

**BUILDING ROMOMATTER**  
**Local/Community Coalitions**

**Romomatter!**

**– GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS –**

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## INTRODUCTION

ROMOMATTER explores new ways to prevent gender discrimination suffered by Roma girls and women inside and outside their communities. These discrimination patterns are strongly associated with motherhood since Roma women are often pushed to be mothers in their adolescence. ROMOMATTER's initiatives will promote actions to empower adolescents to decide their life goals freely, be recognized and valued in their communities independently of their decisions about motherhood and have influence in the decision-making processes in their communities. This is a pilot project structured on the principles and stages of Community Based Participatory Action Research. These processes require involving all parties, creating empowering community spaces that facilitate their active involvement, ensuring the sustainability of actions and the continuous improvement of quality beyond the project's completion. For this, ROMOMATTER will create local/community coalitions.

A local/community *coalition* is a group of individuals from community-based services and institutions, grass-rooted community organizations and key community members. Coalitions share a common vision and are dedicated to build multi-stakeholder knowledge in order to respond to complex social issues<sup>1</sup>. Coalitions are dynamic settings because they build collaborative capacity within individuals, between individuals and within organizations. By developing organized responses to community needs, coalitions have the capacity to grow into recognized sources within community contexts or localities. Multiple stakeholders can provide different perspectives and resources to include the community priorities in their organization or institutional agendas. With this target, key stakeholders are those who may be affected by or have an effect on the effort. They may also include people who have a strong interest in the project or topic for academic or political reasons, even though they and their families, friends, and associates are not directly affected by it<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/search/node/coalition>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/participation/encouraging-involvement/identify-stakeholders/main>



The contexts where coalitions are formed are influenced by multiple factors such as geography, demographics, politics, local norms and values. So, the capacity of local coalitions to accomplish their targets is strongly related to their building process, including how the involvement of the key stakeholders was managed and how the community readiness for this matter was assessed. Community readiness is the level at which individuals and groups are willing to accept and support the implementation of a new program or initiative in the community<sup>3</sup>. As ROMOMATTER is a pilot study to explore the state of Roma girls' mattering, we should keep in mind the physical location and demographics, but especially assess community readiness when deciding where coalition formation will take place.

These guidelines have been prepared to help ROMOMATTER partners in the process of building their local coalitions. It is based on the guidelines and principles of the Community Tool Box<sup>4</sup>, which should be the common handbook for ROMOMATTER partners. First, the main recruitment tasks will be described. Next, this report deals with the first meeting agenda and some guidelines for follow-up and key actions that the local coalitions have to accomplish from the beginning.

## RECRUITMENT OF MEMBERS

### *About the core group*

Local/community coalitions in ROMOMATTER will be initially comprised of the **core group**-university-community partners which will become a recognized group within the community. For this purpose, partners will designate a person (e.g., staff, professional) who will be a member of the coalitions and will be involved actively in the fieldworks. This individual must remain consistent throughout the project, and they have to be familiar and be well reputed in the community. Their knowledge of all actions is key to the success of ROMOMATTER.

### *About the members*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/overview/models-for-community-health-and-development/community-readiness/main>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/promotion-strategies/start-a-coalition/main>



The core group will identify between 5-15 members, including local policymakers, individuals from relevant organizations and institutions, and influential Roma community members/leaders. Coalition members from community organizations, institutions and services should be self-nominated, and they should be individuals who are strongly motivated to advocate for Roma girls, inside and outside their organization, institution or community structure to which they belong and represent. However, they do not necessarily represent the principles of their respective organizations about these issues, but it is assumed that their organizations are open to learn, be influenced by and implement the ROMOMATTER findings, suggestions and efforts. We can imagine the local coalition as the motor of the project. Coalition members are responsible for ensuring that Roma girl's voices are recognized and have the opportunity to influence throughout the implementation of the project.

