

How You Can Bring Together Concerned Citizens To Take Action In Your Community

“You can’t fight city hall.” That’s a common sentiment heard over and over in most communities. The fact is, many of your friends and neighbors would like to do something about local issues that impact faith and family, but the problems seem overwhelming.

The good news? You *can* fight city hall—but not on your own. When you find friends who share your objectives, suddenly the task isn’t so daunting. This is the primary purpose of a grassroots network, often called “a coalition.”

A coalition is a network of people with common goals who meet on a regular basis to share information and develop plans of action. A coalition can be as small as a handful of friends meeting in a home, or as large as several dozen people gathering at a meeting hall. The size isn’t too important, especially at the start. What is important is bringing together like-minded people around common goals.

GOALS OF A COALITION ARE MANIFOLD

1. Unite. A coalition does not represent any one group—it seeks to unite citizens and groups who share common goals. Most likely, concerned Christians in your community have little or no idea what other Christians are doing to reclaim your community for Christ. The coalition seeks to bring these groups together.

2. Educate. Sharing information is a primary goal of the coalition. Every meeting should educate participants on key issues taking place in your community, state, and nation. Your coalition’s ability to quickly and effectively communicate vital information will, in large part, determine your success.

3. Strategize. Coalition meetings develop and present plans of action to accomplish specific goals. We call these “Impact Items.”

4. Motivate. Talk is not enough. A

successful coalition meeting always results in documented information to encourage and motivate participants to action.

5. Communicate. There are several ways to express concerns and viewpoints to your local, state, and federal elected officials: (1) phone calls, (2) personal letters, (3) faxes, (4) e-mail messages. Computer access is an invaluable tool and is often available free of charge at community libraries. However, if your computer access is limited, WEB-TV has e-mail and Internet capabilities and can be demonstrated at your local electronics store.

GETTING STARTED

The best way to get started is to just do it! Contact a few friends (two or three will suffice). Share with them your desire to talk about and respond to faith and family issues in your community. Then, set up a meeting. It’s that simple to start reclaiming your community for Christ!

Give your coalition a “jump-start” by finding a hot issue to galvanize around. Find out what faith- and family-based issues interest your friends—and capitalize on those common interests as you launch your coalition.

Don’t wait for someone else to get a coalition started. If you are motivated, take the lead! Don’t use lack of experience as an excuse. With all coalition work, willingness is more important than expertise.

CONDUCTING A MEETING

Your coalition goal of reclaiming your community for Christ *must* be clear at your coalition meetings. If a meeting lacks focus, it will lack direction, and soon you will lack participants! A focused meeting must have an agenda. Be sure to come to your coalition meeting with a prepared agenda—and stick to it! An agenda could develop along these lines:

1. Open with prayer. The Bible says, “The Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind” (Daniel 5:21, NASB). Start the meeting by acknowledging God as ruler over all, asking His blessing on your community, and seeking His guidance.

2. Welcome participants. Every participant is important. Make sure you greet and introduce those who are new

Continued

TESTIMONY

Barbara Collier

About 20 years ago, Barbara Collier of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, began buying books on current events for her local Christian bookstore. As she read about problems with the education system, abortion, homosexuality, and other issues, she was alarmed. “I began sharing this information with my customers,” she recalls.

“A few said, ‘Let’s do something about it.’ So I called a meeting at my home.”

That’s how the issues coalition started—just five or six people at first. They met again the next week, and each brought a friend. As the participants shared information and began to take action, the group quickly grew. “We began clipping articles for documentation. We quickly moved to writing letters, making phone calls, and sending faxes and e-mails. The CENTER FOR RECLAIMING AMERICA’s website, www.reclaimamerica.org, has also been an invaluable resource for our coalition.”

Barbara emphasizes the importance of working with other Christian organizations in building a successful coalition. “It’s foolish to

See Testimony on back

to your coalition. All participants need to record their attendance by signing in with their name, address, phone and/or fax number, e-mail address, and one issue of concern.

3. Review Impact Items. Ask for reports on Impact Items from prior meetings. Encourage honesty and accountability. Based on the report, determine the next course of action on that issue. Then move on.

4. Set New Impact Items. Each new Impact Item presentation should include (a) background information, (b) specific course of action, and (c) assignment of action. Be sure not to move to the next Impact Item until the action on the table has been assigned.

