



State Coalition Building Guide

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO BUILDING YOUR COALITION

1. Crafting your core group
2. Expanding the coalition
3. Keeping the coalition engaged

STRUCTURING YOUR COALITION

While all coalition partners are valuable, they'll contribute in different ways. It helps to think of your coalition as a four-layered pyramid.

- Your Core Group: A few organizations or individuals chosen to give your coalition a sound tactical and strategic foundation
- Your Working Coalition: A larger group of organizations that respond to requests and aid your efforts
- Your Letterhead Coalition: An even longer list of organizations that endorse the goals of the campaign
- Individual Members of Member Organizations (for action alerts, petitions, etc.)

CRAFTING YOUR CORE GROUP

Your coalition's core group is a small team of organizations that will either:

- Fulfill tactical needs by contributing staff time or other significant resources to the effort
- Fulfill strategic needs by bringing influential groups on-board or mollifying potential opposition

Potential tactical roles:

- Taking the lead on coalition building overall
- Taking the lead on outreach to a particular type of group
- Fulfilling an advocacy role
- Taking the lead on press outreach
- Sharing strong legislative or media relationships
- Hosting or organizing coalition events
- Providing part of the funding to jointly hire a coalition organizer
- Creating the coalition website and leading social media efforts
- Administrative duties like accounting, serving as fiscal agent, record-keeping

Potential strategic roles:

- Convincing potential members that groups like theirs join this coalition
 - Strategic coalition lists can be one of your most powerful recruiting tools
 - Umbrella organizations such as conservation congresses or camouflage coalitions are particularly valuable strategic partners

- Ensuring your coalition reflects bi-partisan support
- Blocking knee-jerk opposition by demonstrating support from a variety of major organizations

Examples of strategic choices:

- Early support from a statewide hunter/angler group may be essential to building support among other hunter/angler groups
- Launching a coalition with early endorsements from opinion leaders. In one case, former governors from each party co-chaired a coalition (while this is a best case scenario, we encourage you to think big)
- What interests are powerful in your state? These are often cited as critical early partners.

Do you already have a core group?

- What group meets regularly to focus on wildlife, land conservation or outdoor recreation?
- Pre-existing committees like a wildlife diversity advisory councils can serve as the “core groups” for a coalition
- Some states created committees to guide their wildlife action plans and could help lead your coalition

Can you redirect the focus of an existing coalition?

- Contact coalition leaders to explore expanding their effort as part of your coalition
- Has a coalition expired that could be rejuvenated?

The Value of a Coalition Co-chair- shares work and shows partnership orientation

The ideal co-chair includes:

- A statewide organization with credibility and reach
- A diversity of wildlife interests such as a hunter/angler group and a green group

The co-chair model can either complement or take the place of a core group.

EXPANDING YOUR COALITION

Once your core group is organized, it's time to expand your coalition. Cast a wide net –

- Some organizations will become part of your active, working coalition.
- Others will do nothing beyond endorsing, but will add strength in numbers and credibility to your list.

Both levels of involvement are valuable, and it's often hard to predict which groups on your list will take an active role. This section features ideas for growing a balanced, effective coalition.

How to start growing your coalition....

These are all strategies for growing your coalition that should be evaluated by your core group. Not all of them will be right for you!

- Brand your coalition with a name and logo
- Mention the coalition and campaign in newsletters and in wildlife and outdoor-related email lists in order to familiarize wildlife and outdoor enthusiasts with the initiative

- Use your core group contacts to get on the agenda at meetings of prospective members to present and ask for support. Types of meetings that are particularly helpful include:
 - Events where the leaders of prospective members are present and can sign-on right away
 - Meetings of state federations or associations so you reach a lot at once
 - Bird watching festivals, bald eagle days, or Earth Day events
 - *Attend* meetings, don't just *hold* meetings
- “Piggyback” coalition meetings onto other conservation-related events when possible to encourage wide participation from your target audience
- Send e-mailings to potential partners followed by **personal contact**. (Mailings without this follow-up are usually not as effective.)
- Personally call organization leaders (most effective method!!)
- As you add coalition members, ask them to share with their networks to assist in further expansion

Full coalition meetings are helpful in specific cases, but also consider whether holding a broader state summit (see State Summit Guide) would be a more useful endeavor.

- Big, one-time meetings help map out coalition strategy, resolve conflict over priorities and bring together constituencies.
- If wildlife advocates already meet regularly, it may be possible to re-brand these meetings as coalition meetings or to include the campaign as a regular agenda item.
- Coalition regular meetings can be important venues for letter writing, event planning, etc...
...but carefully facilitate your agendas to avoid getting sidetracked by other issues.

Remember to keep your coalition's mix of groups balanced as it grows:

- Hunter/anglers groups
- Environmental groups
- Outdoor recreational groups/clubs
- Agricultural, forestry, and energy groups/natural resource based businesses
- Tourism and outdoor recreation related businesses (retailers/manufacturers)
- Other influential businesses
- Opinion leaders (“influentials”)
- Educators

Circulate your list of member organizations whenever possible

- Even the largest coalitions have found that new members would join based on the stature of existing members.
- Reminders to share with others keeps the list growing.

Places to look for coalition members (see associated list of potential coalition members)

- Stakeholders who helped to develop your state's wildlife action plan
- Groups with grants/projects funded by State Wildlife Grants
- Other existing wildlife coalitions and advisory groups in your state
- Individual organizations, businesses, and agencies with any connection to wildlife

Make it easy to endorse

- You can create an endorsement form or sign-on letter (see samples).
- You can put the endorsement form right in e-newsletters and magazines.
- Create an endorsement web-form on your site and link to it everywhere.
- If you create a flyer, print the endorsement form on a section that can be torn out and sent back.

What to do after an organization joins:

- Follow up with a thank you letter and attach a questionnaire to:
 - Gather additional contact information
 - Determine how involved the organization would like to be in various coalition efforts
 - Gather their ideas for future events or organizations to recruit
- Send a statement announcing and praising each new member (part of circulating letter often).
- Celebrate your progress in updates to the coalition
 - It's important to frame coalition building as a goal for the coalition, and to frame new members as victories in that effort

KEEPING YOUR COALITION ENGAGED

- Coalition members want to be engaged, informed and rewarded for their efforts
- Well-timed email updates or print newsletters as essential – they should be frequent, but not inundate

Consider the many goals your coalition can work towards:

Shorter-term

- Input on your state's wildlife action plan
- Annual federal appropriations for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants
- Annual state general funds for state wildlife agency budget
- Media and legislator field trips
- Milestones in the size of state coalition
- Successful wildlife summit
- Good media coverage of wildlife crisis and wildlife action plan specifics
- Strong relationship with state agency leadership

Longer-term

- Passage of state legislative and ballot initiatives providing greater and dedicated wildlife funding
- Dedicated federal funding for wildlife conservation, outdoor recreation and conservation education
- Addition of commissioners/board members supportive of wildlife action plan goals
- Full implementation of your wildlife action plan and the recovery of wildlife in your state!

- Short term-goals and victories large and small will give your coalition something to rally around. How you prioritize among potential goals is up to you. What's practical in your state depends on many factors.
- But your coalition *always* has *something* to celebrate!
- And never forget to thank them and show how they made a difference for wildlife! Keep your coalition informed and give them ways to help win everyday victories