



Basic Steps & Tips to Building a Coalition

Coalitions are powerful. A coalition is a network of organizations (and sometimes just regular people) that work together to achieve a greater goal. Here are just a few of the major perks of a strong coalition:

- A sum of heads can bring smarter decisions to the table and set a clear path forward.
- More people and groups to help promote events and push messages.
- A big group of engaged people creates energy and long term trust.
- It is the perfect place for brainstorming ideas and exchanging breaking news.
- A diverse coalition speaks in many voices to different audiences.
- It's powerful! There's nothing like a coalition letter with dozens or hundreds of different organizations signed on to show your strength.

Suggested Steps to Building a Successful Coalition

The success of a coalition depends on how much time its committed participants invest into it. Here are some basic steps and things to keep in mind as you get started:

1. Establish the basic principles your coalition will support. Write it out. Keep it very simple and limit it to 1-3 points. Remember that sometimes less controversial, broader, positions will attract larger coalitions. Decide if you will engage other types of organizations in this process and how.
2. Write up a simple, powerful, short coalition letter and sign your own organization on. Do not publish it yet.
3. Decide whether you want to accept individual signatures or only organizations. Organizations generally look better, but you may need to include individuals that are thought-leaders or bring access to new communities. You can also consider having a different petition for individuals to sign.
4. Get signers! (This step takes between 2 days to 2 weeks)
 - a. Make a list of all the possible organizations that might want to sign on. Use your professional contacts and Internet searches to seek out organizations that work on similar issues.
 - b. Contact the appropriate decision maker at each organization. Explain the issue and ask them to sign on. It is your duty to follow-up! So, try sending emails and do count on phone calls for crucial follow-ups.

- c. Always approach large organizations early. Large organizations may have bureaucracy in place that makes decision-making slow. A large organization may also request you make slight changes to your guiding principles; you'll have to weigh these requests on a case-by-case basis.
- d. Approach big names first. Groups and individuals with name-recognition who sign on early can inspire others to get engaged.
- e. Once you get an organization to sign on, ask that organization who else you should contact. Ask for email introductions where possible. Think about the rule of three's—every new contact can bring you more potential signers.
- f. Ask all your cosigners to help circulate an email to other possible signers.

5. Announce your coalition

- a. When you have gathered a decent-sized group of signatories, put out a press release (see media guide) and/or a blog post. Bombard your social media channels! If you can't get a big coalition together within a couple weeks, you should probably launch with what you have and keep trying to grow.
- b. Publish your press release, your guiding principles or letter, and a list of everyone in the coalition on a public website.
- c. Tell people how they can join the coalition by providing an automatic sign on or a clear way to contact you. Add new organizations to the site as you hear from them.
- d. If organizations can't sign on to your statement, encourage them to issue a statement in their own words.

6. Set up a mailing list or list serve

- a. Create a mailing list for everyone from the coalition and use it to exchange news and updates. Set clear rules in regard to the purpose of such list. It's fine if people post things that aren't directly relevant to your campaign. However, if someone routinely sends controversial and off-topic posts, approach him/her off-list and politely request that they stop. You do not want to generate any embarrassment within your community.
- b. Send emails to the list regularly, with links to relevant news articles and updates on the campaign. Keep the tone conversational and personal. If you're sending a link to a news article, include a summary in your own words.
- c. Use the mailing list to promote the work of other people on the list.

7. Exchange info & plan events with conference calls.

- a. Schedule regular or semi-regular conferences calls to discuss strategy, exchange information, task-forces to tackle specific needs, and brainstorm next steps.
- b. Take extra time to find a time that works well for a lot of people in the coalition (perhaps through a Doodle Poll), rather than just scheduling something that's convenient for you. Yes, you may need to wake up at 6am some days!
- c. Send several reminders about coalition calls—including a reminder 1 hour and 5 minutes before the call starts. Try to use toll-free services. You can also use other services like free-video conference platforms, like Google Hangout. But do have a phone-line as a back-up.

- d. Try to keep calls under 1 hour whenever possible by setting an agenda in advance.
- e. Make sure other people talk on the conference calls. If you're worried that you'll be doing all the talking, contact a few of the other members beforehand and ask them to handle certain parts of the agenda, then review with them what content to include.
- f. If you find attendance on conference calls is dropping, try to recruit new members to the coalition. Individually reach out to key members and ask them to participate in calls. Ask yourself: do people feel like their participation is necessary and important? Are the calls fun? Insightful?
- g. Send a follow-up email with notes from call, so everybody feels they are on the same page. If necessary, build a wiki or another environment where your community can refer to when feeling lost.

Pro Tips

- Once you've established your main objectives, **make room in the coalition for anyone who shares your goals**. Don't alienate other groups. In fact, political diversity is a wonderful thing in a coalition!
- **Avoid Founding Member Syndrome**. Just because some groups were involved in the beginning doesn't mean they are more important. Except when the list is extremely long, it's generally best to list coalition members alphabetically. Never separate your coalition into 'founders' v. 'late-comers'—that can alienate new signatories.
- **Build coalitions for the long term**. Some coalitions pop up for one issue and then die off after a few weeks. But ideally, your coalition will thrive for years, based on trust and the belief of greater goals, fighting, growing, and continuing to be a source of energy and information for committed activists. Focus on short-term goals, positive feedback, and inclusivity. If your coalition finishes its work, keep the mailing list intact in case the issue reemerges later—or find ways to transition to a related issue.
- **Work to develop a personal relationship with as many coalition members as possible**. If previously engaged members start skipping calls and becoming unresponsive, check in with them individually. When you're mulling an idea, give one of the other coalition members a call and ask her opinion. Whenever possible, show other members of the coalition how important they are and how glad you are that they're involved.