



# COLLECTIVE POWER

## FRAMEWORK AND INDICATORS

JULY 2024



Measuring the Redistribution  
of Power in Coalitions

## Thank you to everyone who gave feedback and shared their knowledge to contribute to this understanding of collective power.

We want to express our heartfelt thanks to all the groups who provided feedback and shared their knowledge for this paper on collective power. They are the true builders of collective power, and we have only captured their knowledge and insight. Their input has been incredibly valuable, enriching our understanding and strengthening our research by grounding it in your real experiences and goals. Their thoughtful contributions can inform countless more coalitions just beginning to envision collective power for themselves.

**We truly appreciate their contributions and partnership in exploring collective power:**

- CC NEXT coalition members
- Alliance for Early Success
- CC NEXT Advisory Committee
- TEEM community of practice members
- Forth Mobility
- Greenlining Institute
- Wend Collective
- American Evaluation Association conference attendees

This paper is the culmination of many ways of reflecting, sharing, and engaging in conversation about collective power. It is written and published by Innovation Network and co-authored by:

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# BRIEF SUMMARY

All people deserve to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives and know what solutions are best for them. Advocacy efforts are increasingly recognizing this truth, including people closest to the issues and reaching farther for real social change rather than legislative wins.

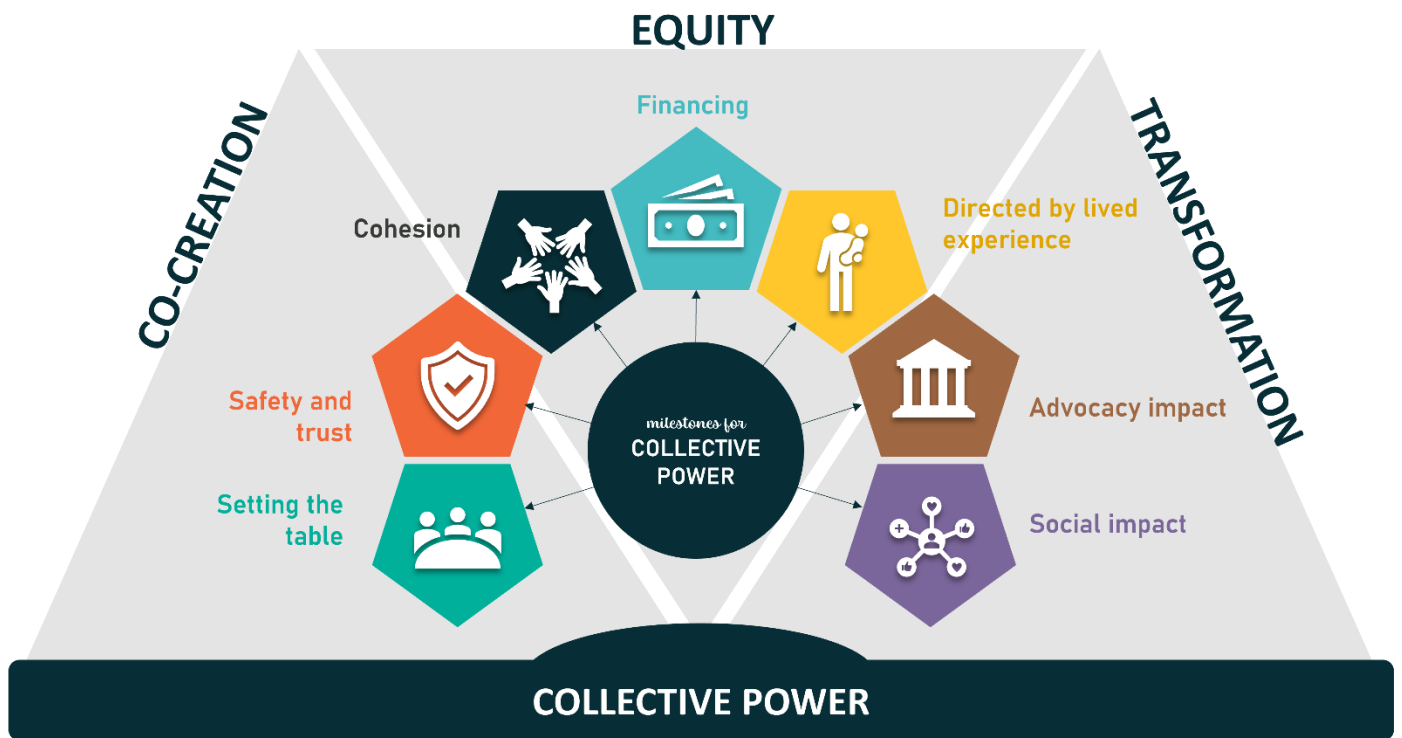
Coalitions are an important advocacy strategy, pooling the resources and expertise of both people and organizations to amplify their impact for social change. As coalitions shift to build the leadership and participation of individuals and communities most directly affected by the issues they address, they are shifting their priorities and processes to build **collective power**.

*Collective power is the joint strength of a diverse group (organizations, communities, and individuals most affected by the issue) working for a shared goal of transformational social change, who has been able to realize the full knowledge, abilities, and actions of all people in the*

*group. Collective power requires shifting power to and centering the people most affected by an issue, who are often people of marginalized identities, allowing their needs and leadership to shape the use of funds, strategies, and priorities of the group.*

We wanted to understand what it takes to build collective power to share insights and one potential roadmap for how diverse groups can center equity and create meaningful social impact.

The absence of frameworks for collective power in coalitions prompted us to collaborate with the advocates who are building collective power as part of their regular practice. Through surveys, interviews, and reflection conversations with two initiatives - Towards Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM) and Child Care Next (CC NEXT) – we created a framework and indicators for collective power that coalitions can use to as a tool to be more inclusive and strengthen their collective efforts.



The Collective Power Framework comprises three pillars – Equity, Co-creation, and Transformation – supported by seven intersecting milestones. Equity emphasizes the empowerment of marginalized voices, while Co-creation fosters collaborative decision-making. Transformation focuses on long-term social change beyond policy wins. The **seven milestones** emerged from CC NEXT's experiences, representing critical stages in building collective power. These milestones encompass:

1. **Setting the table.** *Intentional membership and leadership of their coalitions. Diverse membership, starting with grassroots groups.*
2. **Safety and trust.** *Accessible and safe environment, where members feel included and find consensus.*
3. **Cohesion.** *Coming together with a spirit of co-collaboration and building common goals, policies, and processes.*
4. **Financing.** *Funding and resources to form and strengthen the coalition.*
5. **Directed by lived experience.** *Ensuring that those most impacted are not only engaged but equipped to lead in the coalition.*
6. **Advocacy impact.** *Continued action, advocacy effort, influence and legislative support*
7. **Social impact.** *Real impact for the issue at hand, which is affordable, inclusive, and equitable for all people.*

To enable coalitions to measure their progress according to the first five milestones of collective power, Innovation Network has piloted a tool, **Powered Together: A Pulse Check for Coalition Power, Equity, and Strength**. The tool aims to facilitate self-assessment, identify opportunities for growth, and refine strategies for collective power building. It is more vital than ever to harness the collective power of advocacy coalitions, and the Collective Power Framework serves as a tool for coalitions and their funders to instill equity and build strength for real change.

