



The Children's Alliance Handbook

Vision:

To be the best community for all children

Mission of The Children's Alliance

To work collectively to identify, advocate for, and implement real solutions for the challenges and barriers faced by the children of our community.

Value

Each adult in our community shall protect, value, educate, nurture, and respect each child and teenager.

History

For many years, a group of organizations committed to the well-being of children and families in Mecklenburg County has been working together on several shared issues and concerns.

Organizations have informally collaborated on various projects in the community, primarily focused on a specific goal or outcome.

- In 2002, these organizations decided to form a collaborative—now called The Children's Alliance—with the purpose of working on identified projects as well as creating a forum for new collaboratives to emerge.

The work of the Alliance was originally facilitated by The Lee Institute, first in its formation and later in managing a smooth flow of meetings and operations of the group. Now, The Children's Alliance is facilitated by a rotating leadership team. The Children's Alliance meets monthly to learn about each other's services, build a shared understanding of key issues, and explore opportunities for collaboration. In 2010, The Children's Alliance redeveloped its website as a portal of information for families and caregivers to build community awareness and support for children's issues. A part-time employee provides administrative support for The Children's Alliance.

Inclusiveness/ Membership

One of the goals of the Alliance is to be inclusive. To this end, The Children's Alliance is open to requests from organizations and individuals who are concerned about children and families to join this effort. The standards for being a participant are very clear:

- Commitment on the part of the participating organization to the Core Values and Standards for Children in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.
- Attendance at all meetings by the top executive of the participating organization or an appointed designee who has the authority to make commitments or decisions on behalf of the organization during a meeting. Currently, the Alliance meets monthly as a large group and twice a month on committee work.



- Consistent individual to attend all meetings.
- A level of funding agreed upon by The Children's Alliance to underwrite the effort.
- The willingness to participate in honest dialogue with professional colleagues and work collaboratively to support the group's decisions
- The willingness to actively participate on a working committee between meetings
- The willingness to accept some leadership role during the life of the collaborative

Any organization or individual concerned about children may request membership and/or be nominated by simply contacting a member of the Alliance who will link the potential participant with a member of the Leadership Team. The Leadership Team will make sure the applicant is committed to the above criteria. The Leadership Team will bring forth the agency to The Children's Alliance for a vote.

Retaining membership is contingent on each participant's willingness to follow the standards, which include regular attendance (75% or more of all meetings).

Organizational Structure

The Children's Alliance will consist of the Core Group, permanent membership, work groups, and guests.

Core Group

The Core Group are those individuals who attend the regular monthly meetings and contribute financially to The Children's Alliance. The Mission and Vision of the Alliance, along with the yearly work plan, will determine the ongoing function of the Core Group. A formal endorsement of the Mission and Values of the organization and a commitment to the membership criteria will be submitted by each member organization and will be kept on file.

Committees

Committees will consists of one or two Chairs drawn from the general membership and members who, because of experience, passion or expertise in the focus area, are invited to join from within or outside the membership of The Children's Alliance. Membership will be open to all interested members in good standing of The Children's Alliance. Membership is also open to others outside of The Children's Alliance, but their participation must be coordinated through the Chair(s) of the Committee.

Committees will be formed as needed, in keeping with the mission and vision of The Children's Alliance and The Core Values for Children. Recommendations for a Committee will be brought to the full membership for discussion and final adoption. The Leadership Team will ultimately be responsible for administering the formation and/or sunset of such Committees per the guidelines established in the Handbook. In order to continue as a Committee in good standing, they must maintain active participation by no fewer than three separate organizations that are members in good standing of The Children's Alliance, must meet on a regularly scheduled basis to ensure



participation remains open, and must maintain ongoing communication with the Leadership Team as to changes in priorities, mission, and work plans.

Committees will be responsible for submitting a copy of their meeting minutes to The Children's Alliance administrator who will give them to the Leadership Team in order to archive work plans. They will maintain a list of two to four priorities, which will be used to aid communication with the other Committees and the membership as a whole.

Guests

Guests may be invited to The Children's Alliance or committee meetings when necessary or appropriate. These participants may be elected officials, clients, or business partners from the community who would add value to specific topics, dialogue, or presentations related to the Core Values. Their attendance will be limited by their need to be involved in specific issues on the work plan.

When a member of The Children's Alliance wants to invite a guest to participate, (s)he will inform the Leadership Team of the purpose of the invitation and how this relates to the core values and/or the work plan that is in effect at the time.

