



Building Coalitions

The Bonner Community Engagement Curriculum

BWBR Description: *Bonner Curriculum workshop teaches participants ways to build coalitions around a common goal or project, a key skill set in more complex capacity building or community change.*

Overview: Often, student leaders, community organizers, and professionals encounter issues on their campus or in their community that are difficult to address with one organization or club alone. Collaborative efforts or coalition support can prove helpful in addressing such issues. In practice, coalition building can be a challenging task to accomplish, but is often worth the effort. It demands the ability to analyze contexts and issues, identify allies and supporters, and negotiate unity among individuals, groups and organizations with different goals. This workshop provides some guidance for coalition building. Through a series of group exercises and demonstrations, participants practice ways to analyze campus issues, build coalitions, and create shared goals and objectives.

Category: Project coordination; leadership and skill development; people and project management; networking; organizational skills; relationship building; communication

Level: Moderate to advanced

Recommended Bonner Sequence: This training is recommended for Bonner students during the junior year, especially in conjunction with project coordination roles. It helps prepare



**suitable
for all
levels**

students to effectively build on-campus teams or coalitions who will work together on an initiative. It is also effective for seniors who may be involved in capstone-type projects on campus or within the community.

Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will learn how to evaluate campus issues and determine if a coalition could be helpful or appropriate for addressing an issue or building an initiative.
- Participants will be able to identify individuals and organizations to approach to join a coalition
- Participants will learn how to create relevant and effective mission statements and goals for a coalition
- Participants will be provided materials to help them establish coalitions on their own campus

Materials:

- Copies of *Campus Coalition Worksheet* for each participant
- Copies of *Guide To Forming Coalitions* for all participants
- Organization signs for warm up
- Markers
- Flip chart paper

How to Prepare:

Read the workshop carefully and prep all worksheets and activity materials. Adapt content to fit your situation, whether that is training in coalition building or guiding the development of a specific coalition.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

This workshop is organized around leading participants through a series of activities and group exercises that will demonstrate issue analysis and coalition building. It will be helpful if the participants can utilize actual problems on their own campuses to use in exercises.

The outline for an hour version of this workshop has the following parts:

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| 1) Opening Activity | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 2) What Are Coalitions? | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 3) Exercise 1: Worksheet | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 4) Creating Missions Statements and Goals | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 5) Exercise 2: Writing Statements and Goals | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 6) Closing and Next Steps | suggested time 5 minutes |

Part 1) Opening Activity

Suggested time: 10 minutes

As participants enter the workshop, randomly distribute folded stapled copies of the organization signs you have made from Organization Descriptions for Opening Activity (see copy at end).

Hand out all signs (11 organization signs as well as any you want to add) as well as the “?” sign.

When all participants have entered, introduce yourself and the title of the workshop. Without any further explanation of the workshop’s purpose, tell participants with folded signs to unfold and read them. Ask the participant with the “?” sign to join you at the front of the room. Then ask the remaining participants with signs to form a line at the front of the room behind you and the “?” participant.

Next, introduce the premise of the activity by reading the opening scenario (choose 1 of the 2 examples below) to the “?” participant as well as to the other participants:

Scenario 1

The administration and faculty on your campus keep saying that they are interested in service-learning and in expanding volunteer involvement of the student body. They are ready to put an emphasis on this, including with the allocation funding. As a student who has been actively involved in a range of activities, you see this as a chance to build real momentum, gain support, and garner resources. While it’s true that a majority of the student body is uninvolved in community service, activism, politics, or other civic activities, there are nonetheless many enthusiastic and involved students and groups. But these groups have been working distinctly for the most part, contributing to the perception of the lack of involvement and impact.

