

TOOLKIT

**COALITION-BUILDING TO
END MASS INCARCERATION**



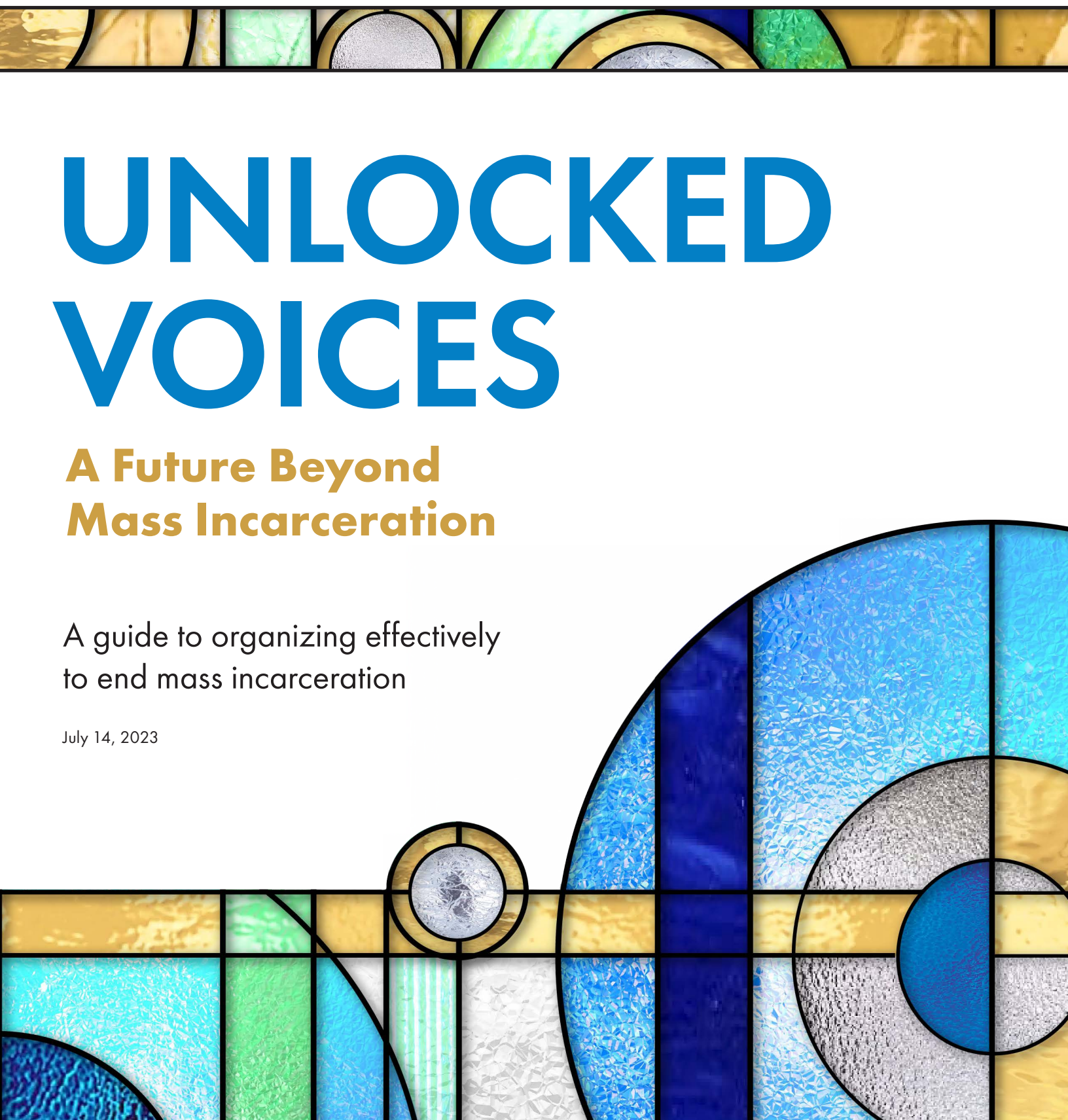
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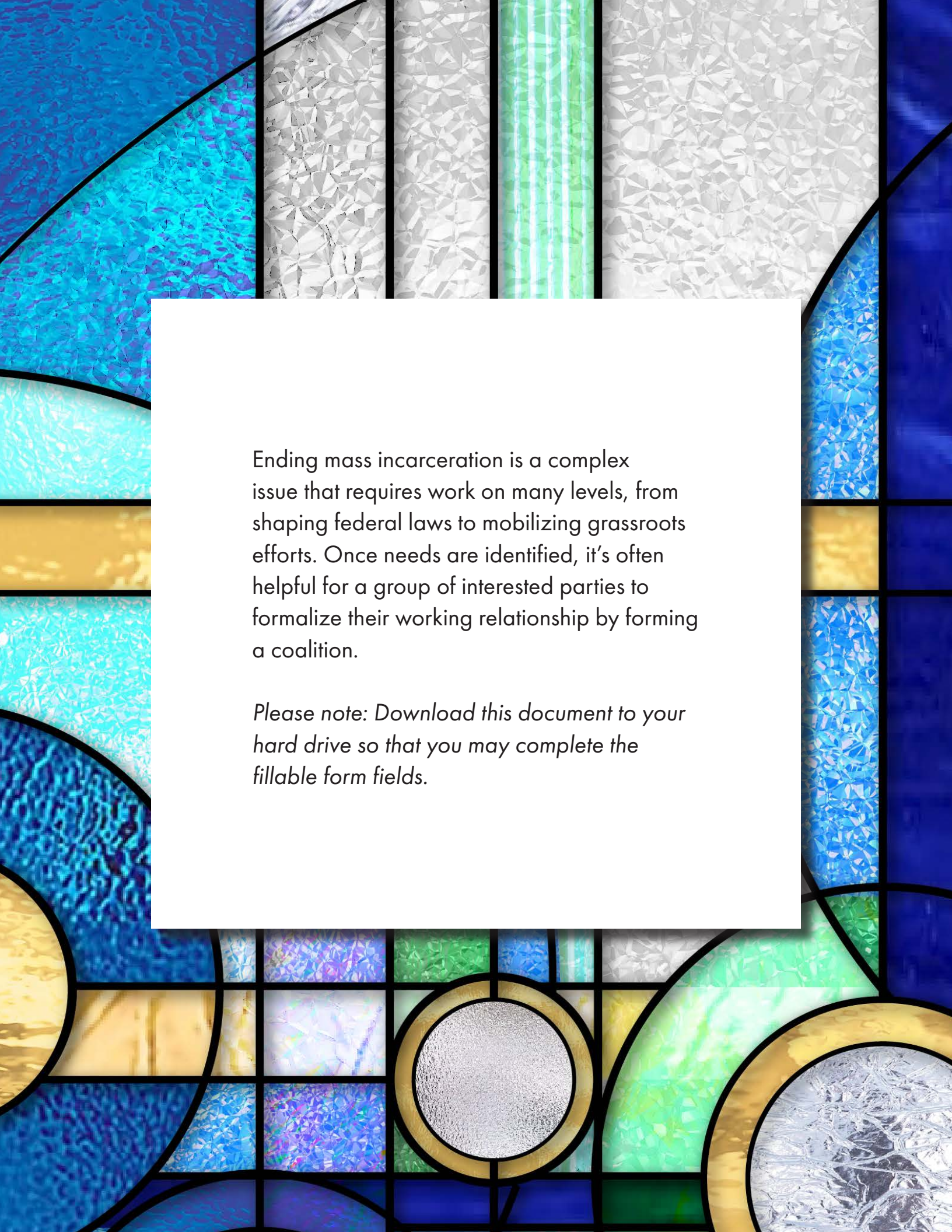
UNLOCKED VOICES

