



The Leadership
Conference
Education Fund

GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS & ADVOCACY

SECTION 4: BUILDING & SUSTAINING COALITIONS





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The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. The Leadership Conference works toward an America as good as its ideals.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization that builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States.

Access this material online at http://www.civilrights.org/action_center/toolkit.



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Dear Friend:

This toolkit was put together with you in mind. Its purpose is to educate, equip, encourage, and empower you to make change.

Our goal is to provide you with the basic structure and strategies needed to plan and carry out an effective grassroots public education or advocacy campaign. It's possible to write an entire book on each of the areas covered in this toolkit—in fact, many have been written. But you don't have to read half a dozen books to put together a smart campaign.

What you need to do is establish your goals, create a strategy, make a step-by-step plan, and mobilize the people, partners, and resources to make it all achievable. This toolkit is meant to be a concise guide to accomplishing that. And we include plenty of suggested resources if you want more in-depth information.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and The Leadership Conference Education Fund provide leadership and coordination to coalition efforts and support the work of national and local partners by providing strategic and

technical assistance, preparing materials, offering training, and identifying resources to support coalition efforts. Information on training for grassroots advocacy is provided by The Leadership Conference; information relating to education and coalition building is provided by The Education Fund.



We believe in the power of coalitions to bring people together for a common purpose. History shows that change can be made when diverse voices unite around a shared goal. We hope you will consider us your partners in making needed change happen. You can learn more about our work at <http://www.civilrights.org>. You can also reach The Leadership Conference field staff at 202-466-3315 or at grassroots@civilrights.org.

Have fun!

Ellen Buchman
Vice President, Field Operations
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Leadership Conference Education Fund



The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Field Department

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Field Department (the field team) provides grassroots consultation, advocacy coordination, support, and assistance to national, state, and local organizations regarding field campaigns around important civil and human rights issues. The team is based in Washington, D.C., with a satellite office in Atlanta, Georgia.

Overview of National, State, and Local Work

Nationally, the field team convenes and provides field outreach and guidance to the coalition's more than 200 national civil and human rights organizations on a broad range of issues. With that focus, the field team provides field outreach and advocacy, and public education campaign guidance, on a broad range of issues.

For example, through national coalition efforts, the field team has played a role in implementation of field campaigns for legislative victories, including: the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010.

Further, when resources permit, the field team works in collaboration with local organizations to conduct national direct-service, public outreach campaigns such as the Digital Television Transition (DTV) campaign or the 2010 Census education campaign.

The field team also works throughout the country with local organizations to provide assistance and support to local coalitions' work in their communities. This support includes field outreach and advocacy,

and public education campaign guidance. The team collaborates with leaders in states including: Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Maine, Mississippi, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Texas. As just one example, in Nebraska, the field team has worked with coalitions to preserve equal opportunity, as well as judicial nominations and immigration reform education.

In concert with The Leadership Conference's policy and communications departments, the field team works proactively to create rapid response mechanisms on important federal civil and human rights issues with national coalitions in Washington D.C., and state and local coalitions in key states.

Support Provided to National and State Coalition Members

The field department is proud to offer an array of services to both national and local partners to help support their work. These services include:

- Strategic Campaign Development, Guidance, and Execution (when applicable)
- Webinars, National Conference Calls, and Legislative Updates
- Legislative Email Action Alerts
- Trainings and Workshops on Coalition-Building, Community Outreach, Grassroots Advocacy, and Key Civil and Human Rights Issues
- Media Readiness Training (in conjunction with the Communications Department)
- Educational Material Development, Grassroots Toolkit, Resource Guides, and Fact Sheets
- Support in Organizing Press Briefings, Lobby Days, and Coalition Convenings

