



TIPS FOR WORKING IN COALITIONS



 "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." — Margaret Mead 

What is a coalition?

In advocacy, a coalition is a group of folks with a common goal who come together to make policy change. Coalitions may be lasting or temporary, tightly bound or loosely woven, but they should be thoughtfully structured so they can be effective advocacy groups.

Why make a coalition?

There is strength in numbers, especially when it comes to political advocacy! The more committed and active members you have in your coalition, the wider range of skills and connections your coalition will likely have. Your coalition can use those strengths to effect change.



Building a Coalition

Start with a **core group of 5-10 people** or organizations. The group should represent diverse perspectives and experiences; this gives the coalition a wide range of viewpoints and skills. However, all members should have shared values and goals so that your work stays on track. When reaching out to prospective members, be clear about **how much time you expect** from them. For example, do you want to meet once a month or once a week?

When you have a group together, take some time to **build a foundation**. The more work you do up front—developing expectations, building relationships, and fostering a respectful culture—the easier it will be to do your work together. As a group, discuss:

- **Goals** – why are you forming this coalition? What are you trying to accomplish?
- **Meeting structure** – how will your meetings run? What roles need to be filled, and who will fill them? Facilitating a meeting is a learned skill, and it can be very helpful to have at least one practiced facilitator. Consider also developing shared [community agreements](#).
- **Decision making** – how will you make decisions as a group? For example, will you use a consensus model or a voting model?

Working as a Coalition

Once you've created a foundation for your coalition, you're ready to develop your strategy. As a group, define your **short and long-term goals**. What steps can you achieve that will move you closer to your longer-term policy change goal? Next, figure out **who has the power** to address your issue. Is it your municipal legislature? Is it your mayor? Once you've landed on who holds that power, you can think about how to influence them. **Powermapping** is a helpful tool to understand the connections between different players and how your coalition might persuade key decision makers. Develop a powermap as a coalition to help guide your strategy. From here, you can think about possible **tactics** (e.g. op-eds in the newspaper, rallies, meetings, press conferences, townhalls) and how you can use them to influence decision makers.

To accomplish your goals, you'll need to keep meeting as a coalition. Each time you meet, make sure you have an **agenda, take notes, and assign tasks**. Then, at the next meeting, follow up on the tasks assigned at the last meeting. This will help you get things done rather than just meeting to meet. Remember, you made a coalition structure for a reason. Use it to keep yourselves on track.

Continue to build relationships within your coalition but know that **conflict will occur**. Having solid foundations between coalition members helps to prevent and resolve conflicts. When conflict does appear, talk about it outside of the group space if possible. This will help protect the work you're doing and minimize conflict. Remember to pick your battles; not every disagreement can or needs to be resolved.

Re-evaluating as a Coalition

Occasionally, you should **take stock** of the coalition. Has the coalition developed new needs or new roles that need to be filled? Is there someone who can stretch into another role? Do you need to grow your coalition to include members with a particular background or skill?

Continue to revisit and **refine your goals** as a group. Your understanding of the political landscape today may be different than what it was yesterday.

Critically, take time to **celebrate your successes!** Policy change is often long and difficult work. We need to lift up our wins—no matter how small—to remain motivated and connected as a group.