A Future Beyond Mass Incarceration

A guide to organizing effectively
to end mass incarceration

July 14, 2023





Ending mass incarceration is a complex issue that requires work on many levels, from shaping federal laws to mobilizing grassroots efforts. Once needs are identified, it's often helpful for a group of interested parties to formalize their working relationship by forming a coalition.

Please note: Download this document to your hard drive so that you may complete the fillable form fields.

WHAT IS A COALITION?

A coalition is an organization of diverse individuals and/or groups who agree to work together toward a common goal or shared interests, such as ending mass incarceration.

Coalition-building involves various stakeholders joining forces, pooling resources and combining efforts to pursue this shared objective. Coalitions often bring together diverse perspectives, expertise and strengths to achieve greater impact and influence. They can exist in a variety of contexts, such as activism, advocacy, community development, or policy reform, and can tackle a wide range of issues. The strength of a coalition lies in its ability to amplify voices, build consensus and advocate for change through collaborative action.

PURPOSE OF A COALITION

There are numerous reasons to start a coalition, many of which are described below.

Amplify Impact – By forming a coalition, you join forces with like-minded individuals and organizations to share expertise, knowledge and resources. Together, organizations united with a shared vision can accomplish more than they could individually.

Strength in Numbers – When multiple stakeholders come together, it demonstrates a unified front and strengthens your position. It sends a powerful message to decision makers and the community at large, increasing the likelihood of achieving your objectives.

Collaboration & Synergy – Coalitions bring together diverse perspectives, skills and resources. This diversity can lead to innovative solutions and approaches that may have not been possible in isolation. By working together, you can tap into each other's strengths and combine efforts for greater effectiveness.

