Co·a·li·tion
ˌkōəˈliSH(ə)n/:

(*noun*) Two or more individuals or groups who combine influence, power, and resources to achieve a mutual goal.[1]

Coalitions are a powerful tool to transform campus culture emphasizing the responsibility of civic engagement to the student body. A review of the 84 Voter Friendly Campus designees of 2016 proved that designees with robust coalitions wrote and executed the strongest democratic engagement action plans. These same designees also better performed in all other categories of their democratic engagement efforts. The coalitions had schedules for input, delegating responsibilities, and follow-up. Strong coalitions were able to reach various areas of an institution, incorporate diverse perspectives, and benefit from existing campus infrastructure. Further, they were the best positioned to interact with and benefit from partnerships with other organizations such as the League of Women Voters or state and local governments. In this document you will find a succinct guide on the importance of a coalition, recruitment methods, successes and pitfalls.

❖ **Importance of Having a Coalition for Student Democratic Engagement:**
➢ Offers a space to engage in conversation about democratic engagement. This includes discussing barriers, gaps, and strengths
➢ Engaging in conversation with varying partners leads to the exchange of different perspectives, providing depth and creative means to those ends
➢ Individual partners have varying expertise to utilize in addressing their shared goals
➢ There is power in numbers when working toward a shared solution
➢ Creates a space to collectively complete tasks

❖ **Who Should Be Involved:**
➢ Partners from across campus, including:
▪ Representatives from student and academic affairs
▪ Faculty from a wide-range of disciplines across campus i.e. STEM, health professionals, etc.
▪ Student leaders/organizations representing unique cross sections of the institution
▪ Specialized offices such as residence life, IT, research/assessment, librarians, marketing/communication, government relations, Greek life, athletics, etc.
➢ Nonpartisan organizations such as:
▪ Local election officials
▪ Local nonprofits doing voter engagement work such as the League of Women Voters
➢ Each institution has a unique make-up so make sure your membership is broad enough to reach across your institution, but not so large that it is unwieldy to maintain.

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[1] https://sociologydictionary.org/coalition

- Having representatives on the coalition who can report back to larger portions of the institution can help with this, as well as having subcommittees or work groups for specific projects or activities if necessary.

❖ **How to Identify & Recruit Members:**
  ➤ Coalition leaders need to reach out to partners individually
  ➤ Reach out to potential members and request they ask their networks to join
  ➤ Convey the value of involvement in achieving the institutions overall mission as well as specific goals around democratic engagement
  ➤ If groups working on democratic engagement already exist, reach out to invite participation to coordinate and collaborate on efforts

❖ **Initial Meetings:**
  ➤ Sets the stage for coalition effectiveness
  ➤ Set clear expectations for members such as
    - Time commitment
    - Roles and responsibilities
    - Utilizing expertise, resources and networks to support the mission and vision of the coalition
  ➤ Provide information on past and current initiatives related to democratic engagement both successful and unsuccessful such as:
    - Data collected from on-campus research partners, NSLVE (National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement)[2], NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement)[3], CCSSE (Community College Survey of Student Engagement)[4], etc.
    - Initiatives on campus currently happening or ones that were attempted but were not successful
    - Participation in programs like the Voter Friendly Campus[5] or the ALL IN Challenge[6]
  ➤ Once goals are shared and understood, begin brainstorming how the coalition will achieve goals and delegate tasks based on interest and expertise

❖ **Successful Coalitions:**
  ➤ Clearly identify the issue (mission/vision)
  ➤ Ensure all members know and are familiar with the issue
  ➤ Have ambitious, but S.M.A.R.T (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time Bound) goals
  ➤ Reassess goals as needed to ensure the group stays focused in its efforts and adjust as needed
  ➤ Form workgroups to complete specific tasks and dismantle when a task is complete so members are not bound to one group
  ➤ Share responsibility of leading the meeting among members by offering participants the opportunity to prepare the agenda and lead discussions
  ➤ Allow students to take leadership roles

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[2] https://idhe.tufts.edu
[3] http://nsse.indiana.edu
[4] http://www.ccsse.org
[5] https://www.voterfriendlycampus.org
[6] http://www.allinchallenge.org

- Provide an agenda to members prior to each meeting so members can come to the meeting prepared to share thoughts
- Send meeting minutes to review all that was discussed for the attendees and update those who were not able to come
- Set consistent coalition meeting times (ex. first Friday of every month at 10 a.m.)
- Are ongoing learning opportunities
- Institutions are organized into many different departments and offices and serve diverse student populations. To make sure democratic engagement efforts reach them, partners from all these areas need a seat at the table

❖ **Common Pitfalls:**
- Members do not have a clear understanding of the issue and goals
- Taking on too much too fast before building a solid foundation for the coalition
- Meetings, coalition leaders, and related materials are not organized
- Lack of time management and/or inconsistent meeting time and location
- Ineffective management caused by:
  - The responsibility of the coalition's efforts falling on one person, leading to burnout
  - Lack of accountability and investment from the other members
- No student leadership or leaving effort entirely to students
- Limited representation of student body
- Lack of buy-in from partners
- Limited financial resources to support efforts
- Duplicate efforts across campus
- Minimal communication and coordination with groups already doing democratic engagement efforts on campus
- Not celebrating small successes