Networking & Alliance Building Toolkit
for Diaspora Organizations

Table of contents

List of tables

List of figures

Acknowledgements

The aim of the Toolkit

This is one of three toolkits commissioned by the Danish Refugee Council's Diaspora Programme to UNU-MERIT/Maastricht University as part of its Diaspora Dialogue in Europe programming. The Diaspora Programme is implemented by DRC's Civil Society Engagement Unit. DRC engages civil society actors rooted in and/or with direct ties to the Global South, and therefore considers diaspora transnational civil society actors an integral part of the civil society they work with. The toolkit series intends to offer practical guidance to diaspora actors in three main areas: (1) Diaspora Fundraising, (2) Community Outreach and (3) Networking and Alliances Building.

This toolkit provides practical guidance for building and connecting networks and alliances among diaspora organizations and other civil society actors.

Section 1 highlights the importance of networking and alliances building for diaspora organizations as well as the role of network culture and structure to keep alliances working in the long run.

Section 2 provides an overview of the different types of collaboration by outlining the advantages and disadvantages of the different forms of collaboration.

Section 3 offers some practical tools that can be used in the 1) planning, 2) initiating and 3) organizing of networks and alliances. These tools and methods not only help to integrate the collaborative work in your overall vision and to discover new allies and partners, but also provide practical guidance on how to deal with common challenges in organizing networks and alliances.

Section 4 summarizes the main obstacles networks face as well as some lessons learnt to provide practical recommendations for organizing networks and alliances within and beyond the diaspora civil society.

The toolkit is informed by lessons learnt and good practices of diaspora networking and alliances building arising from the discussions within trainings for diaspora actors. The trainings were part of the Danish Refugee Council's Civil Society and Engagement Unit, which aims to support civil society actors in European countries to engage more broadly with the diaspora community in a dialogue on various aspects of what it means to be or become part of a diaspora, as well as its role in the country of residence and towards its country of origin.

The importance of networks and alliance

"The world doesn't change one person at a time. It changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what's possible. Rather than worry about critical mass, our work is to foster critical connections." ~ Margaret Wheatley

Diaspora civil society actors can contribute in various ways to both countries of residence and origin. Creating networks and alliances is a valued strategy to strengthen diaspora organizations' capacities and contributions to both societies.[1]

Networks or alliances can play an influential role in influencing policies and decision-making, where networks advocate in a single amplified voice or act as a watchdog for issues that need to be addressed.[2] As such, by building alliances and networks, diaspora civil society **actors can amplify migrants' and refugees' voices** for greater impact on society.[3]

Networks **can provide spaces that facilitate the exchange of information, the allocation of resources and the coordination of joint action**.[4] By identifying shared interests through the exchange of perspectives, the creation of networks contributes to addressing the fragmentations, which in return serves to learn from each other, grow together and build capacities.[5]

Building a network or alliance can be a lengthy and resource-intensive task. It can be challenging to balance different identities, values, objectives and priorities of members and motivate them to engage in joint action. Initiating alliances and networks more strategically not only helps to discover new allies and partners but also to build a sustainable network culture and structure that keeps the alliances working in the long run.

Reasons for working together as a Network

Amplification of voice

To spread the risk involved

To form a national body that can represent different interests

Sense of solidarity on a shared purpose

To bring together actors with diverse expertise and strenghts

To learn from each other

To expand individual areas of coverage

To carry our activities together

To show a coordinated response

[1] Papadopoulou, A.; Edda, J.; Farrow, K.; & Bathily, A. (2015). Working together with refugee diasporas in development. Discussion Paper, January 2015. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Brussels.

[2] Christian Aid (2018). The Art of Networking: A study of civil society networks in Myanmar. Christian Aid, London.

[3] Ashman, D.; Charles, C.; Cuenca, A.; Luca, C.; Singer, B. & Schmith, M. (2005). Supporting Civil Society Networks in International Development Programs. AED Center for Civil Society and Governance, Washington D.C.

[4] Plastrik, P., & Taylor, M. (2006). Net gains: A handbook for network builders seeking social change. Innovation Network for Communities.

[5] Brown, L. D. , & Kalegaonkar, A. (1998). Challenges to civil society and the rise of support organizations. Institutional Development, 5(1), 20-37.

Coalitions, networks & alliances

Civil society networks tend to capture various forms of partnership and connections, varying in their degree of formality and interdependence as well as their level of joint action. They can range from individual activists or initiatives connecting themselves through social media, such as WhatsApp or Facebook, to realise sporadic joint actions, to highly formalised networks with formal membership, shared long-term vision and continuous programs and collaboration. Also, civil society networks may be referred to in different names, including coalition, alliance, or movement. What all these terms have in common is, that "civil society groups, organizations and sometimes, individuals come together voluntarily to pursue shared purposes of social development or democratic governance".[6] The purposes of civil society networks can range from the exchange of information, the allocation of resources, the enhancing of power by influencing and expanding citizens' voices for greater impact on society, to practices expressing collective identities as community or social groups.

Diasporas organize themselves in the social, cultural, economic, and political spheres and establish transnational networks that connect the diaspora, the receiving country and the country of origin. Hence, per definition diasporas connect scattered individuals to a distinctive transnational community. Diaspora networks or alliances tend to emerge due to synergies between the members and through a joint effort and ownership by the different diaspora organizations, to enable coordination and collaboration and to strengthen the basis of the collective voices. One can distinguish between different forms of networks and alliances:

- **Geography-based networks** seek to connect diaspora organizations and initiatives in specific location (e.g., city, region, or country) active in diverse fields such as advocacy, humanitarian aid, development and integration.

- **Issue-based networks** foster collaboration of diaspora organizations in specific domains such as humanitarian aid, integration or advocacy.

- **Group-based networks** connect different sub-segments of the diaspora, such as women or youth networks to provide space for empowerment and collective action.

Diaspora groups and their sources of network identity should not be considered just along national, ethnic and religious lines, but also based on gender, professional networks and political affiliation. Diaspora agents are seldom homogeneous or unified but characterised by a heterogeneous set of actors with diverse and sometimes conflicting interests and aspirations and institutions. Intersecting factors such as class, professional, ethnic, generational or gendered hierarchies may further shape the socio-political dynamics such as fragmentation, power relations and competition. Successful diaspora networks therefore not only connect groups or individuals based on shared geography, but also based on a shared culture, values, vision, and common purpose and action.

Next to building alliances within the diaspora, there is an intrinsic value of creating networks with actors outside of your community. Engaging with a more diversified range of actors can enable you to generate new ideas and help you to get a deeper understanding of how different groups, e.g., ethnicities, classes, genders, sexualities, immigrant status or ability are differently impacted by the same problem.

---

[6] Ashman et al., 2005, p.7

By connecting different groups and organizations, these networks or alliances expand their basis of influence and incorporate a wider range of voices.

While the terms coalitions, networks and alliances are often used in a fluid and flexible manner, the following definitions highlight some specifics of each of the terms:[7]

- **Coalitions** tend to be rather short-term in nature and align around a specific campaign or objective. The cooperation tends to dissolve once the goal of the campaign or project is achieved. However, the connections that have been built may engender more long-term networks and alliances in the future.

- **Networks** connect groups or individuals that tend to share a similar organizational form and purpose. While they can differ in terms of their degree of formality and interdependence they generally develop a clear structure, membership criteria and a shared vision and agenda.

- **Alliances** connect two or more organizations to build power to affect broader change and transform systems of power. While members of alliances tend to maintain their independent organizational structures and identities, they are bound by a long-term vision and seek to achieve a bigger societal impact.

Depending on the objective you want to achieve with the network, you may choose different forms of collaboration. For instance, you may form a coalition with other migrants- or refugee-led organizations to mobilize the migrant constituency to exercise their electoral rights in the next elections. Alternatively, you want to build a more long-term alliance with various actors at the local level to pressure politicians to ensure and protect migrants' rights.

---

[7] Pastor, M.; Ito, J. & Ortiz, R. (2010). Connecting at the Crossroad -Alliance Building and Social Change in Tough Times. University of Southern California, Program for Environmental and Regional Equity.

Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of different forms of collaboration and can help you to make a more strategic choice for partnership. Looking at this table, you may want to reflect on your potential partnerships and identify the level of trust, benefits and risks you have with them.

Table 1. Continuum of Collaboration

Low intensity, low risk, limited benefit potential →→→ Deeper trust, higher stakes, bigger potential benefit

	Cooperation	Networks of organizations and/or individuals	Campaign-based coalitions	Strategic alliances	Merger/ Structural affiliation
Purpose	Purely tactical for efficiency or coordination	Connect a set of organizations and/or individuals to learn or strategize together	Work together for some mutual benefit, usually structured around specific campaign goals	Bigger impact, longer term vision. Jointly launch/ manage 1 or more projects	Combine most or all resources for impact, effectiveness, unity
Time Horizon	Short term, Sporadi.	As needed, but can be longer term	Depends on time needed to win a campaign or complete a project	Intentional and long-term	Permanent
Vision, Value, Political beliefs	Not necessarily shared	Depends on purpose. Can be issue-based, role-based, geographic, etc.	Often a single-issue focus, may have diverse political beliefs but a common constituency or goal	Share common long-term vision, strategy, world-view and systemic change goals	Deeply aligned, unified around a common joint purpose that brings together separate groups
Decision-Making	Informal	Dispersed; Staff-centric; or sometime more formal structures	Some form of agreement and structure, varies dependent on voluntary level of engagement	Driven by formal, written agreements. High level of expectations. Shared decision-making	Merger results in a new entity and new decision-making body. Formal, written accords
Level of Relationship	Limited, non-permanent	Varies. Can be very tight or very loose. Individual bonds can be stronger than organizational	Varies. Joint planning; info sharing. Potentially deep relationships among core and less developed relationships among all members	Members agree to act in the best interest of the collaboration, sometimes above individual groups' interests. Deep trust and solidarity	Creation or dissolution of one or more organizations. Period of transition results in new relationships
Mutual Accountability	Limited to none	Depends on structure	Defined mutual expectations related to joint work. Limited consequences to low-performance	Clear expectations, and formal and informal mechanisms for accountability to commitments	Organizational vision and priorities. Formal and informal mechanisms
Time Commitment	Limited	Depends on structure	Limited based on project or goal	Long lasting, significant investment of time	Significant leading up to merger

Source: Adapted from ROADMAP (2013) Our Healthy Alliance Resources.
https://roadmapconsulting.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Collaboration_Continuum.pdf

Networking and alliance building tools

While some networks emerge organically, driven by synergies between the members and through a joint effort and ownership, others might have established a more top-down approach (e.g. donor-driven) or due to material interests (e.g. generation of funds). However, spending time on planning, initiating and organizing an alliance or network can yield considerable benefits. The following tools can not only help to integrate the collaborative work in your overall vision and to discover new allies and partners, but also provide practical guidance on how to deal with common challenges in organizing a network and alliances. By engaging more strategically in the alliances and network-building process, it also makes it easier to respond dynamically and flexibly towards complexity and change.

Planning the network and alliance building process

Building a network or alliance can be a lengthy and resource-intensive task. It is, therefore, crucial to invest enough time in the planning of the process. No matter if you want to initiate a short term coalition or long-term partnership and network, having this process integrated into your overall strategy and vision helps you to choose the right partner and allies to realise the change you want to achieve. Reflect on what the concrete goals of the network or alliance are and how these align with your overall strategy and vision. Ask yourself for which of your objectives or projects an alliance would be beneficial and what resources would be needed for initiating and maintaining the partnership.

Having a theory of change provides you with a road map on how to realise your overall vision, as it helps you to reflect on how and why the desired change is expected to happen in a given context. The theory of change helps you to outline your activities and intervention, the objectives you want to achieve and how these connect to your long-term vision.[8] The tool further helps you to analyze the context as well as the power dynamics at play and how these influence the change you want to achieve.[9] We can start by answering the following question:

> **If …** we take this **action. Then …** we will achieve **this goal. Because …** of these **reasons**.

For instance, if we want to launch a campaign that seeks to mobilize the migrant constituency to exercise their electoral rights in the next elections, with the long-term goal that politicians ensure the protection of migrants' rights and respond to the demands and needs of the migrant constituency, we may start with the following sentence:

> **If** we conduct workshops that inform migrants about their rights and the benefits of voting, **then** we will increase the voting turnout of these groups, **because** the historical low voting turnout is a result of a lack of awareness of voting rights.

---

[8] Center for Theory of Change (2021). Theory of change. Retrieved from: https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/
[9] Green, D. (2013a). What is a theory of change and how do we use it? From Poverty to Power. Retrieved from: https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-is-a-theory-of-change-and-does-it-actually-help/

We can reflect on the change we want to achieve further and connect the previous statement to the broader goal we want to achieve:

If we raise awareness of the voting potential of migrants among politicians, *then* politicians take into consideration the needs and demands of the migrant constituency, *because* getting the migrant's vote can determine if they get elected or not.

Once we are clear about our overall goals and vision, we can further reflect how the concrete goals of the network or alliance-building align with the change we want to achieve:

If we build a coalition with other migrant or refugee-led organizations, *then* we will mobilize different migrant constituencies, *because* the organizations have access and are trusted in their communities.

Most civil society work involves a redistribution of power, for example by empowering refugees to demand their rights, or by building a strong collective voice to influence decision making on integration issues. It is, therefore, necessary to not only understand the nature of redistribution power, but also the key forces that are driving or blocking the change you want to achieve. Below you will find some tools that help you to guide the power analysis.[10]

Problem Tree

Effects

Root Causes

Force field Analysis

Forces for Change   **Forces Against Change**

Desired Change
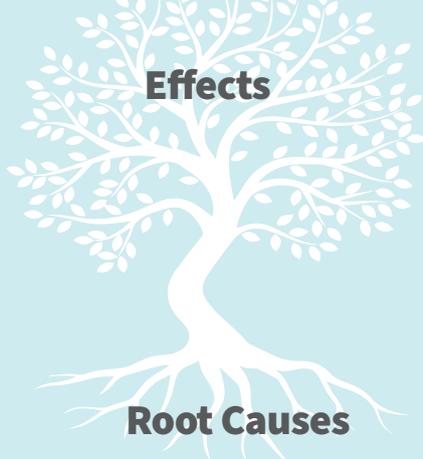
In most cases, social problems are so complex that a project or initiative can only deal with the solution of one aspect. And yet, it is important to grasp the problem in all its complexity and to take into account the influence of specific factors. The Problem Tree provides a useful tool for analysing a problem with all its root causes, consequences and influencing factors.

For more information see: ODI (2009). Successful Communication, A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organizations. Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Retrieved from: https://cdn.odi.org/
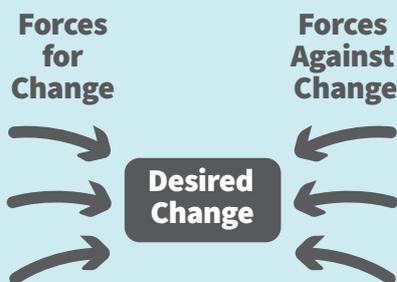
The Force Field Analysis is an analysis tool that helps to identify and visualise factors and forces - positive and negative - that influence the change you want to achieve. The aim is not only to recognise these factors but also to work out solutions to change the force field in one's sense. To achieve this, the factors and forces are assessed and specific measures are developed to shift the forces to your advantage.

For more information see: Mind Tool. Force Field Analysis-Analyzing the pressures for and against change. Retrieved from: https://www.mindtools.com/

---

[10] Green, D. (2013b). What questions help us understand how change happens? Retrieved from: https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-questions-help-us-understand-how-change-happens/

Initiating the alliances – identifying actors and determining engagement strategies

Planning your alliances and networks more strategically not only helps you to discover new allies and partners but also to understand the political and social power structures at play. The following tools enable you to creatively identify potential allies, opponents, targets and constituents, visualise the different power relationships and develop concrete strategies to reach out, educate, or mobilize different groups that are relevant to your cause.