# CONTENTS

<u>Shifting Power within Coalitions</u>	6
<u>Current Knowledge on Collective Power</u>	6
<u>Learning from Two Collectives</u>	11
<u>Collective Power Framework</u>	14
<u>3 Pillars of Collective Power</u>	15
<u>Milestones for Collective Power</u>	16
<u>Measuring Collective Power</u>	21
 APPENDIX	
<u>Milestones and Indicators for Collective Power At-a-Glance</u>	22
<u>Methodology</u>	23

# SHIFTING POWER WITHIN COALITIONS

Coalitions are the cornerstone of many organizations' advocacy strategy. In fact, a staggering 85%<sup>1</sup> of nonprofits are now part of coalitions aimed at advancing their advocacy efforts. This trend underscores the pivotal role that coalitions play in driving social change initiatives.

Historically, coalitions have served as vehicles for collective action, pooling resources and expertise to amplify their impact. They have been created and led by funded, formalized, and professionalized groups and organizations who are familiar with research, policies, and political processes. In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in their composition and objectives. Increasingly, coalitions are prioritizing the leadership and participation of individuals and communities most directly affected by the issues they address<sup>2</sup>. As a result, more grassroots groups and communities with marginalized racial and social identities who are often most directly affected have been invited to coalition spaces they previously did not have access to. This shift reflects a broader move towards equity-centered approaches to advocacy. As a result, funders are increasing investments for

community and grassroots advocates who are closest to the issues.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps because of this shift, many of today's coalitions are embracing more inclusive and transformative goals in their work and in their internal operations. They prioritize using equitable means to achieve change, and legislative victories are seen as just one tool to achieve social impact. True progress requires structural and systemic transformations, and today's coalitions are boldly calling for large-scale change in society and in how we work together.

This paper seeks to understand this new form of coalition, where every voice, particularly those most affected by an issue, can be part of transformative solutions and build political strength for change. These coalitions build power from the inside out by centering equity, transformational change, and co-creation: what we call **collective power**.

We discuss current knowledge and frameworks related to collective power and present a new framework including milestones and indicators rooted in advocates' definitions of success that can be used to understand and measure progress towards collective power.

*Coalitions that build collective power embrace a spirit of co-creation, realize the power of those closest to the issues, and demand transformational change.*

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<sup>1</sup> Gardner, A., Williams, S., & Hoehstetter, S. (2023) Amplifying Nonprofit Voices: Bridging the Advocacy Evaluation Gap. Bolder Advocacy & Alliance for Justice. <https://evaluationinnovation.org/publication/amplifying-nonprofit-voices-bridging-the-advocacy-evaluation-gap/>

<sup>2</sup> Wolff, T., Minkler, M., Wolfe, S., Berkowitz, B., Bowen, L., Dunn Butterfoss, F., ... & Lee, K. (2017). Collaborating for equity and justice: Moving beyond collective impact. *Nonprofit Quarterly*, 9, 42-53.

<sup>3</sup> Fine, M. & Hafid, M. S. (2020). "How Philanthropy Support Organizations Understand and Advance Community Power Building." TCC Group. <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/how-philanthropy-support-organizations-understand-and-advance-community-power-building/>

# CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ON COLLECTIVE POWER

When we began this project, little literature existed on **collective power centered on coalitions embedding equity into their work**. This is not surprising; advocacy efforts exist at the precipice of change and often demonstrate new models before they are widely accepted. As we seek to understand advocacy efforts, including the work and structures of coalitions, we encounter a space that is perpetually adapting, shaped by advocates' innovative strategies and forward progress. Evaluators must learn to measure new and changing priorities and concepts.

Funders and evaluators have only recently begun to talk about coalitions as places to cultivate equity and build collective power. "Collective power" as a term is not universally accepted or understood: among the groups we spoke with in the process of understanding collective power, we heard of other terms with meanings that overlap with our definition, such as "shared power," "redistributed power," and "community power."

For our purposes, we define collective power as the **joint strength of a diverse group (organizations, communities, and individuals most affected by the issue) working for a shared goal of transformational social change, who has been able to realize the full knowledge, abilities, and actions of all people in the group. Collective power requires shifting power to and centering the people most affected by an issue, who are often people of marginalized identities, allowing their needs and leadership to shape the use of funds, strategies, and priorities of the group.**

This collective power definition and following framework presented in this paper **builds on research from others in the field who have explored the effectiveness and impact of coalitions, power building strategies, and centering equity in program work in addition to our own research with two initiatives.**

*Collective power builds on research from the areas of:*

1. *Coalition effectiveness*
2. *Value generation in communities of practice*
3. *Equity in programs, organizations, and systems*
4. *Community engagement*
5. *Power building*



Coalitions, as pivotal structures within advocacy efforts, embody shared purpose and collaborative decision-making among member organizations while preserving individual autonomy.<sup>4</sup> Historically, measurement has focused on the **effectiveness** of these groups in achieving policy wins and sought to understand coalition capacities. In one such framework, the TCC group focused on coalition effectiveness by defining core capacities coalitions must demonstrate: leadership capacity, adaptive capacity, management capacity, technical capacity, and cultural capacity. Together these explore the structure and environment of the coalition and amongst its members<sup>5</sup>. Another framework from the Collective Impact Forum identifies five capacities that support collective impact, along with indicators to support their measurement: common agenda, shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, backbone infrastructure, and continuous communication. While both frameworks present measures that explore both the technical function and the relational nature of coalitions, neither recognize or address the power imbalances inherent when organizations hold varied influence and financial power. Further, the Collective Impact model has been criticized as using a top-down approach and omitting grassroots groups as equal partners<sup>6</sup>, which is a core component of collective power.

Other groups that involve cross-sector collaboration include **communities of practice**. Wenger presents a conceptual framework for value creation in communities and networks. The framework focuses on cycles of value creation and what each member of the



group gains from their participation, including: immediate value (outputs of what was gained from the experience), potential value (knowledge capital), applied value (changes to their work), realized value (resulting in improvements), and reframing value (strategy changes).<sup>7</sup> While the values include increasing connection and understanding which we see in coalitions seeking to build collective power, this form of network is focused on knowledge building and not action for social change. Further, as with the frameworks that explore coalition effectiveness, it does not address equity across members of the network, which is a central consideration of coalitions building collective power.

For a just society, **equity** must be applied at multiple dimensions: the individual level, organizational level, and systems level. It is both a strategy and an outcome. Multiple frameworks have emerged that explore these different levels of equity. At the program level, the Annie E. Casey Foundation created a Race, Equity, and Inclusion Action Guide with seven steps. These steps include engaging affected populations, understanding

<sup>4</sup> Mizrahi, T. & Rosenthal, B. (2001) "Complexities of Coalition Building: Leaders' Successes, Strategies, Struggles, and Solutions." *Social Work* 46(1): 63-78

<sup>5</sup> "What Makes an Effective Coalition?" TCC Group. 2011. <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/what-makes-an-effective-coalition-evidence-based-indicators-of-success/>

<sup>6</sup> Boumgarden, P. & Branch, J. (2013) "Collective Impact or Coordinated Blindness?" *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.; Wolff, T. (2016) "10 Places Where Collective Impact Gets It Wrong." *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*.

