

Coalition secretariat principles for connecting and growing movements for development justice

"Love is the greatest force in the universe. It is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos."

- Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Coalition for Human Rights in Development is a global-south-led coalition of 100+ social movements, civil society organizations, and grassroots groups working together to advance community-led and human rights-based development. We do so by making sure that communities have the information, power and resources to determine their development pathways and priorities, and to hold development finance institutions (DFIs), governments, and other actors accountable for their impacts on peoples and the planet.¹

Over the years, there has been significant growth in the number and size of financial institutions investing in development activities. These institutions that hold significant resources and influence are increasingly formalising their collaboration with each other, and with governments and corporations. Around the world, they are acting together in ways that are not democratic, inclusive or accountable to local communities.

Since its inception in 2013, the number of members of the Coalition and the scope of our collective work has grown significantly, and continues to grow. From the beginning, the members of the Coalition created a secretariat to strengthen collective efforts and advance collective goals of equity, dignity, and justice in development. As the scope of collective work increased, Coalition members pushed for a growing secretariat.

It is in this context that we in the Coalition secretariat commit to centering "love" as the fundamental organizing principle in our work and amplify it as a force for social change. We understand love as seeing both ourselves and others as whole and legitimate, and yet deeply connected. We practice love by taking care of each other, and nurture relationships and networks that share power to advance equity, dignity and justice.²

The focus of this document is to articulate certain principles around how the Coalition secretariat will work with love to strengthen the collective work of members and partners, and grow our movements through connection, collaboration, mobilizing, and organising.

¹ This beginning paragraph is based on the Coalition's mission, which was collaboratively drafted by members of the Coalition in 2015.

² This document draws on the Interaction Institute for Social Change's Collaborative Change Lens to shift power dynamics, focus on building networks, and amplify love as a force for social change. See "Networks for Social Change: A Love Story" (November 2019) at <https://interactioninstitute.org/networks-a-love-story-2/>.

1. Secretariat principles governing relationship with members

Over the years, through feedback from Coalition members and partners, the secretariat has learned several lessons which are proposed here as operational principles.³

Be Strategic	We all have limited resources, so we have to prioritise what we work on. The secretariat will help facilitate a clear strategic roadmap for specific areas of collective work, with clear roles and responsibilities, and then work within that strategy.
Be Transparent	It is important for the secretariat to be transparent and regularly communicate with members about what it is working on, and proactively disclose decision-making processes and ways to participate.
Be Member-led	The biggest strength of the Coalition is its members and their history of working together on collective efforts. So the secretariat has to ensure the centrality of members' voices in decision-making and public communications. ⁴ The work of the secretariat has to be additional and not duplicate the work of members. To do so, the secretariat must be in close communication with members, knowing their work, and enable them to realise the full potential of the Coalition.
Be facilitative leaders or servant leaders	<p>The main focus of the secretariat is facilitation, coordination, mobilizing and organizing. However, to advance collective work, the secretariat may also need to draft documents, send meeting minutes, conduct its own communications, engage in advocacy, and accompany communities, defenders or civil society groups as they engage with other members and partners or development actors.</p> <p>Additionally, the Secretariat does have a voice on behalf of the Coalition and its mission, including in: convening meetings, producing collaborative research, shaping and advancing advocacy positions, and applications for funding. Members may also ask the secretariat to leverage the Coalition's collective voice and name as a show of strength or solidarity. All of this has to be advanced in accordance with the Coalition's norms of collaboration.</p>

³ These principles have emerged, been informally articulated, tested and confirmed in collective efforts with members and partners.

⁴ From a communications perspective, visibility and branding of the Coalition as "The Coalition" is not a priority. We often ghost write articles, press releases and other communication materials when members provide the key messages, and want us to do the design or paperwork. This strategic anonymity helps us advance our mission and enables collective ownership of communication efforts.

2. Recruiting for champions

As a mobilizer and organiser, the Coalition secretariat aims to identify and empower others to lead, and therefore scale up delivery on our collective mission. The Coalition secretariat is constantly trying to recruit new leaders to advance the Coalition’s missions in their own areas of work and expertise. We call this “recruiting for champions”, and it is central to how the secretariat operates.