Offices and departments responsible for different areas of community service are doing their best to engage small numbers of students, but there hasn't been a campus-wide or cross cutting effort. You think that campus Town Hall meetings, service events, panels, forums, fliers, and other tools could be extremely effective in harnessing the energies of what's already existing and building some exciting strategies for the future (as well as obtaining university support). But you and your organization could not handle the task of initiating this series of events and programs alone. You think that other organizations are interested in this issue as well. You wonder if there is a way to bring these groups into some kind of coalition or union to initiate these events. You are aware of several organizations and their purpose. But how do you choose the ones that will be most effective in addressing this issue?

Scenario 2 (broader issue)

- You've heard at your college that there have been a series of sexual assaults on campus. The students who have been assaulted have decided not to file charges against their perpetrators, so the school is not publicly acknowledging that assaults have occurred. You believe that the source of the assaults may be linked to the lack of educational programs at your school. Offices and departments responsible for health and issue awareness (including the Dean of Students, Residence Life, the Counseling Center, the Student Peer Education Group, and Campus Security) offer introductory sexual assault workshops to students as freshman but do not provide further training or workshops beyond that. You think that campus Town Hall meetings, panels, forums, fliers, and other tools could be extremely effective in educating students, but you and your organization could not handle the task of initiating this series of events and programs alone. You think that other organizations are interested in this issue as well. You wonder if there is a way to bring these groups into some kind of coalition or union to initiate these events. You are aware of several organizations and their purpose. But how do you choose the ones that will be most effective in addressing this issue?

Identify the “?” participant as the coalitionist whose job it will be to choose the organizations that could compose this coalition. Read the organization signs held by participants to the group. Tell the coalitionist that you will read steps to help him determine how to build the coalition. Also explain that he will be responsible for explaining to the group why he chose a certain organization from the line up:

- **First, as the student who is forming this coalition, you must first identify the challenge and/or issues that need to be addressed.**

Note to facilitator: you've identified the prevalence of sexual assault or the lack of civic engagement, depending on which scenario you are using).

- **Second, determine the cause of the challenge/issue.**

Note to facilitator: you've determined as a lack of educational programs or the lack of cohesion and visibility for existing programs.

- **Third, identify the offices, groups, and campus departments that are responsible for addressing the problem.**

Note to facilitator: Ask the coalitionist what groups seem most relevant, based upon the scenario.

- **Fourth, find out what has been done so far to address the problem.**

Note to facilitator: From the scenario, there has only been an introductory freshman workshop (scenario 1) or discrete groups running smaller programs without a coordinated effort (scenario 2).

- **Fifth, brainstorm ways to address the problem.**

Note to facilitator: in this case, you have decided that discussion panels, forums, and Town Hall Meetings could effectively address the problem (scenario 1) and same for 2, with the addition of service events and other visibility-raising activities.

- **Sixth, brainstorm the tasks involved in initiating these events.**

Here, with flip chart paper and markers, have all participants brainstorm all the tasks and duties involved in initiating these events. Spend about 90 seconds doing this. Once this has been done, continue with the steps.

Now that you understand what is involved in addressing this issue, you can turn to selecting the organizations that could help in this effort. Based upon the tasks we've just brainstormed, and the descriptions of the organizations, which organizations could you ask to join this coalition?

Have the participants with signs read their club's description. Then ask the coalitionist to determine what organizations he will choose based on the tasks that need to be accomplished and the description of the organization.

(Ex. If the events require PR, then choosing the student newspaper organization would be a good idea. If you need volunteers to help run events, then contacting the student service groups might be appropriate.)

Take a few minutes for the coalitionist to finish the exercise and present his coalition to address the specific scenario.

Now, debrief and transition into the next part:

From this activity, we can see that coalition building should consider particular criteria in order to address particular challenges (which may range from very serious and immediate to more long-ranging and general). And though the scenario provided much of the information in relation to identifying the problem, departments involved, what has been done to address the problem, and possible solutions, many problems that students encounter on campuses takes some effort to identify the background of an issue.

Let the participants return to their seats to start the next part of the workshop.

Part 2) What Are Coalitions?