<sup>7</sup> Wenger, E., Trayner, B. & Laet, M. (2011). *Promoting and Assessing Value Creation in Communities and Networks: A Conceptual Framework*. Ruud de Moor Centrum. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220040553\\_Promoting\\_and\\_Assessing\\_Value\\_Creation\\_in\\_Communities\\_and\\_Networks\\_A\\_Conceptual\\_Framework](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220040553_Promoting_and_Assessing_Value_Creation_in_Communities_and_Networks_A_Conceptual_Framework)



and addressing root causes of inequities, and evaluating effectiveness and impact.<sup>8</sup> At the organizational level, Equity in the Center's Awake to Woke to Work introduces different levers that recognize the power held by different roles in an organization and shows three stages of an organization becoming more conscious and then acting on racial equity.<sup>9</sup> This framework introduces more cultural elements to shifting internal practices towards racial equity. Finally, at the systems level, Race Forward's Advancing Racial Equity Framework considers an organization as part of a larger ecosystem. It identifies elements of change for racial equity, including shared values, understanding, relationships, and tools.<sup>10</sup> These frameworks provide insight into how to think about addressing inequities, a core goal of collective power. Yet we found them challenging to apply to coalition work. They do not address group dynamics or creating equitable relationships and redistributing power in a shared space.

Equity is also a central consideration in the extensive literature on **community engagement**. Between 1969 and 2020, frameworks like Arnstein's Ladder of Participation<sup>11</sup> and Facilitating Power's Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership<sup>12</sup> have defined levels of community engagement from none (where the community is ignored) to where the community has the power to advance their own solutions. Coalitions building collective power are creating internal structures that shift power to communities and community decision-making. However, these

frameworks omit the ecosystem in which communities build power and the responsibilities of other groups to support the power of communities and to bring their own knowledge and expertise into communities' chosen solutions and the advocacy needed to achieve them.

With greater attention to community needs and grassroots efforts, many advocates are shifting their efforts to include **power building**. Advocacy that builds power centers those closest to the issues and is focused on larger social change rather than legislative wins.<sup>13</sup> Several frameworks for building power for social change have emerged. Both Fox<sup>14</sup> and Cushman<sup>15</sup> present similar frameworks for community organizing that include similar concepts of base-building (building individual power), drawing connections across individuals for collective people power and capacity, and working for larger impact and influence in governance. These bring important insight into building the power of those closest to the issues who are not professional advocates. However, the frameworks stop before they consider how their efforts tap into the larger ecosystem of organizations doing advocacy around an issue. The Barsoum power-building framework<sup>16</sup> examined power considering the ecosystem of organizations, and described the structure of the power building ecosystem that centers the community and grassroots organizing and forms an infrastructure to facilitate information sharing, collaboration, and joint action. It included cycles of building power, exercising power, having power, and expanding power. This does include the

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<sup>8</sup> Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide. (2015) Annie E. Casey Foundation. <https://www.aecf.org/resources/race-equity-and-inclusion-action-guide>

<sup>9</sup> Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture. (2020) Equity in the Center. <https://equityinthecenter.org/aww/>

<sup>10</sup> Rudiger, A. (2022) Advancing Racial Equity: A Framework for Federal Agencies. Race Forward. <https://www.raceforward.org/practice/tools/advancing-racial-equity-framework-federal-agencies>

<sup>11</sup> Arnstein. (1969) "A ladder of citizen participation." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35.4: 216–224

<sup>12</sup> Gonzalez, R. (2020). The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership. Facilitating Power. <https://movementstrategy.org/resources/the-spectrum-of-community-engagement-to-ownership/>

<sup>13</sup> Coffman, J., Barsoum, G., Lopez, A., Brothe Gantz, M. (2021) Advocacy that Builds Power Transforming Policies and Systems For Health and Racial Equity. Center For Evaluation Innovation. [https://www.calendow.org/app/uploads/2021/09/CEI-Advocacy-That-Builds-Power\\_FinalReport\\_2021.pdf](https://www.calendow.org/app/uploads/2021/09/CEI-Advocacy-That-Builds-Power_FinalReport_2021.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Fox, K., Post, M. (2021) "Evaluating power building: Concepts and considerations for advocacy evaluators." *New Directions for Evaluators*. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ev.20473>

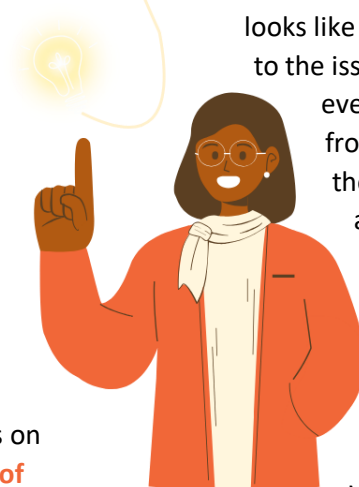
<sup>15</sup> Cushman, C., McKenna, E. (2023). "Power Metrics: Measuring what Matters to Build a Multiracial Democracy." *Democracy & Power Innovation Fund*. <https://www.innonet.org/media/Power-Metrics.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Barsoum G, Farrow F. (2021) "An Ecosystem to Build Power and Advance Health and Racial Equity: A Report for the California Endowment." Center for the Study of Social Policy.

acknowledgement of community voice at the ecosystem level but has little guidance on specific strategies and how to measure progress towards each cycle of work. These frameworks gave us insight into how people can shift power, but they are focused more on the individual level or fail to include different organizations and systems working together.

**While we have something to learn from each of these frameworks, collective power bridges the gaps between them and provides new insight into how groups can center equity for transformational change.**

In recent years, some initial strategies have emerged to center equity in collaborative work such as coalitions. The earliest mention we found was by McAfee, who called equity the “soul of collective impact.”<sup>17</sup> They list several characteristics necessary for coalitions to center equity, including analyzing and addressing racial barriers, elevating the voice and leadership of community residents and subsequent accountability to them, and using disaggregated data to focus on those most in need. **Their article is the first of several unanswered calls for improving measurement frameworks to include equity.** In 2017, Wolf introduced six principles for collaborating for equity and justice.<sup>18</sup> Their principles mirror the characteristics introduced by



McAfee and further reinforce the idea of community ownership through the addition of principles focused on community organizing and equal power for community members in directing the coalition’s agenda and resources. These principles were reinforced in 2022 when Collective Impact shared five strategies for centering equity in coalitions: ground the work in data and context, and target solutions, focus on systems change, in addition to programs and services, shift power within the collaborative, listen to and act with community, and build equity leadership and accountability.<sup>19</sup>

These strategies are our first understanding of what it looks like for coalitions to shift power to those closest to the issues and to build collective power across everyone working together for social change: from those most affected to the policymakers themselves. Yet these strategies are incomplete, and they are just the beginning of the deeper understanding we need to know how to successfully achieve these strategies and what they look like in action in coalitions.

**Coalitions want to shift power within their coalitions but don’t have the tools to help.**

We turned to advocates themselves to learn from them and fill our knowledge gaps about how to define collective power, what success looks like, and how we can measure it.

