

TIPS ON GAINING PARTICIPATION IN A COALITION

You have an issue, and you need others who share your passion to join you in making change. Here are some tips from professional coalition builders to help you build the support you need:

1. State the common need or issue clearly, and outline the advantages to joining in your effort. Use motivating language that pulls people together to face this unprecedented problem.
2. Demonstrate that there is limited time to act without creating unnecessary panic or exaggerating the situation.
3. Help your audience understand their relevance to the issue, and why they are important to helping solve the problem.
4. Use trade and affinity groups, community lists, and personal contacts to make an initial list of where to find potential participants. Then decide how best to approach them - people want to hear about possible solutions from people they trust.
5. Decide how best to communicate this need to the target lists. Some will prefer a personal phone call or email, and some may want to hear through a trade organization or trusted point of contact that has vetted the situation already. Assess what approach, or combination of approaches, will work best in this situation.
6. Identify if and when to bring media into the situation after your core coalition is established. If you need public support, you have to control the message to get it. Cultivate media contacts who have large followings and want to be the first to highlight your issue, perhaps paired with a local interest spotlight. Local media will be most effective at addressing local issues, state-level media will be best for state issues, and so on.
7. Social media can be equally beneficial or harmful, depending on how savvy the content manager is. Word choice matters. Images and content can work for or against you—always consider how the other side could use what you say to their own advantage.
8. Think carefully about what you share with the public and broader audiences. Test out your message before launching. Make sure what you are asking the public or participants to do will achieve the desired result. There are times when an outpouring of public support is critical to achieving your goals, but there are also times when a small, quiet conversation with trusted coalition members and partners is best. Do not squander the trust of the core coalition, the public, or other strategic partners.
9. In all media engagement, provide quality content and stay current and relevant. Your message must be consistent, and must hook your audience with something they care about in order to move them to action. Make your content unique to stand out from the noise and demonstrate your passion for the issue at hand. Your audience must feel like they know and trust you before they will act. If you are engaging the public, make sure you have set up a way to give and receive public feedback.