6. NETWORK CAPACITIES

> The objective of this section is to assess the organization's ability to fulfill network functions in order to benefit member organizations.

► **Sub-Sections under NETWORK CAPACITIES**

    6.1   Size & Diversity of Membership

    6.2   Membership Process and Outreach

    6.3   Member Involvement

    6.4   Coordination

    6.5   Member Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

► **Resources you may wish to refer to in this section:**

- Membership records;
- Documents defining membership criteria / conditions / procedures for joining the network;
- Network meeting notes and reports;
- Strategic plan; annual work plan; and
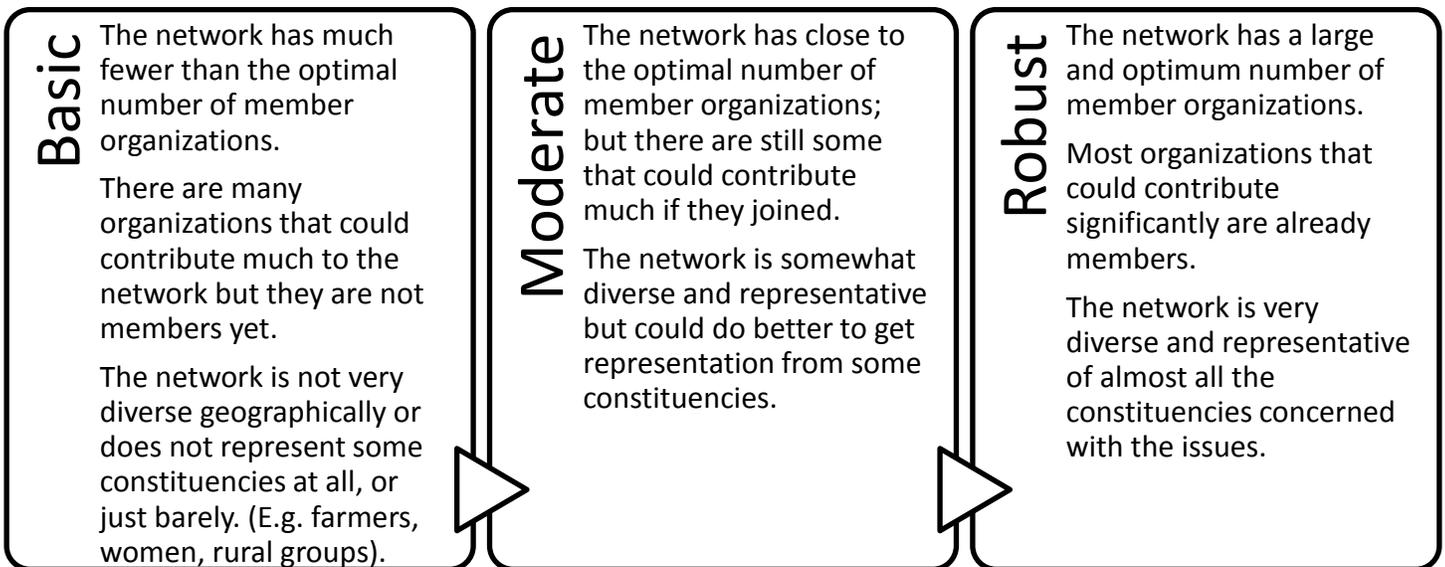- Network website.

6.1 Size and Diversity of Membership

Importance: The value and effectiveness of a Hunger Free Community (HFC) coalition is closely tied to the number and diversity of its member organizations. While there is strength in numbers, too many member organizations can become unmanageable, so the target is an "optimal" range, depending on various factors. A coalition seeks a diverse membership to represent all constituencies concerned with the focus issues of the network. Particular attention should be paid to under-represented constituencies in the community.

➢ **Discuss some or all of the following questions:**

❑ Is the HFC coalition/network big enough? Does it have enough members to be taken seriously/carry some weight? How many member organizations are there and how many should there be?

❑ Are there member organizations from all geographic areas of the region? From both urban, suburban, and rural areas (if applicable)?