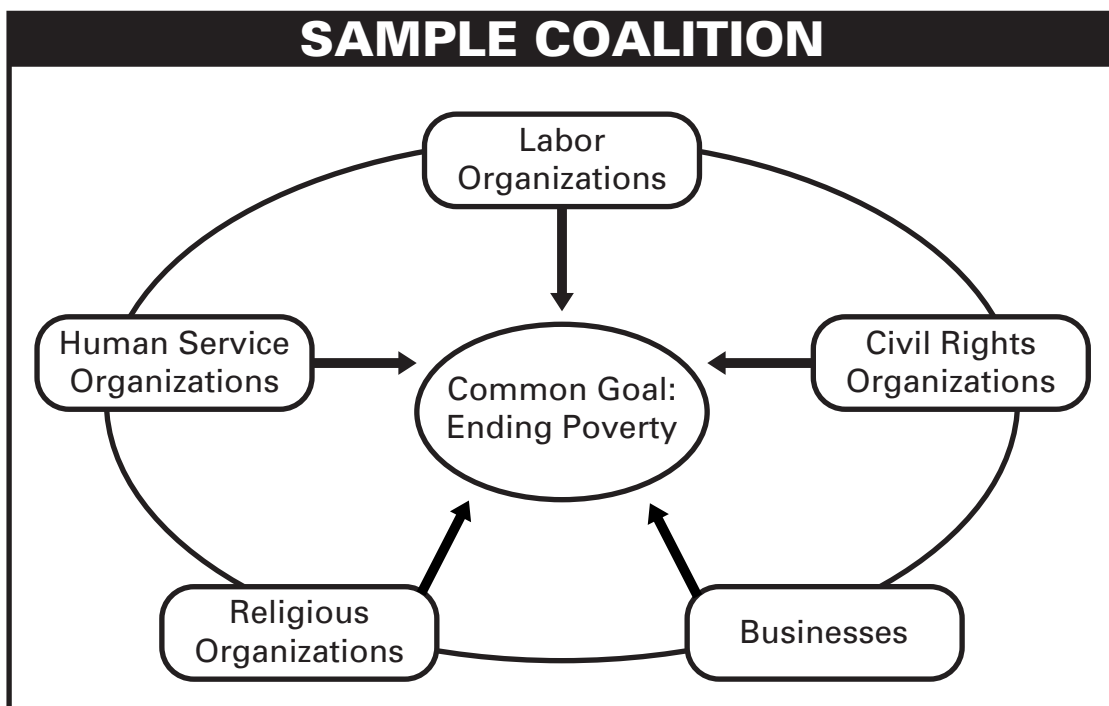
BUILDING AND SUSTAINING COALITIONS

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. Through advocacy and outreach to targeted constituencies, The Leadership Conference works toward the goals of a more open and just society—an America as good as its ideals. The Leadership Conference and The Leadership Conference Education Fund believe in the power of coalitions, because every day we see how the diverse expertise and abilities of organizations working together strategically can create a whole that is greater, more efficient, and more effective than the sum of its parts.

A coalition is a group of organizations that agree to work together toward shared goals. It may be a more permanent and structured coalition, like The Leadership Conference, or a less formal collaborative working group that comes together

as needed. Many coalitions will not have their own staff, but function as a team of people representing the coalition’s members. For example, the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination includes national organizations that work together to monitor legislation, challenge threats to religious liberty, and promote policies to prevent taxpayer funded discrimination. It doesn’t have its own staff or budget, but functions based on what each group is able to bring to the table.

A coalition may come together for a single purpose—to achieve one particular policy change—or maintain an ongoing effort to share information and pursue goals that reflect its members’ shared values and priorities. Ideally, working together on one campaign will demonstrate the value of collaboration and encourage the maintenance of lasting relationships. Focusing on underlying values may help organizations that focus on a variety of different



issues to understand what they have in common and how they can support each other's efforts. As one grassroots organizer is fond of saying, "If you want a friend, be a friend."

Learning to work in coalition is an essential skill for bringing about change that would be impossible for a single organization to achieve on its own. It's hard to imagine any public education or advocacy campaign that would not be strengthened by a larger and more diverse coalition. Of course, coalitions also require their own investment of thought, energy, good will, and open communication to keep diverse groups focused on a common goal.

