

# Sustaining Coalitions

## Background

This resource provides guidance to help coalitions continue their activities long term. It focuses on building strategic partnerships and securing ongoing funding to sustain the coalition’s work. Other factors that strengthen long-term viability are establishing a clear governance structure, developing a strategic plan, and implementing succession planning to prepare future coalition leaders.



## Creating a sustainability plan

Creating a sustainability plan helps your coalition maintain its work over time. As part of the plan, consider three categories: (1) activities to continue as they are, (2) activities to continue with revisions, and (3) activities to transition to another organization. Next, identify strategies to sustain activities in Categories 1 and 2, and potential partners who could take on those in Category 3. The Getting Further Faster [Sustainability Planning Guide](#) and [Template](#) can help you create an action plan to carry out your chosen strategies or engage with partners. Below is an example of an action plan for a coalition that wants to increase activity funding.

**Table 1. Use action planning to carry out your sustainability strategies**

Strategy 1. Increase the diversity of our funding sources.						
Objective 1. Apply for one local foundation grant by June 2026.						
Action step	Responsible individual	Partners		Necessary resources	Timeline	Measuring success
What needs to be done? (List and number the action steps to achieve the objective)	Who will make sure it gets done? (Name coalition members)	Who can help? (Name partners to involve, if any)	How will we engage them? (List timing, frequency, and types of actions)	What resources do we need? (List resources needed to achieve step and how to obtain them)	When does it need to be done? (Specify the deadline or date range)	How will we measure success? What data do we need to collect? (List measures and data)
1. Research local foundation opportunities	Work Group Lead A	Food Bank partner intern	Schedule onboarding meeting for intern	Online searches for local foundations (available through Work Group Lead employer)	Develop research strategy by January 2026; conduct research by March 2026	A list of foundations and funding opportunities is complete
2. Review the eligibility criteria for each funding opportunity	Work Group Lead A	Food Bank partner intern		Excel file to create a list of eligible opportunities	April 2026	The list of eligible opportunities is complete
3. Select one opportunity to apply to	Work Group Lead A, with collaboration from coalition	Not applicable	Not applicable	List of eligible opportunities (created in Step 2)	May 2026	Selection complete

Adapted from Mathematica. “[Understanding and Planning for Sustainability: A Guide for Multi-Sector Community Partnerships Working to Address Social Determinants of Health.](#)” 2023.



## Developing strategic partnerships

Developing strategic partnerships is a key strategy for sustaining your coalition's work. Strengthening existing partnerships with coalition members or seeking new partners are two examples. For more details on selecting partners, see the *Building Coalition Membership* resource. When approaching organizations, highlight how their mission aligns with your coalition's goals and outline specific ways they can contribute to your efforts.

### Mission alignment

Explain how supporting your coalition's activities can help advance your partner's mission. For more details on how to do this, see the *Strategic Communication for Coalitions* resource.

### Ways partners can offer support

Outline the ways partners can support your coalition. For example:

- Funding coalition activities through their budget
- Providing supplies
- Volunteering staff time



## Identifying funding sources

Your coalition should strive for a diverse set of funding sources. In addition to strategic partnerships and partner contributions, consider options such as:

- 1. Grant or contract funding.** Coalitions can approach local or community foundations; apply for local, state, or national grants; and include coalition work as a line item in partner organizations' funding applications. To search for grants, look at sites such as [Candid.org](https://www.candid.org) (foundation directory), [GrantWatch](https://www.grantwatch.com) (grants database), and [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) (federal grants).
- 2. Fundraising campaigns.** Fundraisers can provide money or in-kind support for coalition activities. These activities might include traditional fundraisers or creative events, such as food drives. For example, Rooted Santa Barbara held a [Kale Disco fundraiser](#).
- 3. Existing funding sources.** Coalitions can also tap existing funding streams by adding a line item under members' budgets. Additionally, reviewing current activities can help ensure funds are used efficiently and reduce unnecessary expenses.
- 4. Sponsorships.** Local businesses and organizations can be valuable partners through sponsorships. These may include financial contributions or in-kind support, such as donating supplies or volunteer time.
- 5. Policies and systems.** Explore opportunities to secure funding through policy changes or budget appropriations at the state or local level. For example, states and cities can tax sugar-sweetened drinks to fund health programs. ChangeLab Solutions developed an [example of legislation](#) for taxes on sugary drinks that can be a helpful starting point to share with local policymakers. In

California, [the City of Santa Cruz has a beverage tax in place](#). Seattle, Washington has also established a [similar tax](#) with funds going to [local programs](#) that support healthy eating.

6. **Financing.** Consider exploring loans or social impact bonds, which allow private investors to provide upfront funding for social programs and receive repayment if the program generates savings. An example of a social impact bond in California is [The California Endowment's Social Bond](#).



### Key consideration: Managing coalition funds

Coalitions should establish a clear structure for managing funds. One option is to designate [a lead organization](#) (such as a local health department or other coordinating entity) that can apply for and accept funds on behalf of the coalition. Coalitions could also choose to become [a 501\(c\)\(3\) nonprofit organization](#). Under this approach, the coalition can pursue funding independently, without relying on a separate leading organization. However, this requires significant effort and time to set up and maintain.

## Sources

The content in this document was informed by the following resources:

- Butterfoss, F.D. *Ignite! Getting Your Community Coalition "Fired Up" for Change*. AuthorHouse, 2013.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "[Public Health Law and Policy Innovations: Social Impact Bonds](#)." n.d..
- Mathematica. "[Understanding and Planning for Sustainability: A Guide for Multi-Sector Community Partnerships Working to Address Social Determinants of Health](#)." 2023.