they need in their homes." This led the group to commit to each other to set up regular meetings and continue the dialogue to address this issue head-on. By engaging those within the system, the coalition was able to pinpoint specific challenges, which, in turn, will streamline how, when, and to whom they raise awareness about issues impacting the safety of older adults in their homes.

Approach: Position the coalition as an educator and expert to policymakers and legislators.

Legislators, policymakers, and administrators are extremely busy and must be tuned in to multiple issues simultaneously. They rely on organizations like EJs to provide them with trustworthy, timely information to best meet the needs of their constituents. Building awareness campaigns that position the coalition as a reliable source of information for policymakers can have a profound impact on the level of



influence a coalition can exert on systems-level change. Often, an awareness campaign can position a coalition as a bridge between the issues impacting older adults and the solutions policymakers can implement. With trust established, many legislators and policymakers can serve as champions for a coalition both on policy issues and through budgetary support.



FROM THE FIELD:

From stories to systems change

In September 2025, the [Wisconsin Elder Justice Coalition](#) coordinated the Frontline Briefing for Policymakers at the state capitol to raise awareness on financial exploitation and elder abuse with state and local policymakers. Designing for impact, the coalition identified the stories most likely to move legislators and assembled a panel of speakers offering a breadth of perspectives on the issues facing older adults across Wisconsin.

They invited Paul Greenwood, a retired San Diego Deputy District Attorney with national clout, to start the event. Then they prioritized time for a panel of people with on-the-ground experience, either those who had experienced financial exploitation or had worked firsthand with those impacted. This included a retired law enforcement officer, who is also the daughter of a victim of financial exploitation; representatives from financial institutions; a prosecutor; and county APS. “The stories people shared gave such insight into the problem of financial exploitation, and the energy that has come from this meeting is really impactful,” shared Laura Nolan, Associate Director. “Immediately, we started receiving emails with questions and comments about what people heard during the briefing. And the coalition was asked by the Speaker-appointed committee on elder issues to provide additional education and support for legislators on understanding elder justice, along with an invitation to testify at an upcoming hearing.”

The coalition was able to leverage its understanding of elder justice across multiple Wisconsin communities and identify who could best share their



experiences with policymakers responsible for policy-level changes. By doing this, they demonstrated to legislators that they have a pulse on issues occurring in Wisconsin communities, can be trusted to provide reliable information, are organized enough to deliver what they need, and serve as an ongoing resource to support legislative priorities affecting older adults throughout the state.

Approach: Create awareness opportunities that foster sharing, respect, and preservation of culture.

Building trust happens over time and can often take many months or years to develop. Breaking trust, however, can occur in an instant, particularly if respect for cultural differences is not prioritized. Awareness campaigns can be an excellent opportunity to connect with communities and build relationships if time is taken to understand, honor, and respect the cultures of those you hope to engage with. For example, there are 574 federally recognized sovereign Native Nations across the United States, each with its own system of government, culture, history, language, traditions, etc. However, a common challenge expressed by many Tribal communities is stereotyping and treating all Indigenous communities as a homogenous group, with a lack of respect and understanding for the vast diversity that exists across them. If coming from an outside perspective, starting from a place of respectful learning can demonstrate a commitment to building campaigns and solutions that honor the uniqueness of each community you hope to work with or support.



FROM THE FIELD:

Work at the Speed of Trust

To better understand the relationship between Tribal communities and APS programs, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services hired Diane Hofstedt, Tribal APS Specialist and a Bad River Band of Lake Superior Tribal Member, to initiate a temporary project to learn from and build connections. Diane collaborated with the Wisconsin Elder Justice Coalition (WEJC) to deepen the understanding of existing Tribal programs, strengthen connections with county





APS, and expand collaboration with Tribal communities. As a coalition representative, Debi Leis, WEJC Program Specialist, supported the project with relationship-building efforts and helped to bridge state, county, and Tribal systems.

Together, they coordinated four roundtable events: three for Tribal communities and one that allowed for engagement between Tribal communities and state and county systems. “Collaboration between state and county systems and Tribal communities is so important because they have programs that Tribal communities do not have access to. However, the approach of these programs is not always aligned with what a Tribal community may need,” shared Diane.

Diane aimed to create an initiative that would allow Tribes to share their needs, and for systems like APS to begin building relationships and developing processes that better serve individual communities based on their specific needs. “An appropriate approach to elder justice is going to look different for each Tribe. But across all Tribes, elders should have the biggest voice on the issue.” Before coordinating the roundtables, Diane and Debi met with the leadership and elders of all 11 federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin, as well as the leadership of three of the largest Tribal programs in Milwaukee. “The first and most important thing you need to do is prioritize trust and relationship building, particularly if you do not already have a connection with the Tribe,” continued Diane. “We met with Tribal elders at food sovereignty sites, where they eat their lunch. We spoke with Tribal leadership and asked for permission before engaging with anyone. I conducted an environmental scan and compiled a substantial amount of research before designing the event plans for the roundtables, and we based the roundtables on topics elders brought up during those initial conversations.”

“Each roundtable started with a prayer in the native language, drums, and speakers from the community,” shared Debi. “We ensured that cultural elements were interwoven throughout the events. During our visits with Tribal Elders, we provided information about APS, the Coalition, and financial exploitation, and gave time and space for people to share their own stories.”

For many of the Elders, this was the first time they had been given the opportunity to share their own lived experiences on these issues. “It was clear that we really had their attention, and that people had been holding on to these stories for a long time with no one to share them with,” added Diane. “So, we gave them time, adjusted our plans, and did what we could to earn their trust. Elders have the primary voice on this issue. We really need to listen to their wisdom on how to approach elder justice in their own communities.”

What emerged from the Tribal visits and roundtables was an expanded understanding of how to build bridges between Tribes and state systems, along with a foundation for new relationships that the coalition plans to build on into the future.



RESOURCES FOR WORKING IN AND WITH TRIBAL COMMUNITIES:

- [Justice for Tribal Elders: Issues Impacting American Indian and Alaska Native Older Adults](#)
- [National Indigenous Justice Information Inclusion \(NIJII\) WEAAD Indigenous Song — It’s Time to Protect the Elders](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:

- Considerations for Tribal Elder and Tribal Communities: pages 28-39

2. Develop a streamlined and person-centered communications strategy.

At their core, marketing and communications are about building and strengthening relationships, creating pathways for trust, and motivating people into action. Using a person-centered approach to your communications prioritizes the needs and perspectives of your audience, working towards establishing trust between your coalition and those you hope to support or influence. A streamlined communications strategy enables your coalition to use its resources effectively, adjust as needed,

establish clear priorities, plan for potential ripple effects, and ultimately achieve greater impact—all of which are critical when sustainability is an overarching goal.

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Approach: Identify clear reasons for your communications.

Identifying clear reasons for your communications will keep your strategy on target and help prevent your messaging from getting lost or misunderstood by your intended audiences. Before developing your materials, social media, press releases, etc., catalogue what programmatic goals you hope to achieve and identify how communications efforts can tangibly move you towards meeting those goals.

Approach: Identify the right audiences to meet your goals.

Your audience will change depending on what you are trying to achieve with your communications. Aim to be as targeted as possible when identifying your audience and avoid creating communications for the “general public.” The more specific you get, the better able you will be at developing communications that elicit a response. Most communications from coalitions should inspire action, ranging from learning more about an issue to encouraging people to contact their legislators. By targeting audiences based on your goals, you can better fine-tune your requests, making it more likely that the intended audience will take action.

Audience categories can include:¹⁹

- People from specific locations, demographics, identities, or family and professional roles.
- Your base audience: People who are already supportive of your issues
- Your movable middle: People who can be persuaded
- Your target: People or institutions whose behavior you want to influence
- Your opponents: People who are strongly opposed to your issues.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Identifying the right audience

1. Who is most impacted by the issue?
2. Who has the most influence on shaping or influencing the issue?
3. Who already supports the issue?
4. Who are you not currently talking to who is impacted by the issue?
5. What audience or communities are your coalitions already connected to, or have influence within?

Approach: Identify where your audience already goes for information.