<sup>17</sup> McAfee, M., Blackwell, A. G., Bell, J. (2015). Equity: The Soul of Collective Impact. PolicyLink. [https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/Collective\\_Impact\\_10-21-15f\\_0.pdf](https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/Collective_Impact_10-21-15f_0.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Wolff, T., Minkler, M., Wolfe, S., Berkowitz, B., Bowen, L., Dunn Butterfoss, F., ... & Lee, K. (2017). “Collaborating for equity and justice: Moving beyond collective impact.” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, 9, 42-53.

<sup>19</sup> Kania, J., Williams, J., Schmitz, P., Brady, S., Kramer, M., & Juster, J. S. (2022). “Centering Equity in Collective Impact.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 20(1), 38–45.

<sup>20</sup> Although the term “advocates” can have many meanings, here we indicate every person involved in building collective power in coalitions; at times these may be community members who do not consider themselves to be advocates but who bring lived expertise and have been vital to the advocacy efforts of coalitions.

# LEARNING FROM TWO COLLECTIVES

When we realized there were no existing frameworks for collective power in coalitions, we looked to the advocates<sup>20</sup> who are building collective power as part of their regular practice. Since 2021, Innovation Network worked with two collectives representing a total of **11 state advocacy groups in 8 states**: [Towards Equity in Electric Mobility \(TEEM\)](#) organized by the Greenlining Institute and Forth Mobility, and [Child Care Next \(CC Next\)](#) organized by the Alliance for Early Success.

These coalitions are very different, and yet have similar goals. Over three years (and counting), we gained insight from these two collectives who brought together traditional grassroots policy organizations working for

legislative change with equity-focused and grassroots organizations. They are changing the ways in which policies are created and advocated for, starting first with their internal structures focused on advancing equity and justice in their communities in various fields. These collectives have helped us understand what it takes to center equity in groups who want to build collective power.

## TEEM

Toward Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM) is a Community of Practice created in 2021 to improve equitable clean transportation by enabling cohort members to **share policy goals, learn together, build capacity, and develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment** towards advancing racial equity and climate change goals in electric mobility. TEEM brings together grassroots and grassroots organizations.

## Child Care NEXT

Child Care NEXT is an initiative that supports six states that are ready to mount long-term campaigns to achieve transformative change in their child care policies and funding. It is guided by four core principles co-created with an Advisory Committee comprised of diverse advocates, including 1) Building and sustaining political power, organizing, and advocacy capacity at all levels, 2) Transforming child care policies and systems, 3) Centering those who most impacted by child care policies and programs to have a meaningful role in shaping the solution and campaign, and 4) Centering racial equity.

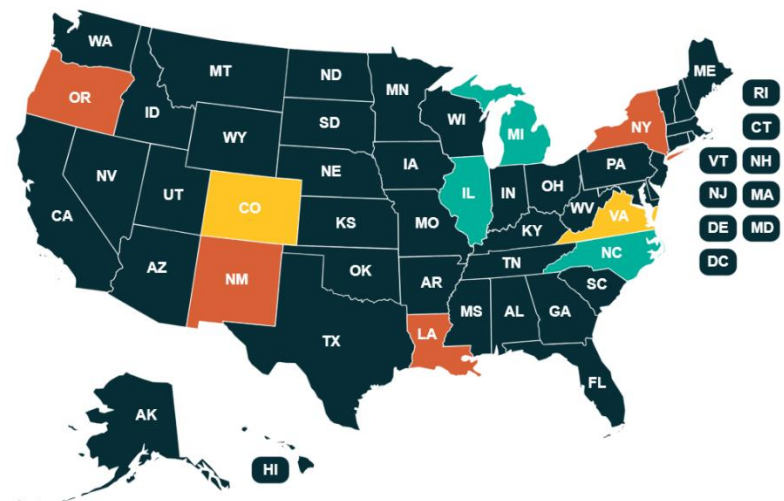


Figure 1 | States where TEEM (green) and CC NEXT (orange) have state coalitions. Yellow states are where both initiatives have state coalitions.

<sup>20</sup> Although the term “advocates” can have many meanings, here we indicate every person involved in building collective power in coalitions; at times these may be community members who do not consider themselves to be advocates but who bring lived expertise and have been vital to the advocacy efforts of coalitions.

## Comparing Collectives

As their names suggest, these two groups focus on very different issue areas. TEEM brings equity into electric transportation policy and was formed through recruitment and invitations. CC NEXT seeks to transform child care and had a competitive process with detailed

proposals and states forming groups before they applied. But they have many similarities: TEEM and CC NEXT are both new coalitions, founded in 2021. They both have a national gathering, and state-level cohorts in 6 states. They both have Foundation support. The table below compares key elements of each collective.

TEEM	CC NEXT
Both are new, est. in 2021	
Both have a national cohort, and 5-6 state cohorts	
Both funded by Foundations	
Invite-only	Competitive process
Grassroots groups receive modest stipends to participate	Each state receives substantial funds to distribute to its coalition
Power is centralized with facilitators	Power is concentrated in states

Most importantly, **both TEEM and CC NEXT are trying to build collective power among their members.** They do this by bringing together grassroots, community representatives with expertise in centering equity and grassroots organizations with research and legislative expertise. These groups are able to learn from each other, build relationships, and take action together while centering grassroots voices in spaces that have typically been the domain of grassroots organizations.

## Grounding our Knowledge in Advocate Experiences

In 2017, Wolff wrote about how a framework for collective power should be developed, saying,

Evaluation and measurement for collaboratives following the Collaborating for Equity and Justice principles require first and foremost that the indicators, outputs, and outcomes are developed and generated by the local community. Second, the evaluation design and measurement need to incorporate internal and external factors that include policy and systems change, racial equity, and justice. Third, the evaluation design and measurement should draw on ecological frameworks and community organizing literature to conceptualize the change model.<sup>21</sup>

This framework strives to do just that, and is grounded in the lived experiences and insights of advocates working within these two critical coalitions. It is their perspectives and understanding from which we have formed a framework for collective power.

Our learning partnership with TEEM focused on supporting facilitators who played a crucial role in guiding state cohorts towards building collective power. Through a combination of reflection conversations with facilitators and advocates, along with a survey of advocate experiences, TEEM provided valuable data.



This data helped us define the characteristics of a "healthy environment" that fosters collective power within coalitions. Furthermore, insights from TEEM advocates and facilitators shed light on the crucial elements required for a coalition to effectively challenge existing power dynamics, a key aspect of achieving collective power.

Our work with CC NEXT took a more direct approach towards understanding collective power. We conducted a series of in-depth interviews, reflection conversations, and surveys with advocates within CC NEXT coalitions. These activities aimed to define collective power itself and identify key milestones and indicators that signal progress towards collective power. We presented and validated data so that each round of data collection

built on the previous. This allowed us to narrow in on collective power milestones and enabled advocates to add or correct findings from previous rounds of data collection. The data gathered from CC NEXT played a central role in shaping the core tenets of the collective power framework presented in this paper.

In essence, while TEEM's contributions provided valuable validation and contributed to the overarching framework for collective power, it was CC NEXT who offered the most significant insights that directly informed the framework's development, particularly with the indicators and milestones for collective power. You can read more about our evaluation approach with each collective in the appendix.



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<sup>21</sup> Wolff, T., Minkler, M., Wolfe, S., Berkowitz, B., Bowen, L., Dunn Butterfoss, F., ... & Lee, K. (2017). "Collaborating for equity and justice: Moving beyond collective impact." *Nonprofit Quarterly*, 9. 42-53.