❑ Are groups from all constituencies affected by the network's focus issues represented in the network? E.g. non-profit organizations, faith based orgs, businesses, government agencies, elected officials, schools and universities, religious institutions, hospitals and health care systems, chefs/restaurants, civic groups?

❑ What about women, youth, the elderly, disabled, people of color, etc.?

❑ Does the network have the information on record to keep tabs on membership diversity? Does it have a plan to address size and diversity issues?

➢ **Come to consensus: Where does the organization fall on this spectrum?**

Basic

The network has much fewer than the optimal number of member organizations.

There are many organizations that could contribute much to the network but they are not members yet.

The network is not very diverse geographically or does not represent some constituencies at all, or just barely. (E.g. farmers, women, rural groups).

Moderate

The network has close to the optimal number of member organizations; but there are still some that could contribute much if they joined.

The network is somewhat diverse and representative but could do better to get representation from some constituencies.

Robust

The network has a large and optimum number of member organizations.

Most organizations that could contribute significantly are already members.

The network is very diverse and representative of almost all the constituencies concerned with the issues.

Indicate where you approximate your organization to be in this category on a scale of 1 to 5.

Basic		Moderate		Robust	N/A
1	2	3	4	5	

Discussion Notes/Rationale for rating.

On the above scale of 1 – 5, where would you like to see your organization in 12 months? _____
Brainstorm briefly: how could the organization get to where it wants to be?
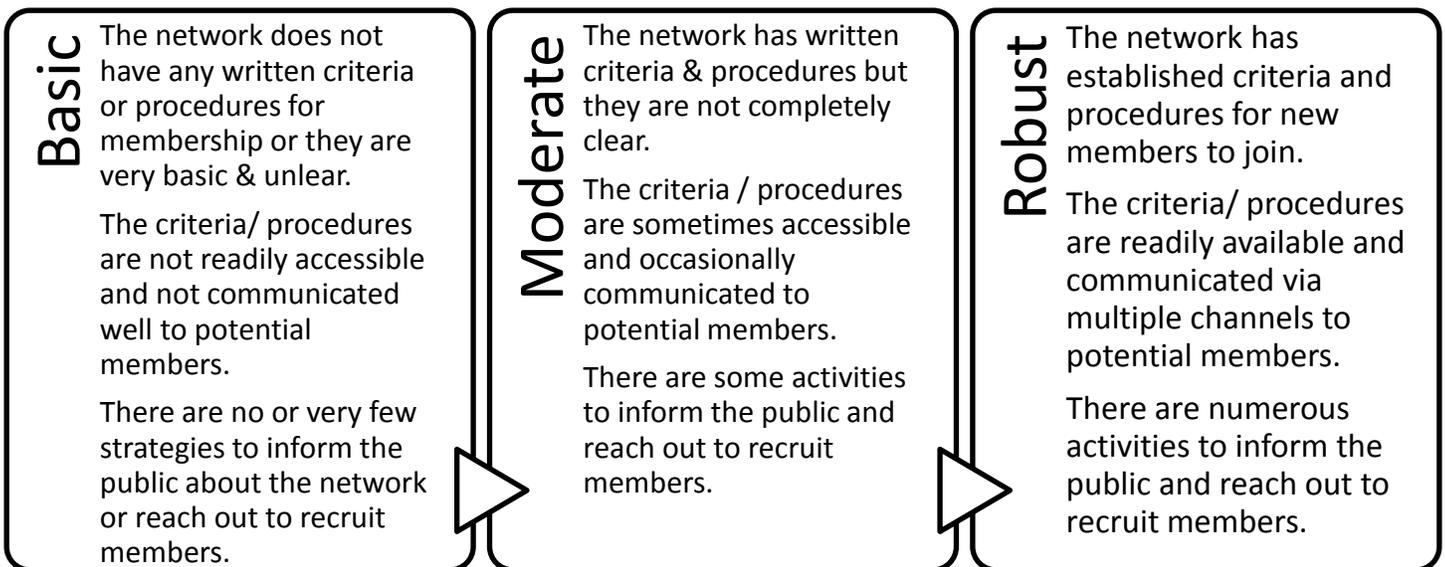
6.2 Membership Process and Outreach

Importance: The criteria and procedures laid out for officially joining a coalition establish the foundation for the relationship the network has with its members and with other stakeholders.

