

CAMPAIGN FOR  
**YOUTH  JUSTICE**

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

Ending the Practice of Prosecuting Youth as Adults

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**COALITION BUILDING GUIDE**

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## Welcome!

We are excited that you are preparing to build a coalition and work toward creating change for your state! We hope that this packet can provide you with some helpful guidelines and resources in doing so.

**Background:** The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is a national advocacy organization committed to ending the prosecution and incarceration of youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system. We partner with states to pass legislation that (1) keeps youth in the juvenile justice system, where they receive age-appropriate services; and (2) protects youth who are charged as adults, ensuring they are protected while in custody. Since we opened in 2005, 27 states have passed more than 40 pieces of legislation limiting the prosecution of youth as adults.

*The Coalition Building Guide* is intended to provide advocates with guidelines to assist in the creation of a successful coalition dedicated to state legislative change. Building a strong coalition is also an essential part of our Theory of Change Factors:

1. Direct Action/Organizing
2. Policy Advocacy
3. Research
4. Media & Communications
5. **Coalition Building & Outreach**

We hope that you find this guide helpful and that your coalition efforts are greatly rewarded!

Have questions or need extra help? Contact **The Campaign for Youth Justice** for more in-depth support.

## Why Build a Coalition?

### What is a coalition?

By definition, a coalition is an alliance between individuals or organizations for combined action. Coalitions are built with the intention of building power to achieve the goal(s) you have set in order to achieve youth justice reform. They create an opportunity for organizations to come together under shared goals with the understanding that what we are trying to win cannot be accomplished alone. The power and strength that is fostered in a goal-oriented coalition allows you to obtain the large numbers, resources, and effectiveness needed to achieve the shared goal (i.e. statewide legislative wins).

Coalitions do come in a variety of different forms. Having decided to pursue a youth justice reform campaign in your state, it is likely that the coalition of organizations you build will be a permanent and long-term one. This is why it is critical that you start things off right.

### Why is a coalition necessary for my State Campaign Goals?

Coalitions can be extremely helpful in a state campaign effort. Regardless of whether you reside in a small or large state, there are a lot of organizations around you that may support juvenile justice reform. With a little outreach effort, a coalition can help you conserve resources, achieve a more widespread reach than your single organization, bring credibility to the cause and establish a forum for information sharing. A coalition is more likely to be recognized at the state level than your organization by itself. Some specific benefits of a coalition for state campaigns:

- The members of the coalition will hold legislators accountable when it comes to implementing your state legislative win.
- It is an effective way to get many voices to use one stronger voice to articulate the necessity of reform.
- It creates a great distribution of labor.
- It can bring in external experience and expertise that your organization may not have yet.
- It has a large reach; (i.e. combining mailing lists is a very simple, yet very effective tool)
- It fosters a larger cooperation within the state as a whole
- It builds new leaders—as experienced leaders step forward to lead the coalition, openings are created for new leaders in the individual groups, strengthening them and the coalition simultaneously
- It builds a lasting base for change—once groups unite, each group’s vision of change broadens and it becomes more difficult for the opposition to disregard the coalition’s efforts/interests
- Diversity of individuals, skills, and viewpoints—the coalition is made up of people who have never worked together before, forcing them as a whole to understand each other’s point of view to accomplish something bigger

## Where to Begin

**In order to create and maintain a successful coalition, you must first set an organizational structure for your coalition to follow. Effective change cannot and will not happen if a coalition is loosely structured and lacks clarity. Where to start:**

### **Who should be included in my Coalition?**

Before starting your coalition, determine whether similar organizations already exist in your community. For instance, your community may have a Youth Advocacy group whose members may be the same as people you would recruit for your own organization. Don't forget to look into churches, schools, and other community-based institutions.

