

GUIDELINES: FORMING URBAN COALITIONS NATIONWIDE

On August 24, 1967, in Washington, D. C., the Emergency Convocation of The Urban Coalition issued an urgent appeal to all concerned American citizens to join with The Coalition in efforts to fashion a new political, social, economic, and moral climate that will make possible the breaking of the vicious cycle of the ghetto. Action at the community level must now follow.

Community leadership is now called upon to use its commitment and ingenuity to muster the public support and involvement needed to bring about a major reordering of both national and local priorities in the face of the unresolved urban emergency.

At the conclusion of the August Emergency Convocation, The Urban Coalition adopted a comprehensive Statement of Principles, Goals and Commitments. It is this document which charts the course for our mutual efforts. The Urban Coalition's program as adopted at the August Convocation may be characterized as follows:

"We believe the American people and the Congress must reorder national priorities, with a commitment of resources equal to the magnitude of the problems we face. The crisis requires a new dimension of effort in both the public and private sectors, working together to provide jobs, housing, education, and the other needs of our cities.

"We believe the Congress must move without delay on urban programs. The country can wait no longer for measures that have too long been denied the people of the cities and the nation as a whole--additional civil rights legislation, adequately funded model cities, anti-poverty, housing, education, and job-training programs, and a host of others.

"We believe the private sector of America must directly and vigorously involve itself in the crisis of the cities by a commitment to investment, job-training, and hiring, and all that is necessary to the full enjoyment of the free enterprise system--and also to its survival...

"This convocation calls upon local government, business, labor, religions, and civil rights groups to create counterpart local coalitions where they do not exist to support and supplement this declaration of principles."

The National Steering Committee at the present time consists of thirty-six members. They are broadly representative of business, labor, local government, religion, civil rights, communications, and education.

The Coalition identified seven specific areas of urban affairs calling for action by The Coalition and the Nation. Emergency Task Forces have been created reflecting these problem areas:

(3)

Public Service Employment and Urban Legislation
Private Employment and Entrepreneurship
Educational Disparities
Housing, Reconstruction and Investment
Equal Housing Opportunities
Communications and Public Support
Local Coalitions

The National Steering Committee and its seven Task Forces are already at work developing strategy and fostering action to achieve the goals set forth in The Coalition's Statement of Principles, Goals and Commitments. This will not be enough. There must be complementary action at the local community level where ultimate responsibility rests and where urban problems are most clearly perceived.

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What is a Coalition?

A "coalition" is an alliance, association or combination of persons, groups, organizations or constituencies drawn together for one or more specific purposes. A coalition is not necessarily a formally chartered, regulated and structured organization. Typically, coalitions emerge in time of crisis or emergency and endure for the period of that emergency. Development of a coalition which will include all civic interests is, therefore, most appropriate in the face of America's present urban crisis.

Local Circumstances

Local circumstances and the status of existing local organizations, of course, vary greatly from community to community. The Urban Coalition recognizes that the nature of the organized response to its call for local counterpart action will also vary from community to community. A local coalition can encompass a single city or an entire metropolitan area in which it is located, whichever is feasible and appropriate. The organization of an urban coalition may take several forms. It may involve individuals or organizations. It may embrace a large membership or be an organization centered on leadership.

New Coalitions

In those local situations where citizens determine that it is appropriate to form an essentially new coalition of community leadership, the immediate need is to assemble an organizing or steering committee. As is the case with the National Steering Committee, local steering committees will typically be made up of representatives from the community's business, organized labor, religious, civil rights, educational, local government and communications leadership. In order to insure, however, that the local steering committee is broadly representative of the life of the community, it is important that low-income neighborhoods of the community also be represented. It is the local steering committee which would serve as the initial link with the national Coalition.

Coordination of Existing Groups

In other communities, it may be that coalitions broadly representative of the life of the community have previously been formed around such single issues as jobs, schools, or housing. A local coalition in these communities may, under these circumstances, be an association of such existing single-purpose groups which should jointly establish a coordinating committee to serve as a local coalition with a

multi-purpose, comprehensive concern. Through this mechanism, mutual agreement on goals, policy positions, and local needs could be developed. Equally important, a joint coordinating (steering) committee could also facilitate a complementary network of program efforts carried out through its member organizations. The full weight of community leadership could, thereby, be brought to bear on local problems without causing any existing individual organizations to surrender their identities or their program control. The coordinating (steering) committee would serve as the initial local link with the national Coalition.

Incorporation Not Necessary

In either kind of community situation, formal incorporation of a new local coalition or of an association of existing single-purpose groups is not necessary, although in some cases it may be desirable. The national Urban Coalition has chosen not to incorporate. In the case of unincorporated local coalitions, funds for technical support may be channeled through a separate fiscal agent, such as a cooperating organization.

Statement of Principles

The steering or coordinating committee in either kind of community situation should consider developing a draft Statement of Principles, Goals and Commitments, which (a) endorses the national Statement and (b) broadens and supplements it to include major local concerns. This approach will chart the course for local efforts in cooperation with the national Urban Coalition. Such a local statement, when formalized, will also serve to inform local citizens and focus their discussion and action.

Operating Structure

With respect to newly-formed local coalitions, it is anticipated that the local structure will include not only a steering committee but task forces to deal, respectively, with national urban legislation, expansion of private employment, housing and education, and public support. The task force subjects suggested above are, of course, by no means the only problem areas for which task forces could be created. Task forces in the named problem areas would correspond with and could relate to the task forces working at the national level.