Power mapping

Power mapping is a tool that has been used widely in advocacy and campaigning to unpack the dynamics of power within a system. The method helps to map relevant actors (individuals, groups, organizations, institutions) relevant for your issue or campaign and identifies their position and relations of power. The mapping is based on the assumption that the value of relational power is an important dynamic in social organizing and as such provides you with useful guidance on who to target to promote social change.

The term power often conveys a more negative meaning, in which the power holder maintains control over those in a more disadvantaged position. However, we can think about power also in more positive terms, as something that can be mobilized to create positive strategies and create multiple opportunities for change.[11]

The question then becomes – how can I transform resources into the very sources of power needed? You can make use of different exercises that help you to map out the biggest forces at play (e.g., the Pillars of Power, or the Pillars of Support).

Begin with a concrete action or campaign and outline the key underlying problem as well as the **objectives** you want to achieve. Take significant time for brainstorming to **identify the different actors** (individuals, groups, organizations, institutions) that have a stake in or are affected by your campaign/action, by asking yourself who is affected by the issue, who can influence the situation, who can make decisions, who has necessary resources/skills to implement potential ideas and solutions? Think broadly about potential connections to identify people's and organizations' work, political, family, religious, and neighbourhoods' ties.

Once you have identified the different actors, list as much identifying characteristics as possible in order to categorize them into sub-groups. Taking into account the heterogeneity and diversity within the sets of actors will help to develop concrete strategies to reach out, educate, or mobilize the different groups. Consider also key individual actors in each of the groups that you could target directly, as it is often not institutions but persons who take the discission.

---

[11] Hunjan, R. & Pettit, J. (2011). Power: A practical guide for facilitating social change. Carnegie United Kingdom Trust.

Figure 1. Players and Actors Brainstorming

PLAYERS AND ACTORS

Other Communities
- Religious groups
- Other Migrant groups
- Other CSOs

Government
- Department or Ministries
- Level (Local, Regional, National)

ISSUE CAMPAIGN

Particular segments of the community
- Newcomers
- Women
- Youth

Media
- Media Outlets
- Social Media Groups

Professionals
- Teachers
- Police
- Local Business
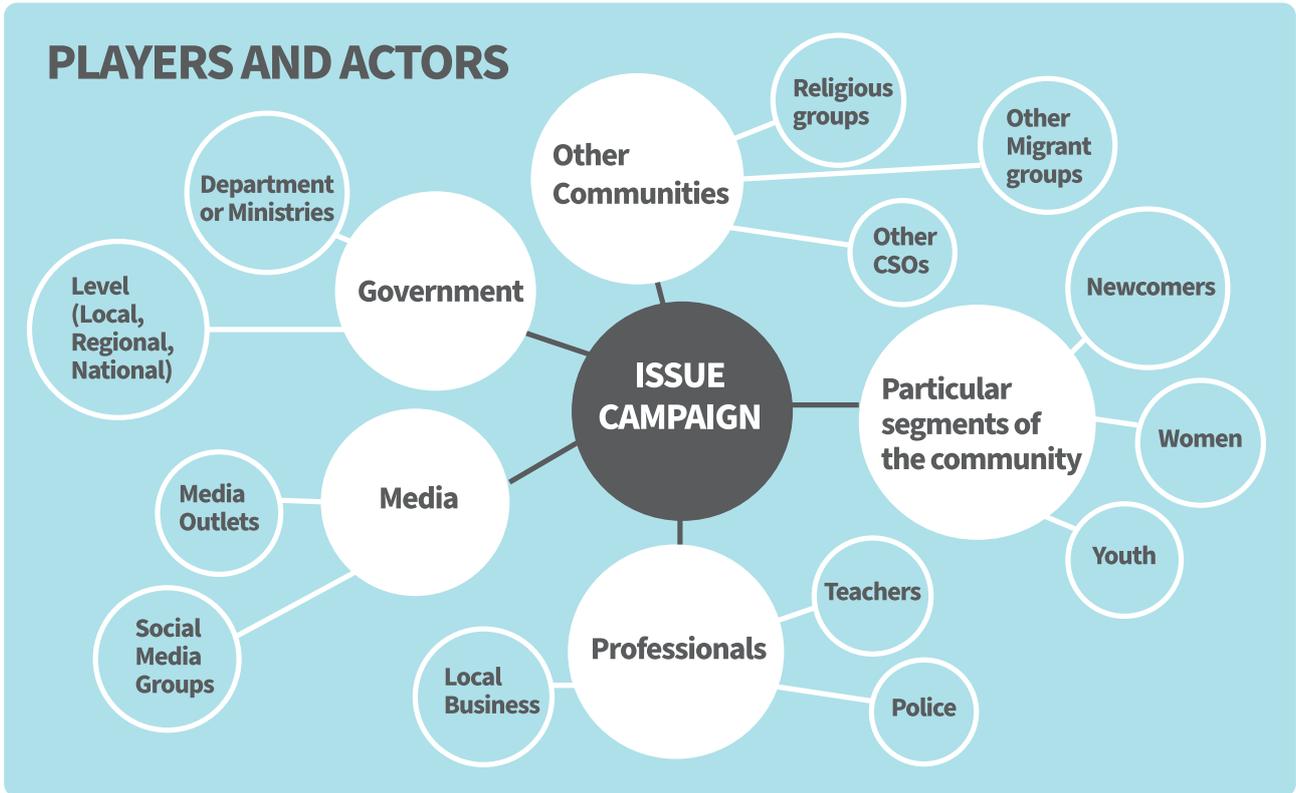
Now, reflect on each actors' or group's level of support and degree of influence in the context of your objective/s. Who of the players can be an obstacle to change? Who has a desire for change? Who lacks the capacity and who can play a key role in the change you want to achieve? Place the different players on the power map (see Figure 2) and leave enough space between them. Don't forget to include your organization or initiative in the map. You may also want to reflect on the relational power lines between the actors (are the actors cooperating or in conflicting positions? Who has a wide range of connections, who has limited?).

Figure 2. Power Map
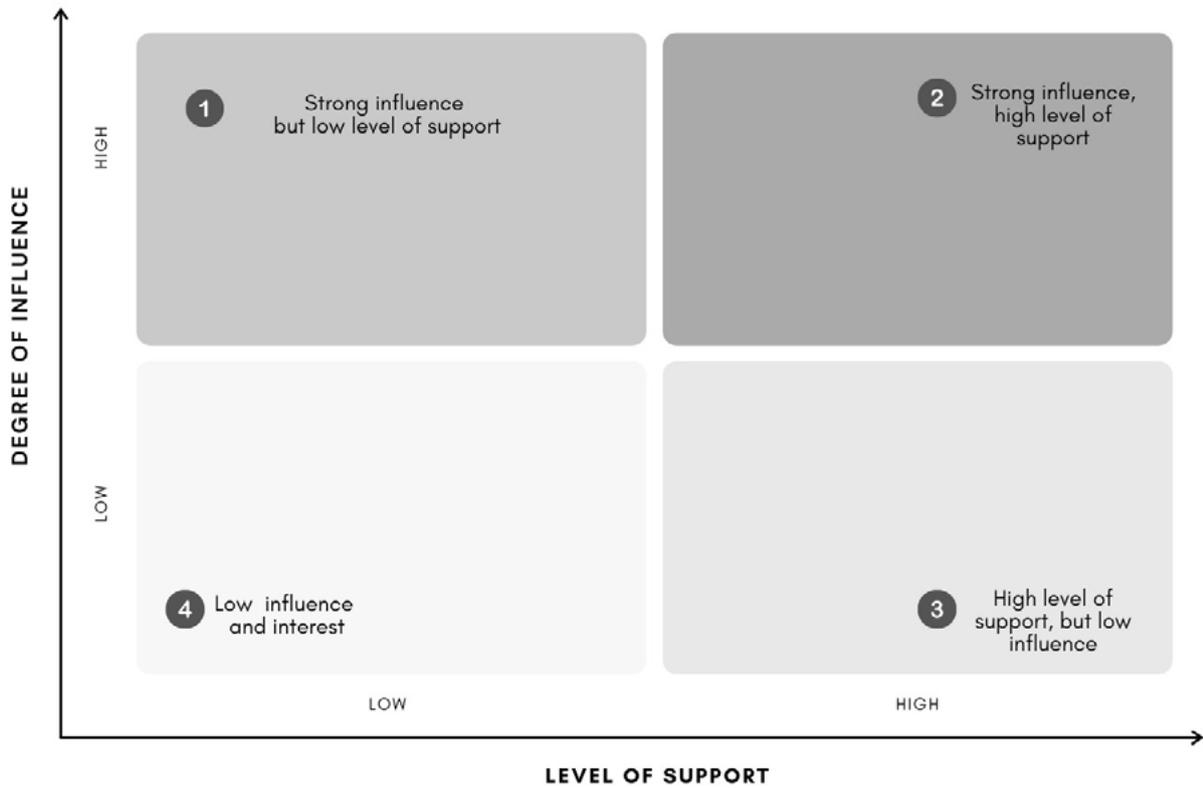
When your map is complete, use this analysis to plan potential networks and alliances. Be specific in choosing potential strategies to target the different actors on your map[12]:

