Coalitions are most effective when they possess at least three attributes: (1) an active and committed membership, (2) effective processes to make decisions that members support, and (3) leaders that are acceptable to the members, and therefore capable of guiding activities. This memo explores the extent to which the state and local coalitions comprising the Covering Kids and Families program possess these attributes. It reports on the participation rates of members in coalition activities, their perceptions of coalition leadership, and how important coalition decisions are made. The data is based on the assessments of those members of Covering Kids and Families coalitions that responded to the Coalition Self Assessment Survey (CSAS) sent to the 1,078 members of 10 state coalitions and 20 local coalitions in February and March of 2003.

Responses were received from 552 coalition members; of these responses, 473 were “completed” surveys. Most of those that responded but did not complete the survey indicated that they had little or no connection with the Covering Kids and Families initiative. Any interpretation of the survey results with respect to participation in the coalitions, therefore, must be tempered with the strong possibility that the 526 individuals that did not respond in any way have less involvement with the coalitions than the 473 that completed the survey. Moreover, 50 percent (235) of those that completed the survey indicated significant levels of involvement in the coalition. Sixty-four respondents indicated that they had leadership roles, either as officers of the coalition (34) or as the chair or co-chair of a coalition committee (30) (Eighteen of the 64 coalition leaders were also grantee staff.). One hundred forty-seven other respondents were members of the coalition steering or executive committee (of whom 32 were staff). And an additional 24 respondents were grantee staff that did not indicate that they were otherwise part of the leadership of their coalition. Thus, the results of the CSAS reported here are primarily assessments of some of the more active participants in the CKF coalitions.
PARTICIPATION IN CKF COALITIONS

Overall Participation by Type of Participant

Most respondents to the CSAS (449 or 95 percent) indicated that they had participated in one or more coalition-related activities within the past year, ranging from attending a coalition activity to committee meetings. (See Appendix A for a list of the possible responses.) Eighty-four percent of respondents (398) had attended at least one coalition or committee meeting in the past year. The results were similar for state coalitions versus local coalitions: 83 percent of state coalition members and 86 percent of local coalition members responding had attended at least one meeting in the last year. Figure 1 shows the number of survey respondents and the ways they had participated in various activities.

Of the 449 individuals who indicated some type of coalition-related activity, only 27 individuals indicated that their only participation was through conference calls, e-mail, chat groups, or reading written materials from the coalition. Since this question did not include an option to respond “none of the above,” it is not possible to distinguish between those that didn’t answer this question and those that didn’t actively participate in the coalition.

Coalition Level Responses

The level of participation in coalition meetings varied from coalition to coalition, as can be seen in Figure 2. Most of the coalitions had large numbers of members attending at least one meeting a year. For four of the coalitions, all respondents had attended at least one coalition or committee meeting in the last year.
Coalition Interaction

year. Only two coalitions had less than three-fourths of respondents indicate that they attended a meeting in the last year. One of these two is the coalition for a local grantee that is no longer participating in CKF.

Figure 2: Percent of Members Attending At Least One Coalition or Committee Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Coalition Members</th>
<th>Number of Coalitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91% to 99%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81% to 90%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71% to 80%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61% to 70%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% to 60%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coalition members were also asked to indicate the number of coalition or committee meetings they had attended in the last year. There were 374 individuals that provided a specific value or an estimate of the number of meetings that they had attended in the last year. They had attended an average of 5.1 meetings. The median number of meetings per participant was 4 meetings, with the most common value being 2 meetings. There were 54 individuals that had attended 10 or more meetings in the past year.

COMMITMENT TO THE COALITION

Respondents were asked questions about their commitment to the coalition and reasons for participation. Since the responses to these questions were similar for state and local coalition members, they are analyzed together. About 90 percent of survey participants answered these questions.

Attitudes Toward the Coalition

Most respondents indicated strong loyalty to the coalition, with 83 percent of respondents to the statement either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Nearly 25 percent of those answering this item strongly agreed that they had a strong sense of loyalty to the coalition. Unfortunately, a significant minority of coalition members (22 percent) reported that they only attended coalition meetings because it was part of their job.
Coalition Interaction

Commitment of Time and Financial Resources

The survey also asked the extent to which the respondent or their organization contributed certain resources to the coalition, including time and funds. About 90 percent of survey respondents answered these questions. Coalition members reported very different commitments in terms of financing versus time.

As we can see in Figures 3 and 4, 73 percent of state coalition members and 85 percent of local coalition members indicated that they or their organization contributed some or a lot of time to the coalition. (The values for those that agreed “a lot” with this statement were 36 percent for local coalitions and 43 percent for state coalitions.)

