



Six Tips to Help You Create Coalitions That Achieve Legislative Wins

As hundreds, if not thousands, of organizations' advocacy activities heat up during the legislative session, we think it's worth sharing our lessons learned about building and engaging a strong coalition. These tried-and-true strategies will help you create a diverse and stable foundation of support for your policy priorities.

1. Look Beyond the Usual Suspects

Sometimes your strongest support can come from an unlikely source, so don't get too comfortable working with the same groups year-in and year-out. While those organizations may provide you with a stable go-to force, be on the lookout for groups with different but potentially complementary agendas. For example, groups looking to improve community health can develop alliances with organizations working to improve transportation infrastructure, expand access to healthy food, or increase the availability of high-quality education.

Tactics

Conduct a landscape analysis to identify organizations that share a broader vision or values with your coalition but may not be directly related to your cause.

Organize "discovery" meetings with potential partners in different sectors to explore overlapping goals and interests.

Hold cross-sector workshops to foster networking among unlikely allies, sparking ideas for collaboration and co-sponsorship opportunities.

2. Take the Long View

If you've been in the legislative game long enough, you know the downsides to going it alone. Plenty of organizations have learned the hard way that pursuing their own agenda without consideration for like-minded stakeholders can threaten alliances that could bring long-term and sustainable value to their cause. In the months leading up to your state's legislative session, you consider not just your immediate priorities, but those for the next two to three years. Then, plan your policy priorities and outreach accordingly. There may be years when you gain more from supporting the policy priority of a key ally in order to gain their support for one of your key issues down the line.

Tactics

Map out a three-year policy strategy that includes mutual priorities with allied groups.

Set up regular check-ins with core allies to stay updated on their priorities and look for ways to support each other's agendas.

Establish a coalition charter that outlines shared values, a long-term vision, and a commitment to mutual support for priority issues.

3. Identify and Prioritize an Outreach List

To be effective, you need both high-level or “grasstops” influencers such as community and business leaders as well as a broad-based grassroots network. So, once you’ve pulled together a core group, you need to draw upon your collective circles of influence to create a prioritized outreach list. These are groups and individuals who need to understand your agenda and whose support would be valuable to your cause—typically because they represent a different or broader constituency. Decide which groups or individuals are most critical, and label them as Tier One contacts; then decide who’s going to reach out to each of them and who will coordinate your core group as they go about conducting outreach meetings. Once you get through the top tier, go on to the next, nice-to-have contacts on your list.

Tactics



Develop a tiered contact list with specific roles, including primary contacts, grasstops influencers, and grassroots advocates.



Assign outreach responsibilities within your core group to ensure consistent engagement with high-priority contacts.



Create a shared outreach tracker to record progress, share notes, and track follow-ups with each contact.

4. Capture Statements of Support in Writing

As soon as an organization agrees to support your effort, get one of their executives to sign a statement indicating their support. This will ensure you can list them on fact sheets or other handouts for legislators throughout the session, without having to go back to them during crunch time—or worse, having them be unhappy that you have listed them on a piece after the fact.

Tactics



Draft a template for statements of support that can be quickly customized for each new ally.



Secure written commitments early, ideally during initial meetings with new coalition members.



Develop a “supporter acknowledgment” document to share internally, clarifying who has signed statements and how you can publicly reference their support.

5. Identify the Right Tools for Building and Engaging the Coalition

There are a variety of tools to consider for connecting and activating individuals who support your cause. In the past, such activation typically consisted of an email alert asking supporters to contact their legislator – with a plea to let you know when they’ve done so. Current tools like Engage, Salsa and Voter Voice make it possible for you to provide recipients with recommended language for their contact with legislators and allow you to track whether or not they take action. In addition to the activation tool, you may need to identify an email service provider, or ESP, like Salesforce Marketing Cloud, SilverPop and MailChimp. Tools such as Luminato provide both an engagement tool and ESP in one, but come at a higher price.

Tactics



Evaluate coalition needs and budget to determine which tools are most appropriate for your activation strategy.



Create customized messaging templates for different platforms (email, social media, direct outreach) to streamline activation.



Set up tracking capabilities to measure the effectiveness of each tool and modify strategies based on real-time feedback.

6. Raise Your Voice and Share Your Story

In addition to email, there are a range of traditional and social media tools and strategies to keep your coalition connected and raise the profile of your issue. Coordinate media outreach for placement of opinion pieces and letters to the-editor.

Tactics

Develop a social media toolkit for coalition members, including sample posts, graphics, and hashtags, to make it easy for them to share.

Coordinate a media outreach calendar to schedule opinion pieces, press releases, and updates throughout the legislative session.

Host regular webinars or live Q&As where coalition members can discuss the cause and engage with broader audiences.

How SE2 Can Help

Building and sustaining a coalition is only the beginning. But what if you're finding it difficult to identify the decision-makers who can turn your advocacy into real change, or struggling to amplify your coalition's impact across the right channels? SE2's PowerMap™ process can help you uncover and mobilize the networks that hold the most influence over your issues. With PowerMap, we analyze the landscape to identify key allies, grassroots leaders, and power brokers, aligning them with your mission so your coalition can make a measurable impact where it matters most.

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