



## **Building and Working with Coalitions**

**2006 - Quarter Three**

### **Goals**

Understand what coalitions are  
and how they function.

Identify the pros and cons of  
creating or working in  
coalitions.

## So - what are coalitions?

Coalitions are organizations of organizations, working toward a common goal or campaign.

Coalitions can be temporary or permanent.

Coalitions traditionally do not include individuals who aren't part of organizations.

Traditionally, all coalition members have equal say and power. Coalitions have their own decision-making structure - some operate on consensus, others by majority rule.

There are advantages and disadvantages to working in coalitions.

## Advantages:

- win something that can't be won alone
- build an ongoing power base
- develop new leaders
- increase resources
- broaden the scope of your issues (for example, going national on a state campaign)

## Disadvantages:

- distracts from other organizational work
- weak members can't always deliver
- too many compromises involved
- inequality of power
- individual organizations don't get credit
- tactics have to be dull in order to be safe

Four things are necessary to build an effective coalition:

1. Conditions
2. Commitment
3. Contribution
4. Competence

1. Conditions - the more of these conditions are met, the more likely your coalition will be effective:

- urgency of the issue
- relevance of the issue
- feasibility of winning
- political and economic realities
- relationships with campaign target
- available resources

## 2. Commitment - all coalitions demand commitment.

- levels and intensities of commitment can vary
- the most effective coalitions have opportunities for different levels of commitments, while encouraging coalition members to commit as much as possible
- effective coalitions require members to clarify their level of commitment and how it will be demonstrated

## 3. Contribution

- not all coalition members can or should contribute the same thing
- ideally, you'll get some combination of:  
**resources:** money, people, expertise, media contacts, space, equipment  
**ideology:** vision, values, beliefs, commitment  
**and power:** money, size, influence, reputation, authority

## 4. Competence

Coalitions need different types of leaders and people with skills, such as:

- facilitator or chairperson
- note takers
- representatives from each organization
- spokespeople
- strategist or organizer

Tips for building effective coalitions:

- Encourage groups to maintain individual identity as they participate in working toward common ground with coalition
- Recognize that each group has its own agenda
- Separate incompatible issues from compatible ones. Choose unifying issues.

- Frame issues in a way that most groups can identify with.
- Accept that working on consensus is very difficult. Accept partial consensus at times in order to take action - agree to disagree.
- Think in terms of power and influence - from building power bases to forging new community networks and projects.

Perhaps most importantly, be sure to think through whether or not a coalition is the best structure for meeting your campaign goals.