

# Building Effective Coalitions in Education

## Lessons from the Collective Impact Model and Brazilian Cases

The experiences of Brazilian initiatives like Todos Pela Educação (TPE) and Movimento pela Base (MPB) illustrate the power of collective impact. By acting as coalitions, they were instrumental in advancing structural policies like the National Learning Standards (BNCC), the New Fundeb (the public funding mechanism for basic education) and the National Commitment to Child Literacy, even in highly unstable political contexts.



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LIGHTHOUSE  
COALITION

Building Global South exemplars for government-led education reform

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## The Five Pillars of Collective Impact

For a coalition to succeed, it must ensure five essential conditions that produce alignment and generate powerful results.

### 1.1 Co-create a Common Agenda

All coalition members must share a vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it. This agenda acts as the "backbone" of the educational reform you aim to advance.

#### Practical Example:

The **Movimento pela Base (MPB)** was created in 2013 with a clear focus: advocate for the prioritization, formulation and implementation of BNCC and, later, supporting the High School Reform.

**Todos Pela Educação (TPE)** also operates with priority agendas, such as the New Fundeb and Early Childhood. The 13 priorities for the national government are set out in the "Education Now" document, launched in 2018 and updated in 2022 by Todos Pela Educação in collaboration with over 80 education specialists, and presents a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to address Brazil's most pressing educational challenges. A coalition of 21 organizations share this vision for change and the implementation of the systemic agenda, and this joint effort has an impact that no single entity would have individually.

**KEY MESSAGE:** A shared vision for change is the foundation for alignment and powerful results.

### 1.2 Shared Measurement Systems

It is essential to collect data and measure results consistently across all participating organizations using a short list of indicators.

This ensures efforts remain aligned, enables mutual learning, and holds members accountable.

#### Practical Example:

MPB created the **Observatory of the Implementation** to monitor and provide transparency on the progress of policies. TPE has **Public Monitoring** as one of its three core pillars. Within the scope of the national Education Now coalition, it already monitors internally the stage of the formulation of strategic structural policies, and how much these are aligned with the measures proposed by the Education Now systemic agenda.

**KEY MESSAGE:** Measuring results consistently ensures alignment, enables mutual learning, and fosters accountability among participants.

### 1.3 Mutually Reinforcing Activities

The coalition should encourage each participant to undertake the specific activities at which it excels, in a coordinated manner that supports the actions of others.

The power of collective action comes from the coordination of differentiated activities, not from the uniformity of effort.

#### Practical Example:

The members of the MPB coalition formed different working groups to address complementary activities based on their areas of expertise – such as communications, technical support for elaborating curricular standards, and holistic education, to ensure the standards reflected students' integral development.

**KEY MESSAGE:** The strength of collective action comes from the coordination of differentiated activities, not from the uniformity of efforts.

## 1.4 Continuous Communication & Effective meetings

Building trust among organizations from different sectors (government, civil society, private) is a monumental challenge that requires time and constant interaction.

Regular, structured meetings (monthly or even bi-weekly) are necessary to align vocabulary, discuss progress, learn, and solve problems together. They should be very action oriented, with planned moments for group updates, learning something together and co-creating.

### Practical Example:

MPB's networks met every two weeks for more than three years.

**KEY MESSAGE:** Constant and structured communication is essential for building trust, aligning vocabulary, and ensuring joint learning.

## 1.5 An Anchor Organization

Coordinating a coalition requires time and specific skills. An organization with a dedicated staff must act as the "orchestrator" of the initiative.

This organization is responsible for overall strategy, planning, management, facilitation, data collection, communication, and all logistical and administrative details.

### Practical Example:

MPB (with support from the Lemann Foundation) played this orchestrator role, articulating multiple actors, producing technical inputs, and ensuring the process' continuity, even during political crises.

**KEY MESSAGE:** The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons for its failure.

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## Strategies to Build & Sustain the Coalition

An effective coalition requires ongoing maintenance to preserve its vitality and ensure the sustainability of its actions.

### 2.1 Assemble and Engage the Right Members

Identify and recruit key stakeholders, including policymakers, technical experts, community opinion leaders, and those most affected by the issue. Be as inclusive and participatory as possible. Engaging a diverse set of members is key to persist through political shifts.

### Practical Example:

The initial MPB group was intentionally selected to include leaders from across the political spectrum and different sectors of education to ensure diversity of perspectives, broad representation and buy-in. This helped sustain the pressure for the cause, even through high political instability.

**KEY MESSAGE:** A diverse and representative membership, including those directly affected by the issue, is essential for the coalition's legitimacy and effectiveness.

## 2.2 Invest in Skilled Leadership and Facilitation

A coalition needs strong leaders to articulate the vision and keep the group focused, and shared leadership is essential to avoid dependency on a single person

The role of a facilitator is crucial for running meetings, mediating conflicts, ensuring all voices are heard, and moving the group toward consensus.

### Practical Example:

MPB's leadership had skills in both activism and facilitation, and they carefully planned each meeting to create a "safe space" for dialogue and trust-building. Before each meeting or relevant decision making, previous conversations were held with key stakeholders to make sure that all the relevant information was shared and that a common vision of intended outcomes was built.

**KEY MESSAGE:** Strong and distributed leadership and skilled facilitation are essential to guide the process, mediate conflict, and keep the group focused on its shared vision.

## 2.3 Secure Adequate and Flexible Funding

The sustainability of a coalition depends on financial resources to support its infrastructure (the anchor organization) and its activities.

Funders should be willing to support the long-term process of change with flexibility to adapt strategies, rather than funding only predetermined solutions.

### Practical Example:

The **Lemann Foundation**, among other funders, played a central role by providing long-term, adaptable funding for MPB, allowing the coalition to respond to the emerging needs of the political context.

**KEY MESSAGE:** Funding should support the long-term process of change, including the coalition's infrastructure, with the flexibility to adapt strategies as the context evolves.

## 2.4 Maintain Momentum and Foster Renewal

To keep members engaged, ensure the **"6 Rs" of participation**: Recognition, Respect, Role (a clear one), Relationships, Reward (benefits outweigh costs), and visible Results.

Celebrate victories, even small ones, to maintain morale and reinforce the value of collaboration.

Continuously recruit new members to bring fresh energy, perspectives, and resources, preventing stagnation.

### Practical Example:

MPB kept its members engaged through a clear purpose and by demonstrating continuous progress, even amid obstacles, which attracted more allies over time.

**KEY MESSAGE:** To sustain engagement, it is important to recognize contributions, define clear roles, foster respectful relationships, celebrate results, acknowledge and reward members' contributions and always be open to renewing the group's composition.

The information on this document was compiled with the support of AI, using the sources listed below. Centro Lemann holds full responsibility for the content.

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