People inherently collect information all day, and often those with similar interests, lived experiences, or identities access it in similar places. Communications are best received when you meet people where they are, rather than trying to convince them to come to you. Understanding where your audience already goes for information will help you to narrow down the tactics and platforms you use to reach them.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Identifying where people access information²⁰

1. What online spaces do your intended audience use?
2. Where does your intended audience spend time?
3. What community leaders, cultural figures, or online influencers does your intended audience listen to?
4. What types of stories influence your intended audience?

Approach: Create targeted messaging.

Once you have identified who you want to reach, create key messaging targeted to each audience. The following framework can help you streamline your message



development process and can be used to create written content or to develop talking points for presentations, press engagements, or networking:²¹

- 
1. **Start with shared values:** Research shows that messages that begin with shared values are more likely to resonate with people than those that start by identifying a problem, discussing policies, or giving facts. Starting with shared values also mitigates the ever-growing problem of crisis fatigue by giving people something to relate to on a personal and emotional level.

To help identify which values will resonate with your audience, start by identifying the values behind your original goal. For example, if your programmatic goal is to coordinate priorities across statewide agencies, then the values associated with that goal would include knowledge, collaboration, cooperation, transparency, and so on. You can use those values to develop messaging that will resonate with your audiences.

VALUE STATEMENT EXAMPLE: Access to safety (value) and independence (value) for older adults often depends on systems and supports working well together (value).

2. **State the problem framed as a threat to the values you've identified.**

Clearly stating the problem while tying it back to the values you've identified will help keep your audience interested in the issue. You can and should use data, facts, and stories to back up your problem statement.

PROBLEM STATEMENT EXAMPLE: Lack of communication between APS and law enforcement leaves many older adults experiencing harm without a clear pathway to safety. Families should be able to rely on these systems designed to provide support; however, the cracks in the system have resulted in many older adults lacking the care they need and putting them at risk for future harm.



3. **Provide clear and actionable solutions.** When it comes to inspiring people to take action, providing clear solutions does a lot of the work for them. You remove the obstacle of people having to come up with ways to contribute and give them clear direction. To help keep your audience engaged, create concise messaging that shifts quickly from a problem statement to a solution.

SOLUTION STATEMENT EXAMPLE: Elder Justice Coalitions can better support older adults by opening pathways for communication among professionals, increasing collaboration among agencies, and expanding training and education opportunities for law enforcement and APS.

4. **Provide a concrete action for the audience to take.** Providing your audience with a call to action helps build a relationship with them, encourages participation, prompts them to learn more about the issue, and opens pathways for future engagement, all while advancing your coalition's goals.

ACTION STATEMENT EXAMPLES:

- Contact your representatives to request increased funding for elder justice initiatives and enhanced law enforcement training on elder abuse.
- Sign up for our newsletter to learn about and attend our next coalition meeting.
- Register for our free webinar on collaboration between APS and law enforcement.



Tips for Developing Effective Communications Efforts:

- **Be realistic about your capacity.** Do not take on more than your resources and skills can handle. Lean on coalition members who have the right skills and access to power and or resources to help deliver your messages.
- **Be organized.** Create a content calendar to track where and how you are engaging with your audience, as well as what has worked and what hasn't.
- **Be consistent.** Repetition is critical for landing messages. People often need to hear content multiple times to register it as important.
- **Use storytelling.** Telling a meaningful story is the most effective way to convey a message. People find themselves in others' stories. Stories can build connections and help bridge gaps. Stories are also easier to digest and easier for your audience to share with others.
- **Plan for accessibility.** Leave time in your planning process and allocate funds in your budget to ensure your written and digital communications, along with virtual and in-person events, are accessible.
- **Be culturally responsive.** Include members of the communities you hope to target in your communications planning process. When this is not possible, take the time to build relationships with community members before creating communications materials for them.
- **Avoid myth-busting.** When trying to correct misinformation, repeating it often unconsciously reinforces the false information. Instead of restating a falsehood, offer the correct information using the framework above, including values, solutions, and actions.
- **Get out and talk to people.** Your most effective communication tool is connecting with people authentically. Prioritize relationship and trust-building. Use traditional communications strategies as complements to real-life engagement. The more people become familiar with the coalition, the more likely they are to engage with your initiatives and participate in your advocacy efforts.



RESOURCES FOR MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT:

- [Narrative Design Toolkit](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:](#)

- Communications tools: page 96
- Storytelling and message framing tools: pages 96-97



3. Develop compelling and relevant professional training opportunities.

Like awareness campaigns, professional training opportunities are a way for an EJC to showcase its capacity as a trusted resource for the field, policymakers, and community members.

From a sustainability perspective, offering training opportunities to professionals can help your coalition meet many goals, including:

- Build the coalition's network
- Foster connections across agencies
- Increase the capacity of partner organizations to do aligned work
- Establish the coalition as a reliable source of information
- Recruit new coalition members
- Serve as a fundraising tool.

Tips for coordinating professional training opportunities:

- Coordinate opportunities with local and national talent to broaden your reach.
- Connect with potential presenters at national and regional conferences.
- Plan for accessibility accommodations, such as ASL or closed captions, for in-person and virtual events. Include accessibility as a line item in your budget and ask for accommodation needs on event registration forms.



- Establish a conference planning committee to share the workload among coalition members.
- Be culturally responsive to the audience and the surrounding community in which you are presenting. If your coalition does not reflect the communities you're training, partner with members of those communities, particularly if your audience includes Tribal members and other historically marginalized groups.
- Set time for cultural rituals, traditions, and audience story sharing.
- Support trainers in framing their content to align with your coalition's goals.
- Build bridges between professionals with different perspectives (e.g., medical professionals, advocates, law enforcement) by incorporating opportunities for collaboration into your trainings, such as working on a case study or problem-solving together.
- Consider the room design and seat layout to best meet the goals of your training.
- Be flexible and responsive to your audience's needs. Do not hesitate to pivot your training plan if it better serves the group.
- Solicit feedback from participants to assess, adjust, and improve future trainings.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Designing a training²²

1. What will make a training worth the attendees' time and/or money?
2. Who is your target audience, or who will be attending?
3. How does the content you share inform your specific audience's work?
4. What does your audience already know?
5. How can you build on the information your audience already has?
6. What are the power dynamics or different agendas of audience members?

7. What do you want participants to walk away with (i.e., increased knowledge, call to action, etc.)?
8. What do you want to learn from your audience?



FROM THE FIELD:

Creating an event people come back to

From the start, OCAPS founders had a vision for the coalition to elevate a platform for elder abuse across the state, aiming to create “something to be reckoned with.” The idea of an annual conference emerged and was successful from the outset, with hundreds attending their inaugural conference in 1985. Forty years later, the event remains a mainstay for aging, APS, and elder justice professionals across Ohio.

“We have done different things over the years, but we always go back to centering our advocacy work and our conference because those are the things we do best and have the most impact. By focusing on what we are good at, we have been able to grow our reputation as a coalition,” shared Sylvia Pla-Raith, former OCAPS Board Chair. Described by coalition members as their shining star, the annual conference has continued to position OCAPS as a central force in elder justice in Ohio. “The success of our conference over the years has allowed us to do several things,” continued Sylvia, “we are able to create connections between people and agencies across the state, create access to national speakers that local professionals may not otherwise have access to, position OCAPS as a peer-to-peer support for county APS programs, and it has provided a level of financial sustainability to enable us to continue our work year to year.”

OCAPS dedicates a significant portion of its board’s time to planning and executing a successful conference, utilizing volunteer hours to secure sponsorships, organize scholarships, coordinate and connect with engaging speakers, and collaborate with universities to provide reasonably priced event spaces. “A lot of work goes into coordinating the conference every year, but it continues to be worth it,” continued Sylvia. “But that doesn’t mean we haven’t had to pivot year to year to make it a





success. Agencies are having to do more with less, and expiring funding programs, such as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), have impacted attendance. Over the years, we shifted the conference from two days to one day to accommodate but always plan to make it as robust as it's always been.” As a volunteer coalition, OCAPS dedicates person-hours to its advocacy work, but a conference requires significant financial contributions. “We have laid a lot of groundwork and built a lot of relationships over the years, enabling us to secure sponsorships from state departments, law firms, financial institutions, etc. However, we also rely on registration fees to cover approximately half of the cost. If people are paying to attend, we make sure we are continuously putting on an event that people want to come back to.”



