

**NEW  
ERA  
OF  
PUBLIC  
SAFETY**

AN ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR FAIR, SAFE,  
AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY POLICING

# Step 2: Build Your Coalition

A coalition is a group of individuals or organizations who share an interest in a particular issue and come together to address that issue. A coalition may lead several projects or campaigns, and these may change over time as conditions change. Typically, one or two individuals represent their organization's interests at coalition meetings and events.

Before developing your coalition, identify who is already doing work around the issue(s) you are concerned about. Decide what voices need to be at the table in a coalition.

## Policing concerns in my community:

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

### Who Came Before Us?

- *Do any organizations have experience working on this issue?*
- *Are there elders in the community or informal groups that have important historical information to share?*
- *Do any other community members have direct experience with the police department?*

Remember to defer to the expertise of those who have been doing this work for a while, even if they have been doing so with little to no funding or visibility. Having these groups and individuals at the table as you plan and launch your campaign can be critical to your success.

Individual	Organization	Area of Expertise
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

**Engage Directly with Impacted Communities**

Key players in any campaign include representatives from communities who are experiencing the brunt of the problem you are trying to solve. For instance, if you are concerned with how police officers interact with people experiencing homelessness in your community, be sure to engage not only agencies that provide services to homeless people but also groups that are led by homeless people.

Whether you form a small group or a very large one, decide on your group’s structure before launching a campaign together. The group can be a coalition, a new organization, or something else.

Considerations for deciding which structure to use:

- The number of organizations or individuals involved.
- How long you plan to work together.
- Whether you want to work on a general issue or toward a specific set of goals.
- Whether you can raise money to start and operate a new organization or will trust an organization to hold your collective work as a campaign.

Establishing a clear decision-making structure upfront can help the group navigate difficult decisions in the future. Consider existing power dynamics in your group as you determine what makes the most sense for your decision-making structure.

# A Note on Supporting Survivors in Sharing Their Stories

Sharing personal experiences of profiling or misconduct by police officers can be traumatic, particularly in cases of near-lethal force or sexual misconduct; it can be just as traumatic if a person is humiliated or abused during a brief stop or search. Police representatives must be mindful of such experiences when asking community members to share their stories, whether for a community-led research project, a public forum, or a meeting with a legislator. It is important to:

## **Ask people who have experienced police misconduct what they need.**

Do they feel comfortable sharing their experience? What would make them more comfortable?

- *Having a support person with them?*
- *Submitting testimony in writing instead of delivering it in person?*
- *Having someone else read their testimony?*
- *Sharing their experience privately?*
- *Including it in an anonymous report?*

## **Have support on hand.**

People often do not know how they will react to sharing their experiences, so make sure that someone who has experience supporting people who have experienced trauma (social worker, therapist, community member with skills and experience, a healer) is available to speak with survivors before, during, and after they share their stories. Also, have a list of resources ready for survivors, including ongoing community support services, crisis lines, and attorneys experienced in officer misconduct cases who are known to the community.

## **Do not pigeonhole people.**

Often, policymakers and the media categorize people as “victims” (people with direct experiences of policing) and “experts” (usually lawyers or other professionals who do not have direct experience with policing). They want to hear from survivors about the problem and from experts about the solution. Survivors are experts in their own experiences and can also be experts in the proposed solutions. Work with survivors who share their stories to develop campaign goals so that they can make connections between their experiences and the solutions in their testimony. Organize press conferences, meetings, and events in ways that prioritize both survivors’ voices and the solutions called for. Such an approach can also mean asking people seen as “experts” on policing issues to step back to make way for people who have more direct experience with harmful policing practices to speak out and articulate campaign demands.

# Decision-Making

## Decision-making options include:

- \* Going with the consensus or modified consensus.
- \* Implementing majority rule.
- \* Creating a steering committee or advisory council that makes decisions with input from the larger group or from subcommittees.
- \* Creating committees that make decisions about their particular issue areas and then report to the larger group.

Also, consider how the group will be accountable to the larger community. For example, prioritize the voices and perspectives of people in communities that are directly impacted by the issues you are working to address. And be mindful that some groups are well resourced with funds, staff, and legal and policy expertise, whereas others may have no paid staff or budget to support travel or participation in meetings during work hours.

