



Who Wants To Be A Coalitionist?

Forming Coalitions on Campus

Overview: Often student leaders encounter issues on their campus that cannot be addressed solely by one organization or club alone. These issues call for joint collaborative efforts by student leaders and their organizations in addressing such issues. However, student coalition building is a difficult task to accomplish because it involves analyzing problems, identifying organizations that can be most effective, and establishing goals and objectives that will focus a coalition's efforts to address an issue. Through a series of group exercises and demonstrations, participants will practice ways to analyze campus issues, build coalitions, and create goals and objectives.

Category: General leadership and skill development; people and project management; networking; organizational skills; relationship building; engagement.

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Type: Structured activities suitable for workshop (e.g. retreat or training)

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- Participants will learn how to evaluate campus issues and determine if a coalition is appropriate
- Participants will be able to brainstorm organizations to join a coalition
- Participants will learn how to create relevant and effective mission statements and goals for a coalition
- Participants will be provided with materials to help them establish coalitions on their own campus

Materials:

- Copies of *Campus Coalition Worksheet* for each participant
- Copies of *Guide To Forming Coalitions* for each participant
- Organization signs for warm up
- Markers
- Flip chart paper

How to Prepare:

Read the trainer guide carefully to become comfortable with information and activities and prepare all worksheets and activity materials.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

This workshop is organized around leading participants through a series of activities and group exercises that will demonstrate issue analysis and coalition building. It will be helpful if the participants can use actual problems on their own campuses in the exercises.

The outline for this 1.5 – 2-hour workshop has the following parts:

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| 1. Opening Activity | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 2. What Are Coalitions? | suggested time 15 minutes |
| 3. Exercise 1: Worksheet and Small Group Discussion | suggested time 35 minutes |
| 4. Creating Missions Statements and Goals | suggested time 15 minutes |
| 5. Exercise 2: Writing Mission Statements and Goals | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 6. Closing | suggested time 5 minutes |

1 Opening Activity

Suggested time: 15 minutes

As participants enter the workshop, randomly distribute folded stapled copies of the organization signs you have made from *Organization Descriptions for Opening Activity*. (see copy at the end of this guide). Hand out all signs (11 organization signs and any you want to add) as well as the “?” sign.

When all participants have entered, introduce yourself and the title of the workshop. Without any further explanation of the workshop’s purpose, tell participants with folded signs to unfold and read them. Ask the participant with the “?” sign to join you at the front of the room. Then ask the remaining participants with signs to form a line at the front of the room behind you and the “?” participant.

Next, introduce the premise of the activity by reading the opening scenario to the “?” participant as well as to the other participants:

- *You’ve heard at your college that there have been a series of sexual assaults on campus. The students who have been assaulted have decided not to file charges against their perpetrators, so the school denies that the assaults occurred. Offices and departments responsible for health and issue awareness (including the Dean of Students, Residence Life, the Counseling Center, the Student Peer Education Group, and Campus Security) offer introductory sexual assault workshops to students as freshman but do not provide further training or workshops beyond that. You think that campus Town Hall meetings, panels, forums, fliers, and other tools could be extremely effective in educating students, but you and your organization could not handle the task of initiating this series of events and programs alone. You think that other organizations are interested in this issue as well. You wonder if there is a way you could bring these groups into some kind of coalition or union to initiate these events. You are aware of several organizations and their purpose. But how do you choose the ones that will be most effective in addressing this issue?*

Identify the “?” participant as the *coalitionist* whose job it will be to choose the organizations that could compose this coalition. Read the organization signs held by participants to the group. Tell the *coalitionist* that you will read steps to help him determine how to build the coalition. Also explain that he will be responsible for explaining to the group why he chose a certain organization from the line up:

- **First**, as the student who is forming this coalition, you must first identify the problem that needs to be addressed. You may either suggest that, in this case, the problem is due to the lack of sexual assault education, or you can let the participants come up with their thoughts on the problem themselves.
- **Second**, determine the cause of the problem - again, either a lack of educational programs or something the participants have decided.
- **Third**, identify the offices, groups, and campus departments that are responsible for addressing the problem. (Ask the coalitionist what those groups are, based upon the scenario. The groups probably are the **Dean of Students, Residence Life, Counseling Center, Student Peer Education Group, and Campus Security.**)
- **Fourth**, find out what has been done so far to address the problem. (From the scenario, there has only been an introductory freshman workshop.)
- **Fifth**, brainstorm ways to address the problem. In this case, you have decided that discussion panels, forums, and Town Hall Meetings could effectively address the problem.
- **Sixth**, brainstorm the tasks involved in initiating these events.

