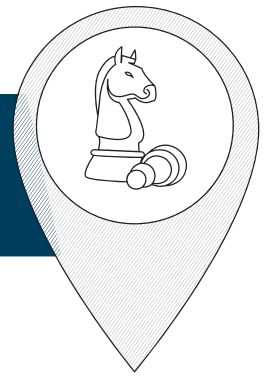




HOW TO BUILD A COALITION TO SHOW SUPPORT FOR YOUR ISSUE



PRO-TIP: Third-party validators are an essential component to moving an issue. No matter how worthy your issue, you will be viewed as a “special interest” without broad-based support. Coalitions are a great vehicle that demonstrate how your issue touches multiple stakeholders.



WHY A COALITION?

- Coalitions should, at a minimum, broaden your grassroots and grass-tops reach.
- Financial resources can be expanded according to means and interest.
- A letterhead with multiple names and organizations speaks volumes for your issue.

WHERE DO YOU START?

- Who are your natural allies?
- What organizations could benefit from or be harmed by your issue once it is explained to them?
- Who has a close relationship with your legislative targets?
- What political interests may be in play?
- What larger public interests may be served or harmed by your issue?

MANAGING COMMUNICATIONS

- Good communications are absolutely essential among coalition partners.
- Regularly scheduled meetings, calls or updates are necessary to keep everyone informed and accountable for their assignments.
- If there is not a natural “lead” organization with sufficient staffing to run the coalition, consider hiring an outside consultant to run the group and coordinate communications.
- Develop a good system for distributing up-to-date talking points and background information that can be easily accessed by coalition partners at any time of day.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

- Coalition partners bring varying relationships to the table. Determine who is best-suited to be the lead on your legislative targets.
- Set specific timelines and deadlines for certain actions. Hold each other accountable for meeting these objectives.
- Multiple contacts and voices are the purpose of a coalition. Don’t let any one partner “own” a target to the detriment of the effort, i.e., you find out too late that someone you thought was with you is not.

THE CHALLENGES

- Remember that each coalition partner also has its own agenda on other issues. That doesn’t mean you can’t trust each other. It just means that you need to recognize this and be realistic about priorities.
- Developing a specific strategy up front and sticking to it is paramount. There will be differences along the way, but sticking to a plan everyone agreed to at the beginning should help settle these differences.
- Not all coalition partners are equal in manpower or financial resources. Set parameters up front to make the coalition successful. If the coalition is large enough, you may need an executive committee empowered to make decisions.
- Coalition partners may come and go. It’s not the end of the world if someone leaves. It’s better to part ways than to paralyze the effort.

WHEN TO GO IT ALONE

- Can you line up third-party validators without forming a coalition?
- If you have a short window in which to act and speed is of the essence, a coalition is likely an encumbrance.
- When it is in your self-interest to go it alone and not confuse your issue with competing agendas.

REMEMBER: Coalitions can be a powerful advocacy vehicle. But coalitions come at a price in extra manpower and resources to keep everyone aligned. Make sure you weigh the benefits and limitations before starting or joining a coalition.

