Tips for Building Effective Coalitions

Don’t be afraid to have multiple coalitions
Make your coalitions strategic – they should fit your issue and your target. You may find that you work with some groups on only one issue and other groups on every issue.

Set goals together
Make sure the development of coalition goals is a joint process, rather than one or two group representatives deciding the goals and then inviting others to join. You want the coalition to be a true collaboration, not one group making up the plan themselves and then assigning tasks to the other groups.

Understand each group’s self interest
There must be a balance between the goals of the coalition and that of the individual organizations. Each group at the coalition table has their own organizational mission, goals, and priorities. The more you can learn about the groups you collaborate with, the smoother that collaboration will be.

Respect each group’s internal process
It is important to understand and respect the differences among groups. These differences are often apparent in processes or chains of command for decision-making. Make a commitment to learning about the unique values, history, interests, structure, and agenda of the other groups and organizations.

Agree to disagree
All the groups are not going to agree on everything all the time, and that’s totally fine. What keeps you together are the shared goals.

Structure decision-making carefully
You don’t want any group at the table to feel like they don’t have a voice, even if they are smaller in terms of staff, membership, or budget. At the beginning, create a set process for decision-making that each group agrees on – and make sure it’s one where each group gets a say.

Recognize that contributions vary
Each organization will have something different to offer. Each contribution is important, so be sure to acknowledge them all, whether they be volunteers, meeting space, funding, copying, publicity, leafleting, passing resolutions, or other resources.

Give and take
It is important to build on existing relationships and connections with other organizations. Don’t just ask for or expect support, and be prepared to give it in return. You need to build trust and respect amongst the groups.
Be strategic!
Building coalitions in and of themselves requires a good strategy. Which organizations you ask, who asks them, and what order to ask them are all questions to figure out. This is where doing a power map will help you out.

Tips for Thinking about Coalitions “Outside-of-the-Box”

Use your power mapping
Collaborate with the organizations that will help you influence your target.

Get messy with your power mapping
Make multiple maps. Dig deep and find those outside-of-the-box groups – those unique avenues of influence.

Google it
Do some Internet research. Find out what groups are active in your area. Don’t assume you already know.

Ask current allies
What organizations do they work with? What other organizations do they know of that are active locally? What other organizations do your fellow AAUW members belong to?

Contact AAUW national staff
We may be able to provide you with some ideas and be able to put you in touch with local representatives of our national allies.

Think about all the different stakeholders
Look at your issue from all the different angles. Who benefits from what you are trying to achieve? Who would it affect? Think about the reach of your issue’s impact.

Think about it in reverse
What organizations are opposed to your chosen priority issue? Then ask yourself: What organization is a counter to that organization?

Make the approach
Ask an organization to join your coalition. They can’t join you if you don’t ask. And there’s never any harm in asking.