Identify and Recruit Potential Coalition Partners

When you are ready to build or expand an existing coalition, keep two things in mind. On one hand, you want your coalition to be as broad and diverse as possible, so that it reflects and can draw interest and resources from as many different segments of the community as possible. On the other hand, you want to be sure that any groups joining the coalition are solidly supportive of your goals and mission. Not every public-minded group will be able to join every coalition. But try not to limit yourself to thinking only of the "usual suspects"—people and groups you're comfortable or used to working with on particular issues.

For example, the coalition of organizations that worked successfully for passage of federal hate crimes legislation included not only traditional civil rights organizations and groups that advocate for particular communities (including the rights of women, people with disabilities, and LGBT people), but also law enforcement groups. Advocates for immigration reform are working in coalition with religious groups from across the political spectrum that usually are on opposing sides of public policy issues.

Look for intersecting interests and focus them on common goals. Passing legislation to overturn the Supreme Court's egregious misinterpretation of anti-discrimination law brought together groups primarily

“encouraging words”

The coalition has to fit the campaign, not the other way around. When approaching other groups that you would like to work in coalition with, it's important to be open to their ideas and input, but not at the expense of the campaign losing cohesion or wasting anybody's time working on a huge project that won't actually benefit them in the long run.

interested in women's equality and those whose main focus is workers' rights.

Start by making a list of people you know and groups whose missions are clearly aligned with the goals of your campaign. Build outward to include groups that generally share your values but may not have worked on the issue specific to your campaign. Unexpected allies can help get your message to new audiences.

Here's an example. Let's say your goal is to create a new ethics commission that would have both the independence and the power to tackle corruption in state government and hold elected and appointed officials accountable. You could start with your most likely allies, such as groups with a focus on ethics and accountability in government. That might include your state Common Cause affiliate and the League of Women Voters. Consider organizations that are likely to share the values your campaign will promote: honesty and accountability in government. That might include ministerial associations, interfaith coalitions and local community groups. Next think about other potential allies who might see value in the campaign: community service organizations, state or local bar associations, public employee unions, state and local chambers of commerce, and other public interest advocates who see favoritism and corruption standing in the way of their ability to do their jobs or compete fairly for funding.

Call people you know personally. When you've enlisted their support, ask them to take a look at



The Leadership Conference and The Education Fund are experts at establishing and maintaining coalitions at the national level and working to engage allies at the state and local levels. Feel free to contact the field staff at grassroots@civilrights.org with any questions.



**think
inclusively**

Diversity is about much more than skin color. It is important to engage and create leadership opportunities for individuals and organizations representing the full range of people most affected by the issue you're working on. For example, if you are building a coalition in support of better voting rights enforcement, involve groups representing African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, immigrants, people with disabilities, people who speak languages other than English, people in faith communities, or labor unions. Think about diversity in terms of age, religion, sexuality, and gender identity. Include local affiliates of national organizations and local community-based organizations.

your list of prospective coalition participants and get their suggestions for potential additions. If they have personal or professional relationships with some of your potential partners, ask if they'll make the first contact or introduce you.

Have a short written description of the coalition's goals and objectives ready to send as a follow-up to your conversation. Give people different ways to be involved depending on their own organizational capacities; if they can't serve on the steering committee, perhaps they can name a staff liaison to the campaign or task force. If they can't commit to long-term participation, maybe they can co-sponsor a single public event. Be careful not to take a polite expression of interest as a commitment to the campaign; don't put anyone's name on a public list of coalition members without having their confirmation in writing.

Some organizations may have to follow a formal process before signing on to a new campaign. You might be asked to speak at a board meeting, for example. Or you might be added to the agenda for a service club's monthly meeting. Think of these as opportunities to make new allies and to sharpen your ability to make a short and compelling case for your campaign.

Attend community meetings and other organizations' events where you'll be able to meet community leaders. Be sure to collect business cards and to have someone follow up with each person you meet. Creating and maintaining a database of contacts—like an Excel spreadsheet—will help you keep track of who you have met, what level of information you shared, and what kind of response you received.

Building Common Purpose

Getting and maintaining agreement on the coalition's purpose, strategy, and activities can sometimes be

challenging, especially if you are fortunate enough to have a large and diverse coalition. Try to have clear buy-in on the goals, strategy, and action plan as early as possible.

