

Working Together: Lessons that Last.

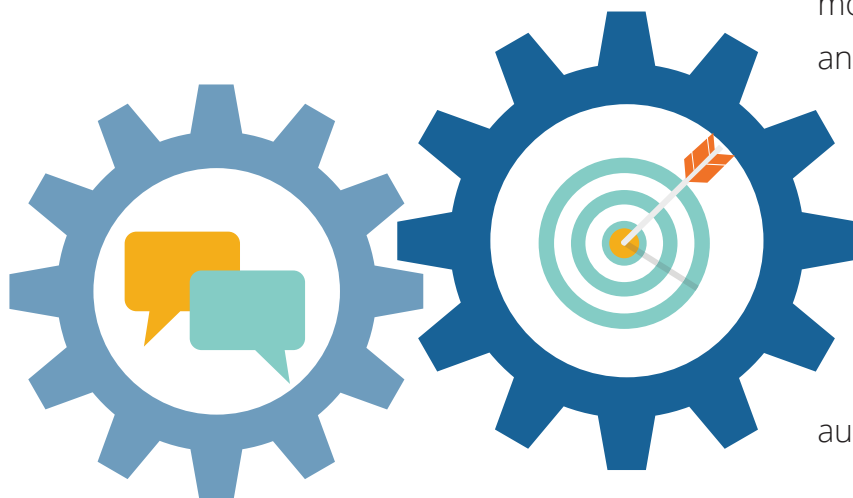
The lessons we learn early in life – to share, self-discipline, cooperate, focus and communicate – last. These skills, including motivation and self-esteem, begin to take root from birth to age 5. Successful people share these traits, and children need tools to develop such essential skills to help develop as individual human beings and also as professionals who work in just about any field. Early care and education is one of five primary fields of focus for ACS. (The other four are workforce development, health & human services, K-12 education, and Medicaid.) In this newsletter, we're happy to impart some learnings from our early childhood work that have broad application for any field where working together is critical.

Improving the Effectiveness of Coalitions

Addressing big issues like early childhood or criminal justice reform requires a big effort. This often means many organizations come together to form coalitions. But what are the

most effective roles for a coalition and the members within it? How do you build a coalition? And how do you move the work forward?

ACS President Lori McClung and Vice President Scarlett Boudier recently helped an audience of 80 people in the field



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of early childhood development explore these and other questions at the First Things First Summit, in Arizona. In a 90-minute workshop, “Building Coalitions in Local Communities: Bringing together unlikely partners on behalf of early learning,” McClung and Boudier shared best strategies for creating an effective coalition structure, attracting engaged partners and stakeholders to participate in the coalition, and keeping the coalition’s efforts on track and on target.

McClung and Boudier explored six key components of building a strong and effective coalition, which apply well beyond the early childhood field:

1. Establish a clear purpose and goals.

Coalition work can quickly become frustrating and ineffective if those engaged don’t share the same understanding of their purpose and common goals. In the earliest stages, coalition organizers should be able to clearly explain what they wish to achieve and why now is the time for collective action.

2. Understand the capacity and leadership.

Some coalitions are driven by one organization or agency. Others use a board or committee structure to make decisions. Much of this depends on the size of the community, the amount of time dedicated to the issue in question, and the ability to consistently meet to make decisions. Many effective coalitions establish various levels of leadership, designed to streamline the overall coalition processes while still keeping partners and stakeholders in the loop. This could include a small core leadership team, a larger steering committee, various action teams, or a combination of all of these roles.

“Having such an in-depth training for our representatives from across the state was a godsend in terms of increasing our capacity and getting everyone on the same page. ACS is truly gifted when it comes to engaging participants in a fun, meaningful, and memorable way. Everyone left with actions they could take immediately to improve their effectiveness.”

— *Session Participant*

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3. Engage partners and clarify expectations.

The success or failure of a coalition's effort is largely determined by who is at the table. Use ACS' [network mapping tool](#) to intentionally identify not only the usual suspects, but also those organizations that represent key voices or allies that may be overlooked. Mapping for partners isn't a one-and-done activity, but something to revisit annually as a coalition's work evolves. Once partners are identified, work with each of them to determine roles, reasonable expectations for engagement, and measures of accountability.

4. Communicate clearly and consistently.

Coalitions must pay attention to communication both internally (what and how information is shared among partners) and externally (what and how information is shared with the world). In both cases, coalitions should invest time in determining what information and messages should be shared, who needs to hear the messages and when and how often, the best way to deliver those messages, and what actions target audiences should take as a result. Just as the roles or makeup of coalition partners will evolve, so will communication needs and messaging strategy, so it merits periodic revisiting. Use ACS' [Giving Jargon the Boot](#) tool to help you create effective messaging for any audience.



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5. Understand the environment.

