

TIPS FOR BUILDING A COALITION

In this document, you will find suggestions for building a coalition of diverse partners who have differing business models and structures but a common desire to respond to disasters. In recent decades, many disaster and emergency response events have required local, state, and federal resources, demonstrating the importance of mutually-accepted planning, effective communication, and the sharing of equipment, expertise, and personnel. By breaking down barriers between commonly siloed industries, such as animal health and emergency response, you will be able to build an interdisciplinary team with a comprehensive set of skills that is well-equipped to serve the public.

The first logical step in building your coalition will likely be meeting and organizing with local and regional partners. It will also be extremely important for you to meet with and work alongside local jurisdictional authorities, as this is the only way that you will be able to become an officially recognized emergency response partner and resource. For more information on this, see [Tips for Meeting With Your Elected Official](#).

What is a coalition?

A coalition is an alliance composed of various groups or parties that is created in order to gain more power and influence than would be possible individually on issues of common interest. Typically, a coalition has a temporary purpose and disbands after the completion of its objectives.

Why build a coalition?

- To get to know industry partners better and build stronger relationships
- To bring a variety of industries and business models together
- To involve the subject matter experts in the exotic animal industry, which is part of the community infrastructure
- To improve communication for topics of interest that might need to be reported out to the public
- To bring together a variety of networks and communication styles
- To work collectively on common objectives or interests
- To improve research in areas of common interest
- To build capacity for the industry
- To share information and resources
- To identify gaps where resources, expertise, and personnel may need to be added, improved, or shared
- To raise funds for a collective response
- To mobilize supporters

Types of Coalitions

1. Internal: Works within a specific organization.

2. External: Works with or represents multiple different organizations who collaborate to achieve a common goal. Typically, this type of coalition must gain credibility by including partners from a variety of industries who share common goals for different reasons.

Advantages of Joining a Coalition

Some of the benefits of joining a coalition for a participating organization or facility include:

- Finding common ground for a united effort
- Gaining skills, resources, and knowledge that they would not otherwise have access to
- Broadening their support base in a way that they could not do on their own
- Closing response and recovery gaps in a way that could not have been accomplished alone
- Being able to accomplish goals more quickly and effectively due to access to more people and resources
- Sharing their background and perspectives on issues and gaining others' perspectives in turn, thus creating a more diverse coalition with broader appeal

Challenges

- **Communication, credibility, and visibility:** Internal and external lines of communication must be clearly delineated within the coalition.
- **Authority:** To avoid conflict and turf wars, authority and the decision-making process must both be clearly established. Each group in the coalition should also agree on who will control particular resources.
- **Distribution of work:** Partners will come into the coalition with their own skills, expectations, and ideas. It is important to ensure that work is distributed equitably, which will foster feelings of unity within the coalition and avoid creating resentment among certain individuals or organizations. Distributing work according to individual skills or organization resources and needs can be an effective way to both distribute work evenly and work towards coalition goals.
- **Hidden agendas:** All partners should know exactly what they are expected to give and receive as a part of the coalition. Ensure that coalition priorities are clearly understood so that no participant or partner has concealed objectives that may derail overall coalition progress.
- **Conflicting priorities:** Sometimes, coalition members from different industries or organizations may have conflicting priorities. The coalition must be able to withstand internal conflict, and strong leadership will be necessary to foster cohesiveness over divisiveness. While differing opinions and priorities can cause turmoil at times, these kinds of discussions can also yield new ideas and solutions as opposing individuals bring their own diverse perspectives to an issue.