Figure 3. Engagement Strategies

---
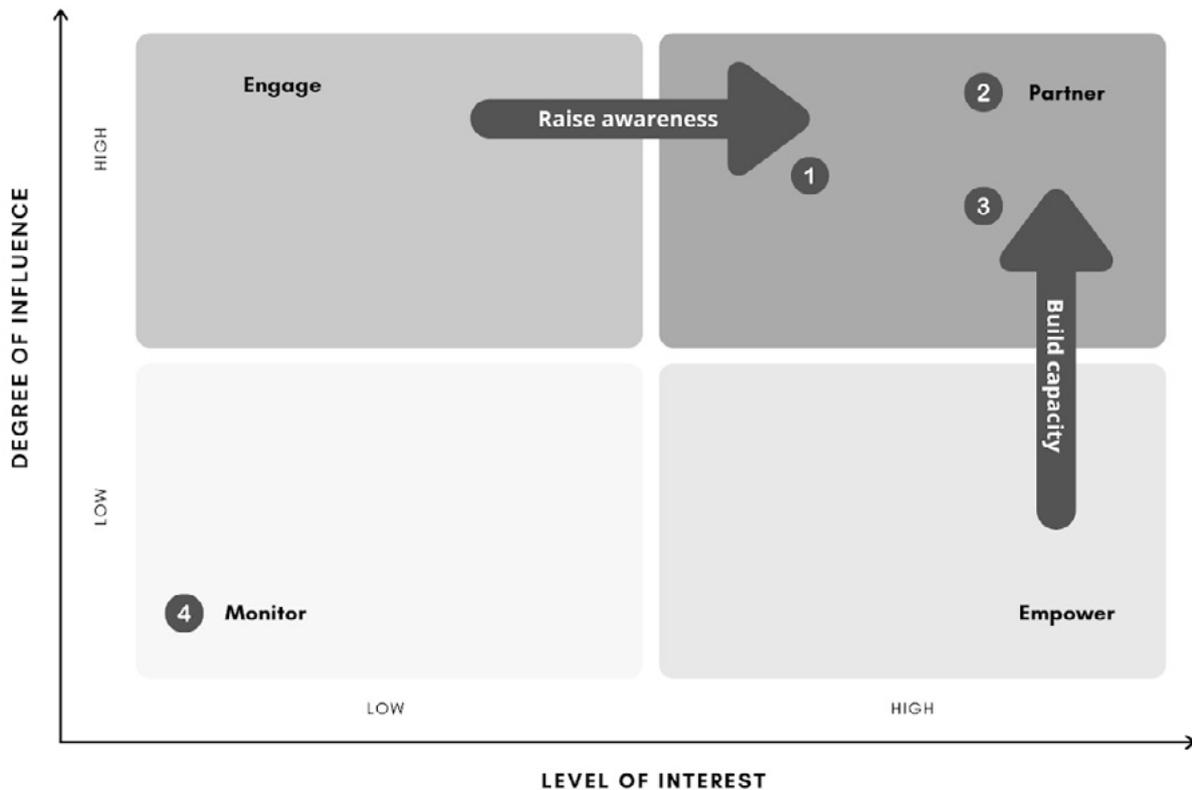
[12] Bosco, C. & Guénéheux, D. (2015). Toolkit. Towards New Social Contracts - Using Dialogue Processes to Promote Social Change. CIVICUS.

- **Awareness Raising:** You may want to engage in different awareness raising campaigns to move those actors who have a high degree of influence, but show a low level of support, a step closer to your position. However, be critical about where the lack of support stems from. In cases where there is limited knowledge of or interest in your cause, awareness raising can help to educate these actors about the problem. However, if the lack of support is due to strongly opposing positions you might not want to have these actors as a first target (see Spectrum of Allies for strategic tactics), as it is very unlikely (and often not desirable) to win a strong opposition for your cause.

- **Capacity development:** There may be a considerable number of actors who support your objectives but do not have a strong influence on the system. Think about ways with which to build their capacity and how to empower them to become stronger players in the system.

- **Partner:** Look closely at the actors who have a high level of influence and are strongly supporting your position. You might find some with whom you are already cooperating, but also others who have not been considered as an ally yet. Reach out to those and win them for your cause.

- **Monitor:** You may not want to target those actors with a low level of support and low degree of influence, as they most likely will not be willing or able to contribute to the change you want to achieve. However, as contexts tend to be dynamic, you may want to keep an eye on them, to monitor if their position is changing over the course of your campaign or project.

> **For more information on the Power Mapping Tool see:**
> **The Beautiful Trouble Toolbox:** https://www.beautifultrouble.org/toolbox/#/tool/power-mapping.
> **Commons Social Change Library:** https://commonslibrary.org/guide-power-mapping-and-analysis/

The Spectrum of allies

Another tool of mapping different actors is the Spectrum of Allies developed by George Lakey, Training for Change. This tool is particularly useful for mapping actors and designing engagement strategies with regards to a particular issue, action and campaign or goal. By narrowing the focus on a specific issue, it encourages more optimistic and realistic efforts in building alliances for your action or campaign. Rather than looking at the system as a whole, the analysis focuses on the position of actors in relation to your issue and goals. By identifying potential allies, opponents and the various actors in between, the tool helps to design specific actions and tactics to reach out, educate, or mobilize the different groups and build a strong support base for your actions.

The central idea is that movements or campaigns **are not won by overpowering the opposition**, but rather by moving the various actors **closer to your position**. The method, therefore, reminds us that we should move beyond a narrow focus, by analysing the complex relationships among actors and their relation to our cause. Instead of only focusing on our close allies and circles, or on those who are in strong opposition, the idea is to identify the various actors in between and to design tactics and actions that move them closer to us. For instance, if your campaign focuses on enhancing the political rights of immigrants, you might not want to win the active opposition (e.g. right-wing movements or parties) for you cause, but rather target groups that hold a neutral position or encourage those who have sympathy for your cause to take action.