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Ask the participants what they think a coalition is. Write answers on flip chart paper or choose a participant to write. Once a few suggestions have been offered, explain the definition of a coalition:

A coalition is defined as:

a group of organizations and individuals working
together for a common purpose.

Explain (again with visuals), there are generally two types of coalitions:

- "One issue" or event coalitions only have to agree on one particular issue. The coalition is dissolved when the issue has been solved or the event has been coordinated.

- "Multi issue" coalitions have related issues, such as hunger and homelessness, gender issues, or the environment. This more permanent type of coalition recognizes the value of mobilizing together for action over a longer time. To be effective the "multi issues" coalition should have a date set for work to be completed. The coalition can always be reorganized if there is still a need.

Coalition building is needed when one organization recognizes it alone does not have the technical capability or people power to have a real impact on an issue.

Present the types of activities that coalitions generally assist in:

- setting priorities for action,
- helping to identify specific data and informational needs from other groups and departments,
- developing an action plan and initiating it,
- broadening the development of new audiences,
- improving the ability of some individuals/groups (such as students) to disseminate information to other entities (such as departments, groups of students, groups of faculty).

Most coalitions tend to be "One issue" and are established to run a specific set of events to address an issue. There are, however, increasing numbers and types of multi-issue coalitions, which may show unity towards a particular idea, theme, or plan.

Present the ideas about forming coalitions. When forming a coalition, it's important to must make sure that each organization invited to join the coalition is:

- Committed to the problem
- Committed to coordinating to solve the problem
- Committed to the belief that each organization belongs in the coalition
- Committed to open communication
- Committed to coalition recognition, not individual recognition

Now, transition into the first group activity.

Part 3) Exercise 1: Worksheet and Small Group Discussion

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Pass out the *Campus Coalition Worksheets* to participants (see copy at end). Explain that they should take 15 minutes to start applying coalition-building techniques by working through the questions. Stress for them to use problems from their own campuses. Point out that at the end of the 15 minutes, they will form small groups to share their ideas with other participants.

After 10 minutes, divide participants into pairs or small groups through any method. Have them share their ideas in the group and then choose one person to share their ideas with the entire workshop.

Part 4) Creating Mission Statements and Goals

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Allow the participants to return to their seats and arrange themselves in a comfortable manner so they may be able to follow the next part of the workshop.

Explain that the success of any coalition depends on its goals. Goals function as a thesis statement for organizations, guiding their work and evaluating their process on specific issues. Without effective goals, organizations, projects, and especially coalitions will fail.

But how can you create effective goals? As a rule, goals for coalitions should be:

- Action-Oriented and Clear (who, what, where, by when)
- Related directly to the issue, challenge, or cause at hand
- Representative of all participants' commitments (i.e. each participant must be able to recognize the goals as his or her goals as well, not just the goals of the group holistically)

For your help, below are some examples related to the goals for the sexual assault coalition in the opening activity. You may want to write these goals on flip chart paper in so the participants can read along.

By the end of the semester, the Sexual Assault Education Student Coalition (S.A.E.S.C.) will:

- 1) Increase awareness of sexual assault on campus through panels, discussion meetings, and speakers.*

- 2) *Develop a publication on ways to make safe choices and will be made available to all students through campus mail, email, and on the school web site.*
- 3) *Establish a campus-wide committee of students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni that will focus its efforts on sexual education and provide services for survivors of sexual assault.*

Mission statements, on the other hand, are a broad and concise description of an organization's purpose. They do not set up specific tasks that the organization will accomplish, but rather who the organization is and what it does.

A mission statement for the S.A.E.S.C. might be:

"The Sexual Assault Education Student Coalition (SAESC) is a coalition of campus student organizations, clubs, and groups dedicated to educating the campus community about sexual assault issues through educational programs and publications."

Now explain that the participants will get a chance to develop mission statements and goals for the potential coalitions they have formed with their worksheets.