# COLLECTIVE POWER FRAMEWORK

Taking into account the similarities and differences across coalitions, and what we've learned from the literature, we created a framework for collective power.

The collective power framework below consists of three pillars supported by seven milestones for collective power (Figure 2).

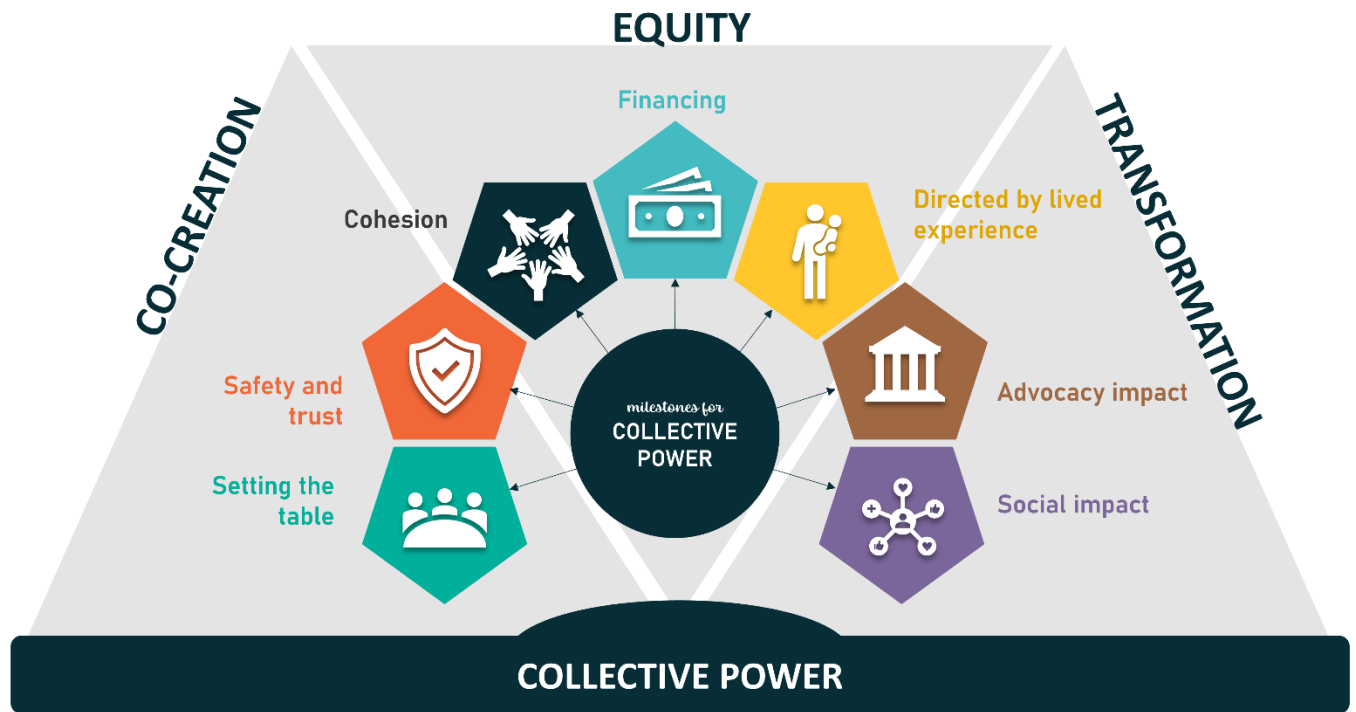


Figure 2 | Framework for Collective Power

*Collective power is the joint strength of a diverse group (organizations, communities, and individuals most affected by the issue) working for a shared goal of transformational social change, who has been able to realize the full knowledge, abilities, and actions of all people in the group. Collective power requires shifting power to and centering the people most affected by an issue, who are often people of marginalized identities, allowing their needs and leadership to shape the use of funds, strategies, and priorities of the group.*



## 3 Pillars of Collective Power

Coalitions that build collective power create equitable structures to realize the power of those most affected by the issues, embrace a spirit of co-creation, and demand transformational change.

### CO-CREATION

**The space is owned, shaped, and created by members in collaboration with each other.** This often involves the traditional work of coalitions creating a shared agenda and finding common ground, but within an equitable structure that sets shared decision-making processes where all have a voice. This enables them to find cohesion within the coalition while leveraging the unique skillsets and sharing knowledge across each organization in the coalition. Co-creation shows up not just as a function of effectiveness, but as shared decision-making and a spirit of collaboration in the coalition.

Co-creation exists when:

- Members feel like they have a voice to share their honest opinion and that it is valued.
- The coalition strives for group-based decision-making that reaches for or achieves consensus.
- There's a spirit of collaboration in how members approach realizing their shared vision rather than competition.

### EQUITY

The recognition that everyone at the table holds different levels of power, and **there needs to be a concerted, intentional effort to shift and build the power of members who come in with less.** Coalitions that build collective power emphasize how those most affected by the issue – often people with marginalized identities – are able to design solutions that are relevant to their unique circumstances. This centering extends to their leadership within the coalition itself and the way the coalition is structured to support their leadership. It often relies on relationships and trust based on a shared commitment to equity.

Equity exists when:

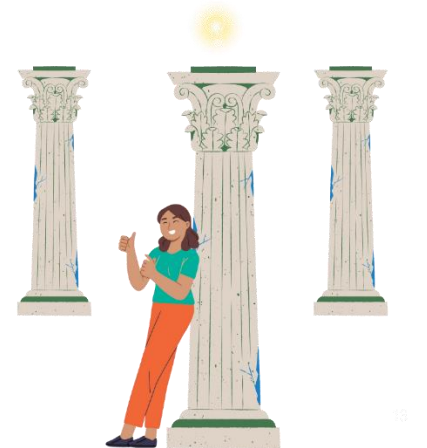
- A commitment and vision for equity is at the heart.
- Members respect, appreciate, and leverage the different strengths other members bring. There's acknowledgment that each member brings their own unique value.
- The coalition openly addresses and strives to mitigate inequitable power dynamics.
- Whatever the issue, those most impacted have power and weight over the coalition and its work equal to other groups or more. Within the coalition, this can mean active elevation of grassroots voices and leadership.
- Participants have the resources to engage in the coalition.

### TRANSFORMATION

Not only are members of the group striving to affect their chosen issue (i.e., electric mobility, child care), they are changing the way the work is done and looking at long-term social change. The coalition sees policy wins not as an end goal, but as one possible tool in their **ultimate goal to improve the experience of and achieve impact for those most affected** by the issue.

Transformation exists when:

- Members are not only valued for their unique skills and the constituency they bring to the group, but for their perspective. The goals created by the group are bigger, more comprehensive, and visionary.
- Members can see their work and contributions make an impact. This impact could be concrete policy change but is often a transformational change in perspective as well.



These three intersecting pillars underpin how coalitions were structured and how members showed up in relationship with each other: not as a competition but as a place where each member is not only welcome but has power in directing the coalition for meaningful social change.