Most social issues naturally attract allies and produce opponents. Knowing which organizations are allies – even if they are not coalition members or direct stakeholders – and how your goals and their goals may be mutually beneficial can help further your coalition’s progress. So, too, can understanding which organizations are opponents and how you might counteract their messages or actions, or even win them over. It’s also important to keep an eye on upcoming events or activities that may have an impact on your work (such as elections, budget cycles, or other major events). You can’t foresee everything, but if you pay attention to the environment in which your coalition operates, you’re much less likely to be blindsided by unpleasant surprises.

6. Track your progress.

Measuring success is critical not only for proving your effort to the world, but for keeping your coalition partners and stakeholders motivated and engaged. From the outset of your coalition’s work, set indicators and benchmarks for how you will assess the results of your activities. (Indicators are signs or measures that show the condition or existence of something. Benchmarks are a measure of where your indicators are at a defined point in time, and are the baseline from which you’ll show progress forward.) Create a timeline for measuring indicators and report your findings at regular intervals to both internal and external audiences. Use ACS’ [Assess Your Collaboration](#) tool to reflect on your progress.

As part of the coalition-building workshop, the ACS team created a workbook that participants used during the session and took with them to continue their coalition work. This tool was acknowledged as especially helpful by several session participants.

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Helping Early Education Programs Meet a Higher Standard

By 2020, all early childhood education programs that receive public funding in Ohio must meet a set of rigorous requirements under the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). That means child care providers participating in the 5-star rating system (Step Up To Quality – SUTQ) must both understand and build capacity to maintain or increase their SUTQ rating. In the greater Columbus area, the Franklin County Department of Jobs and Family Services (FCDJFS) determined the needs of providers and parents, used that information to develop training for providers, is conducting community outreach, and is sharing the message about the importance of improved quality for the county's youngest residents. ACS has been privileged to be a part of this effort, along with its strategic partners: EMC Research, Triumph Communications, and the Workforce Intervention for Development and Education Firm.

To help better understand the early childhood landscape in Franklin County, the consulting team conducted countywide surveys of residents and focus groups with parents and providers in target zip codes to understand perspectives and shape messaging for the

overall effort. Results of this messaging research were infused in paid media and community outreach efforts.

Part of the research revealed nearly 23,000 children are in unrated care and also showed that only 24% of the 740 childcare providers in the county who receive public dollars are star-rated. It also identified “childcare deserts” across the county, as well as communities where children are least likely to receive care from a star-rated provider.

The research that ACS and the consulting team conducted helped FCDJFS understand that there was an opportunity not only to increase the number of providers that are rated, but to target specific providers in specific neighborhoods that serve the most at-risk children and ensure they receive the assistance they need through the free trainings to help become star rated.

Based on the research, ACS helped FCDJFS develop an intensive community outreach program that included a grassroots, door-to-door effort to engage childcare providers one-on-one and encourage them to attend 32 hours of free SUTQ training that FCDJFS offers. FCDJFS

also reached out to multiple other public agencies and nonprofits that share the work of supporting children and families, encouraging them to share information about training opportunities and to help elevate the messaging around the importance of quality child care.

The research-based paid media campaign and training strategy, developed by ACS, shared messages about the importance of quality in early childhood education through television and radio commercials. FCDJFS also garnered hundreds of thousands of social media impressions through intentional outreach on Facebook and Twitter.

What was the result of all this effort?

As of October 2018, FCDJFS had successfully reached and registered 150 providers for training, keeping the project on track to meet its goal of engaging nearly 35% of unrated providers in the county, with an additional three months of registration time still to go. Among the providers who registered and received training are high-risk providers that care for nearly a third (6,200) of the children in unrated care. High-risk providers are defined as those located in target zip codes, currently not rated through the QRIS, who receive public funds.

“Many times public agencies see mandates or requirements as just another hurdle or obstacle to their work. But Franklin County saw this as an opportunity to partner with providers and the broader community,” says Scarlett Boudier, ACS Vice President. **“They created a very focused and intentional strategy to increase awareness, encourage the participation of government, nonprofits and the business community and a training that is hands-on and offers providers all that is needed to be in the strongest possible position to become star-rated by the State of Ohio. Their commitment to increasing quality is commendable.”**

Say What? Understanding Early Childhood Lingo

QRIS. MIECHV. DAP. Sometimes it seems like the field of early childhood education has its own alphabet! Terminology can be confusing, but ACS has you covered with our new Early Care and Education Glossary. In this easy-to-use document, you'll find all the common terms of the field clearly defined and explained.

Download it today for free, and keep it at the ready for ongoing clarity!

15 Years Strong

2018 is a year in which strategic advocacy and persuasive communication have been more important than ever. Celebrating 15 years as a successful, award-winning, and women- and minority-owned business, ACS has the know-how to handle any challenge. Look out for new content on our website as we celebrate and highlight many of the people and issues that have inspired our work and allowed us to play a part in their success!

Want more?

Want to learn how communication, strategy development or advocacy can move your organization forward? Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?

Contact one of our team members, call toll free at **1-877-372-0166** or visit our [website](#).

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