



Little Black Book: **Coalition Building**

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Case Study by Gabe Pendas, *University of Florida*

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This manual is an installment in the **YP4 Black Book** series.

Please see the other issues for valuable information
on similar topics, including:

Starting a Student Organization

Media & Message

E-Organizing



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Introduction

If you're reading this, you should be one of the following:

- a) **a progressive college student in a progressive student group**
- b) **a progressive college student thinking about joining/starting a progressive student group**
- c) **a progressive college student wondering how best to build relationships between student groups on campus**
- d) **a conservative student trying to steal ideas from progressive student groups or sabotage their efforts to advance the cause of social justice**

Even the most experienced campus organizers and student leaders will benefit from this manual. Students just beginning their first year will likewise learn important skills for future leadership.

The manual treats the reader as if she/he were the leader of a progressive group on a college campus, but readers who do not fit this profile should not be dissuaded. Readers not already involved or not yet leaders can use the information set forth herein to better understand campus dynamics, to advise leaders of their organizations, or to prepare them for future positions at the top.

**Remember: This is a Little Black Book.
Keep it in a safe place.**

Chapter One: Coalition Whys and Whens

A coalition, loosely defined, is three or more groups working together under the same name.

Why Organize a Coalition?

There are both practical and political reasons that may create a need for a coalition on your campus.

Practical Reasons to Form a Coalition

1. **Strength in numbers.** It almost speaks for itself. More people working together means more voices, more helping hands, more clout.

2. **Solidarity.** People often take notice when groups with very different purposes come together for a single cause. When choice groups join with LGBT groups and environmental groups and fair trade groups and Democrats, they unify their message, but they also expose individual members to different elements of the progressive community. If Southasian Students Society posts their political events on a coalition e-mail list, they'll draw a larger crowd to that documentary screening on post-9/11 racial profiling. Whether between groups or among individuals, networking is essential, especially for the fragmented Left. If your campus does not already have a progressive network, stop wasting time and get on that now!

3. **Spreading the costs.** If your group needs a deep pocket, it's easier to spread the burden over many than to strain your own small membership. As we will discuss later, a coalition may even serve as a communal war chest.

Political Reasons to Form a Coalition

1. **Bipartisanship.** Bipartisanship (or the appearance of bipartisanship) de-politicizes an issue, draws in the moderate and apathetic crowds, and can even net funding from non-partisan sources. However, bipartisanship is rare these days. Bipartisanship or nonpartisanship may be a lofty goal, so it's best to work toward solidarity (number 2 above) first.

2. **Safety.** Think of a coalition as an umbrella: effective for both poking somebody and protecting you from the rain. A coalition can either be a nebulous entity with limited liability, or an all-for-one-and-one-for-all crusader with tremendous clout, but some frustrating limitations.

Build Human Connections

Successful coalitions have one thing in common: a group of individuals personally committed to working together to ensure the success of the group. Successful coalitions are built on trust, which is built up in time. Once you create a coalition (of any type) it is a good idea to bring the participants together to get to meet each other in a casual environment.

Chapter One: Coalition Whys and Whens

When

Sometimes even a progressive network can be expanded to include apolitical groups in ad hoc coalitions. Pursue an ad hoc coalition when:

1. Large, timely, controversial issues loom (i.e., the Patriot Act).
2. Small, local, or broadly-supported issues crop up (i.e., the firing of a beloved professor, wind energy, recycling program).
3. Your group wants to host a single or series of events that require funding and participants.



You can never be too early, but you can easily be too late—if you anticipate needing an ad hoc coalition at some point, set the groundwork in place immediately. Pursuing a long-term coalition should always be a goal. Try to include apolitical groups as much as possible, but always have a core progressive network to serve as your base.



SOLIDARITY

People often take notice when groups with very different purposes come together for a single cause.

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Chapter Two: Coalition Partners

What is your idea?

Who should be there?

What do you hope to accomplish?

Identify Common Values and Goals: This is the most basic step. Literally, make a list and circulate it around to other members of your organization, friends, fellow activists, professors - anyone who can add some perspective or thoughts to the basis for your coalition idea.

Establishing the ideas, initial priorities and goals will make it easier to recruit participants and set the stage for the first meeting.

Identify and Recruit Participants

What key individuals or organizations should be involved?

Who might serve as unlikely allies?

Consider meeting individually with leaders of organizations that you are targeting to present the idea for the coalition. Most organizations have a few key individuals who you can identify as contacts. Be sensitive to the possibility of conflicts or disagreements within organizations – some may be run by one or two strong leaders, others might have committees that need more time to work and make commitments.