RESOURCES FOR EVENT PLANNING:

- [Nonprofit Event Planning Guide](#)
- [Conference Planning 101](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:](#)

- Training and facilitation tools: page 86
- Creating accessible materials, meetings, and events: page 97



Chapter 3

Adaptability



Strategies for Building Adaptability:

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4. Identify the skills, strengths, capacity, and power of members, staff, board, and partner organizations.	65
5. Encourage relationship building across organizations.	68



Sustainability not only requires us to think about the future but also to have the capacity to adapt to emerging opportunities and challenges as they arise. Ever-shifting political landscapes, new policy or community needs, funding uncertainty or unexpected opportunities, emergencies, staff turnover, and organizational restructures are just a few reasons why a coalition should lead with adaptability in mind and always be prepared for the pivot. The following strategies can help your coalition build infrastructure to adapt to expected and unexpected shifts along the road.

Strategies to build adaptability include:

1. Plan for leadership transitions ahead of time
2. Expect uncertainty and be prepared to adapt and pivot.
3. Make memory keeping and storytelling structural.
4. Identify the skills, strengths, capacity, and power of members, staff, board, and partner organizations.
5. Encourage relationship building across organizations.

Strategies for Building Adaptability:

1. Plan for leadership transitions ahead of time.

Preemptive succession planning is a strong foundational approach that supports a coalition's adaptability. By making succession planning a foundational, ongoing strategic priority, a coalition will be better served when the time comes for a planned or unplanned leadership transition.

Approach: Prioritize capacity building and mentorship for emerging leaders and coalition members.

Building the skills and capacity of coalition members helps establish a larger, more qualified pool of potential leaders in the field and within your coalition. Skill

building can include mentorship on hard skills, such as testimony development and grant writing, as well as soft skills, such as networking and relationship building.

Approach: Encourage relationship building across coalition membership.

Create opportunities and encourage coalition members to build and manage relationships with partners, funders, and allied professionals. This creates a culture where influential relationships are not exclusive to leadership and encourages all members to be champions of the coalition's work. Should leadership change occur, if meaningful relationships are more dispersed, you mitigate the risk of losing those connections during the transition. This also helps broaden the coalition's reach and create a stronger network overall.

Approach: Build transparency into your systems.

Information held by one person is information lost when that person leaves the coalition. Create systems of transparency across your coalition's processes to ensure that information is accessible to all. This can include using a shared drive for coalition documents, using workflow and task management tools, maintaining and sharing meeting minutes, providing detailed onboarding materials, and establishing a process during meetings to give updates and ask clarifying questions.

Approach: Identify what values and skills the group needs from its leadership.

Understanding how coalition members need and want to be led can aid in finding new leadership when the time comes. This assessment can also help the current leader identify shifts needed or capacity improvements in their own leadership to best fit the needs of the group. Include a process for reassessing values and required skills over time to ensure they continue to align with the coalition's current goals and needs.

Approach: Include succession planning in each strategic planning process.

Including succession planning in your regular strategic planning processes helps the group remain current on leadership needs and mitigates scrambling to create a plan should an unexpected leadership change be necessary. Plan to include an



emergency leadership transition plan and a long-term plan during this process. Planning ahead also allows coalitions to feel confident that the work will continue smoothly in the event of an unexpected leadership or staff transition.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Planning for Emergency Leadership Transitions:²³

1. Who can ensure the coalition remains financially healthy, manage budgets, approve expenses, etc.?
2. Who can manage contracts and grant compliance?
3. Who can manage or supervise staff?
4. Who can coordinate coalition-wide meetings and communications?
5. What are the potential threats and opportunities resulting from the transition?
6. How does the transition impact current or future funding?
7. What communication do coalition members need during the transition?
8. What information should be shared with external partners?
9. How can external partners support the coalition during the transition time?
10. What roles can board members fill during interim leadership gaps?



FROM THE FIELD:

Planting the seeds for emerging leaders

Pat King, former Section Manager of Georgia's Forensic Special Initiatives Unit and Co-Founder of the Crimes Against the Disabled and Elderly Task Force, did her work with a clarity of purpose and a vision for the future. When Pat began bringing people together to identify gaps and address elder abuse in Georgia, the forensic nurse didn't know she was starting a coalition. Her infectious energy and passion for advocating for and educating others on elder justice drew people in, making them want to listen. "Pat never took no for an answer when it came to advocating



for older adults,” shared Anna Thomas, Pat’s successor and current Executive Director of NCSTEJC. “She could immediately motivate people with her passion and was really good at relating issues to real-life stories. She also knew how to give people with power the information they needed in a way that inspired them to move into action.” While she was a charismatic leader, Pat did not center the work on herself and was always looking for emerging leaders and diverse groups to collaborate with to fill gaps in systems that left older adults at risk. “She was very good at identifying people she knew could take up the work. She planted seeds everywhere she went,” continued Anna.

Pat hired Anna as a Forensic Victim Advocate, and unbeknownst to Anna, from day one, Pat had tapped her as the person to lead the work one day. “Pat immediately took me under her wing and showed me every single thing about running the unit and the task force. Things that at the time had nothing to do with my immediate role, like budgets and management needs. It was overwhelming at times, but looking back, it was so beneficial to have the whole picture, all the ins and outs.” Pat became Anna’s champion and created as many opportunities as possible for Anna to meet people and position herself as a leader in the field.

“Pat was always thinking about succession planning. On one of our many networking trips, she shared that she had always believed I would be the person to step into a leadership position after her. She saw my passion and recognized the vision I could develop to bring the work into its next phase. She saw something in me that I hadn’t yet seen in myself, and she took it upon herself to mentor me so that I would know for myself that I could move our shared vision forward.”

Pat planned for her retirement for about a year, but unexpectedly passed away before the year was up. “The loss was huge, but Pat had spent so much time setting up the group and me for success. I was able to step in and move it forward from there.” Anna credits much of her initial success in her leadership role to the confidence Pat had in her, and how others’ trust in Pat meant they also trusted her. “When it was my turn to lead, I took the same approach Pat did, and I mentored

emerging leaders as much as possible from the start. Pat’s mentorship and planning not only meant a lot, but they also helped keep the work going, and my goal was to continue that into the future.”



RESOURCES FOR LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS:

- [How to Plan and Execute an Emergency Succession](#)
- [Succession Planning for Coalitions](#)
- [Create A Succession Plan for Your Leadership Role Worksheet](#)
- [Coalition Leadership How-To Series](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:

- Leadership change: page 100

2. Expect uncertainty and be prepared to adapt and pivot.

If there is anything consistent about coalition work, it is that change is always present. These shifts can be anticipated, but often they are not. Either way, a sustainable coalition is one that is prepared to adapt or pivot when needed to better achieve its goals and stay true to its mission.

Tips for planning for uncertainty and change:

- Engage in scenario planning to identify potential risks, anticipate challenges, and plan ahead when possible.
- Incorporate [adaptive strategic planning](#) processes that account for inevitable uncertainty and are designed to plan for the short and long-term.
- Be creative. Uncertainty and change require reactivity, which can motivate innovation. Challenging times often require out-of-the-box thinking and creative solution building.



- Have a plan for tracking indicators. There are often clues that can alert you to a potential pivot. Include a process for monitoring political, social, and financial developments that could impact your coalition's work.

From the Field: Knowing when to pivot, even if it's not popular.

Sylvia Pla-Raith, former OCAPS Board Chair, credits OCAPS' longevity to its capacity to adjust and pivot. Throughout its tenure, many things have required OCAPS leadership to adjust priorities, make programmatic changes, or change the coalition's infrastructure to better support engagement. "You have to be a bit brave to keep a coalition going," shared Sylvia. "You're always planning for something without the proper resources. The work does not wait for resources to come in; you need to be willing to move forward with the confidence that things will fall into place, and if they don't, then you pivot. The trick is really knowing when to adjust."