Leadership

The leadership of The Children's Alliance will be rotated among the members. A Leadership Team comprised of five volunteers will serve on the rotation schedule. They will be charged with the following responsibilities for a staggered one-year term. The Children's Alliance members may request Leadership Team members the option of staying another year:

- calling meetings,
- managing the agenda of the Core Group,
- administering the formation and/or sunset of Committees per the guidelines established in the Handbook,
- maintaining regular contact with Committee chairs, facilitating necessary communications among Committees as appropriate, and monitoring work plans
- maintaining the integrity of the rules set forth by The Children's Alliance (i.e., attendance, participation, work completion, financial commitments)

For continuity within The Children's Alliance, terms will last two years, with staggered starting dates of January 1, April 1, and September 1.

Note: In order to smooth transitions, the new leadership will begin attending the Leadership Team meetings one month prior to assuming their role.

Funding

Funding for the Alliance's expenses will be obtained through grant awards combined with contributions from The Children's Alliance members of the Core Group. The Leadership Team will



keep individual organizations' pledges confidential, and only the total will be used to forecast a budget for the Alliance. Organizations will be sent an invoice for the amount pledged. Beginning in 2015, group funds will be transferred from Alexander Youth Network to the Children Family Services Center (CFSC). The CFSC will have fiduciary responsibility for the funds collected. (Now Ascend NonProfit)

Ground Rules

Members of The Children's Alliance share responsibility for fair, open, honest, respectful communication with each other.

Work Plan

At the end of each meeting, new items may be briefly discussed for consideration and scheduling for future agenda. Before the next meeting of The Children's Alliance, the Leadership Team will review the suggested items for consistency with the mission and values of the group and place them on the agenda.

Decision-making

All decisions of the Alliance will be made by a quorum of 16 or more Core Group members at regularly called meetings. Final decisions will not be made on matters that are not on the agenda. Decisions will generally be made by consensus. To reach consensus the group may begin with a straw vote to identify the level of agreement and differences and proceed to consensus building. If a vote is needed, a decision will be carried with 2/3 of those present.

All participants will:

- Strive for consensus based on trust with all issues placed on the table.
- Pay attention to all voices.
- Pay attention to the opposing voices and the reasons of the opposition, looking for wisdom in the reasoning of opposing voices.
- Separate interests from positions.
- Recognize when the decision has reached the point that everyone can live with it. This is the point of consensus.

When consensus cannot be reached in a reasonable amount of time, the decision can be sent to a committee for study and reconsideration at a future Children's Alliance meeting.

When the group makes a decision that may not be in the best interest of some of the participating organizations, members may be asked to indicate willingness of their organizations to endorse such a decision. Endorsement of individual member organizations will then be recorded in the minutes, and in any public statements made about the decision.



Endorsements and/or Support

All requests for formal support must be submitted in writing to the Leadership Team. The Leadership Team will review the request and, if appropriate, distribute the written request with the agenda in advance of The Children's Alliance meeting.

The Children's Alliance will follow these procedures when an endorsement and/or support is requested:

- Any individual, organization, or member of The Children's Alliance can submit a request for endorsement and/or support to the Leadership Team. This request should provide enough specific information for Alliance members to take action at the next meeting.
- At The Children's Alliance meeting, the Leadership Team will present the request (possibly with the help of a guest speaker or member) and ask for input in the following areas:
 - a. What can you support?
 - b. What are your concerns?
 - c. How does it fit with the mission and priorities of The Children's Alliance?
- If the request puts any member of The Children's Alliance in direct conflict with a policy of their board or employer, that member can abstain from participation in the endorsement/support. Every effort will be made to reach a decision at the same meeting at which the item is presented.
- The Children's Alliance will follow guidelines outlined in the Handbook about decision making. The goal will be 100% support.
- The group will seek consensus on the request or an amended request. If The Children's Alliance cannot reach a consensus, they will determine by a majority vote if the request needs to go to an ad-hoc committee for further research, discussion, and/or debate. If so, the Chair(s) will assign the request to an ad-hoc committee which agrees to review the request before the next meeting. After hearing the recommendation from the ad-hoc group, the Committee will determine whether it can support the issue or find an acceptable alternative.
- If supported, the Leadership Team will place it on the agenda for the next general monthly meeting. The initiative will be introduced for discussion, debate and vote. Again, a minimum of 75% of the membership must vote in favor of a resolution, with every attempt being made within the meeting to achieve 100% support. Note, a quorum of members in good standing must be present for a vote on Endorsement and/or Support to occur.
- If the group cannot reach 75% support, the issue or initiative will not be endorsed by The Children's Alliance.
- Once a request is supported, the Leadership Team will issue the statement endorsing the issue for The Children's Alliance, or assign an appropriate group/member to follow-up on any other necessary tasks.