Part 5) Exercise 2: Writing Mission Statements and Goals

Suggested time: 20

Distribute flip chart paper and markers to participants for them to write their mission statements and goals on to post at the end of 20 minutes. If needed, remind them of the criteria for effective mission statements and goals.

At the end of 20 minutes, select a few participants to present their coalitions mission statement and goals.

Part 6) Closing

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Explain that the ideas formulated in this worksheet can be taken to their own campuses' to address issues. Pass out *A Guide to Forming Coalitions* (see copy at end) to participants as they leave.

Close with a summary of next steps and an evaluation.

Organization Descriptions for Opening Activity

For Building Coalitions

From the suggestions below, create signs for the opening activity. On plain white letter paper (8 1/2 x 11 in), write the organization name in large block letters and then the description. Add more organizations to the list for the opening activity that might be more characteristic of your campus. Also make one sign with a large "?" to indicate the coalitionist. Fold the signs and randomly distribute as participants enter the workshop.

- Women's Group

A student group comprised of predominately female students as well as male students. It aims to promote gender equality on campus as well as off campus. The group hosts special events, guest speakers, discussion panels, as well as publishes a student feminist journal.

- African American Student Union

Comprised of mostly African American students and other students of color, this group works to engage the campus and surrounding community in dialogue on diversity appreciation. The group hosts campus wide discussion meetings.

- Hispanic Student Union

Comprised of mostly Hispanic students, this group promotes awareness of Hispanic cultures through educational programs in collaboration with community based groups off campus.

- Christian Student Group

This group is a non-denominational Christian student group that host weekly Bible study, organizations the campus Christian worship service, as well as organizes and facilitates a homelessness and mentoring ministries in the local community.

- Community service group

This student group directs all volunteer services on campus and help to place interested students with community partners. They publish a monthly newsletter as well as campus email notices concerning service opportunities.

- Student Government Association

This organization is an elected group of students who help to bridge communication between students and the administration as well as provide funding for student initiatives on campus.

- Student Health Educators

This group develops and facilitates programs on eating disorders, depression, safer sex, self-esteem, etc. for residential halls and health education classes. They publish a monthly newsletter.

- Young Democrats

This student group works to inform the general student body on issues pertaining to politics and advocacy in general (in support of the Democratic Party). They hold monthly campus wide meetings and host special speakers.

- College Republicans

This student group works to inform the general student body on issues pertaining to politics in general (in support of the Republican Party). They hold monthly campus wide meetings and hosts special speakers.

- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Queer (GLBTQ) Student Alliance

This group focuses on initiating dialogue concerning GLBTQ issues through gender workshops and residential hall programs. They are also a community service organization dedicating themselves to addressing several issues outside of those directly affecting GLBTQ students.

- A Fraternity or Sorority

Primarily a social organization, it is also dedicated to addressing social concerns through community service by hosting special projects, events, and by making donations to local agencies.

- An Honor Society

This group engages the campus in intellectual dialogue through hosting events and workshops. They also organize several service projects each year.

- Department of Student Life

This is the university's official department that oversees activities related to the quality of student life, including Residential Education, student activities, and all clubs. While this department consists mostly of staff, there are also many student representatives, and this department's members work closely with all official campus groups.

Campus Coalition Worksheet

For Building Coalitions

1) The challenge, problem, or issue on my campus that I want to address is:

2) What are the departments, offices, or groups that are responsible for addressing the challenge or issue?

3) What has been done to address the challenge, problem, or issue?

4) What could be done to more effectively address the challenge, problem, or issue?

5) What some specific tasks and responsibilities in initiating these ideas?

6) What are some student organizations, clubs, and groups on your campus that can help to address the challenge, problem, or issue?

7) Who are the presidents, facilitators, and leaders of these organizations, clubs, and groups? Who are some faculty and staff members that might be interested in helping you in addressing this issue?

Guide to Forming Coalitions

For Building Coalitions

1) Determine the challenge, problem or issue that you want to address.