Now, with flip chart paper and a marker, have participants (as a large group) brainstorm all the tasks and duties involved in initiating the events discussed in step five. Spend only two or three minutes doing this.

Now that you understand what is involved in addressing this issue, you can turn to selecting the organizations that could help in this effort. Based upon the tasks we've just brainstormed, and the descriptions of the organizations, which organizations could you ask to join this coalition?

Have the participants with signs read their club's description. Then ask the coalitionist to determine what organizations he will choose based on the tasks that need to be accomplished and the description of the organization.

(For example, if the events require PR, then choosing the student newspaper organization would be a good idea. If you need volunteers to help run events, then contacting the student service groups might be appropriate.)

Take a few minutes for the coalitionist to finish the exercise and present his coalition to address the lack of sexual assault education on campus.

Now, debrief and transition into the next part:

From this activity, we can see that coalition building must follow specific criteria in order to address some very serious issues. Through the scenario provided, it is easy to see that identifying the problem and the departments involved, uncovering what has been done to address the problem in the past, and brainstorming possible solutions for the future takes some effort.

Let the participants return to their seats and start the next part of the workshop.

2 What Are Coalitions?

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Ask the participants what they think a coalition is and why they think coalitions exist. Write answers on flip chart paper or choose a participant to write. Once a few suggestions have been offered, explain the definition of a coalition:

A **coalition** is defined as a group of organizations and individuals working together for a common purpose.

Coalition building is needed when one organization recognizes that it alone does not have the technical capability or people power to have a real impact on an issue.

There are two types of coalitions:

“Single issue” or event coalitions only have to agree on one particular issue. The coalition is dissolved when the issue has been solved or the event has been coordinated.

“Multi-issue” coalitions have related issues, such as hunger and homelessness, gender issues, or the environment. This more permanent type of coalition recognizes the value of mobilizing together for action over a longer time. To be effective the “multi-issue” coalition should have a date set for work to be completed. The coalition can always be reorganized if there is still a need.

Coalitions assist in:

- setting priorities for action
- helping to identify specific data and informational needs from other groups and departments
- developing an action plan and initiating it
- developing new audiences
- improving students’ ability to disseminate information to other departments and students

Most student coalitions tend to be “single issue” and are established to run a specific set of events to address that issue.

When forming a coalition, each organization must be committed to:

- The problem
- Coordinating to solve the problem
- The belief that each organization belongs in the coalition

- Open communication
- Coalition recognition, rather than individual recognition

Emphasize that coalitions are not always appropriate responses to solving problems. Sometimes, single organizations are better suited to dealing with issues themselves. It is most important that every organization involved is committed to the cause.

Transition into the first group activity.

3 **Exercise 1: Worksheet and Small Group Discussion**

Suggested time: 35 minutes

Pass out the *Campus Coalition Worksheets* to participants. Explain that they should take 15 minutes to start applying coalition-building techniques to their own situations by working through the questions; stress that they should use problems from their own campuses. Point out that at the end of the 15 minutes, they will form small groups to share their ideas with other participants.

After 15 minutes, divide participants into small groups through any method. Have them share their ideas in the group and then choose one person from each group to share their ideas with the entire workshop. Group discussion should take about 10 minutes and workshop presentations in the large group should take about the same length of time.

4 **Creating Mission Statements and Goals**

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Allow participants to return to their seats.

Explain that the success of any coalition depends on its goals. Goals function as a thesis statement for organizations, guiding their work and evaluating their process on specific issues. Without effective goals, organizations, projects, and especially coalitions will fail.