And that brings up a basic dilemma about running a campaign and building a coalition—the inherent tension between the need for a relatively small working group that can plan and make decisions nimbly and the importance of having partner groups feel that they have a voice in decision making. You can help keep the coalition working well together by having an agreed-upon and clearly understood procedure for coalition decision making. Perhaps a small group of half a dozen organizations will be considered an executive committee or board of directors that will have the power to make decisions and release statements on the coalition's behalf. If you decide that a majority of coalition members must agree before the executive committee can authorize new positions or activities that have not been part of previous plans, be sure there's a commitment from members to respond in a timely fashion when decisions need to be made.

Public attention may bring more allies to you. But that's more likely if you have made an effort from the start to be broadly inclusive. Some groups may resent being asked to add their names to what feels like a finished product without opportunity for input. Others will be grateful to have had someone else do the planning and will be content to lend their support as long as the demands on their time will be minimal. Keep in mind that it's only human to want to feel included—and respected.

You will find it easier to build broad coalition support for your campaign if you have been supportive of others. When the Washington, D.C. City Council was considering marriage equality legislation, an interracial and interfaith coalition of pro-equality clergy played an important role in shaping the public

conversation. One of the group's leaders, a gay White minister, said that he was able to go to his colleagues in the community and ask for their support on this issue because he had been working with them for the past decade on issues like affordable housing.

Structure

Every coalition will have different needs and dynamics. If the coalition is more than a few representatives, it may need a steering committee or executive working group that will serve as a functional board. It may also be useful to create working groups or task forces that take responsibility for different aspects of the coalition's work. For example, there is a national coalition of organizations interested in judicial independence and the role of the federal courts in protecting constitutional values and individual rights. It is a broad coalition that functions through task forces that focus on research, communications, and grassroots organizing. Each task force coordinates its work with others through the larger coalition and its steering committee.

Keeping it Together

Maintaining a coalition's focus on a shared plan can sometimes be challenging. Even when you share a common goal, it's easy for disagreements to arise among people with different perspectives, levels of expertise, personal histories, and organizational interests. Here are some general tips for trying to keep a coalition running smoothly.

Clarity is your friend

Having clear goals, plans, procedures, and assigned responsibilities is one of the best ways to minimize potential conflict. Be sure everyone understands and accepts how decisions will be made. After each meeting, be sure to recap what has been decided, who has taken responsibility for which tasks, and when they have agreed to complete them. Putting things in writing helps make sure everyone comes



