

Organizing in Your Community

Successful advocacy on any issue depends on numbers: not just on large numbers of individuals speaking out but also on a united effort by like-minded organizations working towards the same goal. This kind of group is a coalition. Here are some tips for working in coalition with others.

WORKING IN COALITIONS

- ▶ Coalitions strengthen any advocacy effort or community service, and their effectiveness is increased by the inclusion of a wide and diverse range of like-minded organizations. Look for groups beyond the usual suspects to include in your coalition. For example, public health and education organizations might be just as interested in working for comprehensive sexuality education as a reproductive health organization.
- ▶ Coalitions can be permanent or ad-hoc (in existence until the goal is reached). In single-issue coalitions, the organizations involved agree in advance to act only on the issue around which they have coalesced. Coalition partners may disagree on other issues and should take care not to discuss those issues in the coalition context.
- ▶ Although coalitions can plan, monitor, evaluate, support, oppose, and educate, they are not able to take unilateral action or mobilize as quickly as a single organization.

COALITION BENEFITS

- ▶ Increases community visibility for the cause
- ▶ Develops broad-based support for the cause
- ▶ Strengthens the voice of each individual member organization
- ▶ Pools resources: money, labor, information, contacts
- ▶ Creates a diverse political base
- ▶ Creates new community and grassroots contacts that may be useful in future efforts

TIPS ON FORMING/JOINING COALITIONS

- ▶ Appropriate coalition partners include groups with expertise in specific areas and whose goals in the coalition agree with yours (provided that overall principles of those groups are not in conflict with those of NCJW). Natural partners would include groups with whom NCJW has worked on a successful project, program, or other collaboration related to the coalition issue.
- ▶ In a coalition, every group contributes resources, so it is important to look for partners with either an active grassroots membership or a network of personnel to draw upon as a resource.
- ▶ A formal, ongoing coalition should have written guidelines/bylaws developed with coalition partners and agreed upon by all member organizations that:
 - ▶ Define coalition goals around a common concern
 - ▶ Define clear ways of working (including leadership and decision-making process), responsibilities of member groups, and time duration of the coalition if possible
 - ▶ Define coalition procedures on issuing statements in the names of affiliated groups. (If you are forming a coalition in NCJW's name, all statements issued by the coalition must be cleared with NCJW to ensure that they are consistent with NCJW's resolutions.)
 - ▶ Choosing a competent leader may be the key to success or failure of the coalition. Often coalitions have rotating leadership arrangements or are governed by a self-selected steering committee of representatives of organizations who are willing to spend more time on the ongoing issue and coalition work.
- ▶ It is important that the person who represents NCJW on a coalition is not only familiar with the issue but with NCJW resolutions and policy positions as well. The representative must be willing to report back as needed to NCJW locally and get input on any coalition decisions.
- ▶ NCJW's financial support of the coalition should be easily affordable. (Often the amount of a contribution can be negotiated or substituted by in-kind contributions.)

TIPS FOR COALITION SUCCESS

- ▶ Awareness of Plan A goals as well as goals of other member organizations
- ▶ Non-coercive participation: free choice
- ▶ Open information flow and communication and a democratic process
- ▶ Respect and sensitivity to diversity
- ▶ Openness to growth and change
- ▶ Leadership that is committed to serving the interests of all partners
- ▶ Regular review of NCJW relations with coalition to safeguard NCJW's image and integrity
- ▶ Commitment to sharing credit among all member organizations
- ▶ Opportunities for leadership visibility for all participating organizations (and/or individuals, as appropriate)