



COALITION BUILDING & MAINTENANCE
POWER PRISM
A TOOL FOR ADVOCACY PLANNING, EXECUTION & EVALUATION



Effective Coalition Member Recruitment

First and foremost, what does it really mean to be a “coalition member”? Do all coalition members do the same things? Are there things that all coalition members must do to be considered a member?

Typically, there are varied levels of coalition membership – and that’s okay! Know why you need coalition partners and what they can (and can’t) do for you and then work to leverage what each member brings to the table. Here are some typical levels of membership, whether expressly stated or not.

- **Core team** – These are the worker bees that will be with you through the good and the bad. These organizations will invest their staff and volunteer time in helping to manage the campaign and they will also tap into their grassroots advocacy base to pressure and influence decision-makers. Ideally, they designate at least one staffer or volunteer to represent their organization consistently and that person is knowledgeable about the issue and the campaign process. These members need to be consulted when there are significant strategy decisions to be made.
- **Advisors** - These organizational members are important because they have some expertise with your issue or they bring a specific and needed skill-set to the table (such as communications or lobbying). In some cases, you may have an organization that is helping to fund the campaign, and they often fall into this Advisor category. As with core members, it is important to involve these members in strategic decision making.
- **General members** – These organizations do little more than lend you their good name and wish you the best. They may attend some general meetings and should certainly receive your campaign updates, but they probably won’t do much more. If you’re lucky, they will provide you with one or two personal stories and they may send some representatives to a community meeting or a public hearing to show support for the campaign. While that may not sound significant, simply signing on to support your campaign is valuable. This is a good membership level for those organizations you recruit as “opportunistic recruits” – ones that you want to have on your membership list simply because it will compel key decision-makers to look more favorably upon your campaign.

Building and sustaining coalitions is not an easy feat. And, when we seek to build powerful coalitions that are focused on our decision maker targets, the challenges are even greater. This is because we won't be successful if we spend our time attempting to recruit just the "usual suspects", our current friends, and existing allies. Rather, if we want to be successful, we should be working to recruit organizations and institutions that have power and influence on the key decision makers we seek to persuade. This often means we are trying to engage individuals and organizations that have no knowledge of us and no clear connection to the issue on which we are working. The key, therefore, is identifying and being able to clearly and compellingly appeal to their motivated self-interest. There *must* be some benefit to coalition members or they simply will not come to the table. It's not enough to be liked or to ask nicely! If we can't articulate a clear and direct benefit for the coalition recruit, we'll never secure their commitment.

Think about your advocacy goal and all the possible reasons that organizations/institutions might support that objective. What's in their motivated self-interest?

- Will it improve the community in which they live/work?
- Will it have a fiscal benefit for the community?
- Will it have a fiscal benefit for them directly?
- Will it help get them closer to achieving their mission?
- Is it a fit with their organizational/institutional vision or culture?
- If you are successful on your issue, will it somehow make their job easier to get done?

Ideas: _____

Think about your current coalition and what you can offer to members. What benefits do you offer that might appeal to organizations' self-interests?

- Do you have influential or well connected individuals at the table that others might want to get to know?
- Are there good PR opportunities that might come from being involved?
- Do you have relationships with lawmakers or community leaders with whom others might want access?
- Is your coalition "the place to be" if you want to get something done on your campaign issue?

- Does your coalition and your members offer access to a large base of grassroots advocates?
- Is your coalition successful with media advocacy activities and getting the issue – and your coalition members – highlighted in the media?

Ideas: _____

The answers to these questions should guide your outreach and recruitment messaging to potential coalition members. There are several critical components to your recruitment message:

- Clearly articulated campaign goal
- Clarity about your ask and your expectations – are you asking them to be a core member or simply add their name to the campaign? What will you ask them to do? How much time will it require?
- A description of the benefits to them for participating – what’s in it for them?
- Timeframe for the campaign and their participation – are you asking them to join for six months, a year, or several years?
- Why you need them at the table

Remember that the messenger can be as important as the message. Is there someone in your coalition that already has a relationship with the organization you are looking to recruit? Who will be viewed as a well respected peer? Is there someone who can extend the invitation that might make the organization feel extra special and valued?

It is important to recognize that you might need to negotiate in terms of what the organization is willing and able to do for the campaign. Think carefully about what you most need them to do and be willing to “let them off the hook” for the non-essentials if they have limited time to offer.

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