



## Advocacy Education Series: Collaborative Efforts & Working with Coalitions

Joining or creating a coalition to advance a shared interest is more effective and efficient than working on your own. Experienced advocates bring knowledge of what strategies have worked or failed in the past and which legislators are proven champions for your issue. And, of course, more people in your coalition mean more opportunities to reach different legislators.

In addition to the internet, great places to discover active like-minded organizations include townhall meetings, public hearings, conferences, fundraisers, etc. Pay attention to who speaks and/or gives testimony and what organization they are representing. Once you have identified a group of seemingly like-minded individuals, there are a few things you should consider:

- **Mission and Goals:** Identify whether the organization includes your issue in its overall objective and what other issues they work on. Consider whether their other issues may interfere with your goals. If your issue isn't a priority for the group, ask organization leaders about potentially putting more emphasis on your cause. They may be open to you taking the lead, or they may let you know that they are more focused on other areas.
- **Expected Contribution:** Find out what is expected of you if you join the coalition. If you can only be minimally involved, that doesn't mean they can't use or appreciate your efforts. Just be up front about your level of commitment and always do what you say you will do.
- **History and Image:** Look into whether the coalition has a track record of success and if they are perceived as a trusted and reliable steward of their mission.
- **Structure and Members:** Feeling comfortable and being able to work with other members is an important aspect of successful coalition work. Learn about the coalition's leadership structure, how decision-making power is distributed, and the overall group dynamic before joining the organization.

Coalitions can be extremely effective in advancing an issue or cause, but they are not perfect. Power struggles, turf battles, and personality clashes are not uncommon. There are often differences in culture, work styles, resources, time frame issues, and levels of commitment/personal sacrifice to the cause.

*For additional guidance or questions, please contact Monica L. Reid, Senior Director of Advocacy, at [mreid@nacdl.org](mailto:mreid@nacdl.org).*