

Campaign Governance

A Briefing Paper prepared for the North Coast Stream Flow Campaign

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Campaign governance arrangements are nearly as varied and variable as campaigns themselves. Our purpose here is to provide those attending the NCSFC Planning Retreat with information and ideas to inform discussion of campaign governance at the retreat as well as subsequent decisions on NCSFC campaign governance structure and process.

Since this is an environmental campaign we will limit what we present below to environmental campaigns. However, the campaign website contains information on campaigns and campaign planning which is not limited to environmental campaigns.

To begin, it is our experience that environmental campaigns often do not have a well defined decision making structure and process. For example, the Ancient Forest Campaign (AFC) had no formal decision making structure nor did the campaign formally embrace consensus. In spite of this squishiness, the AFC did not have major problems making decisions or major recriminations about decisions, strategy or tactics. We think this was the case because all participating organizations came to the campaign with very similar ideas about what needed to be done and how to go about doing it.

The manner in which the AFC went about drafting Ancient Forest legislation is illustrative of the campaign's process. A senior campaign member proposed that he coordinate the drafting and this was accepted without a vote. This individual took those participating (it was open to all campaign members) through numerous drafts over a period of several months. The drafting process would not move on until all those participating were satisfied with the bill section under development. The process was exhaustive and, at times, exhausting but the result was a bill all campaign member organizations were 100% behind.

Subsequent attempts to create a big tent nation-wide public forest protection campaign were not successful. In retrospect it seems there were too many people and too many different agendas for the sort of informal consensus process used in the AFC and carried over into the national exploratory meetings - to work. Also a factor was the governance ideology of a good number of the organizations participating. Distrust of the "nationals" and insistence on a consensus process

were major barriers that this particular collection of organizations and leaders could not manage to overcome.

The failure to establish a big tent national forest protection campaign may have had a profound impact on the major foundations funding public forest work. One of them subsequently abandoned trying to work with diverse coalitions and alliances and instead began hiring directly and essentially formulating their own tightly controlled forest and wilderness campaigns. Another foundation stopped funding forest work altogether due to their own governing board's conflicts which reflected differences and divisions in the national forest protection community.

This brings us to another major issue in environmental campaign governance – the issue of money. Many of the environmental campaigns we have experience with were organized in order to access money that one or more major foundation or donor had offered but with caveats that often included formulating specific campaign plans with specific objectives or even a specific form of campaign organization. It is our experience that campaigns which are primarily about leveraging funding for the work individual organizations are already doing lack coherence and sustainability. Campaigns which focus on unmet need, new or expanded objectives and new positions (whether housed at the campaign or at member organizations) tend to exhibit more coherence and to be more sustainable as compared to those which are primarily focused on leveraging funds for existing work.

In our experience environmental campaigns that are directly or indirectly driven by funders often experience problems related to governance. We think this occurs because while there is typically a patina of member decision making, the real decision making power is with the funders. When the agenda of the funders conflicts with the agendas of campaign members – or when members challenge subtle control exercised by campaign funders – there are usually problems and often groups or individuals leave the campaign with hard feelings.

At the other end of the campaign governance spectrum are campaign's which develop or adopt detailed decision making policies and procedures. An example of this is the Gang of Seven (GO7) campaign on behalf of Coho salmon. This campaign was developed by and for North Coast groups which were already involved with Coho issues and which had long-standing programs, positions and policies on Coho issues. The Gang decided they needed very tight decision making protocols in order to assure that members could successfully pursue their own

Coho protection programs at the same time they participated in a broader campaign.

By all accounts this approach worked well. We think a similar approach might be appropriate for the NCSFC. The organizations participating are all already involved in one way or another in North Coast stream flow issues and have developed related policies and positions. Furthermore, we like the idea of using the GO7 protocols because that is akin to standing on the shoulders of those who came before us and on whose work we are building. A copy of the GO7 protocols is being provided as a companion to this paper.

There exist a variety of approaches that fall between the modified anarchy of the Ancient Forest Campaign and the formal and structured protocols of the GO7. One prominent example we call the Security Council Model. In this model all member groups have a voice but certain groups have veto power over decisions. This sort of approach can be appropriate where some campaign members bring more to the table (e.g. money, capacity and staff time) or have more at stake (more to win or loose) as compared to other members.

In our view the art of good campaign governance involves choosing – or creating – the approach which works best for those involved and for the particular circumstances and then sticking to that process and those protocols. The temperament of those involved has a role here: some of us want to keep it simple and others want to assure that the process involves everyone when important decisions are made. Some of us want both of these things simultaneously or in a balanced fashion and this, while difficult, can be achieved.

Other key issues in governance include:

- ◆ The role of staff and staff supervision
- ◆ The role of the governing body chair (if there is one)
- ◆ The role of an executive committee (if there is one),
- ◆ Staff supervision, and
- ◆ The need for a governance gatekeeper.

What classes of decisions can staff members make without consulting the governing body and what classes requires activation of the formal decision making process? What is the role and what are the prerogatives of the Campaign chairperson and spokesperson(s)? Is an executive committee needed and, if so, what types of decision are and are not within its purview? These questions can be

answered in a variety of ways but it is essential that the answers are clear for a given campaign. If they are not clear governance-related conflicts usually arise.

Supervision of staff hired by the Campaign – or by member organizations to work on the campaign – can be problematical. Is the position supervised by the Campaign director/coordinator or the director/coordinator of the member organization? In our experience there are not right or wrong answers to this question. The important thing is that it is clear to all involved how supervision of campaign staff will be accomplished and by whom. In this regard we have found that creating and adopting job descriptions - or written contracts in the case of contract workers - for all positions prior to hiring is an essential tool.

We believe that all campaigns should have a governance process gatekeeper – an individual or small group empowered to assure that whatever the governance structure and process may be that it is observed rigorously. In the absence of a governance process gatekeeper governance-related annoyances can accumulate and eventually erupt into major conflict.

We also support and recommend that there be established a formal process for processing and resolving governance disputes and conflicts. While conflict can be creative and lead to breakthroughs, conflict which is not processed and resolved in a timely manner can undermine campaign coherence and effectiveness.

To summarize then, it is our view that there is no one governance structure and process which is appropriate for all campaigns. What is essential is that campaigns chose or establish governance structures and processes which reflect the member organizations' values, provide what they need to feel comfortable in the campaign and that the campaigns remain true to the established structures and processes.

In the heady environment of campaign establishment it is easy for governance issues to be overlooked or receive short shrift. In our experience that can create problems down the road – particularly if there is not both broad and deep unanimity on objectives, strategies and tactics. Paying attention to governance up front and establishing formal governance structures and processes – whatever the particulars may be - pays off for campaigns down the line.