➢ **Discuss some or all of the following questions:**
   - ❑ Does the HFC coalition/network have written criteria/conditions that define which organizations are eligible to be members of the network/coalition? Are the criteria well-articulated and clear?
   - ❑ Are there written step-by-step procedures to guide an organization that wants to join the coalition?
   - ❑ Do organizations sign a memorandum of understanding when they join the coalition?
   - ❑ How are the criteria and procedures available/accessible/communicated to potential members?
   - ❑ How does the network communicate/advertise to potential members and the wider community what the network is, what it does, what services it provides, and what the advantages of membership are?

➢ **Come to consensus: Where does the organization fall on this spectrum?**

Basic
The network does not have any written criteria or procedures for membership or they are very basic & unlear.

The criteria/ procedures are not readily accessible and not communicated well to potential members.

There are no or very few strategies to inform the public about the network or reach out to recruit members.

Moderate
The network has written criteria & procedures but they are not completely clear.

The criteria / procedures are sometimes accessible and occasionally communicated to potential members.

There are some activities to inform the public and reach out to recruit members.

Robust
The network has established criteria and procedures for new members to join.

The criteria/ procedures are readily available and communicated via multiple channels to potential members.

There are numerous activities to inform the public and reach out to recruit members.

Indicate where you approximate your organization to be in this category on a scale of 1 to 5.

Basic		Moderate		Robust	N/A
1	2	3	4	5	

Discussion Notes/Rationale for rating.

On the above scale of 1 – 5, where would you like to see your organization in 12 months? _____
Brainstorm briefly: how could the organization get to where it wants to be?
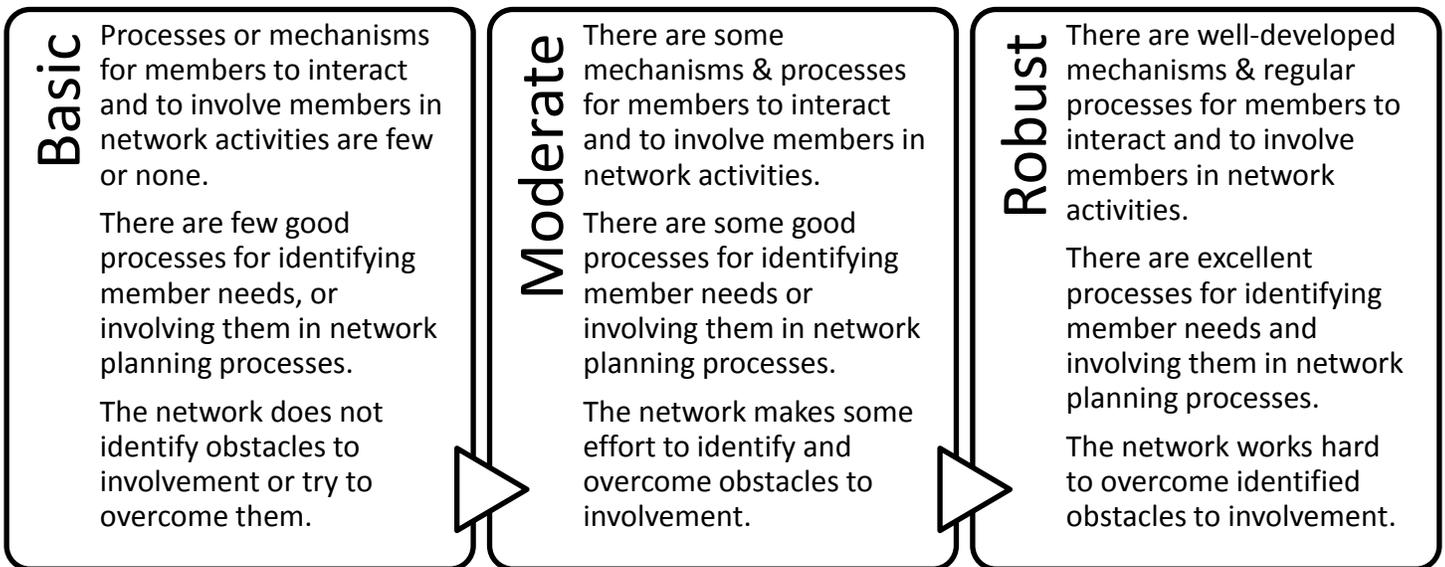
6.3 Member Involvement