Think outside the box:

local unions, graduate or professional student organizations, community groups, theater or arts groups, student government, academic programs and departments can all be sources of support.

**State Your
GOALS**

**Reach Out to
PARTNERS**

**Create a
STRUCTURE**

**Execute your
STRATEGY**

Since every group will have different resources, providing the groups a specific list of action items will allow them to choose what work they are interested in pursuing, as well as what tasks they feel they can effectively accomplish. This strategy can prevent partner organizations from turning you down for fear of getting in over their heads.

Be Strategic When Communicating

Coordinating information, facilitating decisions and arranging meeting times can be difficult with large groups. In order to make this as efficient as possible, collect and distribute key contact information to all of the members of the coalition. Be aware that different people have different styles of communicating: some prefer e-mail, while others prefer telephone. Do not assume someone has received a message if you have sent an e-mail or left a voicemail – call or e-mail again. Also, some important communications should be saved for telephone or face-to-face meetings, especially if there is a risk of miscommunication.

Chapter Two: Coalition Partners

Such a list could include: hosting phone banks, posting information to their listserv or on their website, organizing letter writing campaigns, writing and distributing leaflets, publishing stories in their magazine or newsletter, tabling for a cause or to spread information, getting names for petitions, sponsoring educational programs, helping with a speaker's bureau, signing on to group letters, and talking with or writing to influential legislators.

Create a set of action items for each group to look at and determine which resources they can make available to the coalition



PARTNERS

Establishing the ideas and initial priorities and goals will make it easier to recruit participants and set the stage for the first meeting.

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Chapter Three: Creating a Structure

Whether your individual organization is governed by an executive board, a board of directors or some other body, coalitions need a structure. If you do not clearly organize the coalition, you can run the risk of one person taking too much authority, or the converse – nobody doing anything because they do not feel as if they have the ability to act. Consider the possibilities below when attempting to develop an operational structure.

Deciding on the internal structure of a new coalition organization can be a challenging task. Your coalition should be rigid enough to be effective, yet flexible enough to accommodate each of the coalition members. Groups will differ on priorities, strategies and tactics; those differences can produce internal conflicts. They can also provide a fertile field of good ideas, different perspectives and important resources.

Spokescouncil

The loosest coalition structure. Each organization sends representatives to report their activity, any coordination or common action is voluntary and done as individual organizations.

Collaborative

A loose collection of organizations that may coordinate their activities and develop shared materials.

Campaign

The participating organizations will work and speak together, but on a limited range of issues.

Coalition

A full-fledged coalition will have its own internal leaders, committees, working groups, issue statements and take action with the approval of its members.

Warning:

Do not cripple your organization by equating equal representation with a lack of responsibility.

Hierarchical vs. Non-Hierarchical Structure:

Many groups struggle over this question, but whichever you choose, do not use a structure that will prevent the coalition from being effective. Every coalition needs designated individuals to facilitate meetings, create agendas, serve as spokespeople, or coordinate communication amongst members.

Chapter Three: Creating a Structure

Your coalition should make sure these essential tasks are accomplished while encouraging full participation and equal roles in decision-making.

What is consensus decision-making?

A coalition generally operates on consensus—sometimes an elusive commodity. However, solutions are more likely to be found if the coalition discusses the potential advantages and disadvantages of a particular course of action and reaches a democratic resolution. One of the main functions of a coalition is to gather and share information and help all participants gain a clearer understanding of where the issue is and where it is going.

Organize Your Meetings

Be sure to set a firm agenda before each meeting to incorporate your goals for the meeting. Have an individual or a rotating individual responsible for taking notes at the meeting, and have a way to distribute those notes to members after the meeting – this encourages accountability to the responsibilities discussed during the meeting.



STRUCTURE

Whether your individual organization is governed by an executive board, a board of directors, or some other body, coalitions need a structure.

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Chapter Four: Rules to Live By

Whatever you decide, remember to clearly identify several key components: **What** are the goals of the coalition? **Who** can speak or act for the coalition, and how do they get approval? **How** often will the coalition meet, make decisions or coordinate action?

- Identify common values and goals
- Identify and recruit participants
- Create a clear coalition structure to facilitate making public statements and maintaining communication among member groups
- Clearly define and assign coalition tasks: Consider financial and other resources: what can each organization provide? What sources of revenue are there on your campus?
- Recognize the accomplishments of your coalition members!