A champion is a person, group or organisation that feels so connected to an issue or topic within our mission -- be it local, thematic, regional or other -- that they choose to lead on it themselves, by facilitating and managing collaborative processes of addressing the particular issue or topic. New leaders can be found within existing members and partners of the Coalition as well as new people and groups in our networks who we are not yet connected to. Connection can be created, built up or sometimes it is just found. Connection is a two-way road, while the Coalition benefits from champions, the champions also benefit from the Coalition.

The secretariat constantly has its eyes and ears open for champions. Seeking out and recruiting champions is not simply a series of steps,⁵ but rather an approach and attitude: we see all our members and partners as potential champions and we trust them to lead if they so desire. Below, some key points that summarize our approach to recruit champions:⁶

Listening and Learning	This is about proactively reaching out to anyone we suspect might be relevant to our issue, and also looking to make the most of conversations we have with anyone, especially a new partner. We listen to them and hear them, both as people working on a topic, and as caring and passionate individuals fighting for a cause.
Creating connection	After listening to them and hearing them, we connect the dots between what we do and what they do, we ask how they can see us contributing to their work and suggest where they might be able to contribute to ours. We connect to them both as potential partners as well as on a personal level.

⁵ There is not a formalized procedure to recruit champions. This can occasionally happen in a single conversation; other times, a person or group can become a champion much further down the road when they suddenly see increased relevance in what we do, or they change their own priorities or approach. Champions often go as easily as they come, for example when their priorities suddenly change, or there are staff changes in an organisation.

⁶ Some non-determinative metrics to indicate/assess if a particular relationship is developing into a champion include, does this person, group or organisation:

- respond positively to a request for collaboration/ partnership from another member / partner?
- share lessons learned and analysis on the collaboration/partnership and its results for better following up and replication of the strategy?
- go to other Coalition members/partners with a collaboration/ partnership request?
- manage the collaborative process of addressing a particular issue or topic?
- recruit and refer other potential leaders and champions of our mission into the Coalition?

Offering resources	<p>Champions may ask the secretariat for help to champion the topic: this may involve support during meetings, help in drafting letters or even strategic support.</p> <p>Even as champions they might not feel comfortable with every element of the topic they champion. The secretariat can help fill in the gaps either by linking to other champions or supporting ourselves. This helps give champions the confidence they need to lead on the topic.</p> <p>Generally, any support will focus directly on advancing the Coalition’s mission; but occasionally the secretariat may also provide other support to ensure the champion stays strong to fulfill their role.</p> <p>The secretariat can also recognize and reward champions, by increasing their visibility when appropriate, and providing professional development or other opportunities where possible.</p>
Trusting and taking a back seat	<p>A key element of connection for champions is their ability to follow their passion: if there is connection to what the Coalition does, and it does not go against our mission, the secretariat must accept that champions may have a different strategy, approach or focus than we have in mind.</p>

3. Cross-cutting partnership principles that underlie our work

In all our work we seek to follow the following cross-cutting principles.

Health, wellbeing and security first	<p>We need to prioritise health, wellbeing & security of secretariat staff, members, and partners before outcomes and deliverables.</p>
Build power and devolve power: privilege matters	<p>We work in a world of deep systemic inequities, including gender, sexuality, global north versus global south, race, indigeneity and abilities. In doing our work, we need to be aware of power and privilege in different working relationships, and not act in ways that cause discrimination or lead to exclusion of individuals or groups subjected to marginalisation.</p> <p>Where the secretariat has power and privilege we should work to devolve it to members and partners who are closest to the grassroots. Where collectively we lack power, the secretariat should support the building of power closest to the grassroots. While addressing power and privilege issues, we should always take an intersectional lens.</p>
Be professional: words and timelines matter	<p>The secretariat seeks to have open, effective, respectful and non-violent communication in a timely manner. We commit to ask questions with curiosity when we don’t understand, rather than jump to conclusions. We will say yes enthusiastically when we can, and say no clearly when we cannot. We take our commitments seriously and will</p>

	deliver what we commit to at a high quality in the time we commit, or we will proactively communicate changes around delivery.
Do no harm	The secretariat should not pose additional risks to the individuals or groups we work with. This means we should proactively discuss risks and ensure they are properly assessed and addressed with those who are directly affected. We should always ask informed consent, while recognizing that risk levels can change across time and different contexts.