Importance: Processes and mechanisms for creating a common vision and catalyzing member involvement in joint activities are key to the success of a network/coalition. Developing trust among members and facilitating processes so members get to know and appreciate each other takes time & effort.

➢ **Discuss some or all of the following questions:**

❑ How does the HFC coalition/network get members involved in the mission and activities of the network?

❑ How does the network get members to know and trust each other? How does it go about trying to create a common vision and common goals amongst a diverse membership? A "common agenda"?

❑ How cohesive is the coalition? Would one describe the network alliance as a "loose" coalition – or as "tightly knit" – or somewhere in-between?

❑ Are there regular meetings with high-level representation from member organizations? Regular communications? Using what methods / channels?

❑ How are member organizations involved in the strategic planning process? Is there a process for identifying members' needs and priorities?

❑ Does the network make an effort to identify and overcome obstacles to members getting involved in network activities? (E.g. literacy level, different languages, distance between members). How?

➢ **Come to consensus: Where does the organization fall on this spectrum?**

Basic
Processes or mechanisms for members to interact and to involve members in network activities are few or none.

There are few good processes for identifying member needs, or involving them in network planning processes.

The network does not identify obstacles to involvement or try to overcome them.

Moderate
There are some mechanisms & processes for members to interact and to involve members in network activities.

There are some good processes for identifying member needs or involving them in network planning processes.

The network makes some effort to identify and overcome obstacles to involvement.

Robust
There are well-developed mechanisms & regular processes for members to interact and to involve members in network activities.

There are excellent processes for identifying member needs and involving them in network planning processes.

The network works hard to overcome identified obstacles to involvement.

Indicate where you approximate your organization to be in this category on a scale of 1 to 5.

Basic		Moderate		Robust	N/A
1	2	3	4	5	

Discussion Notes/Rationale for rating.

On the above scale of 1 – 5, where would you like to see your organization in 12 months? _____
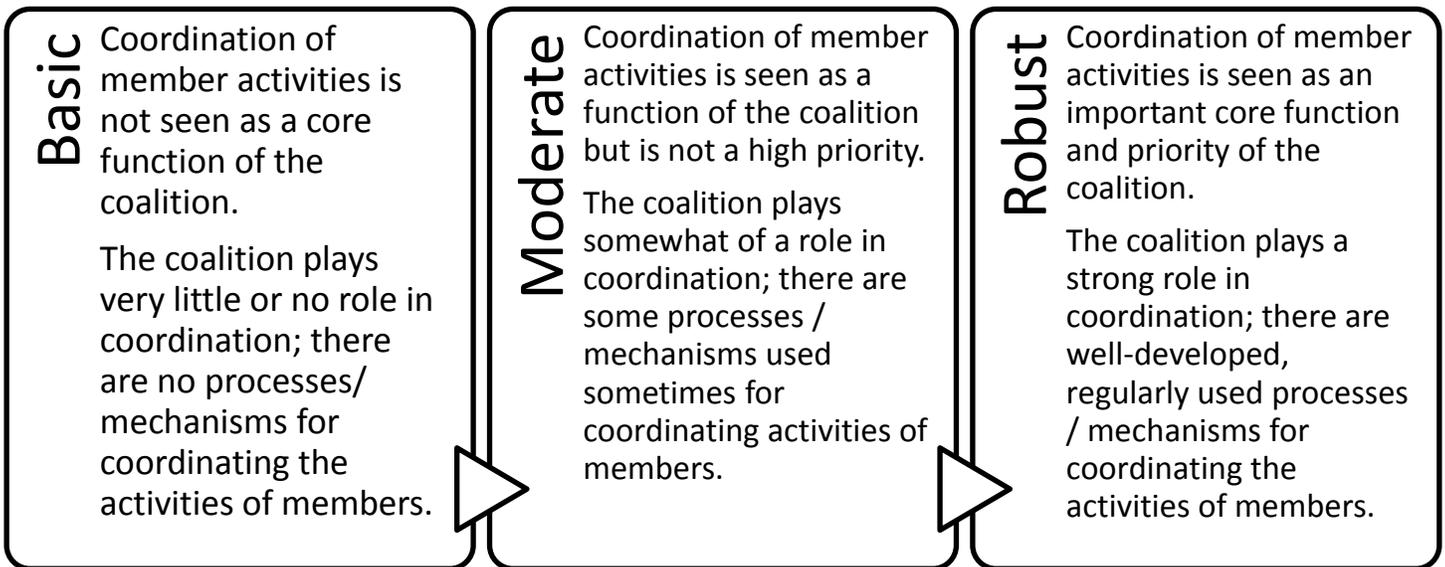Brainstorm briefly: how could the organization get to where it wants to be?