Prior to 2005, Ohio lacked an elder abuse helpline for victim services. OCAPS saw this as a clear need they could fill and successfully accessed Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding to establish the OhioHOPES victim services helpline. OhioHOPES operated for over ten years, during which several other victim services programs emerged. "When we started, there was a need we could fill, but that shifted with time," said Sylvia. "Also, VOCA changed its match requirements from in-kind to a cash contribution. It became an expense the coalition struggled to maintain, and from a business perspective, it no longer made sense for OCAPS to provide direct services."

The decision to close OhioHOPES was not entirely well-received by OCAPS Board members. Many were uncomfortable letting the project manager go, and there were differing opinions on whether the helpline was still relevant, with some believing OCAPS's contribution to victim services still filled a gap. "A group of us could see that if we didn't let go of this program, we weren't going to be able to sustain the coalition long-term. We felt the program had served its purpose, but that it was time, and it was ok to move on," continued Sylvia. "Our first step in making this pivot was designing a strategy for getting others on board with the decision."



Those in favor of the shift formed a committee and developed educational talking points focused on the budget and on making the business case for OCAPS's best interests. Prior to the board vote, the committee members met one-on-one with those opposing the shift to explain their position. "We were very coordinated, very strategic, and in the end convincing," shared Sylvia. "Since that shift, we have done very well. It enabled us to redirect resources to support what we needed, such as an administrative consultant who keeps us focused operationally, allowing the board to prioritize high-level problem-solving and think strategically. And we shifted to focusing on education and advocacy, because ultimately that is where the need is that we are best positioned to fill."



RESOURCES FOR SCENARIO AND PIVOT PLANNING:

- [Managing Uncertainty: A Guide to Scenario Planning](#)
- [Managing Uncertainty: What to Communicate to Your Team](#)
- [Scenario Planning Toolkit for Nonprofits](#)
- [How to Create an Adaptive Plan](#)
- [Responding to Threats and Challenges Planning Tool](#)

3. Make memory keeping and storytelling structural.

When memory keeping and storytelling are structural frames for your coalition's operations, a foundation is created that supports continuity, deep understanding, relationality, and adaptability. Coalitions serve as the connective thread between what is happening in communities, organizations, systems, and among policymakers. Storytelling is an impactful way to keep lines of communication open among those the coalition serves.

Creating time and systems for telling, sharing, and preserving stories enables a coalition to:

- Delve deeper into the nuances of a problem
- Identify and showcase the ripples of impact of issues and solutions

- Identify existing and potential connections between people
- Establish a culture of collective understanding and transparency among coalition members
- Identify throughlines from previous challenges and successes, enabling members to draw on what has and hasn't worked in the past
- Honors past work, and sets the stage for future success

“This is the demand of Indigenous Systems Thinking: construct systems that do not collapse when their designers exit. Install memory as a structural condition. Install continuity as measure. Build architectures that distinguish legitimacy from speed and strength from novelty.”

— Jesse Grey Eagle, *Indigenous Systems Thinking: The Operating System of Sovereignty*

Tips for centering memory keeping and storytelling as coalition structures:

- If providing direct services, incorporate storytelling in your intake process.
- When facilitating decision-making meetings, include storytelling during the initial period of information sharing and level setting. This helps all members be on the same page before making decisions and helps to gain varied perspectives.
- Include time for personal check-ins during meetings.
- Set an example and encourage members to share how they have found themselves in this work, within the coalition, and within their communities.
- Create opportunities for community members to share their lived experiences. This can include standalone opportunities or be incorporated into training engagements.
- Facilitate story sharing in your advocacy and campaign design.
- Engage in regular ceremonial and celebratory practices to honor legacy members, celebrate current wins, and build energy towards the future.

- Utilize [Ripple Effect Mapping](#), a process of sharing stories and connecting the dots between actions, people, and impacts.
- Center your values in your internal and external approaches.
- Incorporate restorative practices into meetings and conflict resolution practices.

A



FROM THE FIELD:

Using storytelling and restorative practices to create bolder conversations

Through the years, the California Elder Justice Coalition has incorporated storytelling into its internal operations to help the group stay true to its mission, goals, and organizational culture. Lisa Nerenberg, former Executive Director, approached steering committee meetings as opportunities to operate from the coalition's values. Using restorative practices as a discussion tool, Lisa introduced talking pieces to ground the group in a conversation about what was in the work for each of them. She asked members to bring their own pieces, but also offered her own — a statue of a rose, with thorns and a bud. The prompts she gave for people to share included: What are you proud of? What do you deserve the rose for? What things have been difficult? What are your thorns? And what are your hopes for the future? What are your buds? "The discussion that came out of this was really meaningful and revealing. What is important is that as long as you are dealing with people on a values-based basis, you are unlikely to go wrong. You need to build in opportunities to keep checking in on that intentionally."

When Donata Bohanec came on board as the next Executive Director, she engaged the group in a Ripple Effect Mapping process that offered opportunities for reflection, sharing of impacts and relationships, and visioning for what's next. "It was really good when Donata started this process," continued Lisa. "It allowed her to hear some of the conversations that were happening before she came on board, maintain some of the history of the coalition, and then establish how to reinforce those values and goals into the future."



“One thing that made my transition easier was the cultural tone that had already been established with the group. There was a sense of being in it together, that the coalition never felt like one person owned it, and everyone involved could articulate their personal investment,” shared Donata. With that foundation, Donata felt set up to look deeply at the programs and really envision the future. “The Ripple Effect Mapping process allowed us to see how our current work, particularly with the A*team, could be built out into more substantial programming, which we could then leverage to gain interest from funders, allowing us to have a broader impact over time.”



RESOURCES FOR STORYTELLING AS A PRACTICE:

- [Mending the Arc: Art and Storytelling Circles](#)

4. Identify the skills, strengths, capacity, and power of members, staff, board, and partner organizations.

Adaptability depends on the team’s skills, strengths, and capacity. Taking the time to understand members’ skills, networks, power, and strengths allows a coalition to quickly identify which members are best suited to help reach each goal. This demonstrates to funders, community members, partner organizations, and legislators that the coalition is organized and can effectively mobilize without wasting resources, time, or energy.

“The skill in mobilizing coalitions and networks is not simply enabling people to play together, but doing so in a way that plays to their individual and organizational strengths. A clever coalition can deploy different members for different tasks — strategic thinking, design, research, communications — and enjoy a huge diversity of talent....The result is much swifter action, and a more responsive and dynamic team.”²⁴

Approach: Build the coalition membership and network with people who have complementary strengths and skills.

“Every individual has the ability to create change, but no one individual can change a system on their own.” — Lily Zheng



Author and strategist Lily Zheng identified seven roles for collaboratives to fill to achieve a sustainable, effective impact in their changemaking efforts. To be adaptable, work to build a coalition comprised of people with the skills, assets, and strengths to fill each complementary role:²⁵

CHANGEMAKER ROLES ²⁶	
The Advocate	A charismatic, vocal person, able to raise awareness and add momentum to an initiative
The Educator	A person who can change minds through increasing knowledge. Skilled at distilling and communicating information to funders, systems organizations, professionals, and legislators.
The Organizer	A person who is skilled at seeing a problem from multiple angles and convening people to build right-fit solutions.
The Strategist	A person who can see the long view of a problem, drill down to root causes, and find effective solutions.
The Backer	An influential person who can legitimize a coalition, either through regular engagement, funding, or championing the work to others.
The Builder	A person who is skilled at taking ideas and turning them into action. Detail oriented, and able to effectively develop policies and processes.
The Reformer	A person who is skilled at thinking long-term about the coalition’s sustainable health. Good at identifying where adjustments and pivots are needed.



Approach: Use power effectively to respond to and create change.

Every person in a coalition holds some type of power. An adaptable coalition knows who has what type of power and can support them in using it to further the group's goals. Having power, or the ability to influence, can increase a coalition's capacity to adapt to changing landscapes and be sustainable over time.

