



Just Talking :

How can our communities work best together in times of austerity?

The current budgetary climate has seen community organizations across Quebec suffer serious setbacks. This next edition of our participative series Just Talking asks, How can our communities work best together in times of austerity?

Based on work from our first discussion, held last May, we asked participants to identify obstacles to coalition organizing that have become particularly challenging since the provincial government began announcing cuts to social programmes. We then brainstormed ways to address these challenges in order to strengthen our coalitions in this difficult political climat.

This document presents some of the solutions we identified together.

Challenging times _____

Currently, what are the most challenging obstacles to coalition work?

- **Lack of funds**
 - Every group seems concerned that their funding will be cut, and some big players, like the CDECs and CSSSs, are going through massive funding and structural changes.
- **Inertia**
 - Some groups seem to want to wait and see where they will stand after the government finishes announcing cuts before moving forward with collective projects.
- **Fear**
 - Some community groups seem afraid for their own survival and it's hard to prioritize 'extras' like showing up to meetings of coalitions and *regroupements*.
- **Self-Interest**
 - It can be understandably difficult for individual community groups to look beyond their own survival and work on collective priorities. In the current context, hard-won solidarity that may have taken years to establish seems in danger of eroding.

Antidotes and Tactics

Speak up against “austerity” policies:

- Communicate economic counter-argument for community work – we save resources!
- Make community projects and their benefits more visible
- Be vocal about the other ways our government could find resources : the Coalition Main Rouge and IRIS (Institut de recherche des information socio-economic) have developed tools with an alternative economic analysis
- Change the language : austerity = impoverishment
- Support independent media, like CKUT, that broadcast a critical point of view

Strengthen Solidarity

- Build space for personal connection in coalitions : go out for a 5 à 7 together, or other informal activities
- Remind ourselves of our common goals
- Build a list of new funding partner and share it (Fundtracker is a great tool)! Show we don't have to fight each other for funding!
- Organize some deeper conversations about the relationship between grass roots organizers and professionals
- Celebrate our achievements - how far we have come!
- Recognize that a diversity of tactics can be used to accomplish common goals

Take action!

- Get together with other coalitions and join the movement against austerity policies
- Be assertive and hold on to our values – think of Greece!
- Exercising our democratic muscles by writing letters, etc.
- Fight for proportional representation

What can COCo do next? We could:

- **make more connections with the Coalition Main rouge, IRIS and other anti-austerity groups, and inform COCo members of how to get involved**
- **share information about alternative sources of funding**
- **organize a workshop on how to talk about the impact of austerity policies on communities**