But how do you create effective goals? Goals must be:

- Action-oriented
- Clear (who, what, where, by when)
- Directly related to the problem
- Representative of all participants (i.e. each participant must be able to recognize the goals as his or her goals as well, not just the goals of the group holistically)

For example, goals for the sexual assault coalition in the opening activity might include (you may want to write these goals on flip chart paper so the participants can read along):

By the end of the semester, the Sexual Assault Education Student Coalition (S.A.E.S.C.) will:

- 1) Increase awareness of sexual assault on campus through panels, discussion meetings, and speakers.
- 2) Develop a publication on ways to make safe choices, which will be made available to all students through campus mail, email, and on the school web site.
- 3) Establish a campus-wide committee of students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni that will focus its efforts on sexual education and provide services for survivors of sexual assault.

Mission statements, on the other hand, are a broad and concise description of an organization's purpose. They do not set up specific tasks that the organization will accomplish, but rather who the organization is and what it does.

A mission statement for the S.A.E.S.C. might be:

"The SAESC is a coalition of campus organizations, clubs, and groups dedicated to educating the campus community about sexual assault issues through educational programs and publications."

Now explain that the participants will get a chance to develop mission statements and goals for the potential coalitions they have formed with their worksheets.

5 Exercise 2: Writing Mission Statements and Goals

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Distribute flip chart paper and markers to participants on which to write their mission statements and goals. They will post these publicly at the end of the workshop. If needed, remind them of the criteria for effective mission statements and goals as stated in section four.

At the end of 15 minutes, select a few participants to present their coalition's mission statement and goals.

6 Closing

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Explain that the ideas formulated in this worksheet can be taken to their own campuses to address issues. Emphasize the importance of bringing in a broad array of people to their coalition – even people who they have formerly avoided working with. In coalition building, it's important to have a variety of perspectives represented and to reach a variety of people through those perspectives. Pass out *A Guide to Forming Coalitions* (found at the end of this guide) to participants as they leave.

Organization Descriptions for Opening Activity

From the suggestions below, create signs for the opening activity. On plain white letter paper (8 1/2 x 11 in), write the organization name in large block letters and then the description. Add more organizations to the list for the opening activity that might be more characteristic of your campus. Also make one sign with a large “?” to indicate the *coalitionist*. Fold the signs and randomly distribute to participants as they enter the workshop.

Women’s Group

A student group comprised of predominately female students as well as male students. It aims to promote gender equality on campus as well as off campus. The group hosts special events, guest speakers, discussion panels, as well as publishes a student feminist journal.

African American Student Union

Comprised of mostly African American students and other students of color, this group works to engage the campus and surrounding community in dialogue on diversity appreciation. The group hosts campus wide discussion meetings.

Hispanic Student Union

Comprised of mostly Hispanic students, this group promotes awareness of Hispanic cultures through educational programs in collaboration with community based groups off campus.

Religious Student Group

This group is a non-denominational religious student group that hosts weekly religious study, organizes and facilitates the campus religious worship service, and homelessness and mentoring religious groups in the local community.

Community Service Hub

This student group directs all volunteer services on campus and help to place interested students with community partners. It publishes a monthly newsletter and sends out campus email notices concerning service opportunities.

Student Government Association

This organization is an elected group of students who help to bridge communication between students and the administration as well as provides funding for student initiatives on campus.

Student Health Educators

This group develops and facilitates programs on eating disorders, depression, safer sex, self-esteem, etc for residential halls and health education classes. They publish a monthly newsletter.

Young Democrats/Republicans/Greens/Progressives

This student group works to inform the general student body on issues pertaining to politics and advocacy in general. They hold monthly campus wide meetings and hosts special speakers.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Student Alliance

This group focuses on initiating dialogue concerning LGBT issues through gender workshops and residential hall programs. It is also a community service organization dedicating itself to addressing several issues outside of those directly affecting LGBT students.

A Fraternity or Sorority

Primarily a social organization, it is also dedicated to addressing social concerns through community service by hosting special projects, events, and by making donations to local agencies.

An Honor Society

This group engages the campus in intellectual dialogue through hosting events and workshops. They also organize several service projects each year.

Guide to Forming Coalitions

1) ***Determine the problem or issue that you want to address.***

Students often confront a range of problems and issues on and off campus that may seem overwhelming. Overwhelming or not, however, students committed to social change can utilize civic engagement tools such as coalition building to initiate solutions to these concerns.

