

**Build a Coalition**

Work with others to strengthen your efforts.

**What is a coalition?**A coalition is a group of organizations and individuals working together for a common purpose. Coalitions may have a “one issue” focus or a “multi-issue” focus. Most likely, many of you are concerned about many issues relating to immigrant communities, specifically to issues of concern for the Arab American and Muslim American communities. Therefore, your coalition may not focus on just immigration, but on a number of issues affecting immigrant communities, including job development, child welfare and access to health care, poverty, etc.

**Why are coalitions important?**There is power in numbers!  By joining with others who align their priorities with you, you are likely to get more accomplished. Coalitions have several advantages:

* Coalitions can reach a broader base.
* Coalitions generally have greater credibility and can have more leverage by demonstrating tangible, broad community support.
* Coalitions can offer better access to policy-makers and connections to influential decision-makers through a strong united voice.
* Coalitions create extensive networking and partnership opportunities for your organization and community.
* Coalitions have the potential to increase media attention and public profiles that member you may not be able to achieve without working in coalition.
* Coalitions offer access to greater expertise by introdocuing you and allowing you to work across sectors and communities.

**Where to Start**

**Identify Potential Local Allies**

Find out who’s working on immigrant rights issues your community (immigrant rights may not be the issue area you are focused on, but this model works for any issue).  Consider local nonprofits, civic associations, faith-based organizations, parent groups, etc.  Start with a phone call to see if there’s enough common ground, then follow-up with a one-on-one meeting.  If there seems to be enough local interest, organize a coalition planning meeting.

Examples of groups in your area you could link to if you are working on an immigrant rights issue:

* NAACP
* Local groups serving Latinos, Chinese, Caribbeans, etc.
* Faith Based coalitions i.e, Interfaith Coalition for Just Immigration Reform, etc.

**Get Together and Define your Goals**

Determine your long- and short-term goals. Why are you forming this coalition and what do you hope to accomplish? Come to agreement on some general guiding principles for the coalition’s work. Begin by creating a mission statement on which your coalition members agree. As the coalition is developing its goals, keep in mind that goals should be:

* Believable: They should describe conditions that the coalition believes can be achieved.
* Attainable: It should be possible to achieve the goals in the designated time frame.
* Tangible: The goals should be concrete and capable of being fully understood.
* On a Timetable: A completion date should be included in the goal statement.
* Win-Win: The goals should allow all members of the coalition to experience some level of success.

Address issues up front so that all perspectives can be brought to the table. Remember that this is a collaborative effort (that’s the whole point of a coalition!) and that means acknowledging and respecting differences, and being able to compromise.

Always designate specific tasks to be done and set benchmarks for completion of coalition activities.

It’s also important to determine how often, when and where your coalition will meet, and who will attend each meeting. Once these logistics are worked out, consider announcing your coalition to the public. By releasing a joint statement or holding a press conference, the coalition can make policy-makers and the general public aware of its existence.

**Take Action and Keep the Momentum Alive**The advocacy coalition should meet regularly to coordinate strategies. Different members will contribute different strengths and it is important to capitalize on those strengths. You need to keep all coalition members informed about the ongoing advocacy efforts, so that they feel a sense of involvement and investment in the coalition. You may consider a regular newsletter to all coalition members or send out regular updates through a listserve. Create a facebook page and post relevant articles and information about the issue and your campaign. Encourage feedback and suggestions from coalition members.

*Some resources in this piece are from “Parents United for Public Schools” in Minnesota.(Linda Sarsour)*