Figure 4. The Spectrum of allies

SPECTRUM OF ALLIES

Neutral

Passive Allies

Passive Opposition

Active Allies

Active Opposition

Source: https://commonslibrary.org/spectrum-of-allies/
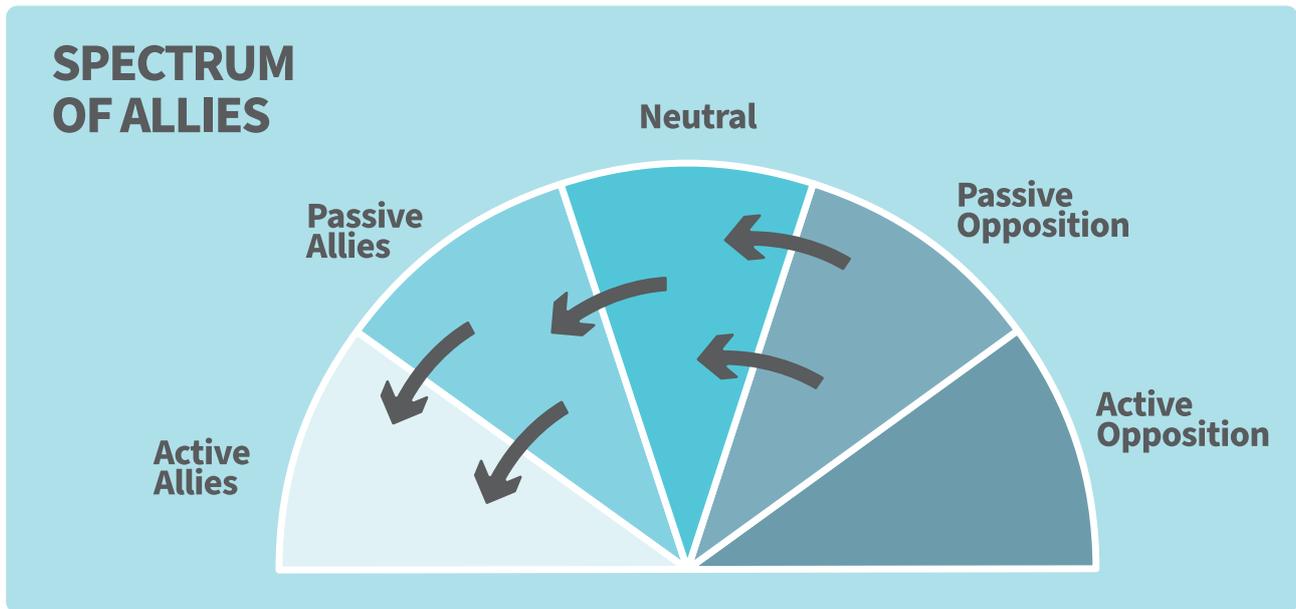
You can use this tool as a separate exercise or as a follow-up of the power mapping. After having identified a comprehensive list of actors **locate them in the different segments** of the Spectrum of Allies.

- **Active allies:** are people or groups who agree with your cause and vision and are organizing along your side.

- **Passive allies:** are people or groups who agree with your cause and vision but are not active yet (!).

- **Neutral:** are people or groups, who have a neutral position towards your cause and vision, are unengaged and/or uninformed.

- **Passive opposition:** are people or groups who disagree with your cause and vision, but do not take any action against you or your organization.

- **Active opposition:** are people or groups who not only disagree with your cause and vision, but actively take actions to prevent the change you want to achieve.

Reflect on your choice and if possible spend time to discuss disagreements. You may want to specify the actors further, or you need to do some research to gain a deeper knowledge on their position regarding your campaign or action.

Once you have found a position for all the identified actors on the spectrum, start thinking about **specific tactics or actions** that could make the actors in the various slices to shift their position. The aim should not be to change the position of those at the extreme end of opposition, but rather to build a stronger basis of those who support our claims and campaign. Hence, you may want to use tactics to encourage passive allies to take action, or outreach to the neutral actors to gain their solidarity and sympathy. Each segment, therefore, calls for different tactics and action to reach out to the identified actors.

- You may mobilize your active allies by organizing joint activities such information or cultural events, seminars or workshops on your issue of concern.

- With regard to your passive allies you may want to understand the reasons that hinder them to

become actively involved. Reflect about ways with which to increase their willingness or capacity to make them a supporter of your cause.

- In the case of neutral actors your tactics should aim at informing and educating them about the problem and your cause in order to increase their knowledge and to gain their sympathy, moving them to a "passive ally" position. When reaching out to neutral groups you may search for ways that connect your campaign or action to their respective experiences. Be creative in finding potential intersections of your actions and objectives.

- It is very unlikely, if not impossible, to turn an active opponent into a supporter of your cause. The more polarized the positions, the less likely it will be that an actor changes its position (even with profound arguments). Do not spend too much time and energy in fighting an already lost battle, but rather focus on the struggles that you can win. Instead of trying to move these actors, focus on strategies that can delegitimize their positions in order to get the passive allies a step further in your direction.

The following questions can help you to reflect more deeply on the potential tactics and engagement strategies.

- Which actors do we want to target in our next action?

- What resources are needed to move these actors one step toward us?

- Which actions address the different interests, needs and cultural inclinations of these groups to make them move a step towards us?

- What actions might drive us apart?

Remember…

- You do not want to get the strong opponents on your side, but rather to move the identified actors just one step further in the direction of the "allies".

- Keep in mind the heterogeneity within each group of stakeholders, so be specific when identifying the different actors to avoid broad categorisations.

- Be aware that each segment calls for different tactics and actions to reach out to the identified actors.

- In case you are undecided about the location of an actor, you may do some research or try to specify the actors further.

- Take into account the dynamics and complexity of social change! Depending on your specific objective actors may change their location in the spectrum, or they may shift their position over time.

For mor information on the Spectrum of Allies tool see:

Lakey, G. (2012). Know your allies, your opponents and everyone in between. Waging Nonviolence: https://wagingnonviolence.org/2012/07/know-your-allies-your-opponents-and-everyone-in-between/

Bloch, N. The spectrum of Allies. The beautiful Uprising (source available in Arabic): https://beautifulrising.org/tool/spectrum-of-allies

Organizing and running the alliance: culture, structure & leadership

The organization of networks and alliances is built on three intersecting dimensions: culture, leadership and organizational structure. Relationships are inherently social in nature; practicing a network culture is therefore crucial to develop a shared vision, values and identities – the culture hence represents the glue that holds networks together. Organizational structures enable the members to reinforce shared norms and to establish arrangements that guide the allocation of resources, the decision-making process as well as joint activities to realise the shared goals. Collective leadership not only coordinates the internal process of decision-making, but is also crucial to enable constructive conflict resolution, consensus, and joint action.

Figure 5. Dimensions of Organizing

DIMENSIONS OF ORGANIZING

Culture

Collective Leadership

Organizational Structure

Culture

Trust is the glue that holds social relationships together. One of the major challenges that networks and alliances face is that they bring together actors with different identities, values and visions to work on a common issue of interest. And even when all the members align in their overall values and visions, they may have very different understandings of the process of working, varying in their specific actions and strategies or the priority they give to the specific objectives.[13]

Creating a safe space for members to reflect on the different organizational cultures, tactics, strategies, and theories of change helps to identify common values and visions and to create a culture of trust. The relationship and trust-building

Mistrust and Fragmented Solidarities

Diaspora groups, especially those originating from conflict areas, may carry traumas of war, loss and displacement. These traumas may evoke a culture of fear and mistrust leading to fragmented solidarities and a lacking sense of community. To a certain degree, societal divisions are reproduced in the diaspora, impairing a sense of collective trust, and deteriorating the overall social fabric of diaspora communities. Networks and alliances help to rebuild social capital among members of diasporas, connect individuals and groups to transform their experience of suffering, trauma and despair into collective claims and action.

---

[13] Pastor et al., 2010

process should be integrated as an essential part of the network and alliance. This means that these spaces should be not only secured at the beginning of the network and alliances process but should become an integral part of the collaborative work.

While a shared vision is crucial for initiating and sustaining a network or alliance, tensions, conflicts and differences are often part of the everyday reality. Establishing an environment that enables reflective dialogues, makes it much easier to deal with conflicts in a constructive way. This means also to open spaces to articulate and discuss disagreements, as much as finding ways of moving forward together.

Through mutual learning, we can create open spaces to reflect on new ways of thinking, understanding and doing the work. In building a team culture you may reflect on your own purpose and the shared values but also the behaviour needed to realize and support the collective purpose and values.

Figure 6. Building a team culture

BUILDING A TEAM CULTURE

My Purpose

Why do I do this work?

What motivates me personally?

Our Purpose

Our Values

What are our core values?

What is the most important for us in a good team environment?