- Make sure that your coalition has a diverse set of stakeholders, including both grassroots and grass-top organizations. For a youth justice reform coalition, some examples of organizations or individuals that should participate are:
  - Policy advocacy organizations
  - Youth advocates
  - Faith organizations
  - Youth groups
  - Parent advocacy groups
  - Lawyers who specialize in juvenile cases

### **How do I get them to join my coalition?**

- Create an invitation letter for organizations and individuals
  - Ensure that you emphasize the issue of juvenile justice and explain what specifically you are going to work to achieve- i.e. raising the age in your state, or jail removal policies-and why it is important
  - Explain the benefits of joining the coalition both for their organization specifically and for the cause at large
  - Explain what your expectations are for the organization/individual (i.e. time commitment, funding, etc.)
- Put up flyers and posters around your community
  - This can help reach groups and individuals you hadn't thought of or knew existed
- Create a simple pitch explaining why someone should be involved and what you want them to do
  - Communicate this to your community via phone calls, letters, and emails. Be personable and remember to include your contact information
  - Make follow up calls to show that you are truly interested in and counting on their participation
  - Talk to people who you know have a lot of contacts (business leaders, citizens with high credibility)

- Consider holding a coalition-building meeting to make your pitch to a larger number of potential members
  - Provide external information in a short presentation or flyers
  - If possible, provide food and refreshments, no one can say no when there is free food involved!
- Ask to make your pitch at larger community events such as town meetings, fairs, or school events.

Allow time for your recruiting effort. Personal contact is generally the most effective, but can also take the most time. Be patient and know that it will pay off! Once you have other organizations on board, they can help with the recruiting effort as well.

## What to do once you have a Core Group

**After you have recruited some groups and individuals who are dedicated to youth justice and have agreed to work with you (the core group), begin structuring your coalition by establishing clear decision making processes, and agreeing on shared values and goals.**

- **Create a shared Statement of Principles:** A statement of principles clearly defines in writing the intentions of your coalition towards environmental, social, and financial responsibilities. Creating this as a group will help create a larger understanding of where you want your efforts to go towards and how you want to prioritize that. This is a necessary starting point to ensure that from the very beginning everyone is on the same page. (A good example from Colorado can be found here: [http://cslc.org/sujy-f0001-sac/Supporting\\_Documents/Leg\\_Fact\\_Sheets/Statement-of-Principles.pdf](http://cslc.org/sujy-f0001-sac/Supporting_Documents/Leg_Fact_Sheets/Statement-of-Principles.pdf) )
- **Create a Steering Committee.** Establishing clear and agreed-upon decision making processes is essential to the smooth function of any organization, especially a coalition with diverse members. A Steering Committee decides on the priorities or business of a coalition and manages the general course of its work. They will be your leaders and organizers, ensuring that everything gets done.
  - This should be comprised of representatives from the various coalition member organizations empowered by their groups to make quick decisions regarding legislation or anything else
- **Develop tiers of involvement** for the coalition
  - By developing levels of involvement it helps identify how involved organizations can be towards state reform (naturally some organizations can do more than others for your specific goal, it is necessary to recognize which organizations these are). For example:
    - **Tier 1** – your issue is a priority for them, fully committed in terms of time and resources
    - **Tier 2** – can contribute some time and resources to the effort, but not fully committed
    - **Tier 3** – will show up for big events, or can contribute in one area (like research)
- **Create a written list of shared goals** on a set timeline (keeping state legislative session timeline as a basis)
  - Have all organizations work together in making this list, remember they are *shared* goals and should be determined as a group
  - These goals will be helpful when the group gets off track or loses focus; you can always refer back to what you agreed to in the beginning.
  - When planning goals, consider setting short-term success goals as well. This can allow you time to gain broad-based support and work up to long term goals, while still recognizing progress along the way.

## Setting Guidelines

In order to create a functioning, fair coalition, be sure to agree upon the ways in which you will act. Specifically:

Develop clear and honest agreements on:

- **Decision-making:** Creating the Steering Committee (mentioned previously) is an ideal way for all coalition members to have a hand in the decisions while still maintaining some ability to decide things quickly.
- **Capacity:** Determine and agree on what each organization can do/provide to achieve the shared goal (having a clear understanding of each organization and its assets/strengths/financial resources will be helpful in this process)
- **Strategy:** What are the deal breakers and compromises for the coalition when making strategic decisions on your legislative goal? Some groups in the coalition may be more willing than others to embrace certain kinds of compromises in the short-term, so clarity about these differences is critical.
- **Tactics:** What are the limits for the coalition in terms of tactics? Some groups may have a more radical or assertive approach to tactics than others, so an agreement on what the coalition will or won't do is important.
- **Meetings:** Where and when the coalition meets; consider rotating across the state.



