



Building Partnerships and Coalitions

Advocacy efforts as an individual or member of a campus group can be beneficial. However, forming partnerships or coalitions to extend the reach of your message can amplify the impact. Hearing from numerous groups on a single issue can attract the attention of campus leaders, as well as state or federal legislators.

The first-generation student organization, with support from other campus groups, may attract the attention of campus leaders more quickly than approaching leadership on their own. Similarly, a coalition of first-generation student groups from various colleges and universities in a particular state can wield much more influence through a letter writing campaign or a virtual or in-person visit with their state representatives than students from a single institution.

Harnessing the voice of numerous groups on a specific issue can be impressive. Ensuring that multiple groups stay focused on a singular purpose can be tricky. One organization needs to take the lead for a coalition to work well. The following steps can help the lead organization in shaping the effectiveness of a coalition:

- Set a goal for your coalition. Clearly define the issue you want to address and the actions that will be important.
- Create a process for assessing coalition members' fit with the coalition's purpose and goals. A simple form can allow potential members to state their reasons for desiring participation in the coalition's effort.
- Develop a relationship with a member of each organization in the coalition to understand each groups' connection to the overall purpose of the coalition.
- Set a consistent meeting schedule, whether virtual or in person. Introductory meetings should allow for time members to introduce themselves, their organizations, and their interest in being part of the coalition.
- Create a process for notifying members when timely action is required, such as signing on to letters to lawmakers. Supplying a copy of the letter and deadlines for becoming a signatory is critical for managing participants, responding appropriately, and demonstrating effectiveness of the group as a whole.

- Communicate regularly with members in between meetings. Sending a newsletter or regular email updates can remind members of their involvement in the event legislation or policy work occurs over time.

Coalitions may be temporary and focused on a specific piece of legislation (e.g. COVID-19 relief measures) or may last longer and focus on areas of continued interest (e.g. childcare support for student parents, increases to PELL grants or work-study funding).