Behaviours

What behaviours do we need to take individually and as a team to support and live our values?
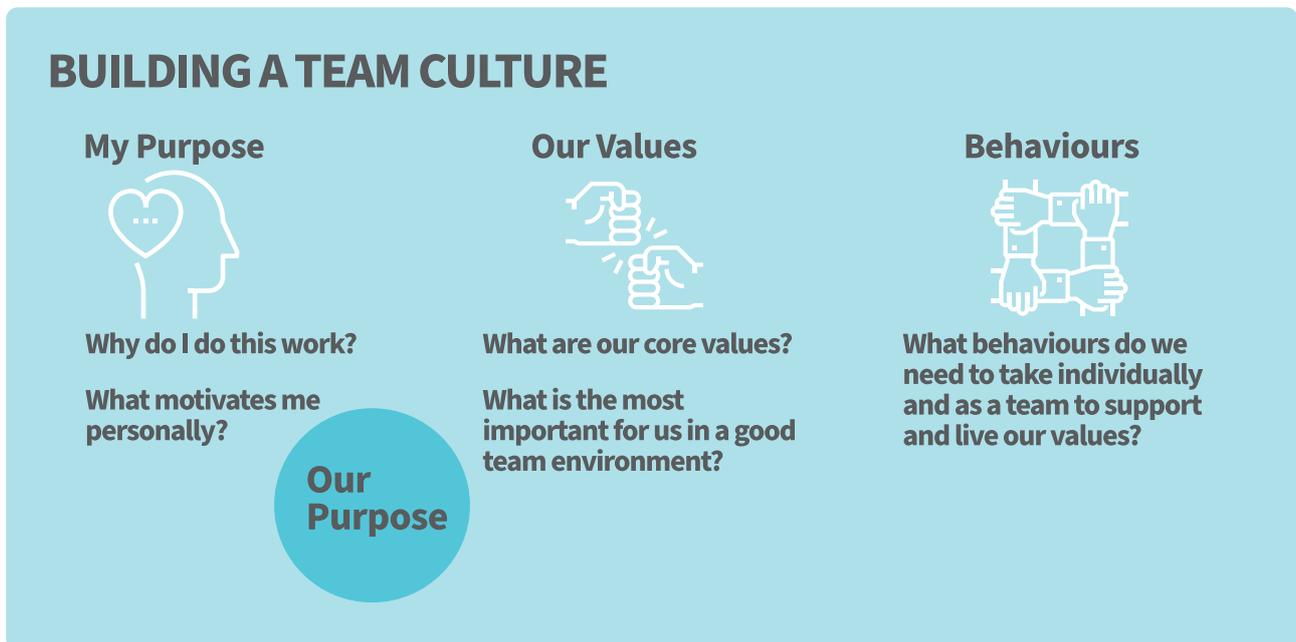
Source: Adopted from MobilizationLab

https://mobilizationlab.org/resources/creating-a-team-culture-worksheet/

Culture functions unconsciously through everyday practices of the network and alliances but can be also cultivated consciously through a range of activities. You may think about organizing social and cultural events, to celebrate the alliance culture and to provide a space for exchange and the expression of collective identities. Team-building activities, team meetings and retreats (e.g., in nature) can create spaces to encourage reflection and relationship-building. Creative tools can be used to build relationships and forester a culture of trust. For instance, the method of storytelling (see Community Outreach Toolkit) not only helps to convey your vision and narrative externally, but also internally to deepen relationships with each other, by exchanging how personal experience informs the way we want to work with each other. [14]

---

[14] Movement Strategy Center (2013). Nuts and Bolts of Building an Alliance. What We're Learning Paper No.

Generative somatics (gs)

Podcast: Trauma, Healing & Collective Power: A conversation about trauma, oppression, healing and organizing for structural change by exploring the connections between personal, collective and structural transformation, and between healing and building collective power.
https://soundcloud.com/generativesomatics/trauma-healing-collective-power

Organizational structure

Organizational structures enable the members to establish a system that guides crucial matters with regard to the operation of networks, such as the allocation of resources, the decision-making process as well as joint activities to realise the shared goals. A clear network structure not only helps you to become more efficient in your work and towards the change you want to achieve, but also can positively influence the relationship and trust-building process. The composition and structure of membership influences the overall organizational structure that is required to sustain networks.

Spectrum of membership

Alliances and networks of similar groups or organizations share similar functions and cultures, memberships, sectors, or ideologies and values. This includes organizations working in the same field (e.g., integration, humanitarian aid), networks of professionals (e.g., engineers, doctors), alliances connecting social groups (women and youth groups) or networks based on shared geography (e.g., Syrian organizations in Germany). Networks and alliances of similar groups or organizations may benefit from greater trust and relationships, and connect to exchange information, coordinate joint actions more efficiently, or strengthen their basis to amplify the voices of their members.

Alliances and networks of diverse groups or organizations often cross-cut sectors, and different constituencies or organizational functions. However, to have the network and alliances functioning in the long-term, there is a need for a shared vision, agreement around a general issue or a set of principles. In networks or alliances with diverse groups and organizations, building trust and relationships might be more challenging due to potential power imbalances. However, as they seek to connect organizations with different constituencies around a shared objective, they can diversify their resources, skills and knowledge, to expand their basis of influence, and to incorporate a wider range of voices. Sharing of resources can further lead to the empowerment of groups or organizations that operate on a lower level of capacity and power.

Over their lifespan, networks or alliances may move from one side of the spectrum of membership to another. Hence, cooperation may start with similar groups and as they grow, networks or alliances may open up to widen their focus and include groups with fewer similarities. The choice of membership structure also depends on the objective of partnership and the change you want to achieve. While cooperation of less-similar groups helps to diversify the resources, skills and voices, power imbalance might counteract these processes and put marginalised voices in an even more disadvantaged position. Networks and alliances with organizations sharing more similar positions can create safe spaces for marginalised groups and build collective power within the group.

Formal vs. informal structures

Next to questions of membership, networks and alliances have to decide on their institutional structure. The spectrum of structures can range from highly informal, e.g., by connecting organizations or activists via social media (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp) to share information and coordinate joint action, to highly formal and institutionalised bodies in the form of an independent organization (e.g., registered umbrella organization).[15]

Formal structures can help to generate a greater and longer-term impact, and may facilitate the acquisition of separate funding for the network or alliance, which in turn increases their capacity for organizational development and makes their actions more sustainable in the long-term. At the same time, highly formalised structures also require more investment in internal processes, which can lead to less flexibility and lower responsiveness concerning joint action. Coordinating different opinions and priorities to enable joint decision-making can take considerably more time than deciding to sporadically organize joint activities. Moreover, formal structures can also lead to higher interdependency, and as a result, there is a continuous need to balance the organizations' autonomy against the larger goal of the network or alliance.

Informal loose structures connect their members through social media sites, committees, or working groups to share information or coordinate joint action. Members tend to be more autonomous in their action, leading to lower interdependences between the actors involved. Given the loose structures, less time has to be spent on the internal process which can lead to quick decisive action and higher responsiveness in realising the goals of the partnership. This form is therefore suited if the objectives of the alliance are to have more sporadic joint action, a more short-term goal, or the idea is to exchange information on an issue. Loose structures can, however, make a sustainable alliance more challenging to realise. There is also a risk that the network may exist on paper, but little is actually done in practice due to a lack of capacity to coordinate the work in the long run.

Table 2. Choosing the right structures

	Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Formal structures	Coordination of joint activities can be easier due to formal procedures Increased capacity to exert influence Can promote sustainability through long-term joint action Enhanced ability to generate external resource for the network	Greater coordination efforts Higher bureaucracy More complex decision-making processes May shift focus towards internal processes, rather than external impact
Informal structures?	Less bureaucracy and easier to implement Freedom to explore new ideas due to less complex decision-making structures Enable quick decisive action and higher responsiveness	Lower influence due to limited capacity May dissolve easier or just exist on paper Not structured enough for the coordination and management of resources

---

[15] Ashman, D., & Luca Sugawara, C. (2013). Civil society networks: Options for network design. Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 23(3), 389-406.

In general, there is no one-size-fits-all solution with regard to structuring the network or alliances, as the choice needs to be guided by the overall objective of the partnership and the change you want to achieve. In addition, structures might be subject to change in response to a changing context or changing needs of their members. For instance, groups, organizations or activists may connect more informally to realise a short-term goal, but with time they build trust and may decide to establish more formal structures to leverage their impact. A common pitfall, however, is an over-emphasis on building structures and procedures which take away the energy to work on the real impact you want to achieve. You definitely do not need an advisory board, a steering committee, 15 work groups, and bi-weekly calls to coordinate your work (Movement Strategy Center, 2013), but rather keep your structures more flexible to be able to respond to change. Alternatively, a clear Terms of Reference can help clarify similar elements and can be shared with non-members or interested member.

Developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as a guiding document

Developing a MoU as a written agreement between network members can guide cooperation and help to institutionalise networking processes. The MoU should be based on mutually accepted principles and actions and…
- Outline the expectations of all actors involved in the network or alliances
- Describe the values and principles of the partnership
- Define the roles and responsibilities of each member
- Clearly explain decision-making, information sharing producers and budget allocations

---

Collective leadership

The leadership of the network, of course, depends on the structure you will choose and implement to govern the cooperation, since these will also influence who has the decision-making authority in the network and alliances. In some cases, there might be an anchor organization, which takes over the network management tasks, in other cases it can be a steering committee with representatives of different member organizations/groups, or decisions are taken based on consensus of all actors involved. If you decide to establish an independent organization (e.g., registered umbrella organization) the leadership might be much more centralised and hierarchical, compared to the one in a network which is much less structured. In the latter, decisions might be taken in a horizontal manner, by allowing equal participation of members in the decision-making processes, and with a flexible approach in response to specific actions taken.

Successful networks tend to institutionalise processes and procedures rather than establishing clear, fixed and hierarchical decision-making structures, by cultivating collective leadership.[16]

Collective leadership

Collective leadership can be defined as 'a group of people working together towards a shared goal'. Collective leadership sees the value of incorporating diverse perspectives and contributions to achieve long-term social change. It puts emphasis on shared responsibilities and decision-making as well as participation and ownership of the group, by involving all members in the creation of a vision and in the work towards achieving it.

---

[16] Leach, M & Mazur, L. (2013). Creating Culture: Promising Practices of Successful Movement Networks. Networks and Leadership. The Nonprofit Quarterly, 16-25.

For more information see: O'Neill, C. & Brinkerhoff, M. (2017). Five Elements of Collective Leadership, Nonprofit Quarterly's winter 2017 edition, "Advancing Critical Conversations: How to Get There from Here. Retrieved from: https://nonprofitquarterly.org/five-elements-collective-leadership/

Collective leadership is based on the following processes and principles:

- **Ownership and participation:** Having a smaller core group that is responsible for major decisions can be crucial for the development and sustainability of the network, especially if it connects a large number of members. However, collective leadership needs to create spaces for participation and ownership of all members especially when it comes to co-creating a shared vision and action.

Tools for facilitating decision-making

Below you find some tools that can help you to establish expectations and agreements around how decisions are made. Through this, you can gather more nuanced feedback beyond a simple "yes/no" or agree/disagree and enable processes of shared decision-making.

- The Gradients of Agreement helps team members to better describe their thinking and feelings about a proposal and be honest.
- The Level of Commitment tool enables quick feedback from a team or group as to how they feel about a particular proposal
- The Six Strategic Lenses provides a framework for decision-making, by helping teams to understand and be intentional about how and why they prioritize one issue over another.

- **Shared decision-making processes:** In finding the right decision-making process you need to balance different forces. For example, you may want to have the buy-in of all members through consensus-building, yet you still want to be flexible to respond quickly to changing conditions (action orientation). Establishing consensus can take considerable time and lead to endless debate without a clear decision taken, hindering the alliances from moving forward. At the same time, ensuring participation in decision-making can increase a feeling of ownership and commitment of the actors involved and fosters inclusion by a representation of different voices.

Tools for facilitating visioning

- The Visioning Toolkit series by atctools.org can help you to create a joint mission, shared vision and common values and give practical guidance how these become integrated into organizational work and culture.
- The organizer's canvas by Benedict Hugosson, Leading Change Network, is a visual tool that help organizers think creatively around building leadership based on five key organizing practices: story, relationships, structure, strategizing and action.

- **Transparency:** Ensuring transparency in the decision-making process not only helps to assure that everybody understands how decisions are taken and by whom, but also is essential to build trust and relationships. Make sure that everybody in the network has access to meeting notes, agendas and

reports, that have been produced by the network or alliances. Fostering accountability not only helps to check if activities are on track, but also builds trust and transparency in the decisions and actions taken.

Tools for facilitating teamwork and collaboration

You can make use of collaborative teamwork tools to facilitate and structure collective brainstorming, planning and reflecting on your work on an ongoing basis:

*   Miro is a free and simple-to-use online whiteboard built to help you collaborate with others online.
*   Applications such as Slack or Flock support communication and collaboration online and help to streamline action, decision making and problem-solving.

*   **Space for dialogue and reflection:** In a dynamic environment, spaces for reflection help to recognize and adjust to changes in the network and its environment. Moreover, reflective dialogues make it much easier to uncover power dynamics within a group and to explore how to balance different positions.

Tools for facilitating dialogue

The Wisdom-circles is a method to promote deeper dialogue on challenging topics by structuring discourse in a way that encourages authentic speech and a deeper quality of listening.

Conclusions and recommendations

Networking and cooperation offer diaspora organizations the opportunity to strengthen their resources as well as their influence and visibility in society. By joining forces in networks, it is possible to respond more effectively to the needs of the target group. Cooperating instead of competing can create valuable synergies by using the different competencies and resources more efficiently. A strong collective voice among diaspora organizations and their allies can also lead to the assertion of political rights and foster empowerment and participation. When building alliances with actors outside of the community, diaspora actors can expand their basis of influence and incorporate a wider range of voices, and as such mobilize support beyond their constituency.

Yet, especially in cases of conflict-generated diasporas, socio-political dynamics of mobilization tend to reproduce various fragmentations within the civil society landscape that to a certain extent mirror the cultural, economic, social and political divisions present in the country of origin context. In addition to diverse structural factors, organizational processes sometimes produce power asymmetries within the civil society, based on factors such as class, generation and gender, risking the exclusion of women, youth and other marginalized groups. In addition, unequal power relations (unequal resources & capacities), different ways of working and logics of action, as well as prejudices, discrimination and (institutional) racism can pose considerable challenges for building alliances among diverse actors.

Understanding the process and nature of fragmentations, as well as being sensitive towards potential power dynamics may help to transform diaspora struggles into a constructive way of dealing with diversity, which would enable them to create common spaces, based on a collective and coordinated vision. In line with these aspects and taking into consideration the preconditions to utilize the tools discussed above, the following recommendations can be given:

- **Integrating the process of alliances-building into your overall vision:** Planning alliances and networks more strategically not only helps to discover new allies and partners but also to understand the political and social power structures at play. Thinking of sources of network identities beyond geography can help to identify other unifying factors such as a shared culture, values, vision, and common purpose and action. Be aware, however, that networks or alliances are not built overnight. Instead, view alliances-building as a more long-term process. You may start with sporadically organizing joint activities and with increasing trust and relationships over time you may move towards a longer-term strategic partnership.

- **Building mutual trust and relationships:** Trust and relationships are paramount pre-requisites for successful networks. After years of conflict, rebuilding trust and social capital among actors in the diaspora can be a challenging and long-term endeavour. Provide continuous space for dialogue and reflection to transform experiences of suffering, trauma and despair into collective claims and action. View the building of trust and relationship as an ongoing and long-term process, make use of creative tools that can incorporate the building of culture in everyday activities of the network (e.g. story-telling).

- **Be sensitive towards conflict dynamics:** Conflicts are an integral part of human life and

natural elements of societies and, if constructively approached, can yield to social change and transformation. Opening spaces to articulate disagreement and discuss ways of moving forward can generate new ways of thinking, understanding and working together. Promoting safe spaces for network members to reflect on the different organizational cultures, tactics, strategies, and theories of change helps to create common values, visions and logics of action.

- **Building collective power:** Putting an analysis of power at the centre of alliances-building not only helps to understand the power structures of the system, but also to reflect on internal power dynamics within the network or alliances. Be aware of these power dynamics, make sure you provide space to marginalised voices and empower people and communities on the ground, by providing a space and platform for people to lead and participate.