Students often confront a range of problems and issues on and off campus that may seem overwhelming. However, overwhelming or not, students committed to social change can utilize civic engagement tools such as coalition building to initiate solutions to these concerns.

2) Determine the cause of the issue or problem.

All problems have causes and they must be understood in order to create solutions to address them. Most often, campus concerns are not fully understood by students. To remedy this, get to the roots of problems by asking people who might know, like faculty and staff. For example, research back issues of your student newspaper for important information.

3) Determine the departments, offices, and groups that are responsible for addressing the challenge, problem or issue.

Concerns that directly affect students may be handled by any Dean or Director of Student Life, Student Activities, or Residence life. Sometimes, the Counseling Center or Campus Security may be involved. There may also be student groups organized to address certain problems or issues.

4) Determine what has been done in the past or what is being done presently to address the problem or issue.

This may be the most important step in addressing concerns through coalition building. The purpose of the coalition can be to initiate events and programs that will address the problem or issue. Understanding what has already been done to address the problem is imperative for the coalition to implement ideas and be effective.

5) Brainstorm possible solutions to the problem or concern.

Follow the basic rules of brainstorming and jot down as many possible ideas you can come up with. Remember that quantity is more important than quality here. Later, go back and eliminate the ideas that are not feasible in your opinion. Develop a short list of ideas that you can easily share with other student organizations in gaining support for

the coalition. Once the coalition is formed, the group can revise or develop further ideas.

6) Develop a list of student leaders and their clubs and organizations and faculty and staff members that you think might be interested in addressing the problem or issue through a coalition.

Create a list of the leaders and their clubs and organizations. Include important contact information like email addresses and phone numbers. This will be beneficial as you start making initial contacts with this group. Also this may be the point at which you might develop a list of possible faculty and staff members who may be beneficial in your efforts by acting as advisors. More than likely, faculty and staff members want to be included in student initiatives and are willing to offer valuable tools to the efforts made by students.

7) Contact student leaders, faculty, and staff members on your list.

For initial contacts, email leaders first. Create a short introductory email that introduces yourself, the problem or issue, your proposed solutions, and the idea of joining a coalition with other organizations to address the problem. Remember, keep it short and to the point. Be sure to include contact information and a deadline to reply. Also explain that if they are interested reply with their contact info. Once leaders start replying, call each one individually to further explain the purpose of the coalition.

8) Call the first meeting.

Once most of the leaders have signed on, call the first meeting. Host the first meeting in a neutral location on campus. At the first meeting, introduce yourself as the temporary facilitator. Have all leaders introduce themselves and their organization and purposes. Review the issue and problem and explain how a student coalition would be effective in addressing it. Also review your initial list of solutions. At the end of the initial meeting, set the agenda for the next meeting. The agenda could be electing a facilitator, developing goals and objectives, naming the coalition, inviting other organizations to join the coalition and beginning to develop an action plan.

9) Build the coalition.

It will be up to the elected facilitator and student leaders to establish deadlines, a coalition membership criterion, inviting faculty and staff members to participate, and general meetings where members from all coalition clubs and organizations will be invited. However, when forming to address one issue, the efforts of the coalition must be focused on an action plan that will guide the group. The plan must include a

purpose, goals, background of the problem or issue being addressed, initiatives to address the problem, schedule of when the initiatives will occur, and a proposed budget. Faculty and staff advisors for each club should be included in the creation of the plan.

10) Introduce a plan of action to all the departments, offices, and groups that are responsible for addressing the problem.

Finally, return to the list of departments, offices, and groups responsible for addressing the problem. The finished action plan will act as a proposal as well as a guide for the coalition. It is important to gain the support of those who work to address the problem or at least inform these groups of the coalition's intentions. You can have small groups of members meet with these groups individually, presenting the plan. Or, you may call a meeting, inviting these groups to attend. Either way, these groups must be informed before the coalition begins initiating events.