## Milestones for Collective Power

Milestones for collective power emerged in our work with CC NEXT as both goals members were working towards and outcomes they had achieved that supported them to build power. They capture the important stages, elements, or “milestones” of collective power in today’s political reality. Milestones included both processes and outcomes. There can be risks to creating milestones for collective power: in our work with advocates to identify these milestones, one

member shared that emphasizing milestones can prevent revolutionary thinking that can create positive disruption. Nevertheless, these milestones provide a starting point for understanding how coalitions build collective power and can be a tool for tracking progress towards and improving collective power.

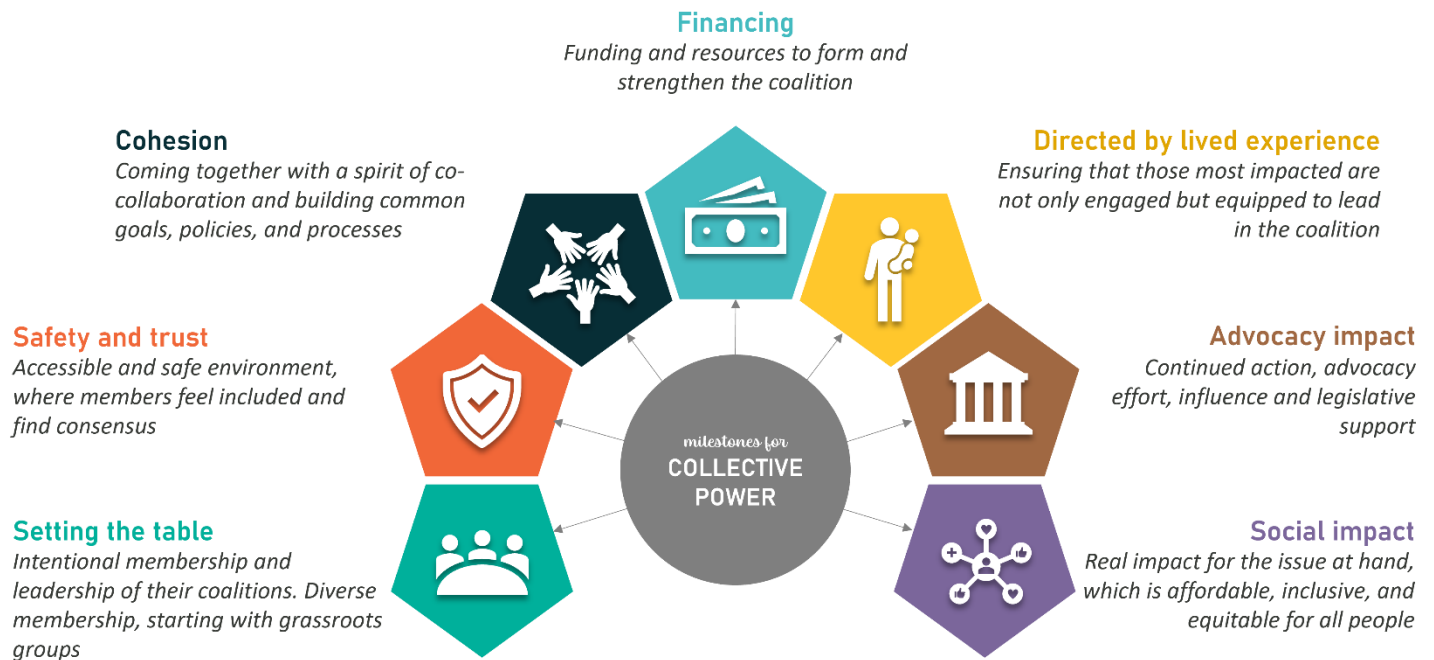


Figure 3 | Milestones for Collective Power

Advocates described seven milestones in building collective power in CC NEXT state coalitions, described below and illustrated in Figure 3.

### Setting the table



The formation of a coalition is a pivotal moment for collective power that creates expectations about who are welcome as decisionmakers in the group. Setting the table begins with the specific people and organizations who make up the coalition, and extends to ensuring each member feels that they belong and holds leadership and decision-making power within the group. Setting a table with collective power ensures every person invested in an issue is included and has power. This includes creating a diverse membership that starts with communities most affected by the issue, creating shared norms centered in equity, level-setting across diverse groups, creating accessible spaces for non-English speakers, and creating internal structures that give those most affected by the issue more power.



## Setting the table (cont.)



### Sample Strategies

- Creating a coalition membership with 55% of its leaders as those most affected by the issue.
- Building in peer learning opportunities, as well as more formal opportunities with external speakers, to account for the varying levels of experience and understating among members.
- Sometimes leading meetings in Spanish to disrupt the power dynamics for those attending, using language not only to communicate but as political education for members.

### Sample Indicators

- Diversity of the coalition through the representation of relevant groups
- Extent to which new members are invited and welcome to the coalition
- Extent to which coalition members feel they can engage in the coalition in the way/to the extent they want
- Extent to which coalition members have clear roles, which contribute to (but not limited to) advocacy work, organizing parents and providers, and backbone infrastructure of the coalition

## Safety and trust



Safety and trust are prerequisites for diverse people to come together in coalitions that build collective power. When there is safety and trust, coalition members acknowledge and respect the diverse skill sets, priorities, and life experiences of each other. These coalitions intentionally cultivate relationships and create space for meaningful dialogue where every person can be a contributor. Creating a culture of authenticity within these coalitions is essential, providing spaces for authentic dialogue and feedback, even if it invites discomfort. Establishing transparent processes for accountability ensures that these spaces remain safe and conducive to collaboration. However, coalitions have realized that they are not starting from a neutral place. Creating safety and trust can take longer with marginalized populations, who have been disrespected and tokenized in the past.

### Sample Strategies

- Caucusing with like-groups to create a safe space to discuss equity from a power-holding and marginalized perspective
- Creating clear and transparent processes, such as how decisions are made
- Leaning into “awkward” pauses in meetings to allow for thinking, processing, and ideas from cautious contributors to emerge
- Checking in with people with lived experience to ensure they have been heard and listened to in group spaces
- Meeting in person to allow for deeper connections

### Sample Indicators

- Strength and type of relationships across coalition members
- Extent to which members feel they can show up with authenticity and honesty
- Extent to which members feel the coalition operates transparently and with clear rules of engagement.
- Extent to which members can openly share feedback, address conflict, and hold each other accountable.
- Strength of relationships across silos.
- Level of fun and laughter in the coalition.

## Cohesion



When coalition members come together to collaborate and build common goals and processes, they create cohesion. Cohesion allows coalitions to harness their collective strength for change. In coalitions that build collective power, cohesion is found through collaborative decision-making to come to agreement about what is important in their coalition. Every perspective is valid when considering both internal practices and values as well as the advocacy priorities that become the focus of a coalition's external efforts. Transparency and open dialogue around differences have helped coalitions build momentum and shift power towards people with lived experience.