6.4 Coordination & Collective Impact

> **Importance:** A coalition can play an important role in coordinating the activities of many organizations that have similar goals and objectives – to avoid duplicative efforts and increase collective impact. A HFC coalition/network can encourage each member organization to undertake specific activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.

➢ **Discuss some or all of the following questions:**

- ❑ Does the HFC coalition/network see coordination as one of its primary functions / services? Is it stated in the mission or strategic plan or other alliance documents?
- ❑ How does the coalition strive to coordinate activities amongst members? i.e. who's doing what, where, when; avoiding duplication; dividing up the work; etc.
- ❑ Has the coalition discussed the concept of collective impact together? Has it identified ways to create buy-in around the idea of collective impact?
- ❑ What types of activities are coordinated? What mechanisms / methods are used to coordinate? E.g. Meetings? Website? Email? Etc.

➢ **Come to consensus: Where does the organization fall on this spectrum?**

Basic	**Moderate**	**Robust**
Coordination of member activities is not seen as a core function of the coalition. The coalition plays very little or no role in coordination; there are no processes/ mechanisms for coordinating the activities of members.	Coordination of member activities is seen as a function of the coalition but is not a high priority. The coalition plays somewhat of a role in coordination; there are some processes / mechanisms used sometimes for coordinating activities of members.	Coordination of member activities is seen as an important core function and priority of the coalition. The coalition plays a strong role in coordination; there are well-developed, regularly used processes / mechanisms for coordinating the activities of members.

Indicate where you approximate your organization to be in this category on a scale of 1 to 5.

Basic		Moderate		Robust	N/A
1	2	3	4	5	

Discussion Notes/Rationale for rating.

