

EXTENDING OUR REACH THROUGH STRATEGIC COALITIONS: A STRATEGY FOR BOULÉ ADVANCEMENT

By Grand Sire Archon–Elect Loren R. Douglass

This past year, 2023, has turned out to be an inflection point for Black and brown people. Unfortunately, recent events across all corners of our society have transpired that fit an all-too-familiar historical narrative that undermines the hard-earned optimism about Black and brown social and economic progress. Not since the hostile opposition to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 have we seen such a clear and comprehensive challenge to the policies and advancements that undergird the Black middle class. The simultaneous attack on education, corporate diversity, minority business ownership and related efforts is a troubling flashback, at least in part, to the methodical dismantling of Black progress that occurred post-Reconstruction.

The U.S. Supreme Court's striking down of affirmative action in college admissions is having a chilling effect in other areas key to Black progress. As the legislative branch of the federal government is mired in generational gridlock, and the integrity of the highest court is now being called into question due to partisanship and questions of ethical transparency, the executive branch has never been more critical to the advancement of the Black middle class. While vigorous exercise of our voting rights is always a great idea, we must develop and invest in other complementary strategies that amplify our various efforts in advancing Black socioeconomic and global interests.

Given the full and complete turnabout in attitudes toward government guarantees of access to the full benefits of our citizenship, it is time to develop and deploy creative new strategies that leverage the Boulé's deep bench of talent and expertise and the networks to which it has access.

In my winter 2018 BOULÉ JOURNAL article, "Globalizing the Boulé and Why It Matters," I referred to the SCAN paradigm, a framework that I developed to crystallize those relationship elements most important to advancing the Boulé. Building cooperative arrangements like a strategic coalition allows us to share resources, knowledge or capabilities without having to recreate them on our own. This is particularly beneficial when the coalition partners involved have complementary strengths. Forming strategic



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coalitions with organizations and institutions with domain expertise, resources and relationships allows the Boulé to activate and operate efficient networks that help us deliver more impact through complex initiatives and over longer timeframes. Thoughtful coalition building can strengthen the Boulé in the following areas:

- **Skills:** By promoting resource accretion (such as expertise, experience, frameworks)
- **Credibility:** By building alliances that provide a seat at the table of the global agenda and a counterbalance to tribalism and exclusionary agendas
- **Assets and Access:** By securing access to a broader inventory of ideas, approaches and channels to possible bidirectional investment
- **Networks:** By enhancing collective action through access to broader networks and promoting relationship development and social connections (social and cultural capital).

As we push to greater heights, the Boulé will need to extend its reach into economic and political ecosystems and power networks where we neither have meaningful presence nor influence. Through strategic coalitions with other organizations, we can grow our resources and expand our reach quickly and without adding significant costs to operations, labor or infrastructure. By pooling our resources, we can achieve more together than we could achieve individually. Additionally, coalitions help us expand our networks into new professional and industry sectors over greater geographical areas than previously practical. For instance, leveraging our London member Boulé (Epsilon Xi) gives us access to European banking relationships not easily accessible and leverageable from the United States, thus expanding our reach beyond the U.S. banking sector.

Deciding which organizations to form coalitions with should be done with due diligence and intentionality. Careful contemplation of potential coalition partner's empirical attributes and how they intersect with and amplify our own attributes should be clearly discerned and understood. At a bare minimum, a qualified coalition partner must share our interests, values and priorities. Such alignment makes it much easier to forge an efficient working relationship capable of smooth execution, no matter the complexity of the joint mission. Besides mission compatibility, the coalition partner should share our

goals with equal commitment and dedication; otherwise, the relationship will not lead to mutual benefit. Writing a concise joint statement of the coalition's mission and objectives will aid in building alignment between the partners. Understanding "what's in it for them" is key to understanding a coalition partner's motivations for entering and staying in the coalition.