- **Building collective leadership:** There can be a dilemma between the need for recognizing the diversity of opinions among different groups, while at the same time speaking with a strong collective voice. Sharing responsibilities, enabling democratic and decentralised decision-making and providing spaces for participation, not only fosters a feeling of ownership but can also encourage intrinsic motivations to bundle the forces and to take joint action.

- **Balancing time spent on internal processes with action orientation:** While it is crucial to invest time in relational work as well as joint decision making processes, do not forget to focus on the real change you want to achieve. Networks and alliances come to live through joint action and are sustained by working on and achieving their objectives. Learn from failures and obstacles and celebrate your success stories.

References

Ashman, D.; Charles, C.; Cuenca, A.; Luca, C.; Singer, B. & Schmith, M. (2005). Supporting Civil Society Networks in International Development Programs. AED Center for Civil Society and Governance, Washington D.C. Retrieved from: https://www.ngoconnect.net/resource/supporting-civil-society-networks-international-development

Ashman, D., & Luca Sugawara, C. (2013). Civil society networks: Options for network design. Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 23(3), 389-406.

Bloch, N. The spectrum of Allies. The beautiful Uprising (source available in Arabic): https://beautifulrising.org/tool/spectrum-of-allies

Bosco, C. & Guénéheux, D. (2015). Toolkit. Towards New Social Contracts - Using Dialogue Processes to Promote Social Change. CIVICUS. Retrieved from: https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/resources/toolkits/617-civil-society-toolkit-towards-new-social-contracts-using-dialogue-processes-to-promote-social-change

Brown, L. D. , & Kalegaonkar, A. (1998). Challenges to civil society andthe rise of support organizations. Institutional Development, 5(1), 20-37.

Center for Theory of Change (2021). Theory of change. Retrieved from: https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/

Christian Aid (2018). The Art of Networking: A study of civil society networks in Myanmar. Christian Aid, London. Retrieved from: https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-09/SPACE-the-art-networking-sep2017.pdf

Green, D. (2013a). What is a theory of change and how do we use it? From Poverty to Power. Retrieved from: https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-is-a-theory-of-change-and-does-it-actually-help/

Green, D. (2013b). What questions help us understand how change happens? Retrieved from: https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-questions-help-us-understand-how-change-happens/

Hunjan, R. & Pettit, J. (2011). Power: A practical guide for facilitating social change. Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. Retrieved from: http://www.mspguide.org/sites/default/files/tool/power-a-practical-guide-for-facilitating-social-change-1_0.pdf

Lakey, G. (2012). Know your allies, your opponents and everyone in between. Waging Nonviolence: https://wagingnonviolence.org/2012/07/know-your-allies-your-opponents-and-everyone-in-between/

Leach, M & Mazur, L. (2013). Creating Culture: Promising Practices of Successful Movement Networks. Networks and Leadership. The Nonprofit Quarterly, 16-25. Retrieved from: https://nonprofitquarterly.org/creating-culture-promising-practices-of-successful-movement-networks/

O'Neill, C. & Brinkerhoff, M. (2017). Five Elements of Collective Leadership, Nonprofit Quarterly's winter 2017 edition, "Advancing Critical Conversations: How to Get There from Here. Retrieved from: https://nonprofitquarterly.org/five-elements-collective-leadership/

Papadopoulou, A.; Edda, J.; Farrow, K.; & Bathily, A. (2015). Working together with refugee diasporas in development. Discussion Paper, January 2015. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Brussels. Retrieved from: https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/DomAid_DiasporaPaper.pdf

Pastor, M.; Ito, J. & Ortiz, R. (2010). Connecting at the Crossroad -Alliance Building and Social Change in Tough Times. University of Southern California, Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Retrieved from: https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/connecting_at_the_crossroads_final_web.pdf

Plastrik, P., & Taylor, M. (2006). Net gains: A handbook for network builders seeking social change. Innovation Network for Communities.

Movement Strategy Center (2013). Nuts and Bolts of Building an Alliance. What We're Learning Paper No. 2. Retrieved from: https://movementstrategy.org/b/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/MSC-Nuts_and_Bolts-WhitePaper2-PreRelease_Draft.pdf

Appendix: Useful resources for CSOs

Toolkits

Martlew, N. (2017). Creative Coalitions – A Handbook for Change. Crisis Action. Retrieved from: https://crisisaction.org/handbook/contents/

Nuhic, M. (2016). Guidelines for Youth Diaspora Networking, Case Study: Bosnia and Herzegovina and Youth Policy Analysis (Master's Thesis, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan). Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/30416694/Guidelines_for_Youth_Diaspora_Networking_Case_Study_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina_and_Youth_Policy_Analysis

Sigamany, I. (2007). Networking and Relationship Building for CSOs, Course Toolkit. Retrieved from: https://www.ngoconnect.net/sites/default/files/resources/Networking%20and%20Relationship%20Building%20for%20CSOs.pdf

Hunjan, R. & Pettit, J. (2011). Power: A practical guide for facilitating social change. Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. Retrieved from: http://www.mspguide.org/sites/default/files/tool/power-a-practical-guide-for-facilitating-social-change-1_0.pdf

Movement Strategy Center (2013). Nuts and Bolts of Building an Alliance. What We're Learning Paper No. 2. Retrieved from: https://movementstrategy.org/b/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/MSC-Nuts_and_Bolts-WhitePaper2-PreRelease_Draft.pdf

Tennyson, Ros (2011). The Partnering toolbook. An essential guide to cross-sector partnering. The Partnering Initiative (IBLF). Retrieved from: https://thepartneringinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Partnering-Toolbook-en-20113.pdf

Online resources and toolboxes

Beautiful Trouble Toolbox
Beautiful Trouble provides an online Toolbox for grassroots and social change actors. In different sections you will find the different theories behind their tools, as well as strategic frameworks and hands-on exercises to help you assess your situation and plan your campaign. It also highlights specific forms of creative action, such as a flash mob or blockade. The website and tools are available in Arabic.
Website: https://www.beautifultrouble.org/

Commons Social Change Library
The Commons Social Change Library is an online collection of educational resources on campaign strategy, community organizing, digital campaigning, communications and media, working effectively in groups, fundraising, diversity and inclusion and much more.
Website: https://commonslibrary.org/

NGO Connect
NGO Connect, is a website site of SCS Global dedicated to connecting and strengthening civil society organizations (CSOs), networks and support organizations worldwide. The Resources and tools database contains technical and program-related materials to support organizational development and institutional strengthening.
Website: https://www.ngoconnect.net/resources-tools

Power Shift Network Resource Bank
Power Shift Network Resource Bank is a crowd-sourced compendium of all the movement's best tools and trainings capturing methods for community building, storytelling, coalition building, fundraising and much more.
Website: https://www.powershift.org/resources

Racial Equity Tools
Supports individuals and groups working to achieve racial equity. It offers tools, research, tips, curricula, and ideas for people who want to increase their understanding and to help those working for racial justice at different level – in systems, organizations, communities, and the culture at large.
Website: https://www.racialequitytools.org/

Trainings 350
Offers practical tools for organizers, facilitators and trainers, including tools to build long-term capacity and power, activities for leading interactive workshops, seminars, and retreats, as well as methods for leading group meetings. The website and tools are available in Arabic.
Website: https://trainings.350.org/

Notes

DRC DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

Danish Refugee Council is a leading, international humanitarian displacement organization, supporting refugees and internally displaced persons during displacement, in exile, when settling and integrating in a new place or upon return. We provide protection and life-saving humanitarian assistance. We support displaced persons in becoming self-reliant and included into hosting societies - and we work with communities, civil society and responsible authorities to promote protection of rights and peaceful coexistence.

The aim of the DRC's Diaspora Programme is to support the constructive role of diaspora as transnational civil society actors that seek to contribute to relevant protection and solutions outcomes for people affected by conflict and displacement – in the diaspora's former home countries, for those on the move, and for those settling in third countries.

Contact: diaspora@drc.ngo
Website: www.drc.ngo/diaspora

Maastricht University's Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG)/United Nations University-MERIT (UNU-MERIT) is a higher-education institute that leads the way in operational, policy-relevant studies and evaluations. Its focus is on preparing robust evidence to support more informed and responsive policy across different thematic domains, including migration.