POSITIONAL POWER TYPES²⁷

Informational	Having and controlling access to information others need
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Formal	The formal ability to make demands or expect compliance
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Coercive	The ability to threaten punishment to influence behavior
-----------------	--

Reward	The ability to give or withhold consequences or rewards, and remove negative factors
---------------	--

PERSONAL POWER TYPES

Expert	Having distinctive or advanced knowledge, ability, skills based on education or experience
---------------	--

Referent	Possessing respect and admiration, and the ability to build rapport and influence behavior through charisma
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To plan for adaptability and responsiveness, take the time to assess who within the coalition holds which roles and which types of power. Many people will fall into multiple categories. Once you know who makes up your team, you can fill in the gaps and mobilize each person more efficiently as needs emerge.



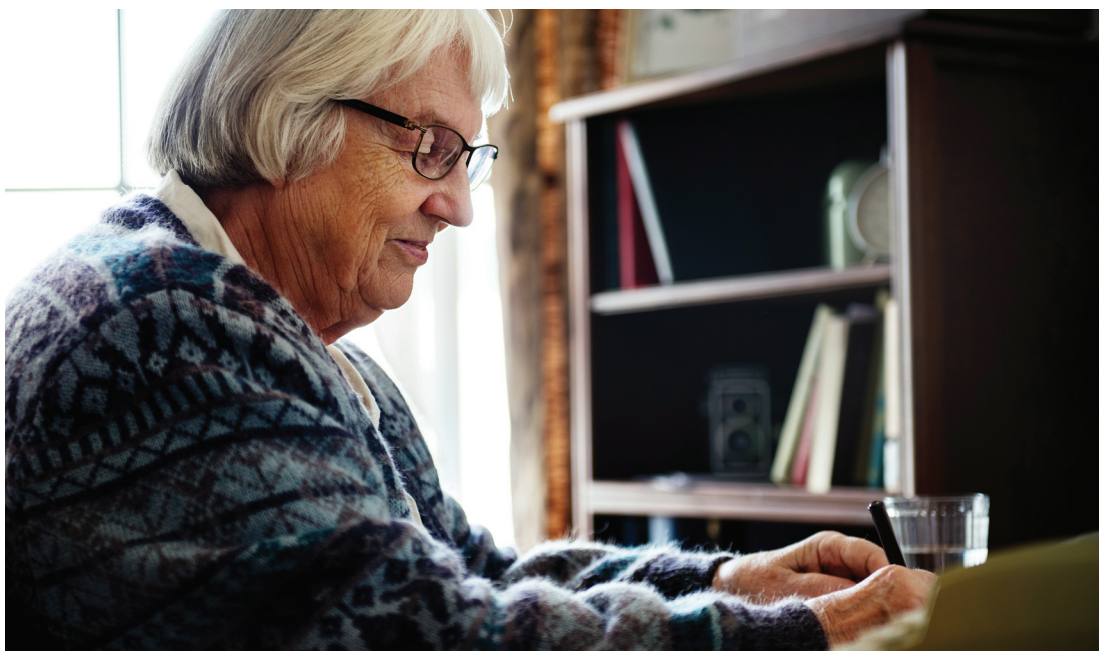
5. Encourage relationship building across organizations.

Almost every strategy in the STAR Framework centers relationship building. However, to be adaptable in our partnerships, we must also be expansive and diverse in how we create those relationships. Relying on one person to build relationships, or having a relationship with just one person at a partner organization, is a common mistake that leaves coalitions starting at square one when that relationship ends. Staff turnover, lost connections, and changing priorities put collaborative relationships at risk. Establish a coalition culture that fosters relationships among all members across partner organizations at all levels, thereby mitigating the loss of a meaningful collaborative partner. Diversity of relationships also allows a coalition to be effectively adaptable, enabling it to call on a variety of people when change presents itself.



Chapter 4

Responsiveness



Strategies for Building Responsiveness:

1. Give decisions the time they need to be thoughtful and strategic.	
Not all responses require urgency.	70
2. Increase your capacity to respond to emergencies and breaking news.	73
3. Cultivate a strong and diverse network of members and partners	
built on sincere relationships.	75
4. Collaborate on intersecting issues.	77
5. Have a plan for navigating conflict.	79
6. Build comprehensive and targeted advocacy strategies.	81



Being responsive is about being prepared, keyed into the world around you, having a reliable and thoughtful network, and a willingness to change your mind. The ability to be responsive impacts an EJC's sustainability efforts on multiple fronts. Internally, coalition leaders must be responsive to coalition members and staff as well as ongoing organizational needs, and must address conflicting opinions productively. Externally, EJCs must know how to respond to thought leaders and key decision-makers who can influence the coalition's work, as well as to emerging issues as they arise. A coalition's capacity for responsiveness affects the stability of its organizational infrastructure and its ability to remain relevant and innovative in the face of the issues it seeks to influence. A coalition's capacity to be strategically and thoughtfully responsive showcases its value to the broader community of aging professionals, older adults, policymakers, and funders.

Strategies for building responsiveness include:

1. Give decisions the time they need to be thoughtful and strategic.
Not all responses require urgency.
2. Increase your capacity to respond to emergencies and breaking news.
3. Cultivate a strong and diverse network of members and partners built on sincere relationships.
4. Collaborate on intersecting issues.
5. Have a plan for navigating conflict.
6. Build comprehensive and targeted advocacy campaigns.

Strategies for Building Responsiveness

1. Give decisions the time they need to be thoughtful and strategic. **Not all responses require urgency.**

While urgency is sometimes required, responsiveness is not defined by urgency but by the capacity to be thoughtful and strategic. External factors such as funding

guidelines, news cycles, and opportunity deadlines can create an environment where speed is prioritized over the quality of responses. However, the instinct to be urgent in all responses puts an EJC at risk for forgoing accountability, excluding those most proximate to the issue, and creating opportunities to break trust. When “Decisions are forced before readiness; elders are excluded because they ‘take too long’; relationships collapse under the weight of speed. Institutions call this responsiveness, yet the result is fracture repeated as process.”²⁸ With proper planning and organized systems in place, a coalition can respond to emerging needs in strategic and timely ways.



FROM THE FIELD:

Taking the time for intergenerational wisdom sharing

“In America, our business culture puts far too much pressure on delivering results too soon,” shared Donata Bohanec, Executive Director of the California Elder Justice Coalition. It’s beautiful that we get to be involved in a world that addresses what aging looks like, because as we age, we get wiser. You can’t take a pill and get wise; you can’t become wise on a deadline. It’s a process. So, let’s put that hat on while we do this work. Building relationships and having intergenerational conversations make all the difference. I love hearing from people who have been in the field for over thirty years. They can reflect and share about what worked and what they would have done differently now that they have the perspective of time. I’m often the youngest person in the professional rooms I’m in. When I have cross-generational conversations, there’s an exchange of wisdom from them to me, and a sense of hope from me to them. I care about the things that they have seen over the last thirty years, and I’m dedicated to seeing the work through into the next thirty.”

Approach: Incorporate scenario thinking into regular coalition activities to prepare for developing robust responses.

Just as scenario planning is a valuable strategy for building adaptability, scenario thinking can increase your coalition’s capacity to develop strategic responses to longstanding or emerging issues.



Scenario planning vs scenario thinking

Scenario planning is a strategic process in which an organization, to the best of its ability, plans how it will respond to potential or predicted scenarios. While there are several approaches to engaging in scenario planning, it generally includes:

1. Identifying potential risks across the pillars of your coalitions
(i.e., operations, funding, programs)
2. Creating a spectrum of scenarios related to those risks from best to worst-case scenario
3. Action planning to manage each possible scenario
4. Identifying potential trigger points that would lead to your predicted scenarios

Scenario thinking is an approach to strategy building that helps your coalition prepare to respond to policy shifts, the changing financial landscape, and emerging needs or opportunities. We cannot predict the future; however, by implementing scenario thinking, we can identify patterns, learn from past experiences, understand how systems work, and develop strategies informed by diverse perspectives.

Where scenario planning often supports a coalition's operational and programmatic needs, scenario thinking supports the coalition's capacity to create responsive advocacy initiatives and to be strategic when crises affect the coalition's constituents.

Additionally, scenario thinking can complement strategic planning, enabling your coalition to move strategy into action in an informed way. While strategic planning, often done every few years, helps maintain a coalition's vision, scenario thinking can be incorporated more consistently between strategic planning phases to ensure strategies are actionable and remain relevant to a changing world.



