



Coalitions are powerful. A coalition is a network of organizations (sometimes including individuals) that work together to achieve a greater goal. Some coalitions are long-term and fight for a shared vision, while others are more tactical in nature and only exist for the length of a campaign. Here are just a few of the major benefits of a strong coalition:

- More people and groups help to broaden mobilization and push key talking points.
- A diverse coalition speaks in many voices to different audiences.
- A diverse set of groups bring different perspectives to the planning process for a better overall strategy.
- It is the perfect place for brainstorming ideas and exchanging breaking news.
- It's powerful! A coalition letter, protest, or advocacy meeting with dozens or hundreds of different organizations will show strength.

SUGGESTED STEPS TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL COALITION FOR A SIGN-ON LETTER

Here are some basic steps and things to keep in mind as you get started:

1. **Establish the basic principles your coalition will support.**

Keep it simple and limit it to one to three points of unity if possible. Remember that sometimes less controversial, broader positions will attract larger coalitions. Decide if you will engage other organizations in this process at the start, and how: sometimes a multitude of voices helps build investment in the campaign, while other times new groups want to know what they're attaching themselves to before they join.

2. **Write up a simple, powerful, short coalition letter.**

Sign your own organization on. Do not publish it yet.

3. **Decide whether you want to accept individual signatures or only organizations.**

Organizations generally look better, but you may need to include individuals who are thought-leaders or bring access to new communities. You can also consider having a different petition for individuals to sign.

4. Create soft and hard deadlines.

When contacting groups, give them the soft deadline. If they need more time, or if the soft deadline comes and you don't have the number of signers you were hoping for, let individual groups or the entire list know the hard deadline.

5. Get signers!

This step generally takes between two days to three weeks.

- Make a list of all the possible organizations that might want to sign on. Use your professional contacts and internet searches to seek out organizations that work on similar issues.
- Contact the appropriate decision-maker at each organization. Explain the issue and ask them to sign on. It is your job to follow-up! Try sending emails, and count on phone calls for crucial follow-ups. Don't overdo it with too much bugging. In emails, provide clear links to the current draft of the letter and the registration sign-up; in email threads, you may need to remove links to old drafts.
- Always approach large organizations early. Large organizations may have slower decision-making processes. A large organization may also request slight changes to your guiding principles; you'll have to weigh these requests on a case-by-case basis, and inform previous signers of all changes and with the updated draft. A chapter-based group might need to check with its parent organization.
- Once you get a group to sign on, ask them who else you should contact, or if they can forward it along. Ask for email introductions where possible and have cosigners help circulate to other possible signers.
- Be conscious of how widely you seek support. Asking some groups to sign may make other groups wary of signing. Sometimes you will include more groups, or groups of important constituencies, by using discretion about who you are asking to work together.

6. Announce your coalition.

Also see: [📰 Traditional Media Outreach](#) and [📱 Social Media toolkit](#)

- When you have gathered a decently sized group of signers, plan a release date, and put out a press release ([see media guide](#)) and/or a blog post. Use your social media channels!
- Publish your press release, your guiding principles or letter, and a list of everyone in the coalition on a public website.
- Tell people how they can join the coalition. If your letter is open to new signers, add them to the site as you hear from them.
- If organizations can't sign on to your statement, encourage them to issue a statement in their own words. Strategize with them to ensure that their statement either speaks to the same goals, or their divergent opinion complements your coalition's goals.

- Make sure each group has the complete version of the letter and its signers, and if you accept more signers at a later time, periodically update all members with the most up-to-date list.

7. Set up a mailing list or listserve for everyone from the coalition to exchange news and updates.

Also see: [🔗 Community Agreements](#)

- Set clear rules about the purpose of the list. Decide if it's fine if people post things that aren't directly relevant to your campaign. However, if someone routinely sends controversial and off-topic posts, approach them off-list and politely request that they stop. You want to encourage productive on-topic exchanges and long-term relationships.
- Send emails to the list regularly with links to relevant news articles and updates on the campaign. Keep the tone conversational. If you're sending a link to a news article, include a concise summary in your own words.

8. Exchange information and plan events with conference calls.

Also see: [🔗 Organizing an Event](#)

- Schedule regular or semi-regular conference calls to discuss strategy, exchange information, create smaller groups to tackle specific needs, and brainstorm next steps. If there are natural breaks in a campaign or a longer term coalition, reduce the frequency of the calls until soon before the next obvious starting point to regroup.
- Take extra time to find a time that works well for a lot of people in the coalition.
- Send several reminders about coalition calls—including reminders an hour before a call starts, and another five minutes before.
- Try to keep calls under an hour whenever possible by setting an agenda in advance.
- Make sure other people talk on the conference calls. If you're worried that you'll be doing all the talking, contact a few of the other members beforehand and ask them to handle certain parts of the agenda, then review with them what content to include.
- If you find attendance on conference calls is dropping, try to recruit new members to the coalition. Individually reach out to key members and ask them to participate in calls. Ask yourself: Do people feel like their participation is necessary and important? Are the calls fun? Insightful?
- If the coalition is large enough, consider having fewer all-coalition calls, and adding some intermediate-sized working group calls.
- Send a follow-up email with notes from each call, so everybody feels they are on the same page. If necessary, build a wiki or another medium for your community to use when feeling lost.

PRO TIPS

- For longer-term and some campaign-based coalitions, **relationships are the most important part of the work**. Do not let tactics or dynamics get in the way of important relationships between groups, or between individuals representing those groups.
- Once you've established your main objectives, consider **making room in the coalition for anyone who shares your goals**. Political diversity is often a wonderful thing in a coalition!
- **Avoid Founding Member Syndrome**. Just because some groups were involved in the beginning doesn't necessarily mean they are more important. It's generally best to list coalition members alphabetically. Avoid separating your coalition into 'founders' vs. 'late-comers'—that can alienate new signers.
- **Build coalitions for the long-term**. A first coalition letter is just a start. Some coalitions pop up for one issue and then disband off after a few weeks. That's totally fine. But ideally, your coalition will thrive for years, based on trust and a belief in the strength that comes from working together. Focus on short-term goals, positive feedback, and inclusivity. If your coalition finishes its work, consider keeping the mailing list intact in case a related issue emerges—or find ways to transition to a related issue.
- **Do not speak for a group or individual without their consent**. For example, don't issue later statements without the opt-in of campaign signers. If you plan to re-issue the statement, and want to implement an option for the same signers to opt out next time, let groups know in advance.
- **Work to develop a personal relationship with as many coalition members as possible**. If previously engaged members start skipping calls and becoming unresponsive, check in with them individually. When you're mulling an idea, give one of the other coalition members a call and ask their opinion. Whenever possible, show other members of the coalition how important they are and how glad you are that they're involved. Do your best to smooth over conflicts or make sure necessary conflicts benefit the coalition and the overall strategy, rather than tanking morale.