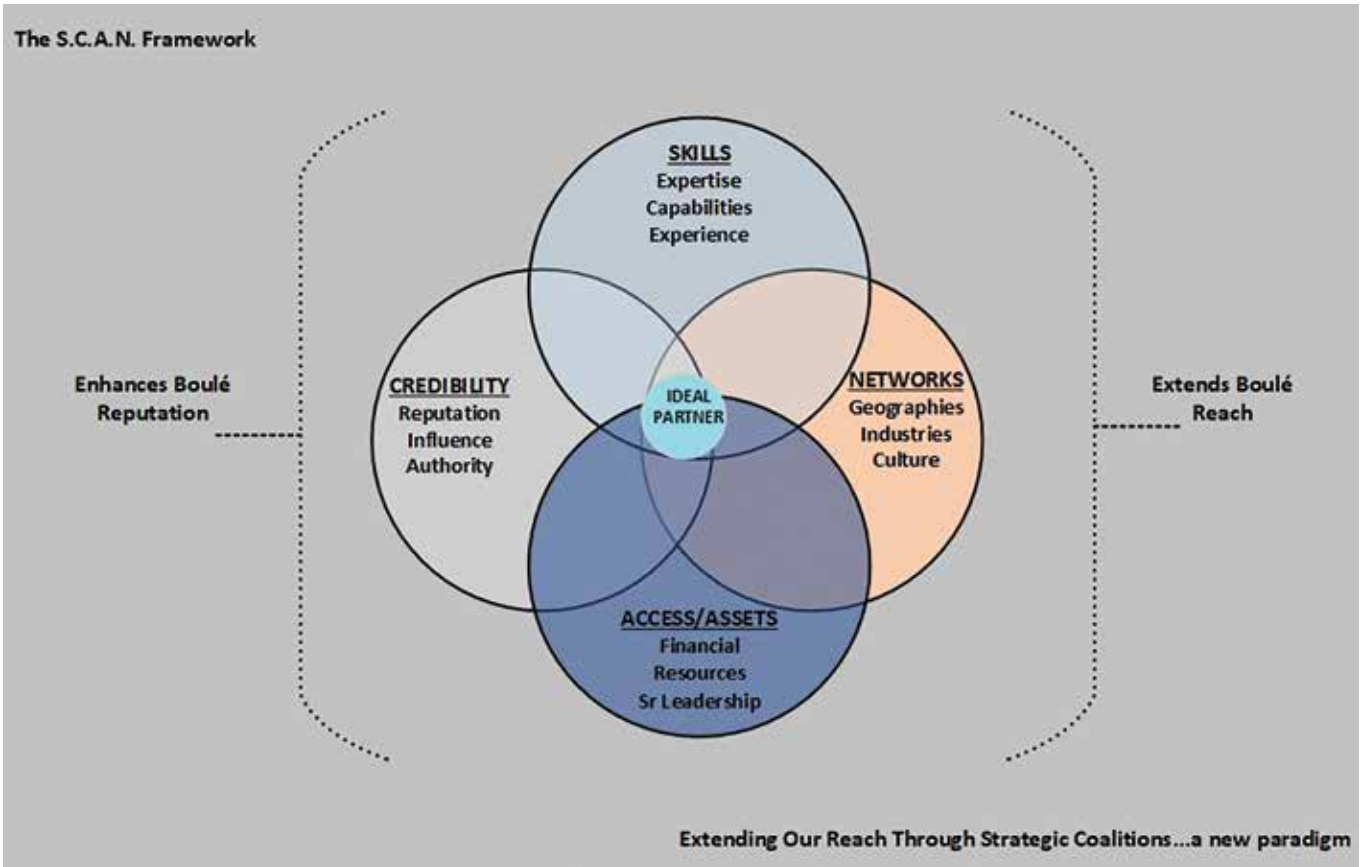
When assessing the potential partner's capabilities, it is also important to determine the following:

- Expertise, networks and capabilities that amplify Boulé strengths
- Reputation and geographic reach that extends our own
- Financial capacity and resources to be dedicated to the coalition
- Boulé access to senior leaderships and other key decision makers
- Culture of innovation and collaboration and other compatibility factors.

Understanding the above will ease joint planning and execution of coalition activities. Should the coalition relationship be mostly transactional (that is, "one-off" projects), it is still important to understand the above as the dynamics will likely be the same.

When selecting a coalition partner, we should have a tangible idea of our desired outcome and the metrics that we intend to affect. Doing so will lead to the necessary core competencies and resources that the partner needs to have as it is evaluated. Additionally, we will have a measurable idea of what success looks like. With a clear joint statement of objectives and goals, the coalition enters into an intentional agreement with specific targets, timeframes, roles and responsibilities, and evaluation tollgates. The Boulé expands its knowledge and influence through strategic use of the coalition's collective strengths on consequential matters such as the plight of young Black men and boys or Boulé economic empowerment. The collaborative experiences created through the coalition will lead the Boulé to refined approaches and practices as we pursue initiatives requiring considerable time and investment to execute successfully.

These applied advancements to the Fraternity will transform the Boulé into a nimble "learning organization" of enhanced capabilities with vastly increased influence, credibility and authority. We can maintain our traditional Boulé values of modesty and discretion by deploying disciplined and consistent messag-



FRAMEWORK FOR SELECTING QUALIFIED PARTNERS

ing strategies designed to maintain our behind-the-scenes posture while also controlling the narrative.

Currently the Boulé has what could be considered strategic coalitions with several organizations through memoranda of understanding negotiated and signed in Past Grand Sire Archon Wes Coleman’s administration. Likewise, we have experience with these types of relationships. We have memoranda of understanding with such organizations as the National Urban League and the NAACP, with which we’ve had a long history of collaboration.

Because of the pandemic, we have had limited opportunity to fully explore the complementary advantages of these relationships; however, we will revisit these relationships and accelerate their development. While doing so, we will explore ways to institutionalize our ability to conceive, organize and deploy other strategic coalitions with entities that share our values and objectives without regards to any other criteria but a mutual commitment to a set of objectives. These vehicles should be able to respond to Boulé priorities that require resource investments

and medium-to-long time frames for successful execution. Although such a vehicle should be managed and governed by Archons, its funding can come from institutions, corporations and foundations along with individual Archon donors who believe in its mission.

The Boulé Foundation is an outstanding example of the genius of the Boulé’s coalescing around an idea with an enduring legacy for generations to come. This proposed evolution of the Fraternity would be a major step toward Black self-determination through the intentional leadership of the Archons of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity. As we contemplate our future as the premier crucible of Black leadership, we should mobilize, modernize and energize our myriad gifts in service of our Archons and Archousai, our families and our communities, through such a bold gesture.

Perhaps the time has come to institutionalize and deploy the genius of the Boulé in unprecedented ways and unleash the tremendous inventory of intellectual and relationship capital stored within the ranks of our proud and distinguished 120-year-old organization. So, to that notion, let the innovation begin!