In contrast, 70 percent of state coalition members and 70 percent of local coalition members indicated that they or their organization contributed very little in funds to the coalition. However, as the graphs that follow illustrate, the distribution of responses was somewhat different between state and local coalitions. More members and/or organizations in state coalitions declined giving any funds to the CKF coalitions.

---

**Figure 3**

Time Contributed by State Coalition Members and Organizations

- Not At All: 2%
- A Little: 25%
- A Lot: 36%
- Somewhat: 37%

**Figure 4**

Time Contributed by Local Coalition Members and Organizations

- Not At All: 1%
- A Little: 14%
- A Lot: 43%
- Somewhat: 42%

**Figure 5**

Funds Contributed by State Coalition Members and Organizations

- Not At All: 59%
- A Little: 11%
- Somewhat: 12%
- A Lot: 18%

**Figure 6**

Funds Contributed by Local Coalition Members and Organizations

- Not At All: 49%
- A Little: 21%
- Somewhat: 19%
- A Lot: 11%
Coalition Interaction

Other Participation by Coalition Members

Coalition members provide other contributions besides time and funds to help the coalition achieve its objectives. As shown in Table 1, most coalition members that responded to the survey provide these other types of support. About 90 percent of survey respondents answered each of these questions. For those answering these questions, Figure 7 shows the percent of respondents that indicated that they or their organization provided some level of assistance.

Figure 7: Member or Organizational Contributions to Assist the Coalition With:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>A Little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Quite a Lot</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help in gaining access to target groups.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help in gaining access to key policy makers or community influencers.</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilizing a constituency to support the policy objectives of the coalition.</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help in gaining access to the media or the public as a whole.</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HOW COALITIONS MAKE DECISIONS

Respondents were asked how coalition decisions are usually made. Of those answering this question, 19 percent of local coalition members and 32 percent of state coalition members indicated that they did not know how decisions are made by the coalition. The most common response was that “coalition members discuss the issue and come to a consensus” (52 percent for local coalitions and 53 percent for state coalitions of those responding to this question).

The survey asked more specifically about decision-making on the budget, staffing, and work plan changes. Nearly half of state coalition members and about 40 percent of local coalition members did not know how decisions were made with regard to staffing or budgets. Respondents had an only slightly greater knowledge of decision making for coalition work plan changes. Table 1 shows the results on these three items.

---

2The response rates for this question were 92 percent for local coalitions and 93 percent for state coalitions.
Coalition Interaction

Table 1: Knowledge of Decision-Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents indicating that they don't know who makes decisions about:</th>
<th>Budget:</th>
<th>Staffing:</th>
<th>Work Plan Changes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Coalitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Members</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grantee Staff</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Coalitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Members</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grantee Staff</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses of leaders (coalition officers or chairpersons of coalition committees or task forces) indicate a higher level of knowledge of these issues. However, the survey still indicated that many coalition leaders and grantee staff were unaware of the processes to alter budgets, modify project staffing, or change work plans.

Who Influences Coalition Decisions

Most CKF coalitions govern themselves. As shown in Table 2, 72 percent of those responding said that the coalition “executive” or “steering” committee had a lot of influence on decisions; 59 percent said that coalition officers had a lot of influence. In comparison, less than half said that paid staff had a lot of influence on decisions.

Table 2: Who Influences Decisions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coalition executive or steering committee</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition officers</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid coalition staff</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CKF grantee representatives</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other coalition members</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But while CKF coalitions govern themselves, many individual coalition members who were neither coalition leaders nor paid staff feel that they have no influence on decisions (29 percent) (see Table 3).

All coalition leaders and most grantee staff indicated that they had at least some influence on coalition decisions. Responses to this item were similar for state and local coalitions.
Table 3: How Much Influence Do You Personally Have in Making Coalition Decisions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent’s Position</th>
<th>No Influence</th>
<th>Some Influence</th>
<th>A Lot of Influence</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coalition Leader</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grantee Staff</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Member</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONFLICT WITHIN COALITIONS

CKF coalition members see very little conflict within their coalition.\(^3\) For most potential conflict factors, less than 30 percent of respondents indicated that the factor caused any conflict within the coalition. The highest levels of conflict were indicated for “difference in opinion about specific objectives” and for “difference in opinion about the best strategies to achieve coalition goals and objectives.” Responses on these items were similar for state and local coalitions. Figures 10 and 11 show that very few members thought that there was a lot of conflict over these issues, but over 40 percent of members identified at least some conflict related to each of these issues.

