

## **The Democracy Center - Citizen Action Series**

Excerpts from *The Democracy Owners Manual*  
(To preview or purchase the book visit [www.democracyctr.org](http://www.democracyctr.org))

### **Building and Maintaining Advocacy Coalitions**

When they work well coalitions can add great power to your cause. When they work poorly, coalitions can be a gut-wrenching exercise in needless conflict.

#### **Why Coalitions Are Valuable**

Coalitions help advocacy campaigns develop a stronger public image, bring together diverse resources and ideas, and avoid duplication of effort. They can link together groups working locally, statewide or nationally on an issue and give your opponents a way to negotiate with you. They also create exchanges between newer advocates and more experienced ones and provide moral support when things get tough.

#### **Forming Coalitions**

The most important decisions that a coalition makes are in the beginning. What goals will it set for itself? Who will it seek to include and who won't it include? What kind of structure will it create to facilitate its work? How the coalition answers these questions at the start will determine most of what will come later.

#### **Creating an Effective Coalition Structure**

The least formal coalitions are "networks", lists of organizations that don't meet together but do share information (through newsletters, etc.). More formal are "ad hoc coalitions", in which one organization may take the lead, but with no formal membership or structure. As coalitions get more formal they may create membership criteria, begin holding regular meetings, and elect their leaders formally, etc. As a rule, it is best to adopt a structure with the least formality necessary to get the job done.

#### **Dealing with Tensions and Conflict**

Tensions are inherent in coalition work. The goal should not be to squelch them (which is usually impossible anyway) but to manage them, by addressing constructively the issues involved and not letting conflict get so out of hand that conflict becomes all that the coalition is about.

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