

Coalition Building

What is a coalition?

A coalition is group or partnership of organizations created to work on a specific issue or a specific goal. Some coalitions are permanent and work on long term issues while others are created for a specific purpose and disassemble once the goal is achieved.

Important definitions:

Actual Coalition—Formal agreement to work on an issue

Allies—Groups of supporters who participate in your events and actions and add resources to your group.

Network—Exchange of information, groups convene to exchange ideas and resources

Permanent Coalition—An established organization of organizations that work on long-term goals that aren't achieved through one project. Example: Working on improvements in higher education.

Some advantages gained through working with a coalition:

- Broadens your scope of work to include issues you may have forgotten
- Increases your power— in numbers
- Adds different perspectives
- Allows you to gain allies

Some disadvantages gained through working with a coalition:

- Competition between organizations within the coalition
- Can become very time consuming
- Goals and objective may conflict

Guidelines for building a coalition:

1. Choose a unifying issue
2. Remember that a coalition is rarely the road to achieving diversity
3. Understand and respect each group's self-interest
4. Respect internal processes
5. Agree to disagree
6. Play to the center with tactics (use tactic that everyone is comfortable with)
7. Recognize that contributions from organizations vary
8. Structure decision making carefully
9. Urge stable senior leadership
10. Distribute credit fairly

Before becoming part of a coalition think about:

1. Know what you want to get out of the coalition
2. Maintain an independent program (separate from the coalition)
3. Evaluate your role carefully and establish your responsibilities