On the above scale of 1 – 5, where would you like to see your organization in 12 months? _____
Brainstorm briefly: how could the organization get to where it wants to be?
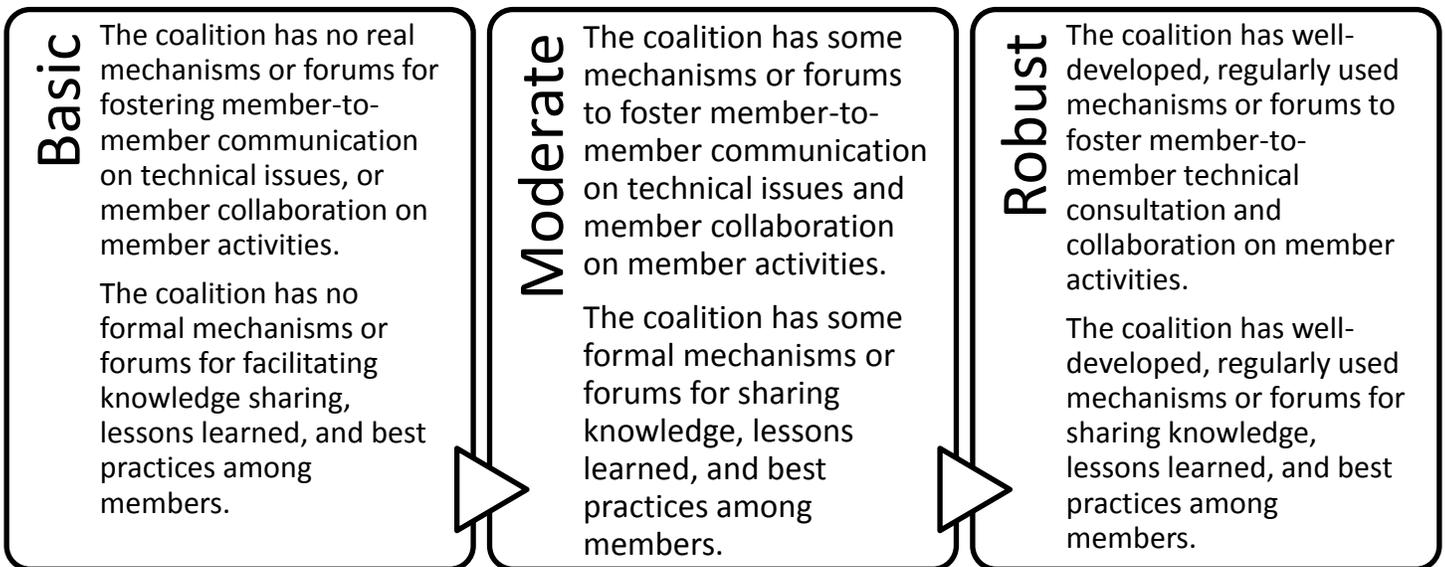
6.5 Member Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Importance: Member organizations of a HFC coalition/network can benefit from each other when there is open communication and members consult with each other on technical issues, share knowledge and lessons learned, and collaborate with each other on specific member projects or activities (apart from network-led activities). The network can add value by creating ways for members to connect and share knowledge.

➢ **Discuss some or all of the following questions:**

- ❑ How does the HFC coalition/network encourage and foster communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing directly between members (Beyond merely getting to know each other and building trust)?
- ❑ Do members regularly communicate and connect amongst themselves for technical assistance or advice to help them with their own activities (apart from network-led activities)?
- ❑ What mechanisms or methods does the network have for members to share lessons learned and best practices?

➢ **Come to consensus: Where does the organization fall on this spectrum?**

Basic

The coalition has no real mechanisms or forums for fostering member-to-member communication on technical issues, or member collaboration on member activities.

The coalition has no formal mechanisms or forums for facilitating knowledge sharing, lessons learned, and best practices among members.

Moderate

The coalition has some mechanisms or forums to foster member-to-member communication on technical issues and member collaboration on member activities.

The coalition has some formal mechanisms or forums for sharing knowledge, lessons learned, and best practices among members.

Robust

The coalition has well-developed, regularly used mechanisms or forums to foster member-to-member technical consultation and collaboration on member activities.

The coalition has well-developed, regularly used mechanisms or forums for sharing knowledge, lessons learned, and best practices among members.

Indicate where you approximate your organization to be in this category on a scale of 1 to 5.

Basic		Moderate		Robust	N/A
1	2	3	4	5	

Discussion Notes/Rationale for rating.

On the above scale of 1 – 5, where would you like to see your organization in 12 months? _____
Brainstorm briefly: how could the organization get to where it wants to be?

Helpful Resources: Network Capacities

- [Mark Winne Associates - Doing Food Policy Councils Right](#)
  A useful resource on the building of food policy-focused coalitions including development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

- *[The Prevention Institute: Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide](#)*
  An easy-to-follow guide on how to develop a coalition generally – from deciding to develop one, to recruitment, to resource mobilization, to evaluation and improvement.

- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy – Tufts University), [Inclusive Engagement Toolkit for Community Food Project Planning](#)
  While specifically designed for organizations applying for USDA Community Food Projects (CFP) grants, this guide offers helpful tips and resources for building grassroots participation, especially from the constituencies you intend to serve; and building a shared vision with partners, with an inclusive, participatory process.