When communicating with the larger coalition be sure to:

- a) Have all leaders of the coalition sign off on the substance of your message.
- b) Create clear and concise messaging with appropriate context- especially when communicating changes in strategy, tactics and goals.
- c) Give participants an opportunity to ask questions, offer suggestions and provide feedback- this is an easy thing to forget and a potentially fatal thing to ignore.



A GOOD RULE

Create a clear coalition structure to facilitate making public statements and maintaining communication among member groups.

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Chapter Five: Sustaining the Coalition

So you've created a coalition and defeated your enemy. What now? There are a number of things you can do along the way to ensure that all the work you did to pull the coalition together doesn't fall apart once the campaign is over.

- 1) Determine the length of the coalition early-on
Find out what every group within the coalition is interested in:
Short-term or long-term involvement?
- 2) Install power-turnover and election procedures
- 3) Build working and personal relationships with coalition group leaders
- 4) Suggest other issues for coalition work
- 5) Apply for club status or official recognition
- 6) Establish long-term goals and procedures

It may be the case that some groups will want to continue working within the coalition on other issues- this may be largely dependent on the basis for your working relationship in the first place. If sustainability is a concern for you, focus on the participants who share common values or goals at their core. You may have differences around specific issues, but if forwarding the progressive movement is something you share, then there is a reason for the coalition to exist.



WHAT NOW

Build working and personal relationships with coalition group leaders

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Coalition Building Case Study: Florida State University

By: Gabe Pendas, 2005 YP4 Fellow

FORCE: Fighting for Our Rights Concerning Education

Objective: To increase student participation in civic/political action and pressure the state legislature to reverse its recent pattern of cutting the University budget and raising tuition.

Targets: The state legislature, the governor and students (in terms of engagement)

Strategy: Present organizations with a simple and unifying issue to use the power built by the many different groups working together to pressure the state legislature to enact policy that promotes accessible and affordable higher education.

Tactics:

- 1) Create a coalition with the groups we had worked with in the past and new groups who found this issue pertinent
- 2) Hold educational events and create materials with well-researched information on the issue
- 3) Build an interactive website
- 4) Bring students to a statewide rally organized at the capitol in support of higher education

What Didn't Work:

There was a lack of a group ideology

We had brought in a diverse group of people, but outside of those students who worked on previous campaigns, none were really thinking seriously about activist work beyond just participating in it. They didn't tie education into race and class, into civil rights and corporate irresponsibility. Privatization was a concept most were not familiar with and we didn't hold the workshops that were needed to convey these ideas.

No work on developing a public ideology

We focused on the threat of students having to pay more money instead of tying the lack of funding in education to a lack of priority, inadequate government and institutionalized racism. Most people who attended the rally came out because friends or organizations asked them to do so. Thank goodness we had a huge "coalition"!

Coalition Building Case Study: Florida State University

Leadership was not diverse

Although we had a diverse base of students, the leadership (with few exceptions) were all part of an activist subculture. This proved harmful in many ways, including creating difficulties in mobilizing organizations as well as making it more difficult for students who wanted to take an active role to do so.

Groups in the coalition were not mobilized well

Due to inexperience on our part, we were not able to effectively use the resources different organizations brought to the table.

What Worked:

The issue was a unifying one and was easy to convey

For the first time, we were able to bring a diverse group of students together in the form of a coalition because the issue was something that students were able to connect to as something that directly affects them. No one wanted their tuition raised and education cut.

SGA became a 1st tier ally.

The ruling party of the student government association was, for the first time, heavily involved in “activist” work with this event. They worked to get the Greek councils mobilized for the rally and helped to add credibility to the coalition. It became almost impossible to marginalize the coalition because of their help.

A good relationship with the administration was formed

Students sat down with the University president in order to find ways for students and the administration to work together. The president was on our side! Through this campaign, we began developing a working relationship with the administration — a relationship that would prove extremely beneficial through the course of the campaign.

Support from prominent figures

One of the most powerful figures in the state legislature, Sen. Ken Pruitt, led the statewide effort on this campaign. The political force we were able to build on campus would not have had the power it did without Sen. Pruitt's help.

Coalition Building Case Study: Florida State

Successful website and publicity

We were able to put together a successful website that included educational materials and a petition for students to sign. We used the website as a way to reach out to those who cared about the issues, but didn't have much time to participate and take a stand. This way, we were able to obtain over 800 signatures with minimal effort. We also were constantly flyering, chalking, tabling, and petitioning with well put-together documents outlining our findings and reasons why we were doing this.