### *Who should be part of the community coalition?*

- (a) Local stakeholders. This category can include managers/staff/field workers from primary healthcare center, community-based organizations, social services, employment office, educators, employers, etc.
- (b) Civic leaders. Religious or spiritual services, influential activists, well-known and respected community members.
- (c) Policymakers. Representatives from local government working in these topics, such as gender rights, Roma inclusion, public health, etc,

*Example 1: How to involve key stakeholders who are reluctant to participate: Excerpt from Road4Health*

*"The Evangelical church, or culto, has an essential role in the three enclaves where we are working. Their role is not only spiritual but important for Roma health. Through Christian values, the culto is a space for the prevention of drug use, alcoholism and domestic violence. However, the Evangelical movement has a deep mistrust towards public administrations and universities because they have been instrumentalized to benefit these institutions and not the Roma community. Therefore, the Evangelical church intends on remaining autonomous from these other institutions in order to have greatest impact in community and remain the strongest influence. In*



*order to build a relationship with them, the Roma community agent has been key. A meeting between the Roma community agent, researcher and the lead Roma Evangelical pastor was organized. The objective of this meeting was to have his formal approval to meet with the other pastors. The planning and process of this meeting revealed the importance of the Evangelical church within the Roma health community, and the capacity of influence they have using religion and spirituality in personal and social transformation. The way they work is at the individual level, preventing health prevention through Christian values.*

*The pastor has given us contact information of four pastors, two of the Poligono Sur where there are the most Evangelical churches, one contact in Torreblanca and one in El Vacie. We are planning to meet with each pastor and attend the culto. The objective of this meeting is to better understand the influence, how they directly influence with Roma communities. We consider this entry point important as a large portion of the Roma community attends services and it is the most important meeting point for the Roma communities in all three contexts, especially since the proximity of the cultos are where Roma reside.”*

## *Getting started*

(a) Develop key message. The core group will develop key messages. This requires to pay special attention in clarifying that ROMOMATTER is not a health reproductive program focused on preventing pregnancies among girls. On the other hand, this is an initiative focused on empowering girls to ensure a healthy life, a thrived future for them, their families and their communities. In fact, the message focusses on Roma girl’s mattering associated to reproductive gender justice.

(b) Take inventory. Identify community resources (linked to asset mapping).

(c) Start with people you know. Both research and community partners can identify potential coalition members from previous experiences and knowledge.

(d) Contact people in agencies and institutions most affected by the issue. Contacting those who are implementing similar efforts to ROMOMATTER.

(e) Talk to influential people: Identifying influential people who have a large network—always being sensitive to community entry points and their own hierarchal processes.

(f) Snowball sampling. Find support from existing contacts to lead to other potential contacts



## *Example 2 from Road4Health*

*“In order to gain support from health professionals and organizational managers from the three enclaves (Poligono Sur, Torreblanca and El Vacie) an introduction to the project at each healthcare center and the healthcare district office has taken place. These meetings have provided a space for the project and a collaborative climate to discuss the need to combat Roma health inequities through improving services provided, professionals capacity to respond to Roma needs and increase Roma neighbors use of service and satisfaction. Healthcare center directors agreed to support the project throughout its duration. For example, in the Torreblanca healthcare center the director invited project technicians to an existing health roundtable in order to connect with community resource professionals. Similar situation has taken place in the Poligono Sur where both CESPYPD and FAKALI (Roma NGO) have strong ties over the past years. The next step is to further build relationship with the healthcare center located near El Vacie where there has been a change in staff, therefore project technicians contacted to plan a meeting with the new community case worker in the following week.*

## *Actions*

- (a) Face to face meetings. Holding one-on-one meetings with potential coalition members to explain the project
- (b) Interview potential coalition members. Meetings with potential coalition members should be seen as an opportunity to map community narratives and identify individuals with Roma sensitivity. This interview has to collect information about:
  - (1) Community knowledge of other initiatives already implemented in the community with similar or useful targets;
  - (2) Leadership in the community (who are the leaders, if they are/or were involved in these initiatives)
  - (3) Community climate (different community attitudes about this issue).
  - (4) Knowledge about the issue (information available).



## (5) Resources available (programs, initiatives, funds, etc.)

The Tri-Ethnic Community Readiness Interviews (available in the CTB<sup>5</sup>) is an excellent interview questionnaire because it allows to collect information about all important dimensions of community readiness, and at the same time, it is a very useful tool for snowballing recruitment of new members. Based on the script for the interview, a semi-structured interview could be developed in order to include the following questions:

- What do you do (job)?
- What is your experience with Roma population?
- How would you describe the Roma community living in this context? What inequities do they experience here?
- Do you adapt your work to respond to Roma needs?
- What challenges do you face when working with Roma?
- What can you do to improve the situation?
- What other organizations/institutions/key community members do you work with?

Note that it is very important to keep in mind that we should collect information about all relevant dimensions.