5. Recap. Review assignments and offer the balance of time for open discussion.

6. Close in prayer.

OTHER PRACTICAL TIPS

1. Begin and end on time. This will show participants that you respect their time and will establish a professional attitude in your coalition. Coalition meetings should be fun, but they must also mean business. One to two hours is a good time limit.

2. Make resources available. Begin to clip articles from your local newspaper. Bring magazines of interest. Set up an information table, and ask participants to bring resources to share with others.

TAKING ACTION

The core of a coalition meeting is the Impact Items. Impact Items give information and strategies aimed at a specific course of action. Impact Items must be

a) **pertinent**—make sure the issue is thoroughly documented and of concern to members of your coalition;

b) **practical**—the Impact Item must lead to an action that members of your coalition can take part in. Make Impact Items practical by meeting

participants at their level of ability and commitment;

c) **winnable**—focus on Impact Items that can result in measurable success. If Impact Items consistently result in failure, your coalition will lose strength.

Impact Items must meet all three criteria before being presented to the coalition. The leader should also review all information and issues before they are brought before the group.

MOTIVATING PARTICIPANTS

Action is the key to a coalition's success. That is why it is essential to motivate participants. Here are three tips on motivation:

1. Keep it simple. Don't overwhelm a participant with a task they cannot handle. Meet them at their level of expertise and commitment: a letter to the editor, phone call, trip to the library for research. Soon participants will be volunteering for more challenging assignments.

2. Reward success. Acknowledge every completed Impact Item, no matter how small. Remember—success breeds success.

3. Promote the team. Participants should know that the coalition is depending on them to complete their Impact Items. Every link in the chain is vital. Between meetings, contact those who have agreed to take action and see how they are doing. Start a phone chain to announce upcoming meetings. You may want to install an electronic calling system for speed and efficiency.

AS YOUR COALITION GROWS

As the organizer of the initial meeting, you will likely serve as the de-facto chairman. The primary responsibilities of the chairman are to determine the time/place of the meeting, set the agenda, and conduct the meeting. For the sake of consistency, the chairman should volunteer to serve for at least a year.

At this first meeting you can appoint chairmen of sub-committees for issues that need more hands-on overseeing than the chairman of the entire group can provide or solicit volunteers for these positions.

As your coalition grows, you may find it necessary to secure a larger meeting place. Select a facility that is accessible and comfortable. Libraries, civic halls, and churches often have rooms available for little or no charge.

BUILDING YOUR COALITION

The best way to expand your coalition is to interact with other Christian and social organizations in your area. Ask them about key issues they are working on. If any issues meet your criteria for an Impact Item, ask them to send a representative to make a presentation at your next meeting.

Guest speakers are a good way to gain exposure. Public officials and visiting celebrities can give your coalition a higher profile in your community. Ask your local Christian radio station to run a public service announcement for an upcoming meeting. Ask participants to announce upcoming meetings through their churches.

CAN WE BE “PARTISAN”?

If you are a non-profit organization, selecting 501©3 status of the Internal Revenue Code, there are specific guidelines you must follow.

Be careful not to allow your coalition to become an “arm” of a political party. Members of political groups and parties are welcome to participate, and you can encourage participation in political events, but your coalition should not become an organizational meeting for “Candidate X.”

“Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand” (Leviticus 26:8, NASB). As we work together, our strength multiplies. This is the key to coalitions and the key to reclaiming our communities for Christ.

Testimony from page 1

be a one-man band. If you don't have strength in numbers, nobody is going to listen to you.”

Barbara continues to lead the issues coalition. Meetings are held once a month on a Saturday morning at 8 A.M. On average, 40-60 people attend. They also have a weekly e-mail alert to keep Broward County residents informed.

To those who are considering forming a coalition in their community, Barbara offers this straightforward advice: “You'll do it when you finally say, ‘Enough is enough!’ That's what happened to me. That's why I finally took action.”

The CENTER FOR RECLAIMING AMERICA is an outreach of Coral Ridge Ministries. Our goal is to connect citizens like you to vital resources so you can reclaim your community for Christ. For more information, contact us:

Phone: (877) 725-8872

Fax: (954) 351-3325

E-mail: cfra@crministries.org

Web: www.reclaimamerica.org

Address: CENTER FOR RECLAIMING AMERICA,
P.O. Box 632, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33302