Successful Student Rally

The rally was the last big event the coalition put together. We gained significant media exposure, including the front page of campus papers devoted to it. We had approximately 600 students there, with various campus subcultures represented, including cultural organizations, student unions, student government and every Greek council at the university.



Case Study Take-Aways

- Establish goals and articulate a purpose for the coalition you are building.
- Ally yourselves with a diverse set of organizations, faculty, administrators and local politicians
- Elect a diverse group of leaders who are representative of the larger coalition
- When voting in an organization, establish the resources they can and will bring to the table

Appendix No.1: Sample Coalition Press Release

Americans for Fair Courts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 14, 2005

CONTACT:

Tony Simone
(xxx) xxx-xxxx
xxx@pfaw.org

Bush's Extreme Nominee, Alito: Would Put Americans' Rights and Liberties at Risk

**NY Americans for Fair Courts coalition calls for the defeat of nominee Alito,
who is outside of the judicial mainstream & whose confirmation to the Supreme Court
would change the direction of the Nation.**

**Progressive Groups and Elected Officials Gather at NYC City Hall
this Tuesday, November 22, 10:30 a.m. to Urge Senators to Oppose Nomination**

(New York, NY) - People for the American Way, Citizen Action New York, NARAL Pro-Choice New York, and other national groups of Americans for Fair Courts, coalesced today to urge Senators to reject the nomination of Judge Samuel Alito to the United States Supreme Court. With the nomination of Judge Alito, a far-right conservative, to fill the seat currently held by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, President Bush has signaled his clear desire to put the demands of his far-right political base ahead of Americans' constitutional rights and legal protections.

Judge Alito's judicial record places him far outside of mainstream America. Justice O'Connor often, not always, cast the deciding vote in decisions preserving Americans' privacy and civil rights. Judge Alito, however, has a long and extensive record of ideological activism, frequently deciding against workers' rights, civil rights and privacy rights.

"There is no room on the Supreme Court for a judge who cannot comprehend that a woman maintains her constitutionally protected liberty when she marries. We need a Supreme Court that reflects the American people not a right-wing agenda," said Assembly Member Danny O'Donnell.

"Just this past week, we discovered in a job application, Alito pledged allegiance to a radical right agenda and declares his opposition to key Supreme Court precedents regarding voting rights, religious liberties, reproductive choice, rights of the accused and religious liberty, " said Tony Simone, People for the

Appendix No. 1: Sample Coalition Press Release (Continued)

American Way, NE Regional Office, Policy & Field Director. "Alito makes it clear he is far from independent and a disciple of the radical right, who want to take away the rights and freedoms of so many Americans. We must defeat his nomination."

"Recently released records show Judge Alito's judicial philosophy to be far more dangerous to the health and safety of American women than the public may have originally thought. From day one, Planned Parenthood has opposed the confirmation of Judge Alito to the Supreme Court because of his judicial record of hostility toward women's rights, privacy rights, and civil rights," says Joan Malin, President and CEO of Planned Parenthood of New York City. "There is no room on the court for someone with a judicial philosophy that places at risk the rights, freedoms, and liberties that Americans hold dear."

Among his most disconcerting opinions, Alito dissented from the Third Circuit's ruling that a Congressional law restricting the sale and possession of deadly machine guns is constitutional. He has also taken positions that, if adopted, would make it harder for victims of race and sex discrimination to prove their claims. Instead of uniting the country behind a consensus nominee, President Bush has chosen a divisive nominee who will work to remove the safeguards on which Americans depend.

"Judge Alito is a clear opponent of reproductive freedom," said Sonia Ossorio, president of the National Organization for Women in New York City. "It's clear that the religious right-wing has been working overtime in its effort to outlaw abortion, Alito is a dream come true for them. It's time for Democrats, Liberals and Progressives to ban together to save the Supreme Court from a hard-line conservative future."

"A very recent survey of our 10,000+ progressive members, overwhelmingly indicated that allowing Alito to be confirmed to the Supreme Court would be devastating to our nation, specifically with regards to privacy, health care, employment and other fundamental protections and rights," said Executive Director Ed Hartzog. "We must do whatever we can to halt George Bush's continuing efforts to move this country backwards by preventing his Judge Alito's confirmation."

It is imperative that Senators fulfill their Constitutionally mandated role of advice and consent. The Americans for Fair Courts coalition, part of a national grass-roots campaign to oppose President Bush's divisive nominee, is confident that once they examine the evidence of Judge Alito's record, the American people will urge their Senators to oppose this ideologically driven appointment.

For more information please visit the People for the American Way and the national coalition website at www.savethecourt.org.

