

# Working Together



**This section provides suggestions on how to engage your members in political action and form coalitions.**

# Mobilizing Member Involvement

Working with others to address an issue has lots of practical advantages – and it's a lot more fun! Here are some tips for engaging members of your Chapter or Interest Group.

## Where to start

- Ask someone you know who has an interest or expertise in your Chapter or Interest Group if they would be interested in working with you on your issue.
- Create a participant tree – you ask someone to participate and have that person ask someone else.
- Contact your Chapter President, Interest Group Chair, or Policy Executive Network Officer to discuss your issue and how to best approach members.
- Raise the issue you would like to address at a meeting of your Chapter or Interest Group, and ask those in attendance for support.



## Approaching members

- Face-to-face is the best way to ask people to participate. Newsletters and emails are the least effective strategies.
- Appeal to their professionalism. Be prepared to answer the question: “Why should a registered nurse care about this initiative?”
- Recognize that participants are busy people, and present the different ways that they can be involved. Be clear about the level of commitment required.

## **Types of involvement**

Each member will bring something different to the table – some will be able to commit more time to the project than others; some will enjoy speaking in public, while others will prefer to stay behind the scenes; and some will have links to another organization, while others will be members who want to get more involved. The more skill resources you have, the more comprehensive your efforts can be. However, if there is a particular skill that you think will be helpful in achieving your goals, you may wish to focus on looking for members who have experience in this specific area.

# Building Coalitions

## What is coalition building?

A coalition is a temporary alliance or partnering of groups in order to achieve a common purpose or to engage in joint activity. Coalition building is the process by which these parties come together to form such an alliance. RNAO is a member of several coalitions, including the Coalition for Primary Health Care and the Elder Health Elder Care Coalition.

## What are the benefits of working in a coalition?

- Working within a coalition is especially useful for groups who have limited access to resources, since members can pool information and expertise. Coalition building is the “primary mechanism through which disempowered parties can develop their power base and thereby better defend their interests”<sup>1</sup>.
- Coalitions can create new opportunities for leadership. As more experienced leaders move forward to lead the coalition, openings are created for new leaders in the individual groups. These new leadership opportunities will strengthen both the individual groups and the coalition as a whole.
- Working as part of a coalition will increase the impact of each organization’s efforts. The activities of a coalition are also more likely to receive media attention, which raises the public profile of members’ efforts.

## What are the disadvantages of working in a coalition?

- Member groups will differ in resource accessibility and experience. Organizations that provide the coalition with a larger share of resources

and leadership may become frustrated with other members who are unable to do so.

- Similarly, individual organizations may not be recognized for their contribution to the coalition's work. Members who are particularly active in their coalition may feel that they deserve more credit than they are given.
- Negotiating tactics can be a lengthy and difficult process, as each group brings different backgrounds and different viewpoints to the table. Coalition members must be able to respect each other's differences and work together to accomplish their common goals.

As a registered nurse and RNAO member, you, your Chapter, or Interest Group may wish to form a coalition with other individuals and/or organizations when you perceive that it may be of mutual benefit to work together in order to accomplish a common goal or objective. For example, to lobby for maintenance of a Level III neonatal intensive care unit in the local community, a strategic alliance might be formed among the local RNAO chapter, the neonatal unit's registered nurses and nursing administration, and a local organization concerned with child health.

### **To build or not to build?**

The first step in building a coalition is to assess whether similar organizations already exist in your community. While they may not deal with your specific issue, some organizations may have very similar messages and objectives. Ask yourself:

- Should your group join an existing coalition?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of joining an existing coalition?

*For more information on coalition building, contact RNAO's Health and Nursing Policy department.*

## General resources

The Community Toolbox (University of Kansas)

<http://ctb.ku.edu/>

Wisconsin Clearinghouse of Prevention Resources – Coalition Building

<http://wch.uhs.wisc.edu/01-Prevention/01-Prev-Coalition.html>

## REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond Intractability: A Free Knowledge Base on More Constructive Approaches to Destructive Conflict. “Coalition Building”. [http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/coalition\\_building.jsp](http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/coalition_building.jsp).