2) ***Determine the cause of the issue or problem.***

All problems have causes and they must be understood in order to create solutions to address them. Most often, campus concerns are not fully understood by students. To remedy this, get to the roots of problems by asking people who might know, like faculty and staff. In addition, consider researching old issues of your student newspaper for important information.

3) ***Determine the departments, offices, and groups that are responsible for addressing the problem.***

Concerns that directly affect students may be handled by any Dean or Director of Student Life, Student Activities, or Residence life. Sometimes, the Counseling Center or Campus Security may be involved. There may also be student groups organized to address certain problems or issues.

4) ***Determine what has been done in the past and what is being done presently to address the problem or issue.***

This is the most important step in addressing concerns through coalition building. The purpose of the coalition can be to initiate events and programs that will address the problem or issue. Understanding what has already been done to address the problem is imperative for the coalition to implement ideas and to be effective.

5) ***Brainstorm possible solutions to the problem or concern.***

Follow the basic rules of brainstorming and jot down as many possible ideas you can come up with. Remember that quantity is more important than quality here. Later, go back and eliminate the ideas that are not feasible in your opinion. Develop a short list of ideas that you can easily share with other student organizations in gaining support for the coalition. Once the coalition is formed, the group can revise or develop further ideas.

6) ***Develop a list of student leaders and their clubs/organizations and faculty/staff members that you think might be interested in addressing the problem or issue through a coalition.***

Create a list of the leaders and their clubs and organizations. Leave room for important contact information like email addresses and phone numbers, look this up and fill it in. This will be beneficial as you start making initial contacts with this group. Also, this may be the point at which you develop a list of possible faculty and staff members who could be beneficial in your efforts by acting as advisors. Faculty and staff members often want to be included in student initiatives and are willing to offer valuable tools to the efforts made by students.

7) Contact student leaders, faculty, and staff members on your list.

For initial contacts, email leaders first. Create a short introductory email that introduces yourself, the problem or issue, your proposed solutions, and the idea of joining a coalition with other organizations to address the problem. Keep it short and to the point. Be sure to include contact information and a deadline by which they should reply. Also explain that if they are interested, they should include their contact information in their reply. Once leaders start replying, call each one individual to further explain the purpose of the coalition.

8) Call the first meeting.

Once most of the leaders have signed on, call the first meeting; host the first meeting at a neutral location on campus. At the first meeting, introduce yourself as the temporary facilitator. Have all leaders introduce themselves and their organization and purposes. Review the issue and problem and explain how a student coalition would be effective in addressing it. Also review your initial list of solutions. At the end of the initial meeting, set the agenda for the next meeting. The agenda could be electing a facilitator, developing goals and objectives, naming the coalition, inviting other organizations to join the coalition and beginning to develop an action plan.

9) Build the coalition.

It will be up to the elected facilitator and student leaders to establish deadlines, a coalition membership criterion, a list of faculty and staff members to be invited to participate, and times/dates for general meetings where members from all coalition clubs and organizations will be invited. However, when forming to address one issue, the efforts of the coalition must be focused on an action plan that will guide the group. The plan must include a purpose, a list of goals, background information about the problem or issue being addressed, initiatives to address the problem, a schedule of when the initiatives will occur, and a proposed budget. Faculty and staff advisors for each club should be included in the creation of the plan. And appropriate community nonprofit representatives are often a huge help to any growing coalition – be sure to invite them into the mix! (See “Manage by Calendar” in the Civic Engagement Curriculum for help in planning an event in a timely and organized manner.)

10) Introduce a plan of action to all the departments, offices, and groups that are responsible for addressing the problem.

Finally, return to the list of departments, offices, and groups responsible for addressing the problem. The finished action plan will act as a proposal as well as a guide for the coalition. It is important to gain the support of those who work to address the problem or at least inform these groups of the coalition's intentions. You can have small groups of members meet with these groups individually to present the plan. Or you may call a meeting and invite these groups to attend. The groups must be informed before the coalition begins initiating events. You might want to create a website or listserv to help everyone stay informed of activity within the coalition.