Authors Diane Searce and Katherine Fulton offer a process for ongoing scenario thinking:²⁹

1. **Orient:** Understand the issue at hand and learn about the challenges experienced by community members, organizations, and systems.
2. **Explore:** Brainstorm the predictable and unpredictable driving forces outside your EJC that will impact the issue (e.g., policy implications, funding constraints, etc.).
3. **Synthesize:** Combine and narrow the driving forces into priorities based on what is most important and most uncertain about your issue. These will become the “critical uncertainties” you scenario plan for.
4. **Act:** Develop action plans for your identified scenarios. Work from the assumption that your predictions will come true and identify ways in which your EJC can prepare and respond.
5. **Monitor:** Track internal and external shifts that may affect your plans and adjust accordingly.



RESOURCES FOR SCENARIO THINKING AND PLANNING:

- [What If? The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits](#)
- [Scenario Thinking for an Unpredictable Year](#)
- [Transformative Scenarios](#)
- [Making Sense of Uncertainty: Nonprofit Scenario Planning](#)

2. Increase your capacity to respond to emergencies and breaking news.

While most issues will allow your EJC to take the time needed to respond responsibly and effectively, circumstances will arise that need your immediate attention. This may be an immediate call to action to mobilize around a new policy, program, or funding shift, or an acute emergency in a community, such as a natural disaster or a large-scale system interruption, like a database hack. From a sustainability perspective, having the capacity to respond to emergencies showcases to others that the coalition is trustworthy and reliable. This can build



membership, connections to a broader network, and potentially open opportunities for future finding. To be a support in emergencies, a coalition must already be organized, well-networked, and keyed into the issues.

Approach: Put structures in place to support regional and local organizations during natural disasters and emergencies.

Coalitions are well-positioned to provide regional or local support to community-based organizations during emergencies. This can help mitigate interruptions to local services, get quick, relevant information out to those affected, support collaboration among responding agencies, and serve as a bridge between community organizations and broader state or Tribal connections.

Tips for emergency preparedness for coalitions:³⁰

- Provide support for community-based organizations and coalition members in developing their [Emergency Action Plans](#) to mitigate service interruptions.
- Share relevant and helpful information via social media, pamphlets, town halls, and/or webinars.
- Establish a process for sharing real-time updates and information to members, community partners, and families. This can be via social media, email newsletter, phone tree, website updates, etc.
- Stay connected to local emergency management news via [FEMA's state and local referral list](#).
- Build a collaborative relationship with local [Community Emergency Response Teams \(CERTs\)](#). Encourage them to join your coalition as members.



RESOURCES FOR EMERGENCY PLANNING:

- [Ready Business Toolkits: Business plans for natural disasters](#)
- [Social Media Preparedness Toolkits](#)

Approach: Be prepared with a rapid response, advocacy, and crisis strategy.

We live in a world of breaking news, short attention spans, and, unfortunately, increasing numbers of crises. A responsive coalition is one that has established itself as a calm, informative, strategic force amid the current storms. Coalitions are positioned to give their members and broader audiences opportunities to take action, supportive resources and information, and context for how a breaking issue or crisis may intersect with elder justice or older adults in general.

Additionally, breaking news can often be used to draw attention to an issue your coalition is already addressing, build advocacy momentum, engage new members, and contribute to the broader narrative.



RESOURCES FOR RAPID RESPONSES:

- [The Crisis Handbook: A toolkit for changemakers to create positive mindset change during crisis](#)
- [Rapid Response Worksheet: A framework for advancing narrative strategy in the face of a crisis of breaking news development](#)
- [Political Rapid Response Checklist](#)
- [Rapid Response 101 Toolkit](#)

3. Cultivate a strong and diverse network of members and partners built on sincere relationships.

An EJC is as responsive as its network can support. With teamwork and collaboration as the central pillars for each coalition, there is truly no way to do this work alone. To be sustainable over time and open to emerging opportunities, building a network rooted in accountability, trust, reliability, and connection to people and issues is essential. This can take different shapes and always takes time. Networks may also ebb and flow over the years, so having an openness to shifting priorities helps keep the work moving forward when engagement is lower.





FROM THE FIELD:

Building the Web between Tribal Communities.

The Web, a Tribal Elder Justice Coalition, was established as a collaboration between the **National Indigenous Justice Information and Inclusion (NIJII)** project and founding members, including the Standing Rock Sioux, Pyramid Lake Paiute, and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. The Web aims to encourage the development of EJs across Tribal communities by providing a cross-Tribal network as an anchor for support for those doing elder justice work in Indigenous communities. “So many people who do elder justice work in Tribal communities are on their own,” shared Dr. Wendelin Hume, Principal Investigator for NIJII, and lead coordinator for the Web. “The work is difficult, and it can be very isolating. The Web created a space for people to come together, not only to support the work but also to support each other. There are unspoken emotional benefits that members keep coming back to access.”

From a sustainability perspective, Wendelin sees network building as a central element that keeps everyone moving forward. “Funding is great, and it certainly gets people initially curious about joining, but what has kept us going is the camaraderie, the support, and the benefit of knowledge sharing. Our core group of partners has trust with one another, a process, and a sense of collegiality that continues to make us all collectively stronger.” Members have been able to lean on and learn from one another and have developed a network of support that enables them to build greater awareness across Tribal communities about elder justice issues.

A collaborative space where people share a common cultural understanding has had a significant impact on the Web members. “For Tribal members, everything is about community. A death of an elder is a death for the whole community, not just one family,” continued Wendelin. “We make sure to give people the time they need for community. This can sometimes mean that meetings get rescheduled. We make accommodations, have patience, are respectful, and make sure to make the most out of the time we do have together.”



The Web continues to grow, with nine Tribal communities now participating. Innovative projects have emerged from the collaboration, including a project on dementia and wandering, raising awareness of the usefulness of Tribal elder justice codes, establishing relationships with banks to address jurisdictional roadblocks in financial exploitation cases, and an international cultural exchange with scholars from Vietnam on preserving Indigenous culture. “The work that has come from this and the partnerships have continued to be so valuable. The network of Tribal communities is committed to continuing to meet even as funding comes and goes.”



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Building a diverse network

- What organizations and/or perspectives are over- or underrepresented in your coalition?
- Are there partner organizations that may not have the capacity to be a coalition member, but with whom you can build a relationship?
- What systems or organizations have the most impact on the issues you are working to address?
- What systems or organizations are historically left out of solution-building conversations?
- What gaps in skills and strengths would your coalition benefit from filling?
- Which organizations or individuals outside the aging network can you build relationships with?

4. Collaborate on intersecting issues.

Indigenous systems thinking teaches us about interconnectedness — how each person, system, and experience has ripple effects and is all interwoven with one another. In elder justice, this means taking a broad but strategic view of how issues like homelessness, long-term care, immigration, incarceration, and LGBTQIA2S+ rights



impact people as they age. Collaboration with organizations working outside the aging world can help an EJC create more meaningful, targeted campaigns and open the door to opportunities that may not otherwise present themselves. Conversely, many other social justice movements create collaborative spaces that coalition members can join to ensure that aging issues and elder justice are considered as they build their initiatives, creating even broader impact.



FROM THE FIELD:

National collaboration centering LGBTQIA2S+ elders

[SAGECollab](#) emerged to establish a network of organizations working at the intersection of LGBTQIA2S+ and aging. Using a circle model, SAGECollab hosts monthly and quarterly networking and advocacy circles for partner organizations that work with and for LGBTQIA2S+ older adults nationwide. They established four circles, each dedicated to a unique lens of life for queer older adults. These include The Services Circle, for direct service providers; The Advocacy Circle, for policy and advocacy work on behalf of LGBTQIA2S+ elders; the Affinity Engagement Circle, to increase the capacity of partners to engage older adults from historically marginalized communities; and the Housing Circle, to support LGBTQIA2S+ affirming senior housing.