Increased Influence – By mobilizing a coalition, you can exert greater influence and create a collective voice for change. Decision makers are more likely to listen and respond when they see a broad-based coalition representing a significant constituency or stakeholder group.

Resource Sharing – Coalitions provide opportunities for sharing resources, such as funding, expertise, networks and infrastructure. By pooling resources, you can access more substantial funding opportunities, leverage shared expertise and benefit from economies of scale.

Enhanced Credibility & Visibility – Being part of a coalition demonstrates that your issue is not isolated and that multiple stakeholders support and advocate for it. This can help garner public support, media attention and recognition from policymakers and other influencers.

Long-Term Sustainability – Coalitions can have a long-term impact by creating a sustainable infrastructure for collective action. By building relationships, trust and shared values within the coalition, you can establish a foundation for ongoing collaboration and advocacy, even beyond the immediate goals.

Cultural Sensitivity & Representation – Having a diverse coalition membership ensures that approaches are culturally sensitive, as coalition members themselves represent the community.

What is the purpose of your coalition? Select all that apply.

- Identify and address community needs
- Drive specific change in the community
- Carry out a needed activity or event
- Respond to new or outside threats
- Build or re-establish trust
- Other? _____
- Raise awareness and mobilize communities around a specific issue
- Advocate for and advance a policy
- Take advantage of funding opportunities
- Create a long-term infrastructure for change

SETTING COALITION GOALS

When considering your coalition's goals, think about them in terms of "SMART Goals."

		Questions to Consider	Elements of Your Goal
S	Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are we going to do? • What strategies will be used? • Who will be involved? • Is the objective clear? • Is the outcome specific? 	
M	Measurable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will we know change has occurred? • Are we able to measure the change and how? 	
A	Achievable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we accomplish the work within the proposed timeline? • Are the limitations and constraints understood? • Do we have the right talent on board to make this happen? 	
R	Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we have the necessary resources to achieve our objective? • Is it even possible to achieve our objective? 	
T	Time-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When must our objective be accomplished? • Do all deliverables have clear deadlines? 	

Write your final goal that includes the elements above here:

RECRUITING COALITION MEMBERS

When building the coalition, be aware that the purpose of convening may vary according to what you are trying to achieve. Depending upon the nature of your issue and where you are trying to impact change (local, state-level or national), your goals may include obtaining funding, advocating for policy change, or implementing specific programs or activities.

Typically, the broader the membership of any coalition, the better. However, it is important to be intentional with coalition invitations, ensuring that those who are included are truly essential to the cause.



Stakeholders These individuals have a personal stake in the success of the coalition's goals. They may include those most affected by the issue, such as those who have been justice-impacted or have loved ones who have been justice-impacted. It is essential to involve these individuals in the decision-making process to ensure fairness and avoid making decisions that affect their lives without their input. You may also include those who are charged with carrying out community functions related to the issue, such as police, the probation and court system, community agencies and school personnel. The outcomes of coalition initiatives may directly or indirectly involve one or more of these stakeholders.



Community Opinion Leaders It is critical to include trusted community members who have the power to influence large numbers of people. This might include clergy, business or civic leaders, or people who simply have a high level of credibility in their communities. Involving emerging leaders is equally important as involving those who are more established.



Policymakers Having local political leaders, state representatives and others in decision-making positions increases credibility and betters the chances that you can influence policy in your area of interest. They also may provide some insight into the current policy landscape and advise the coalition on what approaches may be most politically feasible.

Other groups that might be called upon to join a coalition include:

- Nonprofit organizations working on the issue you are advocating for
- Community service groups
- Community associations
- Ethnic groups
- Religious organizations
- Law enforcement agencies
- Government agencies and programs

The coalition should be large enough to handle multiple tasks, but not too large that it becomes unmanageable. It is important to exercise judgment when determining the number of coalition members who will participate or to seek inspiration from successful coalitions to gauge an appropriate membership size.



Core Group

Although coalitions are made up of numerous members who are engaged at various levels, many coalitions have a core group of individuals or organizations, such as a steering committee, already working on the issue at hand or are particularly engaged. It can be advantageous to engage a core group to provide a support system in leading the effort of building a coalition, identify potential coalition members from each person’s network of relationships, increase shared knowledge of the issue and the community, and share tasks so all the work does not fall on the coalition coordinator alone. Consider appointing some members to the core group to assist with the coalition’s strategic planning and administrative efforts.

You can approach assembling a core group by:

- **Starting with people you know** If you’ve been actively engaged in addressing this issue as an activist or have established a presence within your community over time, you likely have a wide network of contacts, especially among individuals who share your concerns. Leverage these existing connections to either involve them directly in the coalition’s core group or seek referrals for potential members of the core group. Generally, people you know will be more receptive to joining your efforts than those you haven’t worked with before.
- **Contact agencies and institutions affected by the issue** These are groups of individuals with a stake in the issue. They will likely be eager to take a leadership role in furthering the goals of the coalition, as it impacts their own communities and the populations they serve.