In the case of an association of existing single-purpose organizations, the coordinating (steering) committee could look to its respective member organizations to serve the task force roles and treat those problem areas closest to their respective program concerns and organizational focus. This is in lieu of appointing new task forces as is recommended for an entirely new coalition. Each participating single-purpose organization could relate functionally to the national task force working in its subject area of concern, e.g. a local community-wide employment committee could work cooperatively with the national Task Force on Private Employment and Entrepreneurship.

Assistance for Local Coalitions

It is strongly recommended that where a new coalition or a new association of existing single-purpose organizations is being formed, the local steering or coordinating committee arrange for at least one staff person to work full time for the new coalition venture. It is likely that this staff person could be borrowed from the staff of one of the participating groups of the coalition. While the National Steering Committee is not able to offer any financial assistance to local coalitions, it will provide other assistance

in preparing and convening local coalition activities. The National Steering Committee will also provide speakers, where needed and requested, in any or all of the subject areas under consideration by The Urban Coalition Task Forces mentioned earlier.

The national task forces and the national coordinating staff are prepared to share with cooperating community leadership the results derived from their continuing surveys of available resources and evaluation of current programs dealing with urban problems. For example, local coalitions can be kept advised of the status, merits and relevance of pending national legislation pertaining to critical urban problems. Up to date information on the experience gained with new recruiting, training and employment activities or low-income housing development in the private sector can also be exchanged through the national task forces.

Affiliation with The Urban Coalition

The expectation of the National Steering Committee is that local coalitions will, when ready, seek affiliation with the national Urban Coalition. To be eligible for affiliation, a

local group:

One: Must endorse The Urban Coalition's Statement of Principles, Goals and Commitments.

In the absence of common agreement between the local coalition and The Urban Coalition on the basic need for action on urban problems and the broad character of the action needed, affiliation would have little meaning. The Statement constitutes the agreement. Insofar as it is the product of the Emergency Convocation of The Urban Coalition and, therefore, received the endorsement of over twelve hundred leaders from across the nation, it should not be difficult for like-minded local leaders to support it.

Two: Must be a multi-purpose comprehensively committed group.

By way of example, while a broad-based local organization devoted to promoting equal housing opportunity may, in effect, be a local leadership coalition, because of its single purpose it would not meet this standard. The purpose of the standard is to encourage local action on all major urban problems and a single-purpose organization such as a fair housing coalition is not organized or prepared to accomplish that end.

Three: Must be broadly representative of the life of the local community.

The ultimate significance and effectiveness of a local coalition's efforts will be dependent on the extent to which all significant sectors of the community participate in and support the local coalition. A coalition comprised exclusively of businessmen and labor leaders would not be in a position to accomplish nearly as much as a coalition involving, in addition, leaders from religion, local government, civil rights, education, communications and disadvantaged neighborhoods. This standard is a means of encouraging the degree of community involvement essential to major local accomplishments.

The Council of Urban Coalitions

The Urban Coalition is interested in continuing participation in its affairs by local communities and not just endorsement of its goals and commitments. The formation of a Council of Urban Coalitions is anticipated shortly after the beginning of 1968. Each affiliated local coalition should plan to designate two representatives to serve on this national Council. At its first meeting, the Council will elect two representatives to serve on the National Steering Committee of The Urban Coalition. Additional representatives may

be added as the Council expands. In this manner, affiliated local coalitions will participate in and help shape the programs of The Urban Coalition. The Council will serve as a community-based national body working with the National Steering Committee.

Working Approaches

With any new effort, such as that being undertaken by The Urban Coalition, it may be expected that national organizational structure and methods will continue to undergo change. For this reason, The Urban Coalition is understandably following a flexible course of action. Among the working approaches currently being taken are the following:

1. A supporting rather than operational emphasis:
The Urban Coalition is supporting efforts to solve ongoing problems at both the local and national levels. It will stimulate new undertakings, for example, in the crucial area of expanding private employment of the hard-core unemployed, giving emphasis to effective training approaches, recruitment practices and facilitating assimilation of new employees into regular work forces. It is working cooperatively with such major new efforts as the \$1 billion investment allocation of the insurance industry for center city development.

The Urban Coalition's posture is that of a catalytic agent stimulating public discussion, communicating the need for national and local action, and supporting appropriate ongoing efforts. It is unlikely that it will, itself, initiate and administer programs, on a continuing basis as this would tend to detract from the central and critical catalytic role. Given the multitude of existing national and local, public and private organizations capable of program implementation, that role, in most instances, is best left to them.

2. Stimulating interest in successful examples of action.

Through its task forces, The Urban Coalition is attempting identify, work with, and publicize successful efforts to expand employment, extend lower income housing and equal housing opportunities, new educational programs and the like. The task forces hope to serve as catalysts and convenors. They will further serve a clearing-house function with respect to news of local action.

3. Coordinating a national legislative campaign. The Urban Coalition has called upon Congress for action across a broad front to meet the urban crisis.

Interpreting and emphasizing the need for national action is as much a local obligation as it is a commitment of the National Steering Committee. Discussions with members of Congress is as much a hometown affair as are appearances before Congressional committees.

4. Working with the mass media. Through its Task Force on Communications and Public Support and through counterpart committees at the local level, it is

hoped that the mass media can be encouraged to focus greater attention on the needs of cities. Broad public understanding of the need for greater resources, of the complexities of the problems involved and the need for urgent action are essential, if the goals of The Urban Coalition are to be achieved.

(Reprint Statement of Principles,
Goals and Commitments)