## FIRST MEETING

The meeting should be carefully organized keeping in mind time and place for the meeting, the language employed. It should be planned as an informal gathering rather than a formal meeting. It is imperative to ensure that all participants feel important, comfortable and respected in order to allow space for them to express freely and openly.

1. Introductions: Present each member and the project framework
2. Define the issue or problem: Why are we here?

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<sup>5</sup> [http://dhss.alaska.gov/dbh/Documents/Prevention/publications/Community\\_Readiness\\_worksheet\\_primer.pdf](http://dhss.alaska.gov/dbh/Documents/Prevention/publications/Community_Readiness_worksheet_primer.pdf)





3. Structure of the coalition. What will we do?
4. Agreeing on a shared vision. What is our common goal?
5. Preliminary planning. Develop shared short-term and long-term milestones and schedule
6. Commitments. Define the work to be done between meetings and who is responsible

## FOLLOW-UP

(a) Minutes. The minutes should include the logistics (who, when, where), content of the meeting and the commitments of each member or of the group. Specific commitments are important for individual and group accountability. Minutes should be sent out shortly after meeting is held.

(b) Keep looking for new coalition members. Building the local coalition will be a process that continues throughout the duration of the project.

(c) Door is always open for new members.

## KEY ACTIONS

(a) Communication. Weekly e-mail or phone calls to remind of an upcoming meeting and answer any questions that helps to facilitate transparency throughout the process. It is discouraged to avoid creating parallel channels of communication.

(b) Share common spaces. Sharing informal spaces with coalition members helps building trust and commitment. For example, inviting coalition to other organized events within the community or in the participant's institution. Coalition meetings should be a starting point for members to share and participate on more informal interactions, such as, coffee time, birthday celebrations, etc. These gatherings will serve for bonding purposes, and they will aid to attract more members.

(c) Dissemination. The involvement of the coalition in as many community events as possible is crucial to let ROMOMATTER be known. The local coalition must become an empowering community setting where families, women and girls find resources to grow, learn, advocate for



their rights, find joy and thrive. A plan to disseminate the initiative should be agreed from the beginning.

(d) Facilitate discussion. The role of research-community partner is to facilitate dialogue, keep interest of coalition members in check and balances, and keep the common goal in sight. Partners should not dominate the discussion. Meetings are a space for critical reflection, capacity building and knowledge development—not traditional training.

(e) Community need assessment. Coalitions should develop a need assessment (their strengths and weaknesses) in the community to ensure that they are aware of needs and resources of Roma girls and their families. The guidelines developed by Suarez Balcazar is a useful and available tool to carry out this task<sup>6</sup>. This task should focus on filling the gaps left in the community readiness assessment.

(f) Knowledge transfer. Sharing good practices with coalition members ensures linking research to action and builds a healthy relationship with researchers.

(g) Evaluation of collaborative capacity. The local coalition has to assess its collaborative capacity at the beginning, at the middle and at the end of the project. A tool to assess the evaluation collaborative capacity can be found in Garcia-Ramirez et al., 2009<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://cyfar.org/sites/default/files/Sharma%202000.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Manuel\\_Garcia-Ramirez/publication/26298492\\_Building\\_International\\_Collaborative\\_Capacity\\_Contributions\\_of\\_Community\\_Psychologists\\_to\\_a\\_European\\_Network/links/0c960535dfc5eda3f7000000/Building-International-Collaborative-Capacity-Contributions-of-Community-Psychologists-to-a-European-Network.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Manuel_Garcia-Ramirez/publication/26298492_Building_International_Collaborative_Capacity_Contributions_of_Community_Psychologists_to_a_European_Network/links/0c960535dfc5eda3f7000000/Building-International-Collaborative-Capacity-Contributions-of-Community-Psychologists-to-a-European-Network.pdf)

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Manuel\\_Garcia-Ramirez/publication/26298492\\_Building\\_International\\_Collaborative\\_Capacity\\_Contributions\\_of\\_Community\\_Psychologists\\_to\\_a\\_European\\_Network/links/0c960535dfc5eda3f7000000/Building-International-Collaborative-Capacity-Contributions-of-Community-Psychologists-to-a-European-Network.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Manuel_Garcia-Ramirez/publication/26298492_Building_International_Collaborative_Capacity_Contributions_of_Community_Psychologists_to_a_European_Network/links/0c960535dfc5eda3f7000000/Building-International-Collaborative-Capacity-Contributions-of-Community-Psychologists-to-a-European-Network.pdf)