Often members' ability to participate in meetings and do work determines whose ideas take priority and who makes decisions. You can also:

- Schedule meetings for late afternoons, evenings, or weekends, so people with full-time jobs or young children in school can attend.
- Provide transportation, childcare, and food for attendees.
- Set up structures to equitably share resources to help less-resourced groups participate, such as by holding teach-ins around issues that require specialized knowledge (e.g., search and seizure, accountability mechanisms), so that everyone has the same basic information.
- Create opportunities for members of directly impacted communities to share their experience and expertise on the problem with groups that may not have direct experience.
- Create working groups or committees to make decisions in particular areas or develop proposals to bring back to the larger group for discussion.

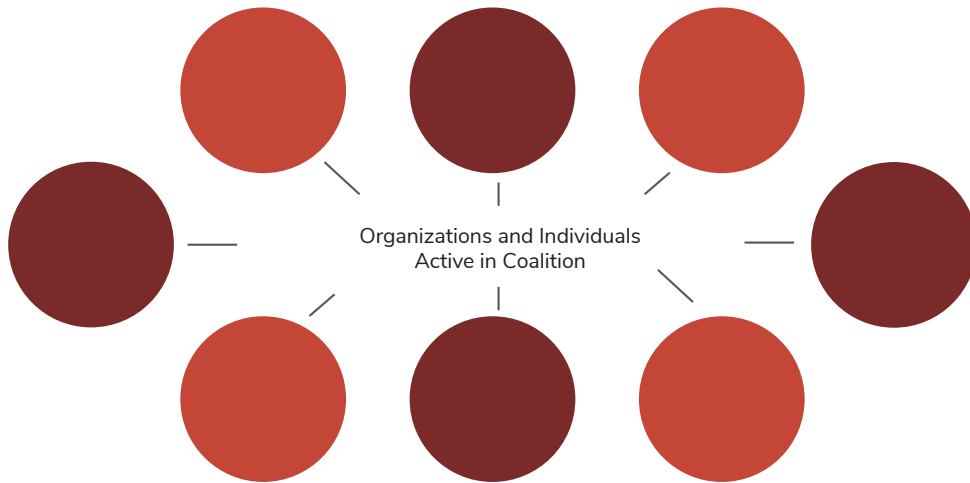
## Examples of Coalition Structures:

**Communities United for Policing Reform** in New York is a campaign governed by a steering committee made up of member organizations. The campaign is an independent organization, with a director and staff. Decisions about the campaign are based on the recommendations of its working groups and its voting members.<sup>67</sup>

**Community Safety Act Coalition** (formerly run by the STEP UP Network) is a broad-based coalition that successfully passed the Community Safety Act in Providence, Rhode Island.<sup>68</sup>

# Coalition Structures

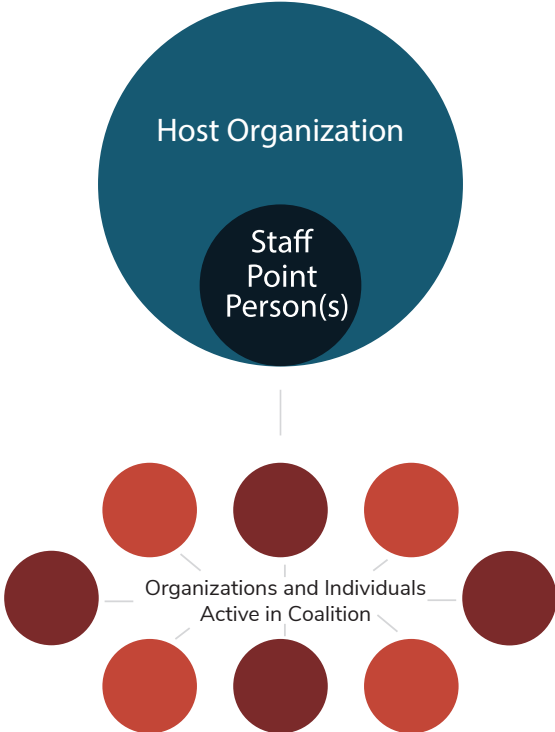
## Coalition



## Coalition with an Advisory or Steering Committee



Coalition with a Host Organization



# Campaign Structure

Campaign Hosted within an Organization



## VI. Making Change

<sup>67</sup> See “Safer New York Act.” Communities United for Police Reform. Retrieved from <https://www.changethenypd.org/>.

<sup>68</sup> See “Providence Community-Police Relations Act.” City of Providence. Retrieved from <https://www.afsc.org/sites/default/files/documents/CSA%20-%20Final%20Passage.pdf>.







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