## Important Resources for the Coalition

You will need to think about the important, necessary resources a youth justice reform coalition may require. This may differ across states and coalitions, but the general ideas hold true. Below are some general tips and ideas for specific resources you may need.

### Who can be a resource for your coalition?

- If possible, hire a coalition staff member to coordinate the coalition overall (if this person works for one of the organizations involved, they must be mindful of not appearing to favor their own organizations interests over that of the coalition.) If this is not possible, bringing in an outside facilitator to run the coalition meetings, especially early on, would be a good idea.

What to keep in mind when reaching out to specific members for the coalition:

- In order to cover all of your fields, ensure that you have members in all five core functions of a campaign. These functions mutually reinforce each other, which is why it is important to be sure you have individuals who reflect each function. An ideal coalition will have members skilled in each of these five areas:
  - Organizing & Direct Action
  - Coalition Building & Outreach
  - Media & Communications
  - Research
  - Policy Advocacy & Lobbying
- Fundraising:

You may want to raise funds as a coalition, or you may have each organization raise and contribute its resources separately. Some things to think about when planning to raise funds:

  - Will the coalition director or other staff be paid?
  - Where will you house your coalition? Will you need to pay rent or lease space from one of the organizations involved? Will you need to pay for computers or other office equipment?
  - Extra costs to remember: furniture, postage, printing and copying, food and refreshments, travel (gas, parking)
  - Where will those funds come from and how much money will be needed?
  - If you do raise funds as a coalition (rather than just having the member organizations contribute as needed), you will need a bank account and treasurer.

## Planning your Coalition's Work

Now that your coalition is structured you are ready to start planning your work. This probably involves a day-long meeting to create a strategic campaign plan.

**Purpose: Create a strategy with your coalition that will win. This meeting requires a lot of defining the terms of your coalition, starting with your end goal and working backwards to ensure your success. You may want to consider drawing/writing out your ideas on a large whiteboard or sheet of paper to help you visualize the process and help others be easily engaged.**

For an example of a strategic planning diagram, including all of the following information in a convenient chart, see page 15.

**Divide your planning into 5 Steps:**

- 1. Goals**
- 2. Constituents, Allies and Opponents**
- 3. Targets**
- 4. Tactics**
- 5. Resources**

It is best to think about it in this order so that your end strategy is logical and comprehensive.

Begin by defining, agreeing on, and setting your goals-long term, intermediate, and short-term goals included. What does that mean?

- **Long Term Goals:** the long term goal of your efforts-what is the big thing you want to accomplish, that may take 5-10 years?
- **Intermediate Goals:** The goal of your campaign. Choose something that can be accomplished during a year or so.
- **Short-Term Goal:** The first step that your group can take to get to the intermediate goal accomplished. This may be a quick victory that your coalition can win, or it may be a step that you need to accomplish before obtaining the intermediate goal.

With those goals in mind, make a list of who you are going to be working with and against

- **Constituents:** Who are the people on your side of the issue who share your self-interest and will benefit if you win? These can be organized individuals or not.
- **Allies:** What organizations and people can align with your issue for reasons that may be different from your own?

- **Opponents:** What organizations and people will oppose you and who will lose if you win? What will they do to oppose you and try to weaken your cause? How strong are they?

Next, outline your primary and secondary targets. This will help you narrow your focus on people who have the power to create juvenile justice reform.

- **Primary Target:** Who has the power to give you what you want? What power do you have over them?
- **Secondary Target:** Who has the power to influence your primary target? What power do you have over them?

Now that you have determine your end goals and targets, how are you going to do it? **Outline your tactics and plans to accomplish your goals.** Questions to consider:

- What are the steps you can take to influence your target?
- What type of media advocacy can you do to promote awareness?
- What type of presentations/demonstrations does your community respond best to?
- Are there public hearings you can speak at?
- Would a meeting with elected officials be helpful? What other forms of communication can you use to reach elected officials attention? (i.e. postcards, letters, phone calls, etc.)

