

Governance Policies and Procedures Handbook

STEPS Coalition

[Approved by Allies on July 25, 2008]

Introduction

STEPS strives to model the participative governance that is rooted in the U.S. Constitution and the UN Declaration of Human Rights. STEPS Bylaws and *Coalition Governance Policies and Procedures* reflect the values and principles of shared responsibility. This shared responsibility affirms the gifts and contributions of all Members and at the same time recognizes that individuals participate in the Coalition's decision-making in a variety of ways.

Decision-making involves various stages, including creating ideas, gathering information, making choices, and implementing and evaluating courses of action. Thus, the choice-making dimension is not the only opportunity, nor always the most influential way, for Members to share responsibility for the mission of the Coalition. In fact, several dimensions of decision-making call for diverse talents and abilities. As Members sharing responsibility for the STEPS mission, we are all called to assess our personal gifts and abilities for participating in the governance structures and to apply ourselves accordingly.

Our structures for participative governance exist to enable and facilitate our mission on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Coalition governance is based upon commonly-held understandings developed at the Strategic Visioning Retreat, June 14-15, 2008. Allied Members asked for simple and fast-acting governance. At the Quarterly Meeting on July 25, 2008, Allied Members approved new coalition governance policies and procedures.

These commonly-held understandings are found in the governance policies and procedures, and the Memorandum of Understanding:

1. STEPS needs policy analysts, lawyers, community organizers, advocates, bridge-builders, and service providers for successful campaigns.
2. STEPS will have advocacy campaigns.
3. Local neighborhood organizing and citizen participation is essential.
4. STEPS needs a strong media presence.
5. STEPS needs to work at local, state and national levels.
6. STEPS membership will include individuals as well as organizations.
7. A democratic movement for justice requires "everyone who shares in STEPS social justice values."
8. Members should actively participate in campaigns so that STEPS can have a strong public voice and community respect and be comfortable with the coalition when it challenges government agencies.
9. STEPS' public messages, platforms, and campaigns will be evaluated using the five principles of social justice.

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Policy: One MOU is used for both organization and individuals not associated with any organization.

The Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] contains both the benefits to and requirements of Allies.

Coalition Benefits: *The STEPS Coalition provides its member Allies the following benefits:*

1. information on coalition related matters, events and local justice issues through email, newsletter, website and membership meetings;
2. access to a broad network of like-minded individuals;
3. ability to inform STEPS campaigns and decisions through participation in Board meetings, annual meeting, quarterly meeting, and campaign/strategy meetings;
4. opportunity to learn from social justice advocates working in different communities, on different issues, or from different walks of life;
5. organization profiles on the STEPS website;
6. access to coalition directory which is update annually;
7. staff assistance for networking and support for emerging campaigns and initiatives;
8. staff assistance for Official STEPS campaigns;
9. opportunities for training, in such areas as leadership development

Membership Requirements: *The Coalition expects that member Allies will*

1. agree with the STEPS Coalition's mission, vision, values and principles of justice;
2. actively participate in STEPS campaigns and be comfortable when the Coalition challenges government agencies and oppressive social and economic structures;
3. promote the mission of the STEPS Coalition and educate the public about its purpose, campaigns and how to become involved;
4. abide by the provisions of governance in the *Coalition Governance Policy and Procedure Handbook*
5. actively contribute to the work of STEPS according to their expertise;
6. attend the Annual Meeting and at least 2 of the 3 Quarterly Meetings per year;
7. stay informed on Coalition matters through email and the STEPS website [Phone outreach will be made for those that indicate a need for this.]; subscribe to issue-oriented updates, discussions, and meetings of their choice.

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STEPS Board of Directors

Role

The role of the Board is to guard the integrity of the Coalition, assure that all Coalition activities address STEPS' 5 social justice principles and that there is a balance among policy analysis, advocacy and community organizing. The Board ensures STEPS' financial and legal integrity and hires and evaluates the Executive Director.

Membership

Board Members are active social justice leaders within the Coast community, including persons not associated with a particular organization. STEPS By-laws require that Membership will reflect a balance of geographic location, gender, race, culture, ability, skills, and experience.

The Board of Directors will be composed of a mixture of Individual Members, and individuals representing civic organizations, and individuals representing non-profit organizations to strike a balance between community leadership and nonprofit leadership.

Executive Committee of the Board

The Executive Committee of the Board and the Executive Director, in a special meeting or by conference call, **decides upon emergency campaign requests**. The entire Board is invited to said meeting or conference call.

Coalition Allies

Role

Allies actively participate in STEPS' work and share STEPS' mission, vision, and core values. Allies vote on STEPS matters, author and manage campaigns and provide expertise and support for neighborhood meetings. Allies establish and amend the Coalition Governance policies and procedures at quarterly meetings and annual meetings.

Voting Delegates:

Allied organizations appoint one [1] Delegate responsible for voting on STEPS matters. Delegates are responsible for voting in person or through proxy vote –submitted in writing and signed by both parties. Three individual votes will hold the equivalent to one organization vote. Those who do not submit a vote or input when it is solicited will be considered in agreement with the vote or work represented.