“The Advocacy Circle starts with updates and highlights from SAGE’s advocacy team and then calls to action for partners to engage at the local level. Partners then share what they are working on and then have time for networking,” shared Jane Haskell, Director of Impact and Engagement at [SAGE](#). “One of the biggest benefits we have seen is the sharing of strategies and tactics for local and state advocacy. In New Jersey, advocates worked to pass a Long-Term Care Bill of Rights inclusive of LGBTQIA2S+ individuals and those living with disabilities. A partner in Oregon was able to learn from the folks in New Jersey and pass similar legislation in their state.” SAGECollab partners in Oregon shared, “SAGECollab membership has provided a robust vehicle of tools and partnerships to help LGBTQ+ older Oregonians be seen, represented, and served by Oregon’s aging services infrastructure.”



The national collaboration between SAGECollab members has increased knowledge across multiple areas, including a deeper understanding of housing issues, enhanced cultural competency, and a more comprehensive understanding of the advocacy and policy landscape. “My ability to advocate for positive change in the community I love is not only possible, but done at a much higher level,” shared a SAGECollab partner.

5. Have a plan for navigating conflict.

Being attuned to the dynamics among coalition members is an essential aspect of responsiveness, particularly related to conflict management. From a sustainability perspective, conflict can either create damaging fissures within a coalition or be the catalyst for robust and innovative responses that strengthen its capacity to have impact over time. A coalition that does not plan for managing conflict productively is at risk of the former.

Approach: Build relational trust between coalition members.³¹

Trust permeates many aspects of a coalition’s work, as we highlighted in the [Trust section](#) of this guide. When navigating conflict specifically, building trust among members is imperative to move discussions from disagreement to productive, robust responses. By building opportunities for coalition members to get to know one another on a deeper level and, hopefully, respect one another, when conflict inevitably arises, there will be a pathway forward rather than staying stuck in debate.

Tips for building relational trust between members include:

- Include opportunities during discussions for everyone to share what is important to them about the challenge the coalition is addressing.
- Allow members to share things about themselves and their identities.
- When a crisis occurs, allow coalition members time and space to process their thoughts and emotions together.
- Provide training for and set an example of nonjudgmental listening.



Approach: Make time for structured debates in facilitated decision-making processes.

Use facilitation techniques, such as generative facilitation or consensus/consent-based decision-making, to set aside time for healthy debate. These approaches invite conflict into discussions in a structured way, ensuring all perspectives are heard, and allowing members to learn from one another and build improved solutions together.



RESOURCES FOR NAVIGATING CONFLICT:

- [Conflict Resolution in Coalitions: Causes and Solutions](#)
- [The Tension of Turf: Making it Work for the Coalition](#)
- [A Manager's Guide to Resolving Conflict in Collaborative Networks](#)
- [Liberatory Design Deck](#)
- [Pros, Cons, and Mitigations Tool](#)



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Invite Conflict to Improve Outcomes:³²

Utilize the following questions to engage your group in conversations that identify conflict early and learn from diverse perspectives to find the most responsive path forward.

1. What are 1-2 things you can imagine going wrong with how the coalition plans to address X issue?
2. The coalition is planning X. What part of this decision do you have concerns about?
3. How can you talk the group out of X plan or decision?
4. What potential outcomes are critical for us to avoid?
5. What is your unpopular opinion about a coalition's decision, stance, approach, etc.?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:

- Navigating Conflict: pages 88-91

6. Build comprehensive and targeted advocacy strategies.

Advocacy work is at the heart of many EJC's missions. It is a primary way a coalition can be responsive to the needs of older adults and the organizations that support elder justice. Advocacy can take many forms, such as providing comments or testifying on legislation, building relationships with policymakers to inform them of elder justice issues, providing recommendations for budget appropriations, using awareness campaigns to build momentum on an issue — inspiring people to contact lawmakers, sign petitions, or share information with their communities. Whatever advocacy opportunities your coalition chooses to pursue, being strategic and engaging in long-view thinking will aid in your approach's success.

Approach: Do foundational discovery work to ensure your coalition is well-positioned to advocate on a particular issue.

Before embarking on an advocacy campaign, set aside time to facilitate a discussion on whether the EJC is well-positioned to be a meaningful voice on an issue. A coalition cannot be all things to all people, but by being mindful of which issues the group decides to champion and ensuring they align with the EJC's overall mission and goals, the coalition can streamline efforts and exude confidence in its effectiveness. These directly affect a coalition's capacity to remain sustainable; a poorly developed advocacy strategy can result in partner organizations, policymakers, and funders losing confidence in the coalition as a whole.





QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Is an advocacy campaign the right next step?³³

1. Is your EJC the best group for the job at hand?
2. Are there other groups already engaging in advocacy work on the issue that the coalition can support?
3. What resources does your EJC have to build an effective campaign (funding, time, expertise, access to power or influence)?
4. Whose perspectives should be included when developing an advocacy strategy? Who is most impacted by the problem, and who has the most influence on the issue?
5. What systems are affecting the issue?
6. Can coalition members find consensus on recommended solutions to the problem?
7. What are the risks of engaging in advocacy on a particular issue?
8. Are there other approaches instead of or aside from advocacy strategies that the coalition is better positioned to implement (i.e., awareness campaign, technical assistance, training, etc.)?

Approach: Identify root causes and intersecting issues to help establish clear priorities.

Once a coalition decides an advocacy campaign is the best approach, the next step is to gather information and analyze the issue. The goal is to dissect the problem to understand its root causes and how the issue impacts multiple groups or systems. This helps you prioritize recommendations, identify who is most impacted, who you should solicit for support, and who you hope to influence. Without this step, your coalition is at risk for experiencing preventable roadblocks, missing essential perspectives, and potentially offering recommendations that cause harm. Information can be gathered from people with lived experiences, public data, formal research, and the expertise of coalition members and partner organizations.



Remember to always ask whose perspective may be missing, and aim to build relationships with those who can fill the coalition's blind spots or gaps.



FROM THE FIELD:

Listening and refining until a plan emerges.

"Defining what it is you're trying to achieve is a very important part of ensuring your message will be clear and that the disparate voices of the coalition will stick together," shared Iris Freeman, Board Secretary, National Center for State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions. "It is helpful to identify early on what different types of success may look like, potential limitations, and who the players are, in order to set the right priorities and avoid unexpected roadblocks." In 2007, while at the Vulnerable Adults Justice Project, Iris coordinated a diverse coalition to collaborate on advocacy initiatives related to reporting and abuse response measures.

"Because there were so many different voices around the table, we went into our advocacy knowing that we would never have a perfect package, but we could put together a campaign that could stay together under duress."

Issues emerged from long-term care consumer organizations calling for an overhaul of Minnesota's reporting and response system. Charged with coordinating efforts to bring together public and private interests to establish an advocacy plan, Iris convened meetings among various groups to reach consensus on the issues. "We began meeting on a monthly basis, and we started by creating a massive list of all the problems. Without judgment, we put together the longest list possible of everything that everyone thought was wrong." From there, the group identified themes and narrowed the brainstorm list into categories of issues, such as investigator education needs, inter-agency mistakes, and problems within banks. The larger group broke into smaller working groups, who then created presentations based on the issue categories for the larger group, making the issue identification process more manageable to sift through. "We just kept refining what was wrong and what was possible to solve it, and what out of all of that everybody could swallow," continued Iris. "We were eventually able to come to a consensus."





During this process, champions began to emerge in the coalition whom the group could trust to lead the charge forward. “When it came time to work with legislators on the issue, we were very organized and had people with the skills to create a framework for visiting with legislators and identifying influencers to have an impact during those meetings with lawmakers.”

This process took time, starting in 2007 and culminating during a 2009 legislative session. Iris attributes much of the group’s success to its ability to identify the nuances of the issues and to access a network of people with opposing views who were willing to work together to find common ground. “During a time when the legislature was split, we were able to secure bipartisan votes on this issue. Much of this was because we were able to show legislators that the opposing sides were already in agreement, had managed the conflict on our own, and had spent the time working out the issues to a point where we were all happy enough to offer solid recommendations.”

Approach: Develop a system for staying attuned to emerging issues and influential people.

A coalition in the know will see greater success in its advocacy and overall impact. Establish a system for identifying emerging issues and having a pulse on how policy or societal shifts are impacting elder justice and the well-being of older adults. The goal is to stay as informed as possible about developments in local, regional, Tribal, state, and national cultural and political landscapes, to identify potential opportunities for action.