### Sample Strategies

- Collectively creating shared values, goals, operating agreements, and policy agendas that all members agree to
- Establishing clear expectations around equity that can check traditional power dynamics and elevate the priorities of those with lived experience
- Celebrating new proposals from members who have not been heard
- Creating a decision-making approach where the majority of members can give input before a decision is made
- Using the coalition facilitator as a mediator to hold members accountable to their principles and commitments

### Sample Indicators

- Extent to which members can articulate the coalition's vision and theory of change
- Extent to which members feel mutual support, solidarity, and collaboration toward a common purpose and vision
- Level of flexibility and willingness to adapt strategies and tactics in the face of new information, successes, or challenges

## Financing



Collective power costs money, both to provide support for coalition initiatives and to ensure active participation from all members, particularly those with lived experience and from marginalized identities. People enter coalitions with different financial resources, ranging from well-funded organizations to people with lived experience who have a vested interest in the work of the coalition but no outside financial support. Often larger organizations focused on research and policy are better funded than community-based organizations or organizations that represents marginalized populations (i.e., NAACP, Refugee Alliance, etc). Coalitions that build collective power seek a just distribution of resources within the coalition so that every member can contribute what they want to. Coalitions need funding and resources to establish themselves and grow stronger, and funding can address barriers to participation.

### Sample Strategies

- Seeking start-up funding to support relationship building and the formation of the coalition
- Seeking flexible and multi-year funding for coalitions building collective power
- Compensating people with lived experience for their role in the coalition
- Advocating for more funds from funders to support collective efforts
- Using a participatory budgeting process to distribute coalition funds

### Sample Indicators

- Level and type of financial compensation to people with lived experience
- Extent state coalition uses resources to support and increase funding streams for grassroots organizations
- Extent to which participants contributed and agree how funds were distributed
- Strength of relationships between the coalition and its funders

## Directed by lived experience



Efforts to center and uplift the voices of people with lived experience are vital for ensuring that policy decisions reflect the needs of those most affected by an issue. By prioritizing authentic listening, accessibility, and financial support, coalitions can create an inclusive space where people with lived experience, especially those from marginalized communities, can realize their power as vital leaders and contributors in coalitions. However, people with lived experience of an issue may not have direct experience with policymaking and by definition are often experiencing issues in their lives that make it difficult to dedicate time and energy to a coalition. Collective power requires a radical shift in mindset for the people accustomed to coalitions that historically excluded people with lived experience as active members. Realizing the suppressed power of these members takes substantial time and effort to do policy education, provide emotional support and basic needs, and counteract the distrust many marginalized communities experience because of their historical exclusion. It also requires those with more power to “step back” and give space to those with lived experience. With support and attention to relationships, coalitions can create an environment that celebrates lived experience and nourishes their power.

### Sample Strategies

- Starting with grassroots and people with lived experience when sharing stories and ideas
- Providing for basic needs such as child care, gas, and meals to enable people to join coalition meetings
- Scheduling coalition meetings during non-traditional hours and at a central geographic location
- Providing access to direct services and aid for people with lived experience
- Leadership trainings for community members to build their confidence in leading and responding.
- Pre- and post-meeting check ins with people with lived experience to ensure they feel prepared and understand next steps

### Sample Indicators

- Extent to which people with lived experience have increasing leadership and decision-making power
- Extent to which state coalitions prepare people with lived experience to lead
- Extent to which the coalition supports the personal needs of people with lived experience in the coalition
- Extent to which those with lived experience represented in the coalition mirrors the state population or the workforce.
- Extent to which the voices and priorities of people with lived experience are centered in the coalition

*I've noticed that **when our conversations lean towards the most marginalized amongst us, our voices are heard, heavily considered, and in some cases the finality of that dialogue, period.***

*- State Coalition Member*

## Advocacy impact



Coalitions recognize that policy change is a meaningful tool for social change. Advocacy that builds power focuses on creating an equitable process for seeking change, and often emphasizes the long-term goals of social change rather than the short-term win of a specific policy change. Therefore, coalitions' work is focused on advocacy efforts that educate, build influence, and affect decisions made to improve the conditions and lives of people affected by an issue. This education, influence, and decision-making can be measured within the coalition as well as outside of it. By demonstrating increased engagement, successful legislative efforts, and the implementation of impactful policies, coalitions are making tangible progress towards advancing their goals and creating change.

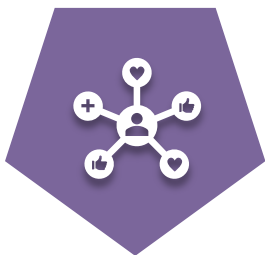
### Sample Strategies

- Launching a campaign
- Completing a cost study for a proposed policy solution
- Educating elected officials
- Changing the narrative to reframe an issue
- Attending hearings on the issue to share stories with lived experience
- Days of action, e.g, protests, in support of an issue
- Inviting elected officials to attend a coalition event that centers the stories of people with lived experience

### Sample Indicators

- Level of campaign engagement including geographic diversity, grassroots diversity, and cross industry engagement.
- Extent to which coalition grows racially diverse partnerships.
- Level and type of racial equity data that is collected and used to inform coalition activities.
- Extent to which families feel their interests are centered in advocacy efforts
- Frequency of preferred narrative used in the media and by policymakers
- Level of funding for proposed policy solution
- Legislation passed or prevented that supports an issue

## Social impact



Achieving concrete social change is the ultimate goal of coalitions that build collective power, extending beyond mere policy wins to create tangible improvements in the lives of children and families. Real change should be grounded in the experience of those most affected by the issue, and entails ensuring accessible, quality change for all, addressing racial and gender equity, and meeting diverse needs that address disparities. What social impact looks like differs based on the coalition and their goals.

### Sample Strategies

- Including lived experience in policy solutions,
- Staying connected to people with lived experience to understand their perspective,
- Research and data to see impact,
- Following policy implementation to track unintended consequences

### Sample Indicators

- Increased funding for issue solutions
- Extent to which people with lived experience feel their interests are centered in policy initiatives
- Reduced disparity
- Increased affordability

While TEEM and CC NEXT are in the early stages and are just beginning to see advocacy progress, the milestones they envision provide a roadmap for navigating the complexities of building collective power and driving meaningful change.

The appendix includes quick-look guide of milestones and sample indicators that coalitions can use and build on to measure collective power.

# MEASURING COLLECTIVE POWER

We are piloting a tool to measure collective power to give advocates the tools they need to measure and grow collective power in and through their coalitions. **Powered Together: A Pulse Check for Coalition Power, Equity, and Strength** is a tool that enables coalitions to measure themselves according to the first five milestones of collective power. The tool can support coalitions to:

1. See how their coalition is building collective power and find new opportunities.
2. Create a cohesive story about what it takes to build collective power.
3. Test and refine a tool for new contexts that other coalitions can use to improve their collective power building.

We are thankful for the support of the [Alliance for Early Success](#) for funding our initial work to understand the milestones for collective power, piloting an initial tool to measure collective power, and for believing in an approach that centers the parents and advocates at the center of collective power.



We plan to develop a self-assessment version of the Powered Together tool to support coalitions building collective power everywhere. A self-assessment version can open conversations for coalitions with limited resources about how to improve collective power on their timeline with the skills they have on hand.

As we continue to refine and scale the Powered Together tool, **we are actively exploring partnerships with potential funding partners** to broaden its reach beyond the child care advocacy space and develop a self-assessment version. By supporting the Collective Power Tool, you will not only contribute to the growing evidence base on collective power within coalitions but also empower advocates with the resources they need to drive meaningful change.

