

# Building Alliances Guidebook

This guidebook explains the steps for creating an alliance (network, coalition, partnership, or other cooperative effort for promoting a common goals. The text provides information on the following:

- The definition of an alliance
- Reasons for forming alliances
- Advantages and disadvantages of alliances
- Steps for building an alliance Effective ways to maintain an alliance When to end an alliance

This guide also includes a list of references for additional information about alliances.

## Introduction

We define alliances as a credible group of individuals brought together to accomplish a specific goal or purpose which will benefit all members of the group in some way. Many alliances are surrounded by some controversy in the beginning simply because they consolidate two agents of change, power and interest. People are wary of combinations that mix power and interest because there is a potential to exclude others. Thus, it is vitally important to investigate the motivations for an alliance before agreeing to lead or become a part of one. After you are satisfied with the goal and organization of an alliance, and you are willing and able to assume the risk implicit in such a combination, then it is time to act.

When we refer to alliances in this guidebook, we are referring to an association or partnership created to promote mutual goals.

"Alliance building" is the process of selecting the most effective members for the team and bringing these members together. Alliance members may consist of individuals, organizations, businesses, or other groups.

## Reasons for Forming Alliances

People enter into formal alliances for a variety of reasons. We will look at the four most common circumstances that may lead to forming an alliance. These situations are:

- In response to a threat  
Individuals, groups, and organizations will sometimes band together in an attempt to preserve security and stability in response to a threat, real or perceived.
- In cases of similar or shared beliefs  
People or groups which share common beliefs or goals may also form alliances. Although alliances have historically formed in reaction to a threat, increasingly, nations and other organized bodies are using alliances as proactive tools to solve problems.
- Economic interdependence  
Groups, which rely on each other financially, or which make financial exchanges, may form alliances.
- Groups share the same members  
Alliances are sometimes formed when group members of one organization are involved or

*"The highest and best form of efficiency is the spontaneous cooperation of a free people."*

Bernard Baruch, Report of the War Industries Board' March 1921

somehow associated with another organization. People will often move in and out of both circles. The "insiders" can use their knowledge of these organizations to emphasize joint areas of responsibilities, vision, and goals; thereby, identifying possible alliance members.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Alliances**

*Alliances usually originate in response to a proposed change and are often flanked by controversy, Recently, however, people form alliances to be proactive.*

#### **Advantages of Alliances**

- **Increases resources:** An alliance can overcome shortcomings, inadequacies, or the lack of resources of any single group.
- **Results in more creative solutions:** The pooling of ideas, which result from a cooperative effort, generates more creative solutions to problems.
- **Allows more risk taking:** In some cases, groups may be more likely to take risks because the responsibility for failure does not rest on any one individual.
- **Spreads out the workload:** Alliances permit a sharing of responsibilities so that no one individual or group has "to do it all."
- **Raises community awareness:** The formation of an alliance often increases public awareness of the conservation program or project being undertaken.

#### **Disadvantages of Alliances**

- **Requires time and skill:** The team must include at least one to three members who have the skill and time to initiate and build the alliance.
- **Results are not always readily apparent:** The process can appear to be time consuming, especially in the beginning, because often the results of the alliance's efforts will not be apparent until program or project implementation occurs.
- **May require special training:** The alliance will need at least one individual to be trained in group dynamics to facilitate compromises and negotiations among alliance team members.
- **Motivation and enthusiasm may be difficult to maintain:** It may be difficult to keep team members interested if program or project planning takes an excessive amount of time.

### **THE MAGIC FORMULA: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

#### **Steps for Building an Alliance**

Alliances emerge when one or more parties take it upon themselves to further their own interests beyond what they could accomplish individually. Alliance formation not only involves organizations that have similar interests; some also enlist members based on personalities and personal interests. There can be a single reason or host of reasons that influence allies to collaborate with one another. Thus, on the one hand, there are circumstances such as threats, economic interdependence, commonalties, and similarities in group membership that can lead to alliance formation. On the other hand, there are human or personal factors.

Although individuals are often familiar with one another, they may not have formed an alliance. When

people recognize the existence of, or potential for an alliance, members establish a commitment to one another that goes beyond daily niceties. Gradually, obligations to allies may take precedence over responsibilities to others outside of the alliance. However, individuals may also have had mutual disagreements in the history of their relationships. For successful alliances to flourish, such disagreements must either be put aside or worked out in a professional manner, to avoid disrupting an emerging allied relationship.