When forming your core group, try to recruit individuals most affected by and concerned with the problem. These members are key to the coalition’s success because they offer unique perspectives through the lens of lived experience. Incorporating such individuals also can provide a connection to the population they represent, add credibility to your efforts and demonstrate your commitment to a participatory process.

If you choose to recruit a core group, consider who those people should be here.

Name	Organization/Affiliation	Why are you inviting them to be a core group member?	Have they agreed to participate?
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Once you’ve formed a core group and decided on the potential members who will be key to the effectiveness of the coalition, the recruitment stage begins. Use the networking capacity of your core group to its fullest. Together with your core group, you can brainstorm a list of essential and potential members, and each core group member can identify individuals on this list who they know personally, or organizations where they have a personal contact. Core group members can take ownership of reaching out to the contacts they know, and any remaining names on the list without a contact can be divided up to be contacted via phone call, email or personal letter.

When contacting a potential member to join the coalition, make sure you have something substantive to offer or to ask them to do. This may be a first meeting, an opportunity to sign-on to a letter or an appeal to contact their state representative about the coalition’s shared goal. Individuals will be more likely to accept the invitation to join if they know their time and efforts will be contributing to a goal they prioritize.

Identify individuals and organizations you believe align with your coalition's mission.

Organization	Contact Person and Information	Who do you know that has a relationship with them?	Have they agreed to participate?
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Which of the above will you have the **easiest** time encouraging to join the coalition? _____

What do you have in common with this organization or individual? (Relationships, causes, organizational priorities, etc.)

Which of the above will you have a **more difficult** time creating a partnership with? _____

What barriers will you have to overcome when recruiting this organization or individual to join your coalition?

What benefits could come about by including this organization or individual in your coalition?

Which of the above will be the **most strategic** for you to recruit to your coalition? _____

What do you have in common with this organization or individual? (Relationships, causes, organizational priorities, etc.)

What benefits could be gained by forming a partnership with this organization or individual?

HOLDING A SUCCESSFUL FIRST MEETING

A successful first meeting is always important. However, a successful first coalition meeting is critically important because it sets the tone for the future work and demonstrates to the new members that this group is worth their time.

Below is a checklist to get you off on the right foot because *nothing* should be left to chance.

- Determine who the most critical attendees are and run a few dates by them for the first meeting to ensure they are available. Free online tools like Doodle can make this process easier.
- Once you have about three date options, send a Doodle poll to the rest of the group to select a final date and determine how you'll meet (in person or online). Unless there is great urgency to meet, provide as much notice as possible.
- When the final date is solidified, send an email with all meeting logistics, as well as a calendar invitation. NOTE: Never assume invitees will remember to add the meeting details to their calendars.
- Create a meeting agenda that may include some or all of the following items, depending upon the amount of time available:
 - Welcome and member introductions
 - Statement of purpose (or vision/mission statements)
 - Ground rules (open, multi-directional communication)
 - Sample coalition structure
 - Member roles and responsibilities
 - Time commitment
 - Additional members needed
 - Short- and long-term goals
 - Sample action plan
 - Necessary resources
 - Process for communication
 - Assignments and reporting process
 - Next steps
 - Meeting schedule
- Send the preliminary meeting agenda to invitees at least a week prior to the meeting. You may choose to ask for input.
- Send a meeting reminder at least two days prior. If someone cannot make it, determine if it's appropriate to ask for them to send a surrogate.
- All good meetings begin and end on time, so be sure to arrive or log on early.
- Someone must take comprehensive notes so minutes can be sent within 24-48 hours of the meeting.



DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

An action plan is a chance to translate your coalition’s goals into tangible achievements and provides a means to solidify your vision. The action plan delineates the strategies and steps your coalition will employ to accomplish its objectives.

Formulating an action plan is an important step to be taken early in the process of coalition-building. It holds the potential to enhance your coalition’s credibility and the initiative it undertakes, heighten efficiency and establish accountability. Furthermore, this plan serves as a valuable instrument for mobilizing the community or group, fostering a shared sense of responsibility among its members and driving positive change.

You can invite these following people to help you in developing an action plan:

- The coalition’s core group
- People representing the groups affected by the issue
- Members of grassroots organizations
- Different sectors of the community, such as ethnic and cultural groups, religious groups, schools, youth, health organizations, and social service organizations

Use the following worksheet as a guide when developing your action plan.

	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 4
Action Steps What needs to be done?				
By Whom Who will take action?				
When By what date will this be done?				
Resources Available				
Needed (Financial, human, political, etc.)				
Barriers What individuals and/or organizations might resist? How?				
Communication Plan for Implementation What individuals and/or organizations should be informed about or involved with these actions?				



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