Processes for staying attuned include:

- Regular current event update meetings
- Opportunities for coalition members to share what they are seeing on the ground with the group.
- Establish working groups to monitor specific issues and coalition priority areas.



- Engage with social media and news cycles to track breaking news, crises, and trends.
- Staying connected with organizations outside of the coalition to collect updates and build relationships.

Approach: Build relationships with legislators over time, and research those you aim to influence.

Taking the time to build relationships with administrators, legislators, and other decision-makers can significantly influence the success of your EJC's advocacy and sustainability efforts. Do the work to establish the coalition and its members as credible resources that decision-makers can turn to for insight into elder justice issues. Cultivated relationships with policymakers can help ensure the EJC has allies as problems emerge, or when funding opportunities may arise in the state budget process.

Additionally, if you do not have relationships with the legislators influencing a specific issue or policy, take time to research those you hope to persuade, and schedule times to meet with them and their staff to share the coalition's recommendations. Do not engage before understanding where a lawmaker stands on an issue, how they have voted in the past, who currently has their ear, and what possible external influences or priorities have their attention. By understanding first how a representative understands the issue, you can identify what points to communicate that will resonate with them.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Before Meeting with Legislators:³⁴

1. What information is critical to share with them in 10-15 minutes?
2. What is your specific goal for the meeting? Do you have a specific request, or are you trying to share information?
3. Who from your coalition is best suited to attend the meeting? If multiple people are attending, who is best suited to share what information?





4. What questions can you anticipate the legislator or staff will ask you?
5. What stories would most move them into action?
6. What information can you gather about the legislator or key decision-maker?³⁵
 - a. What are their voting records like?
 - b. What issues have they championed in the past?
 - c. Do they have a personal connection to elder justice issues?
 - d. Who are their donors?
 - e. How and when do they engage on social media?
 - f. What bills have they authored or co-sponsored?



RESOURCES FOR INFLUENCER RESEARCH:

- [How to Conduct Pathways of Influence Research for Key Decision-Makers](#)

Approach: Use narratives, stories of lived experiences, and solid data to help frame the nuances of the issues.

Sharing stories backed up by compelling data enables lawmakers to better understand how an issue is impacting their constituents' day-to-day lives. Narratives and stories cut through the noise, often getting to the heart of an issue, making it more relatable and understandable. This approach also allows your EJC to connect with community members and identify nuances of issues that may not be accessible by just communicating with aging or allied professionals.



RESOURCES FOR NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

- [Narrative Strategy: The Basics](#)
- [Advocating with Personal Stories: An Evaluation Toolkit](#)
- [The People Say: Qualitative data platform featuring older adults talking about their lives and the policy issues that affect them](#)



Approach: Coordinate awareness campaigns to increase support of the issue and inspire people beyond the coalition to take action.

Lawmakers are more likely to prioritize an issue if they see it affecting many people. Strategically coordinate [awareness campaigns](#) that align with your advocacy initiatives to increase support on the issue, mitigate harm, and provide support while policy is getting established, and inspire action. A well-formulated awareness campaign should always include a call to action, which can range from learning more about the issue to contacting legislators directly. All actions, if strategically aligned, will help move your advocacy efforts forward.



FROM THE FIELD:

Playing the long game for improved APS funding in Ohio

For over 40 years, OCAPS has employed a strong, steady advocacy strategy to increase funding for APS across the state. The lack of funding for the then newly adopted APS law was the impetus for creating the coalition, a goal that remains a priority today. “Ohio has gone from zero money allocated to APS in 1981 to \$9.72 million in 2025, most of which was gained between 2018 and 2024,” shared Maridell Couture, OCAPS Public Policy Chair. The state’s investment in APS has always been allocated to each of Ohio’s 88 counties using a formula based on population and poverty levels of older adults. In 2014-2015, APS only received \$500,000 from the state budget, leaving some smaller counties with as little as \$2,000 for the year. Many services relied on local funding to meet communities’ needs, and many counties had child protective service workers provide APS services.

Concerned that these counties may have been underserving the need, OCAPS advocated for additional dollars to supplement the formula dollars with a designated allocation per county to ensure funding for at least one full-time staff person dedicated to delivering APS services in each county. “Through the years, we continue to build momentum to realize OCAPS’ goal of increasing state support to APS so that where an older adult lives does not determine their ability to be protected,” continued Maridell. OCAPS’ long-term advocacy strategy has included





identifying specific barriers to influencing legislators and finding motivating solutions. For example, accessing data on elder abuse has been historically challenging across the state because, until recently, the state used a paper database. In 2015, state legislators expressed interest in forming a task force to address elder abuse, pledging a one-time \$10 million allocation for infrastructure development for APS programs across the state. Leveraging existing relationships with state legislators, OCAPS successfully joined the task force and provided its expertise to help establish meaningful outcomes for APS service delivery, including an electronic database.

OCAPS aimed to provide recommendations to decision-makers on how to allocate funding most effectively. However, without compelling data, it is almost impossible to persuade a legislator to take action. The coalition collaborated with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association to develop a biannual survey of APS workers and allied partners to identify service needs across the state. With this data, they were able to communicate compelling findings to key decision-makers and influence budget allocations based on documented needs.

As their advocacy initiatives grew, OCAPS knew they needed to focus on issues that would cut through the noise and capture lawmakers' attention. The coalition decided to highlight financial exploitation as a primary issue to motivate legislators. "Financial exploitation is a good lead issue because legislators can personally connect to it through their own family experience, and they hear more and more about it as increasing numbers of constituents are impacted," shared Maridell. "There is also more data available about it, so we are better able to articulate the problem with numbers." Additionally, OCAPS is strategic in how it develops its communications and education on elder justice issues. "We have worked hard to use positive and values-based language while providing testimony and meeting with legislators. We intentionally do not portray people impacted by elder abuse as just victims but citizens who deserve to age with respect and dignity. We highlight how older adults are contributing members of society, remain a vital

anchor in their communities, and play an important role in the state’s financial infrastructure. We believe that working together, we can help create a supportive community for people of all ages.”

In addition to their direct advocacy, their long-term strategy includes education and training to build the capacity of other stakeholders to advocate for APS funding. OCAPS members participate in other state coalitions that address aging to expand their networks and support other coalitions in adding their voices to state budget discussions. They also leverage the annual OCAPS conference to provide training on advocating and relationship building with legislators, with the hope that others will develop their skills to engage in direct advocacy alongside the coalition.



RESOURCES FOR BUILDING STRONG ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS:

- [The Water of Systems Change – Action Learning Exercise](#)
- [Participatory Research and Evaluation Methods](#)
- [Advocacy 101: Tips for Effective Meetings with California State Legislators](#)
- [General Rules for Organizing Legislative Advocacy](#)
- [Justice In Aging Resource Library](#)
- [Evidence, Messages, Change! An Introductory Guide for Successful Advocacy](#)
- [Getting an Advocacy Campaign Off the Ground](#)
- [Campaign Strategy Workbook](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Elder Justice Coalitions: A Resource Guide for Building and Sustaining Effective Elder Justice Coalitions:

- Building advocacy campaigns: pages 105-107



Additional Resources

- [Building a Collaboration Impact Story](#)
- [Disability and Aging Collaborative](#)
- [Diverse Elders Coalition](#)
- [Indigenous Systems Thinking: The Operating System for Sovereignty](#)
- [Indigenous Ways of Giving and Sharing: Indigenous-led Funds Landscape Report](#)
- [Make Your Organization More Resilient with Adaptive Planning](#)
- [NJ Coalition Against Sexual Assault – Statewide Accessibility Plan](#)
- [Public Welfare Foundation: Coalition Conditions for Success](#)
- [Reframing Philanthropy: Indigenous-Led Funds Governance Models](#)
- [Responding to Threats and Challenges Tool – Collective Impact Forum](#)
- [Restorative Justice Elder Justice Resources](#)
- [Tamarack Sustainability Self Assessment Tool](#)
- [The Soar Collective](#)
- [We Deserve Better Project](#)



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