The transition to go from associates to alliances requires some skills to be successful. There are several measured steps an interested party can take to facilitate the process. The following is an outline of one such method.

### **1. Establish a Core Working Group**

The alliance's core working group is a team of at least four, and not more than ten members, who represent the agencies, organizations, collectives, networks that have the most to gain through a successful campaign; and therefore, are willing to provide the most resources toward that goal.

Core Working Group Duties Include:

- Determining alliance policies, objectives, and strategies.
- Recruiting alliance team members.
- Organizing and conducting meetings
- Removing barriers for alliance members
- Assigning or training someone to facilitate meetings.
- Evaluating (and re-evaluating) alliance progress.
- Dissolving the alliance when it successfully completes its mission or ceases to function.

Even if we strive toward democracy in an alliance, we must recognize that certain members will be more useful to the group by virtue of their connection to the group's goals. One example of this is the SALT Talks of the early 1980s where arms reduction was the major goal of the alliance. Although many countries were involved, the United States and the Soviet Union were the major players in the Summit. The reason is simple. The bulk of the nuclear weapons in the world lay in their arsenals.

### **1. Develop A General Goal Statement**

Establish a central goal to which everyone can agree. The true strength of an alliance lies in its agreements. If the group cannot even unite over the base tenets, then the alliance has been built upon a false base, which will crumble under the simplest of challenges. One of the first steps in forming an alliance is to develop a general goal statement, which states the purpose of the alliance. A goal statement should:

- Be concise
- Clearly state the position of the alliance
- Identify the intended outcome of a successful effort

The goal statement should become more specific as the alliance matures through the addition of more alliance members.

### **3. Identify and Enlist Credible Partners**

All participants in an alliance should be informed about the issue at hand and should have an interest in a successful outcome. These individuals should be team players who are able to motivate and encourage others, and who can disagree and criticize in a constructive manner. Alliance members must also possess the ability to negotiate and compromise.

An initial task toward building strategic alliances is to find out who should be part of the alliance. How do you select members? Before selecting members, you must first select organizations that have a stake in the issue. After this identification, a prospective alliance member should be well respected and capable of representing this organization. Asking the formal leader, staff head, director, etc. of an organization to be part of the alliance is, on the surface, a good idea. These formal leaders may be the appropriate persons to serve on the alliance.

However, informal leaders sometimes carry more respect concerning a particular issue than do formal leaders. You can get indicators of who should be part of the alliance in at least three ways: 1) asking staff members of an organization who they think should represent their organization on an alliance, 2) asking other community members who they think should represent organization X on an alliance, and 3) examining recent history to find out who represented that organization on other successful (or unsuccessful) programs or projects.

In moving toward a certain goal, the alliance stands to gain more by bringing the major players on board as opposed to isolating them. Many times extending an invitation is all it takes to attract vital allies. Some prospective alliance members may be old allies or old enemies. Some may be completely new friends or new antagonists. Whether it's an old or fresh issue, alliance selection should be based on the organization's connection to the issue and the capabilities and personality of the perspective alliance member.

Diversity in the membership of alliances is an important issue to consider. It is easy to overlook groups or organizations that represent members of a culture or ethnic group different from your own. Individuals from all cultures have a tendency to associate most closely with members of the same culture. However, the benefits of cross-cultural alliances can be great. In reaching outside your own cultural group, try to identify leaders of groups from other cultures, and ask for their help. Find out what issues or goals you share in common. Be inviting, and show a willingness to open yourself to new cultural norms and experiences.

#### **4. Identify Mutual Benefits For Alliance Members**

During an early meeting of the newly formed alliance, each organization at the table should determine the benefits each alliance team members can claim upon successfully achieving the alliance's goal. Successful alliances are built on the idea that every member of the alliance benefits from the cooperative effort; however, members may not always benefit equally or in exactly the same way. Let's say the goal is clean water, then the table below provides an example of benefits for different alliance members.

<b>Alliance Member</b>	<b>Benefit</b>
Neighborhood Association	Healthy community
Environmental group	Increased wildlife and species diversity
County government	Improved human health indicators
Conservation District	Increased adoption of streambank protection

#### **4. Develop a Strategy**

The alliance's goal statement provides the groundwork for developing strategies. Alliance strategies can, of course, relate to the overall promotion plan that can be developed through an alliance. For example, the alliance's strategy for accelerating adoption of key measures could include identifying goals, target groups, corresponding actions, media strategy, budget, assignments, and beginning and completion dates.