Figure 8
Conflict over Objectives
- None: 60%
- Some: 39%
- A Lot: 1%

Figure 9
Conflict over Strategies
- None: 55%
- Some: 42%
- A Lot: 3%

COALITION LEADERSHIP

Coalition members generally expressed satisfaction with current coalition leadership. Six statements about coalition leadership generated nearly identical responses. Both state and local coalitions felt that coalition leadership:

- Has a clear vision for the coalition;
- Gets things done;
- Intentionally seeks other’s views;
- Utilizes the skills and talents of many, not just a few;

\(^3\)Between 82 percent and 84 percent of survey respondents answered these particular questions.
Coalition Interaction

- Works collaboratively with coalition members; and
- Keeps the coalition focused on tasks and objectives.

On average 58 percent agreed and an additional 26 percent strongly agreed with these characterizations of coalition leadership styles. Respondents reacted even more positively when asked if coalition leadership was respected, with 55 percent agreeing and 43 percent strongly agreeing.

![Figure 10](image)

Leadership is respected:

- Strongly Agree: 43.0%
- Agree: 54.8%
- Disagree: 1.7%
- Strongly Disagree: 0.5%

Coalition members had divided opinions on the extent to which coalition leadership dominated agendas and decisions. When asked if coalition leadership “advocates strongly for own opinions and agendas” and “controls decisions” the number of members that agreed with these statements nearly equaled the number that disagreed. In the aggregate, results were similar for all state coalitions as for all local coalitions. For both of these questions just over half of those responding either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements.

![Figure 11](image)

Leadership controls decisions:

- Agree: 44%
- Disagree: 44%
- Strongly Agree: 7%
- Strongly Disagree: 5%

![Figure 12](image)

Leadership advocates strongly for own opinions and agendas:

- Agree: 39%
- Disagree: 41%
- Strongly Agree: 15%
- Strongly Disagree: 5%

Given the divided response to these issues, the question raised is whether opinions are split within most individual coalitions or whether there is a wide range of leadership styles among coalitions. For six
Coalition Interaction

coolitions (20 percent), more than 70 percent of survey respondents indicated that the coalition leadership “advocates strongly for own opinions and agendas” and “controls decisions.” Another 20 percent of the coalitions painted the opposite picture, with only one third of their members agreeing that the leadership controlled the decisions; while the remaining 60 percent of the coalitions have members with mixed opinions. Thus perceptions of the degree of leadership control varies significantly from coalition to coalition.

These last findings on the role of leadership in controlling decisions or advocating for their own opinions might seem to some contradictory to the findings that respondents were satisfied with their coalition leaders. We cannot be certain of the way respondents interpreted our survey questions, but we believe that there is less contradiction than one might initially think. Apparently many of the respondents are both satisfied with the leadership of their coalition and with the fact that the leadership controls the agenda and advocates for its own opinions. To many, this is the definition of positive leadership.

CONCLUSIONS

CKF coalitions include many loyal and active members. Many individual coalition members are committed enough to respond to a mail survey about their participation (51 percent). More than half of those respondents who completed the survey indicated that they were active in coalition affairs and most asserted strong loyalty to their coalition. Few indicated that they gave financial contributions to their coalition, instead most respondents helped their CKF coalition gain access to target populations or key policymakers or the media.

There are signs that coalition functioning could be improved, however. Nearly half of state coalition members and 40 percent of local coalition members did not know how key decisions about budgets, staffing, or work plan changes were made. Nearly 30 percent of coalition members who were neither staff nor in the coalition leadership felt that they had no personal influence on decisions. Clearly, CKF coalitions need to improve internal communications.

Still, coalition members express clear satisfaction with coalition leadership so far. The vision for the coalition is clear, leaders work collaboratively and keep the coalition focused on coalition objectives.
**Coalition Interaction**

**APPENDIX A: MEMBER PARTICIPATION**

The survey asked the following question regarding the ways in which respondents had participated in coalition and related activities.

In the past year, have you done one or more of the following? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions:</th>
<th>State Coalition Members</th>
<th>Local Coalition Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Attended a coalition or committee meeting. (a. If so, please note the number of meetings attended,)</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sat in on one or more conference calls.</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Participated in e-mail communications/chat groups.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Read materials and/or newsletters from the coalition.</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Participated in non-coalition sponsored meetings or activities to further the coalition goals.</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Other (specify): ____________________________________________________</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>