Appendix No. 2: Sample Coalition Sign-On Letter

November 17, 2005

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
780 Third Ave.
Suite 2601
New York, NY 10017

Dear Senator Clinton:

On behalf of the undersigned New York organizations, we write to you regarding the nomination of Judge Samuel Alito to replace retiring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. We urge you respectfully to oppose Alito's nomination to the Supreme Court.

Recently, right-wing leaders vetoed the nomination of Harriet Miers because she failed their ideological litmus test. President Bush then capitulated to his far-right base, nominating a judge who has issued a number of troubling opinions that threaten to undermine established civil rights -- especially in the areas of race and gender -- and the federal government's ability to protect American citizens. By nominating a judge far removed from mainstream America, President Bush has made it clear that appeasing his right-wing activist base takes precedence over a moderate approach protecting the constitutional rights and freedoms of all Americans. We therefore urge you to fulfill the Senate's constitutionally mandated role of advice and consent and vote against the Alito nomination.

No Presidential nominee has an automatic right to confirmation. As part of a co-equal branch of government, the Senate's constitutionally mandated role in the confirmation of judges, particularly Supreme Court nominees, is of paramount importance to all Americans. We are disappointed that President Bush did not choose a truly consensus nominee who would help to unite this country instead of threatening to plunge it into another highly contentious debate. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor played a pivotal role at the center of the Court. As you are aware, Justice O'Connor was the deciding vote on a number of rulings that have protected the fundamental rights and liberties of all Americans. Many of these rights would be at risk if Justice O'Connor were replaced with Judge Alito, whose record of repeated ideological activism directed against privacy rights, civil rights, workers' rights, and more should give pause to every American. Rather than provide a fair, balanced, and moderating voice on the Court, Alito would promote an activist agenda, striking down many of the protections Americans have come to regard as essential to liberty and equality. It is imperative that this not be allowed to happen.

Appendix No. 2: Sample Coalition Sign-On Letter (Continued)

Many of the dissenting opinions written by Judge Alito while serving on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals cause us great concern. On a number of occasions, Alito was the sole dissenter in cases involving civil rights and Congressional power. For instance, Judge Alito, in a dissenting opinion, argued that Congress should not have the power under the Commerce Clause to restrict the transfer and possession of machine guns. Judge Alito also argued, as the lone dissenter out of a total of 12 judges who considered the case, that a victim of on-the-job gender discrimination should not even be allowed to present her case at trial.

Judge Alito's record indicates a judicial philosophy consistent with those who would overturn settled legal protections in such areas as affirmative action, disability rights, worker's rights, environmental protection, religious liberty, and reproductive rights. Many of our rights could hang in the balance should he actively seek to overturn established precedents. We believe that a judge with this philosophy, out of step with mainstream America, does not warrant a lifetime appointment to our nation's highest Court.

Our country deserves a Supreme Court Justice who represents the mainstream and a confirmation process that is defined by consultation and consensus. We believe that the nomination of Judge Alito does not fulfill these standards, and respectfully ask that you oppose his nomination to the Supreme Court. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Tony Simone at (212) 420-0440, extension 13.

Sincerely,

Citizen Action New York
Code Pink Women for Peace/New York
Democracy for NYC
Gay Men's Health Crisis
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center of New York
NARAL Pro-Choice New York
National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW-NY)
National Organization for Women (NOW-NYC)
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
New Democratic Majority
People for the American Way, North-East Regional Office
Planned Parenthood New York City



**Americans For Fair Courts
PRESS EVENT**



**NATIONAL AND LOCAL GROUPS JOIN TO
ANNOUNCE OPPOSITION TO BUSH'S RADICAL
PICK, ALITO, TO THE SUPREME COURT**

What: Anti-Alito Press Event

When: 10:30 AM, Tuesday, November 22, 2005

Where: City Hall Steps

**Join Progressive Organizations, Elected Officials & other leaders
as part of a national campaign to voice opposition & Defeat
Bush's extreme nominee**

For more information please contact Tony Simone at 212-420-0440 x13 or 646-247-6864

Sponsored by: People For the American Way and its coalition partners in Americans for Fair Courts (Some members expressing concern are not formally opposed)* (upon approval from organizations)

Members & Supporters include:

Citizen Action NY • Code Pink Women for Peace/New York • Gay Men's Health Crisis

NAACP NYS • NARAL Pro-Choice NY • NOW-NYC New Democratic Majority

National Council For Jewish Women • National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health

Planned Parenthood NYC

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