Approval of The Children's Alliance Handbook

This Handbook will serve as a guide for the conduct of The Children's Alliance and will be reviewed periodically. The Handbook will be located on the Alliance website.

Appendix A:

Core Values and Standards for Children in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

In Mecklenburg County, we have minimum standards for our air and water, our cars, even our lawn mowers. What about standards for raising happy, healthy children? The community was asked, "What does it take to enable children to reach their full potential as an adult and become responsible citizens?" The community responded that the following Core Values are "absolutely necessary."

ALL children in Mecklenburg County have a right to expect that:

They will have adults who will provide them with affection, a positive role model and concern for their present and future needs.

- Family Support
- Parent Involvement in Education
- Family Stability
- Quality Foster Care and Adoptions Programs
- Parenting Skills
- Communication Between Parent and Child Adult Role Models

They will have opportunities, from birth to adulthood, for free and appropriate education.

- Education
- Adequate Facilities and Equipment
- Small Class Sizes
- Quality Early Childhood Programs (Child care/preschool/pre-kindergarten)
- Programs to Address Special Needs
- Quality Teachers
- Dropout Prevention

They will not suffer needlessly or be constrained by a lack of health care.

- Health Care
- Obtaining necessary immunizations
- Access to Affordable Health Care Appropriate Dental/Vision Care
- Quality Mental Health Programs
- Teen Pregnancy Prevention

They will feel safe at home, in their neighborhoods and in their schools; the justice system will protect and advocate for them.

- Safety
- Reduction in Domestic Violence
- Reduction in Child Abuse and Neglect



Effective Juvenile Justice System
Advocacy/Legal Protection
Safe Learning Environment
Neighborhood Safety

They will have opportunities to develop emotional strength.

Emotional Well-Being
Positive Guidance from Adults
Opportunities for Diverse experiences
Moral Development
Opportunities to Experience Success
Spiritual Development
Positive Peer Interaction

They will have sufficient food, shelter, and clothing for their needs, and the adults in their lives will support them.

Economic Security
Having Basic Needs Met
Parental Access to Livable Wage Jobs
Affordable Housing
Child Support Enforcement
Career Development for Teens

They will have places to go and things to do that involve them in their community.

Community Activities
Parks and Recreational Facilities
Out-of-School Time Programs
Organized Athletics
Arts and Cultural Activities
Organized Youth Programs

They will be the priority of the entire community.

Community Support
Human Service Agency Programs for Families
Elected Officials' Emphasis on Children's Needs
Accessible Transportation
Comprehensive Available Resource Information
Business Support/Family Friendly Workplaces
Public Awareness of Children's Issues



Appendix B: Approved Policies

Guidelines for Attendance and Financial Commitment

In order to be a participating member of The Children's Alliance, the following guidelines for attendance and financial commitment must be met.

Attendance

- Attendance at meetings must be by a decision maker within the member organization.
- It's strongly encouraged that the same individual attend all meetings.
- If the membership and financial requirements are not met, the Leadership Team will talk with the organization about withdrawing from the Alliance. The Leadership Team can reinstate a member organization at their discretion.

Financial Commitment

Every organization and individual that is a member of The Children's Alliance must contribute financially to the modest expenses of maintaining the Alliance. This sliding scale is listed below:

Individual = \$50

0-\$1 million = \$200

\$1-\$2 million = \$400

\$2-\$4 million = \$600

Over \$4 million = \$800

- Contributions are determined by a sliding scale based on annual budgets. Annual dues are due in February and may be split into 2 payments.
- Organizations that cannot meet this recommended scale must be reviewed individually by the Leadership Team. A fee will be suggested, not to be less than \$50.00.
- Financial commitments run from January to December of each year.
- Failure to contribute financially to the Alliance will automatically end membership in the Alliance.
- In January of every year, each member organization will be asked to confirm its membership including who will represent the organization on The Children's Alliance.
- Annual dues of individual agencies are based on each agency's most recent 990. The Leadership Team reserves the right to grant exceptions. An agency may ask for a reduction in their annual dues based on:
 - Dire financial situation
 - Percentage of budget spent on work in Charlotte/Mecklenburg
 - Percentage of budget spent on work with children and families

In an effort to maintain transparency with the entire group, the leadership team will share the list of the yearly granted exceptions with the group. Exceptions must be requested and reviewed on an annual basis.