## **Effective Ways to Maintain an Alliance**

### **1. Keep Meetings on Track and Interesting**

How do you ensure meetings do what they need to do in a reasonable period of time? Several suggestions follow.

#### ***Group Development***

Within any alliance, it is vital to the success of the group to attend to both task and maintenance functions. Task functions involve the accomplishment of concrete, measurable, and tangible goals; whereas maintenance functions, which are just as crucial to the group's productivity and satisfaction, are often intangible. Group development is concerned primarily with maintenance functions to ensure that individual needs within the alliance are recognized. When individuals within the group as separate and special people are cared for, motivation and performance can peak.

#### ***Share and Rotate Leadership Roles***

Share and rotate leadership roles and responsibilities to avoid alliance leaders burning out, and at the same time leading others to feel they don't have a chance to lead. By sharing leadership roles, leaders can learn from one another's styles. Furthermore, people may be slower to criticize someone else's decisions if they themselves have been in the position of making decisions on similar issues.

#### ***Delegation***

To provide a means of co-ownership, delegate tasks to individuals or subgroups within the alliance. Delegating serves a threefold purpose: (1) to empower, (2) to educate, and (3) to ensure work and power are spread evenly amongst members and not concentrated among leaders. Care must be taken, however, that delegation be used carefully. It should empower, not be a method of control.

### **2. Consensus Decision-Making Model**

Consensus decision-making requires each member's consent to the decision before "group adoption" can take place. In essence, the group creates a total majority. The goal of consensus decision-making is group unity, as opposed to a majority winning and a minority losing, as is the case with traditional voting.

#### **Personal Checklist**

- Have a clear idea of what your personal or organizational goals are which motivated you to consider becoming part of an alliance.
- Be prepared to compromise on anything except these goals. Once in an alliance, the mission of the group takes priority, which will often require compromising individual agendas.
- Create individual allies within the alliance. Personalities will facilitate this process and naturally certain bonds will prove stronger than others.

#### **Prerequisites for utilizing consensus:**

- Common goals and interests
- Time -- There must be adequate time to work through the process.
- Commitment -- The group must attend to process and group dynamics. The group must be as committed to the process as it is to the end product.

**Consensus decision making:**

- Is a process which legitimizes members' opinions and feelings
- Recognizes individually
- Requires that the group make a collective decision on what actions should be taken based on the integration of everyone's opinions, concerns, and creativity
- Seeks the best possible solution given the expressed feelings and needs of the group

If group members experience consensus decision making, they will be more willing to be involved in seeing that decisions are carried out. In general, remember that humans are social beings and want to feel needed and part of the group. There is no better way to affirm everyone's value and worth to the group than by actively listening to their feelings, ideas, and concerns, and then facilitating a group decision that reflects their views.

Consensus decision making can be a more time consuming process than normal processes, but the end result will be richer, more democratic and satisfactory to the group than if a simple majority vote had been taken, and will result in greater unity among the group.

**Rewards of consensus decision making:**

- The collectively made decision will be implemented
- Consensus is an instrument of personal change as well as social change because it represents a total democratic process.
- Any one person can oppose a proposal and halt the proposal's adoption until a satisfying compromise is reached.

There are ways to object without halting consensus:

- Non-supportive: "I don't see a need for this but I will go along."
- Reservations: "This may be a mistake, but I can live with it."
- Standing aside: "I personally can't do this, but I won't block others from doing it."

Consensus decision making, when it works, empowers individuals, gives everyone the chance to voice their opinions, and provides a method of checks and balances.

## **ENDING ALLIANCES**

It does not make sense to allow an alliance to continue after it has outlived its mission. Alliances that are dying a slow death should not be permitted to linger. Once an alliance is over then they need to have an official ending that has some form of "celebration." Just before or just after the alliance's ending, the accomplishments should be documented, publicized, and distributed.

## **CONCLUSION**

Forming an alliance can be useful to group of individuals, agency, or organization facing a task that overextends its present human, financial or organizational resources and abilities. If the successful completion of this task offers benefits to other groups or individuals as well, then building an alliance with these parties demonstrates sound managerial judgment.

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