**Guidance Document:**

**Coalition Membership Structure**

Questions occasionally come up about how Coalitions structure their membership categories, and what types of criteria or dues structures are established. This document provides some background information on this topic. NNEDV also has a chart that outlines the most current information about membership structures for each Coalition. Please contact capacity\_ta@nnedv.org and request a copy of the chart if you would like to see a copy.

**Coalition Structure Background / Context:**

There are dozens of different structures for Coalitions, and it is important to recognize that what works in one state or territory may not be effective in another, as the historical, cultural, political and geographic differences may impact the organization’s decisions about how to structure itself. Conversations about how to define Coalition membership are tied to conversations about Coalition structure, because the two issues are inevitably interconnected.

**Definitions:**

As a membership organization, each Coalition needs to define what the benefits and responsibilities are for its members. While there are many similarities among the different coalitions, there are also many differences.

The common element is that all Coalitions are required (by FVPSA) to have the majority of the state or territory’s domestic violence agencies as members, in order to be recognized as the Coalition. In other words, if there are 5 local domestic violence programs in a state or territory, then at least 3 of those programs need to be members of the Coalition.

Some Coalitions have two categories of membership. This is generally distinguished by the type of organization (or its mission). For example, an organization that is a primary purpose domestic violence/sexual assault organization would be a Full Member Agency (or a “Primary Member Agency”). An organization that has a broader mission, such as a YWCA, but has a program this is dedicated to domestic violence/sexual assault, might be classified as an Affiliate Member Agency or an Associate Member Agency or some other term like “Partner Agency.” The membership fee and the benefits would be different for these different classes of

membership. The responsibilities of these members differ as well, depending on whether the members are certified or licensed by the Coalition, and whether the Coalition’s Board structure requires participation of its members on the Board or committees. Some Coalitions provide “member-only” benefits such as access to webinars, trainings, technical assistance, events, access to grant funding, and other tangible items/donations.

Some Coalitions have a category of membership called “Individual Membership”. This type of member is usually a person, not an organization; the individual makes an annual contribution to the Coalition. Most Coalitions call this type of relationship a Donor, or a Supportive Member. There generally are no responsibilities on this person, and the benefits include whatever is included with being on the Coalition’s mailing list/email distribution list, and being invited to public events.

**Membership Fee Structures:**

Once again, there is no “magic formula” or one-size-fits-all answer to the question about how Coalitions set up their membership fee structures. Some Coalitions use a formula based on the member agency’s budget size, or the agency’s geographic/population base, or a combination of these elements. Other Coalitions keep feels to a minimal amount (such as $25 or $50 per year) in order to minimize the cost to members. Some Coalitions have one fee for all member agencies, regardless of the size or scope of the organization. In general, the decision about membership fees is tied to a philosophical decision by the Coalition, and the decision would take into account factors such as how many member agencies are in the State or territory, what the cost/benefit is for the agency, so that there is an incentive to becoming a member, what fee structure feels fair/equitable to marginalized community organizations as well as to the more established community organizations.

Many Coalitions establish a sliding scale membership fee, based on a philosophy that the goal is to have all providers (or as many as possible) as members. Some members may experience a downturn in their funding for a year or two, and coalitions may have policies about waiving membership fees (or reducing them) for agencies for a limited period of time.

**General Guiding Suggestions**

Based on the survivor-centered philosophy of the domestic violence movement, coalitions have tended to develop their membership structures with a philosophy of being member-focused, and being driven by the needs of the membership. Values such as equity and empowerment have been incorporated into the membership structures, or at least considered during the decision making process.

Large states have very different issues to consider in looking at membership benefits and responsibilities, as there are a host of factors that differ when a Coalition is responsible to a membership of 60 or more member agencies, compared to a Coalition that is working with a handful of member agencies.

*For more information or assistance, please contact NNEDV’s Capacity TA Team at capacity\_ta@nnedv.org.*