**It is more vital than ever to harness the collective power of advocacy coalitions.** Coalitions building collective power are confronting entrenched inequities, dismantling oppressive systems, and fostering inclusive environments where every voice is not only heard but also valued. **The collective power framework and indicators are meant as tools in service to this mission.**

# MILESTONES AND INDICATORS FOR COLLECTIVE POWER AT-A-GLANCE

MILESTONE	SAMPLE INDICATORS
<b>SETTING THE TABLE</b> <i>Intentional membership and leadership of their coalitions. Diverse membership, starting with grassroots groups.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diversity of the table</li><li>• Extent to which new members are invited and welcome to the coalition</li><li>• Extent to which coalition members feel they can engage in the coalition in the way/to the extent they want</li></ul>
<b>SAFETY AND TRUST ACROSS MEMBERS</b> <i>To achieve safety and trust, the environment must be accessible and center parents and providers. There are feedback loops, relationship-building, and honesty that allows states to experiment and disagree. When there is safety and trust, participants feel included and find consensus.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Types of relationships across coalition members</li><li>• Extent to which members feel they can show up with authenticity and honesty</li><li>• Extent to which members feel the coalition operates transparently and with clear rules of engagement.</li></ul>
<b>COHESION</b> <i>State coalitions are coming together by building common goals, policies, and processes. In building these internal structures they seek flexibility that recognizes partners' unique needs and prioritizing parent ownership. If successful, cohesion can result in relationship-building and reduced silos.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extent to which members can articulate the coalition's vision and theory of change.</li><li>• Extent to which members feel mutual support, solidarity, and collaboration toward a common purpose and vision</li></ul>
<b>FINANCING</b> <i>States need funding and resources to form and strengthen their coalitions, particularly funds devoted to address barriers to participation.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Level and type of financial compensation to parents and providers</li><li>• Extent state coalition used resources to support and increase funding streams for grassroots organizations</li><li>• Extent to which participants contributed and agree with the decisions for how funds were distributed</li></ul>
<b>DIRECTED BY LIVED EXPERIENCE</b> <i>Success for this milestone involves ensuring that parents and providers are equipped to lead in coalition roles and are present during engagement with Legislators and community leaders.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extent to which those closest to the issue have increasing leadership and decision-making power</li><li>• Extent to which state coalitions prepare those closest to the issue to lead</li></ul>
<b>ADVOCACY IMPACT</b> <i>This milestone focuses on what progress will look like in childcare advocacy within each state. Findings on this milestone will be indicated by continued action and advocacy efforts in conjunctions with legislative support to help progress toward childcare funding.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Level of campaign engagement</li><li>• Extent to which coalition grows racially diverse partnerships.</li><li>• Level and type of racial equity data that is collected and used to inform coalition activities.</li><li>• Perception of support for priority issues</li></ul>
<b>SOCIAL IMPACT</b> <i>Collective power should result in real impact for children and families through more quality care for all types of families that is accommodating to their individual needs. Such needs include affordability, race/gender inclusive, language inclusive, geographically inclusive, time inclusive, location inclusive, and disability inclusive.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extent to which those closest to the issue feel their interests are centered in policy and advocacy efforts</li><li>• Increased funding for issue solutions</li><li>• Extent to which those closest to the issue are better off</li></ul>



# METHODOLOGY

In the absence of existing frameworks that adequately center equity in the context of collective power, we turned to the advocates actively engaged in building collective power as part of their everyday practice. Our approach involved a comprehensive engagement process with advocates, aimed at both defining collective power and developing relevant milestones and indicators.

We began defining collective power as one learning question in a larger evaluation with TEEM. With CC NEXT, collective power became a central area of exploration. These lessons, combined with insights from the broader field, helped us triangulate the components of collective power included in the framework above. Our approach with each group is detailed below.

## Understanding shared power in TEEM

Our learning partnership with TEEM focused on supporting facilitators who played a crucial role in guiding state cohorts towards building collective power. Insights from TEEM advocates and facilitators shed light on the crucial elements required for a coalition to effectively challenge existing power dynamics and define the environmental characteristics of collective power. Our learning partnership with TEEM included:

1. **Reflecting on facilitating collective power.** Monthly facilitated conversations with the Facilitation Group on successes, experiments,

and challenges in building collective power from the perspectives of the organizers of a coalition.

2. **Defining a healthy environment for collective power.** In a facilitated discussion with most members of TEEM, we explored what it takes to build a healthy environment that allows for collective power.
3. **Assessing shared power.** We launched a survey to see how TEEM was building collective ownership and operationalizing equity, core components of collective power. These findings were validated and expanded on in sensemaking sessions with advocates, organizers, and funders of TEEM.

## Identifying milestones and indicators with CC NEXT

Our work with CC NEXT took a more direct approach towards understanding collective power. We conducted a series of in-depth interviews, reflection conversations, and surveys with advocates within CC NEXT coalitions to define the characteristics of collective power. We presented and validated data so that each round of data collection built on the previous. This allowed us to narrow in on collective power milestones and enabled advocates to add or correct findings from previous rounds of data collection. The data gathered from CC NEXT played a central role in shaping the core tenets of the collective power framework presented in this paper.

Our engagement with advocates included:



*Coalition members help define the collective power milestones.*

- 1. Defining Collective Power:** We spoke with 13 advocates in all CC NEXT states in-depth interviews to articulate their understanding of collective power within the context of their work.
- 2. Identifying Milestones:** Advocates reflected on interview findings during an in-person convening; approximately 6-8 members from every state were in attendance. Participants were able to add to the themes and reflect on what it takes to build collective power and brainstorm milestones for collective power.
- 3. Identifying Indicators of Success:** Milestones were shared and validated with advocates at the next convening during a facilitated activity where they were invited to review each milestone and add stickies with what it looks like when they have achieved or made progress on the milestone. Participants discussed the milestones in greater detail in small groups and added to factors that support them in working towards the milestone. Indicators were weighted through reflection with the Alliance and the CC NEXT Advisory Committee.
- 4. Piloting the Collective Power Tool:** A subset of CC NEXT advocates participated in piloting the collective power tool, providing valuable feedback and insights into its effectiveness and

usability. A scaled test of the tool is planned for all active participants in CC NEXT coalitions for the summer of 2024.

## Compiling the framework

In addition to direct engagement with advocates, our approach also drew from existing frameworks on coalitions and racial equity. We conducted a comprehensive cross-analysis of these frameworks, synthesizing insights and identifying areas of overlap and divergence. This process allowed us to integrate relevant concepts from existing frameworks while also incorporating new insights from advocates.

Furthermore, ongoing conversations and participation in conferences such as the American Evaluation Association (AEA) enabled us to get input and validation from a diverse range of perspectives. This iterative approach ensured that the framework was responsive to emerging insights and validated initial versions of the framework, enhancing its relevance and applicability.

Ultimately, we mapped the identified indicators to the previously defined milestones, creating a cohesive framework for measuring collective power within advocacy coalitions. This integrated approach, combining insights from advocates with relevant existing frameworks, ensures that our collective power framework is robust, comprehensive, and grounded in the experiences of those seeking to build collective power.



## About Innovation Network

**Innovation Network has facilitated meaningful learning and evaluation for over 30 years.** We specialize in advocacy evaluation efforts, strategy, and facilitation. **We believe that evaluation should be a tool for social justice,** and work with clients who have social justice-centered missions. Our diverse client portfolio includes health equity, early childhood, civic engagement, and advocacy and social movements. For more information, please visit [www.innonet.org](http://www.innonet.org).