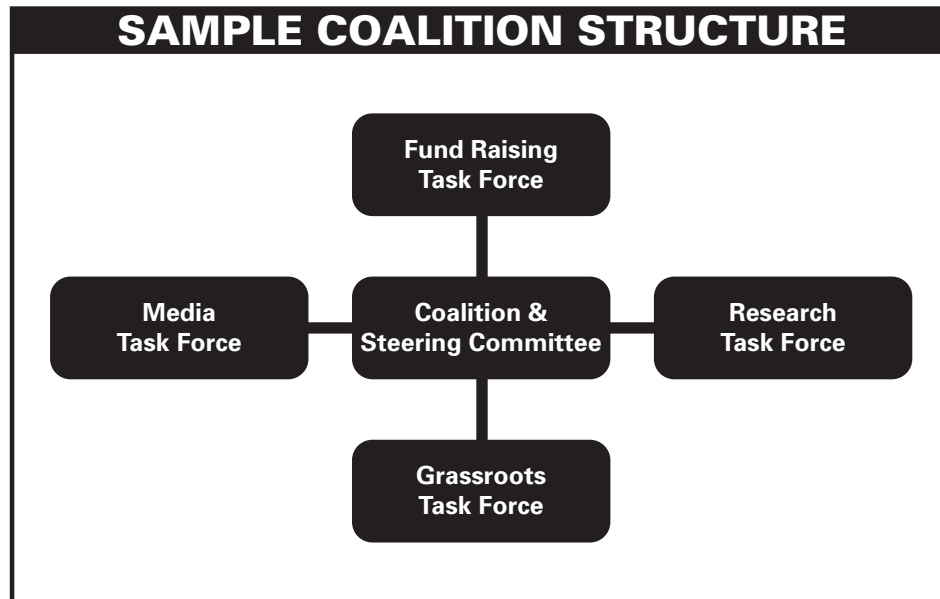
outreach to colleges and universities

When you are identifying potential coalition partners, spokespeople, and volunteers, be sure to consider the resources that are available through local colleges and universities. Faculty and students can be great sources of expertise and activist energy. Campuses can often provide low-cost or free meeting space, especially if you are working with a recognized student group. Identify and recruit active support from social and political student groups. Ask interested students or faculty members to become active in your campaign, sponsor an on-campus forum, distribute flyers on campus, recruit fellow students through existing email lists or social networks, or write letters to the campus or community newspaper. If you have a critical mass of support you might be able to create a campus (or multiple-campus) arm of your campaign team. You may be able to identify campus leaders through one of the progressive youth leadership programs, including the Center for Community Change's Generation Change project, People For the American Way Foundation's Young People For, and the Center for American Progress's Campus Progress.

out of a meeting with the same understanding of what was decided, and it's a good way to raise disagreements or misunderstandings before they cause larger problems.

“encouraging words”

There are no set rules that apply in every situation. You'll have to make some judgment calls about how big your core planning and decision making team can be. And you'll have to decide at what point to reach out beyond that core team to broaden the coalition. You want to do much of your coalition building before going public, so that you can make a splash with the breadth of your support.



Be aware of power dynamics

If one or two organizations dominate a coalition, others' commitment might diminish over time. Remember that each organization in a coalition still has its own priorities and needs for visibility, membership engagement, and fundraising. Find ways to share the coalition's voice.

Communicate frequently and in a way that everyone agrees will be efficient

If you have a small coalition, you may decide to have monthly or weekly meetings to track your progress and make necessary adjustments to your plan. If you have a larger coalition, there may be separate meetings for the executive committee and for task forces organized around specific work areas (like media outreach) or projects (such as the planning team for an event). Be sure that different parts of the coalition communicate decisions and progress to each other—especially when plans are changed.

Clear, shared understanding of goals and plans along with frequent communication should minimize the potential for serious conflict within your coalition. If serious disagreements arise that threaten the group's ability to work together or disrupt progress toward the goal, try to deal with them honestly and directly. Here are some tips:

- Recognize the problem directly and respectfully.
- Seek clarity on the nature of the problem: Is it a fundamental disagreement about strategy? A struggle over turf or visibility? A personality conflict between one or more members of the group?

- Try to identify a coalition member or community leader who might be able to mediate the differences or propose a resolution.

If sincere efforts fall short of resolving disputes, try to determine whether they can be worked around (for example, placing people with difficulty working together on different task forces) or whether there's an acceptable compromise on strategy or tactics that all sides can live with.

Remember that it's normal to hit bumps in the road. Campaigns can bring out intense emotions that can lead to conflicts even among people with the best of intentions. Try not to let challenges frustrate you or distract your focus on carrying out your campaign plan and accomplishing your goals. Disagreements are to be expected and resolving them is part of the process of managing a successful campaign. In fact, by demonstrating a shared willingness to deal openly with disagreements and by working to resolve them together, coalitions can come through conflict with greater mutual trust and respect and a renewed commitment to working together.



when you can't meet in person

People may find it easier and less disruptive to their schedules to hold some meetings by conference calls. Larger organizations may have their own conference call systems. If you don't have an organization with that capability, you can arrange conference lines through services such as <http://www.freeconferencecall.com>.

One of the best ways to communicate quickly with a large number of people is to set up a group email list. It's virtually free and instantaneous and will probably be your primary means of getting information to everyone in the coalition. If there's anyone in your coalition who doesn't yet have an email address, you can help them get one through a free service such as Microsoft's Hotmail (<http://www.hotmail.com>) or Google's Gmail (<http://www.gmail.com>). Both Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com>) and Yahoo Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com>) allow you to set up email lists for free. If you have coalition members without reliable access to the Internet, be sure that someone takes responsibility for mailing them important materials that are shared on the list.

