

BUILDING CAMPAIGN COALITIONS

Strategic alliances with other groups in your neighborhood are one of the most important elements of any successful organization or campaign. By partnering with other groups to form a **coalition**, you not only gain resources and support, but also become stronger collectively. When groups or individuals decide to work together for a common purpose or issue, they can sometimes be more effective as an organized coalition. There is strength in numbers!

The key to a successful campaign of any size is being active at two different levels—a very localized and specific level and at more general level. The coalition's activities at the broader level get media coverage, put the issue on the map, and show candidates that the coalition has political significance. Locally, participation in the campaign by individual community groups gives the coalition credibility and sustainability because most local groups will already have established relationships with their community and will have resources to put into the coalition. Building strong self-sufficient coalitions will not only strengthen the bonds between groups in the community, but will help create a more cohesive parks advocacy movement citywide.

Every city has different political and geographic landscapes, which need to be considered when building coalitions around physical areas or similar interests. If your campaign is citywide, you may want to consider creating individual borough-wide coalitions. However, depending on the size and scope of your campaign, you can also create coalitions at a more localized level, such as by council district, election districts, or even at a neighborhood level.

HOW TO BUILD SUCCESSFUL COALITIONS

- ✓ **Be as broad as possible.** The more groups and variety of groups that support/endorse the coalition, the more “people power” it has, and the more legitimacy it holds in the eyes of elected officials and the public.
- ✓ **Don't recreate relationships.** Build on existing neighborhood-based advocacy efforts or linkages with powerful people in the community to use as rallying points. Tap into the resources of religious leaders or community board representatives to get people involved.
- ✓ **Define structure.** Define and engage the role of the coalition and its political focus or goals early in the process. This will help to solidify the coalition around a general infrastructure.
- ✓ **Facilitate, don't dominate.** When organizing coalitions remember that your role is to provide support, not to dominate the agenda. There needs to be full and active participation by the other members of the coalition. If the coalition is not a joint effort, with fair leadership, giving all members a voice, it will not be successful.
- ✓ **Be yourself.** Develop a role for the coalition of a coach or clearinghouse for the different constituencies—allowing them to retain their individual identities, but also finding a common ground between them. When groups keep their own identities, the coalition will appear to represent a much more diverse population.
- ✓ **Focus on the big picture.** It's important to focus on the larger vision of the campaign, rather than the specific issues of each constituent. For example, when advocating for increased funding for parks, linking the recreation groups in your city with the community garden groups becomes difficult if you talk about dividing resources right away and deciding who gets what. Instead, focus on how both groups are park users and would benefit from increased public funding for parks.

- ✓ **Go with what works.** There is no one correct form or structure of a coalition. Your coalition can be as informal as just a few representatives of various groups united by a single issue for a short time, or an ongoing network of groups working together on multiple issues, or even as formal as having a written agreement and by-laws.
- ✓ **Get technical: create a coalition database.** A core database or mailing list is key to having a strong coalition or campaign. A database allows you to keep track of and contact your constituents in a more timely fashion, which is crucial in any campaign. Use the mailing lists of partner and founding organizations and supplement with on-line sign-ins, petition signatures, and responses to campaign flyers. (See “Technology Tips” tip sheets for further information).