Lastly, determine what type of resources you are going to need to carry out your tactics and ultimately obtain your short, intermediate, and long-term goals. Where will you get them?

- **What do you want to get out of this?** What organizational gains do we want from this coalition (more people, more leaders, more experience?)
- **What do you need?** What resources, people, money, information or other things do you have to carry out the goals? What are potential problems that you need to solve in order to move forward?
- **What do you already have?** What resources, people, money, etc. do you have to carry out the goals?

#### **Things to remember in developing your strategy:**

**Be realistic** about how long it might take to organize certain tactics or fulfill your resource needs. Identify potential times for **spikes in activity** (committee hearing dates, meaningful anniversary dates, conferences or community events) and develop a **comprehensive calendar** for your Strategic Campaign Plan. Include regular organization or coalition meetings, and **assign a point-person** for each calendar item.

## Media and Communications

An important part of a new coalition is ensuring that not only can you communicate with each other, but that you can communicate with your community! Be loud and proud of your goals, your accomplishments, and don't be afraid to always be recruiting more members.

### Announcing your Coalition

Once you have gathered a decent sized group of signatories and come up with a strategic plan, let the community know!

- Put out a press release or a blog post about it! Create a Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms for your coalition where others can follow you and learn about (as well as hopefully join) the movement in youth justice reform
- Publish your guiding principles document and a list of your partners on your public website
- Continue telling people/organizations how they can join the coalition. Add new signatories to the site as you obtain them
- Set up a list serve for everyone from the coalition to exchange news updates or other relevant publicities to youth justice

### Involving Youth Voices

Don't forget that you are pushing for *youth* justice reform. Include their voices in the cause as well!

- Reach out to the youth community around you (schools, sports clubs, churches, etc.) and ask for help. This can be personal testimony or simply someone with a passion for youth justice reform, it's okay if they don't necessarily have experience in juvenile justice
- Be thoughtful about planning that involves your youth, for example considering school schedules when planning meetings or transportation to and from a meeting.
- Ensure that they are partners in the coalition- treat them with respect and authority as you would any other member
- Use their energy and resources! Youth often are involved in many activities (especially on college campuses) and can reach out to groups you normally aren't connected to

## How to Maintain a Coalition

Since youth justice reform campaigns can often take multiple years to achieve long-term goals that have been set, it is important to understand that maintaining a coalition takes time and effort from all parties.

Important things to remember along the way:

- **Any win—big or small—should be celebrated.** In long-term campaigns like youth justice reform campaigns, it is easy for organizations to experience campaign exhaustion. In order to keep all parties engaged, it is critical to highlight tangible results being achieved along the way. Be sure that credit for wins is shared fairly among the coalition members.
- **Consistent and clear communication within the coalition must be present at all times.** The coalition should decide on the best format of communication that works for their particular campaign and stick to it.
- **Maintaining a healthy coalition takes effort.** Each organization involved has its own identity and mission outside of the coalition. So it is important that the coalition serve to prop up each organization's involved and to make sure that all members are benefiting from staying involved.
  - Remember to acknowledge the contributions of individuals and organizations and to provide opportunities for each organization or individual to contribute so that every organization can receive recognition.
  - Joint press releases and statements take more time, as different groups may have different ideas about appropriate language, but they are worth it for internal coalition cohesion and the external appearance of strength in numbers.
- **Always be evaluating success and setbacks.**
  - After every legislative session, the coalition members must debrief on the progress made towards achieving the goal. It is also a good time to talk about what worked, what some challenges were and how to do things better the next time.
  - Take time to regroup and recommit. Don't let your coalition lose the close ties you began with. Recommitting and reminding the organizations of the progress so far and the gains still to be made can keep them motivated.
- Remember that throughout your campaign, different tactics will be needed to move the issue forward. Each member's skill could be used strategically at any specific time, so each member should be valued for what they bring to the table.