



## Building Coalitions: Commanding Numbers

Getting more people involved in your cause will always give you more clout. It's one of the most fundamental and rewarding aspects of a successful campaign. Working to protect the environment is a uniquely human business. The helpers you find along the way may be a big part of what makes it fun.

### WHAT IS COALITION?

A coalition is a broad group of individuals or organizations cooperating to develop effective strategies for accomplishing a mutual goal. Bringing many parts of the community together — business, clergy, sportsmen, health workers, farmers, teachers — puts your issue in the mainstream of your community and broadens the appeal of your message.

Part of the job of a coalition is to divide up the work, educate, and mobilize others. The role of a coalition is to actively develop and coordinate a strategy for building local support.

As a member of your community, you are in the best position to evaluate potential supporters for your issue. No two situations are alike; there are no sure relationships for building working relationships with others. Don't overlook obvious help, but at the same time, think creatively when researching potential allies. Most issues have several different angles. Pitch your issue in the light that makes the most sense for the organization you are trying to recruit.

Do not ignore organizations and individuals merely because you disagree on other issues. *A coalition is formed for one purpose.* All other agreements or disagreements can and should take a back seat.

### Rules for a Coalition

- Clearly define and state your goal.
- Establish a procedure for getting clearance on public statements and maintaining communication among member organizations.
- Agree on the appropriate steps needed to accomplish your goal.
- Clearly define and assign coalition tasks.
- Fundraising is essential to keep the mail and phone lines running.
- Recognize accomplishments and say thanks!

### REACHING OUT

The first step is to research your community and identify local groups that may be interested in joining your efforts. At first glance, Church Women United, the Historic Preservation Society, United Steel Workers and the American Nurses Association may appear to have little in common. In fact, these groups and many others all have a stake in a clean, healthy and beautiful environment.

Don't overlook local counterparts of national groups and groups that have a strictly state or local orientation. Local campuses are fertile territory for clubs and organizations that may be interested in your cause.

One of your top priorities should be recruiting organizations or individuals with the greatest political influence. If they won't join, seek their help in the form of behind the scenes backing or individual endorsements. Sometimes powerful people are willing to help but unwilling to do so in a public way.

Prepare your pitch before contacting any group.

Research the size of the organization, its purpose, activities, offices and organizational structure. It's important to get an appropriate contact person to act as an information conduit.

When asking for help, package your request so that your needs mesh with the organization's current program. For instance, if you are approaching a group that works with children, you may ask them to work on education programs in local schools.

### **BE SPECIFIC**

Since every group will have different resources, providing a specific list of activities allows them to choose what they feel they can accomplish, rather than turning you down flat for fear of getting in over their heads. Such a list could include: hosting phone banks, triggering their email network, organizing letter writing campaigns, writing and distributing leaflets, getting names for petitions, sponsoring education programs, helping with a speaker's bureau, and talking with or writing to influential legislators.

Groups with limited time or interest may still be willing to educate their own members through meetings and newsletters.

### **COMMUNICATION**

One of the most important aspects of smoothly running coalition is communication. Be sure that everyone is communicating the work they are doing with an eye on how best to complement the efforts of others. Don't forget to thank members of the coalition for contributions of time, money and clout.

Give and take is another integral part of coalition work since all individuals and organizations in the coalition have their own identity. It's important to remember that organizations working together in a coalition may have different purposes and assign different values to environmental work. Groups will differ on priorities, strategies and tactics; those differences can produce internal conflicts. They can also provide a fertile field of good ideas, different perspectives and important resources.

A coalition generally operates on consensus – a sometimes elusive commodity. However, solutions are more likely to be found if the coalition discusses the potential advantages and disadvantages of a particular course of action and reaches a democratic resolution. One of the main functions of a coalition is to gather and share information and help all participants gain a clearer understanding of political realities.

Building a coalition – large or small – can be a crucial step in any successful campaign. It takes tact, hard work and a little creativity, but is well worth the effort if you want to make things happen for the issue you care about.

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For more information about coalitions and how they can help your campaign, contact the Audubon Washington, D.C. Policy office, 202-861-2242 ext 3036, or your Audubon state office.