For issues other than campaigns. Meetings with more than 15 delegates present will use a voting system after substantial dialogue where all participants have vocalized their opinions. Meetings with less than 15 delegates will arrive at decision by consensus.

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Executive Director

Role

The Executive Director makes decisions regarding sign-on support, co-sponsor of events; edits official press releases / media pieces, publications; and manages general operations and staff. The Executive Director serves as the public representative of the STEPS Coalition.

Staff

Role

Staff provides support for all STEPS activities according to their job descriptions.

Communications

Policy: Official STEPS communications are sent to membership by assigned staff. The Executive Director is responsible for final editing and approval of all STEPS related publications.

Procedures:

Announcements

Allies send announcements relating to Coalition and Allies' social justice work must receive announcement requests with at least one week's notice.
Staff sends out announcements on a weekly basis.

Online Issue Forums

Online forums may be established for developing campaigns and having issue focused conversations. [Until the online forums are in operation, members are asked to work with staff to help network properly and to ensure that communications are inclusive of all membership.]

Media releases and publications

Allies are encouraged to work with staff in drafting media releases or publications on behalf of the STEPS Coalition. The Executive Director is responsible for final editing and approval of media releases and publications.

Feedback

Staff will officially solicit feedback from the Coalition and especially prior to the annual meeting for purposes of reviewing Strategic Plans and governance.

Neighborhood Meetings

STEPS will facilitate meetings in neighborhoods/communities to support existing civic organizations or to develop new organizations. The goal is to work in [4] neighborhoods each year, offering residents an opportunity to identify changes needed, develop action

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plans and join the STEPS Coalition as Allies. When neighborhood leaders become STEPS Allies, they are equally qualified to be appointed to the STEPS Board.

STEPS Neighborhood Meetings also provide an equal opportunity for unaffiliated community members to receive support for their local issues.

Campaigns

Campaigns are advocacy efforts, agreed upon by the Allies that concerns one or any combination of STEPS' five pillars of justice.

Policy: A campaign becomes official with the endorsement of majority of delegates. Voting may be conducted in person, by phone, by email, or by proxy. All proxy votes must be submitted in writing and be signed by both parties.

Policy: All campaigns (state or local) must have at least three Allied organizations and three community representatives and/or individual Allies committed to leading the campaign from start to finish.

Policy: All STEPS' activities including public messages, platforms, and campaigns will be evaluated using the five principles of social justice.

Policy: Emergency campaign requests are decided by the Executive Committee of the Board and the Executive Director in a special meeting or by conference call.

Procedures:

Allies create potential campaigns, recruit partner support and make presentations at Quarterly and Annual Meetings.

Long term state/national campaigns are voted on by delegates at Annual Meeting.

Local campaigns are voted on at Quarterly Meetings.

Staff Assistance:

Staff assist Allies in networking support for their campaigns and by facilitating meetings when participants are identified. Staff will provide facilitation, coordination, research, publications, campaign kits, and media/ press work for official STEPS campaigns.

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Meetings

Policy: All meetings are open to all individuals and organizations.

1. Board of Directors Meetings are held each month... Board members attend strategic planning and committee meetings.
2. Special Board Meetings require attendance of Executive Committee for decisions on emergency campaign requests.
3. The Annual Meeting is normally held at the end of the year. Delegates vote on year-long, state-wide, coalition-wide campaigns. Staff reports on the previous year's work... Plans are made for activities during the next legislative session.
4. Quarterly Meetings are usually held in January, April, July, and October. Local campaigns are considered.
5. Campaign Strategy Meetings are held as needed.
6. Lobbying Days will be scheduled during State legislative session [January through July])
7. Social Gatherings / Events [At least 2 per year, can be hosted by partners, funders, or Allies]

Shared leadership is an operative value of the STEPS Coalition. Opportunities for shared leadership are reflected in the following:

Shared Leadership

- The composition of the Board of Directors ensures the representation of civic organizations and committed individuals, striking a balance between community leadership and nonprofit leadership.
- The Board appoints non-Board persons to some committees.
- Campaigns are developed by Allies.
- Media spokespersons rotate.
- New Allies receive an orientation packet, materials.

Leadership Development

- Leadership training opportunities are offered to membership and emerging community leaders.
- Local speakers or groups who have been successful in movement building work will be engaged as speakers.
- Coalition shares leadership by creating campaigns, attending and voting at meetings.

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- Board Meetings and Task Force Meetings may be scheduled as needed in the evenings for “volunteer oriented” participation from all Allies.

Grievance Procedure

1. Any grievances, concerns or operational recommendations should be presented to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director does not provide a satisfactory response within two weeks, the Coalition Ally should address the Board President in writing. Board Members’ contact information is listed on the STEPS Coalition website for public use.
2. An Ally of the STEPS Coalition who is perceivably undermining the work or reputation of the coalition will be engaged in discussion by the Board’s Executive Committee. If the issue is not resolved within 3 months, the Ally’s membership will be withdrawn by the Board of Directors.
3. Allies who do not uphold the agreements stated in this MOU will be addressed by the Coalition’s Board of Directors.

Amended on December 3, 2008