

## Coalitions – some Basics

Never forget – a COALITION is not just a list of individuals.  
A COALITION is... **“an organization of organizations.”**

Coalitions come in as many forms as there are issues and groups.

- Coalitions can be *short-term* or *permanent*,
- *single issue* (Low-Income Housing Network, Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities) or *multi-issue* (the Senior Citizens Lobby);
- they can focus on a *specific policy* issue (Alliance for Tobacco Control and Health) or a *broad set of budget matters* (the Children’s Budget Coalition).

Coalitions offer a means to bring communities together, to learn about common problems, and set some common priorities. Because they represent bigger numbers, there are more people to share the work: no one group will have to do everything.

But whatever their form, **coalitions derive their power from their numbers** – their ability to show people in decision-making roles that they are working to build the support required to pass muster with voters and decision-making bodies.

Beyond sheer numbers, coalitions offer many advantages. They:

- ◆ combine resources,
- ◆ offer a forum for thinking about problems,
- ◆ reduce competition for funding and volunteer time,
- ◆ provide an efficient way to work with a broad range of groups and agencies,
- ◆ offer support and expertise to small groups,
- ◆ provide a network for everyone involved.

Want to form a coalition? These simple steps will get you started.

- 1) Talk with those affected; learn their priorities. What PROBLEM would they address?
- 2) Identify a CONVENER, and pull a small (4-6) CORE GROUP together to brain-storm;
- 3) Together, the Core Group will “frame the issue” by turning the *problem* into a good organizing *issue* (not too narrow, not too broad), set the *agenda*, and devise a *timetable*;
- 4) Then, use the Core Group to BUILD THE COALITION.
  - (a) Start with LIKELY ALLIES – groups you feel reasonably certain share common interests and values on your issue. Once you have brain-stormed your way through all the possible likely allies, ask yourselves who has a connection with those groups and can make a personal contact to invite them to join.
  - (b) Next move to UNLIKELY ALLIES/ODD COUPLES. These are groups that might join you on a specific issue, groups you may never have reached out to before.

Unlikely Allies are important for two reasons: they signal to politicians that you are reaching beyond your usual allies to build the “51%” needed to win; and, in the context of closely-divided legislative bodies, all issues need allies from across the political spectrum to win.
- 5) Last, call an *Organizing Meeting*, set a *Goal* (or two), and get started.