

*Activist Summary*  
*How to Achieve Your Goal in 4,000 Words or Less!*

**Building Coalitions with a Purpose**

*The United States started as a coalition of colonies with a common interest  
and people concerned with finding solutions.*

If it is true that coalitions are still the most effective way of getting your message across and achieving your goals in any area of life, then this is especially true in the modern political arena. In fact, developing coalitions could be deemed as the most integral aspect to the success of every activist who is involved in the political process.

As activists, you probably realize that there is a need for greater community involvement. You are proof that there are people in our communities interested in discovering solutions.

As we connect with these individuals or organizations within our communities, we are then able to build coalitions on the common beliefs we share. The key to this process is always seeking to create a group that works well together and who can find commonality in their values.

Here are some basic benefits of building coalitions:

- A greatly increased potential for success.
- The ability to win on more fronts than a single person or organization can when working alone.
- The opportunities for new members to bring different contributions that add value to the overall strategy for change; these additional ideas improve efficiency and avoid redundant efforts among members.
- An increased general knowledge of your issue brings new people outside of the coalition to greater awareness of your purpose.
- The sharing of resources fosters networking and knowledge for everyone involved.
- An influx of resources and perspectives add layers of valuable experience.
- A stronger and more focused foundation for effective change in your special interest.
- A broader ability to develop leadership skills among your members.

*One of the best ways to organize people is around issues,  
especially those issues that touch on fundamental needs such as security, family values, and money.*

## Building Coalitions with a Purpose continued

**Thus, Step #1 on the path to be a successful coalition** would be to identify goals and targets of your group.

Make it a goal to build your coalition in a way that will allow it to grow and last. The impact your coalition will make within your community is directly affected by its strength over both the short term and the long term.

**Step #2 on the path to be a successful coalition** is to take positive action and make intelligent decisions in order to increase community awareness.

This happens through activities such as organizing events that communicate your issues, attending local government meetings, writing press releases, and engaging in online projects and marketing like websites, wiki projects, and blogs.

**Finally, Step #3 on the path to be a successful coalition** involves realizing that people who pool their resources and work together are generally more powerful and more able to advance their interests. Thus, make it a priority to identify potential supporters through petitions, voter ID, and surveys.

A conglomeration of databases pooled from different sources is a great advantage to coalitions. A database is useful for identifying donors, supporters, increasing name and issue recognition, spreading credibility, and strategic planning for the future of the organization.

However, you must also motivate the other members of your coalition to be as involved as they can possibly be while at the same time educating them so they can be an authoritative and informative source for any questions others may have of your organization. Sharing resources with like-minded groups helps to educate, find and mobilize people in your group.

# Organizing Meaningful Events

*When you organize a meaningful event, there are certain steps that must be taken to ensure that the event you are planning is successful enough to make an impact in the present but also provide momentum into the future.*

**Step #1 in organizing a meaningful event** is to determine what kind of event you want to have.

For any event to be deemed a success, especially a political event, you want to make sure that you identify the specific goals you want your event to accomplish, whether it's to support a candidate, an organization or political party, or even a particular issue.

**Step #2 in organizing a meaningful event** is to identify the purpose of the event.

Is the purpose of your event to raise money? Is it to create awareness of the candidate or issue in your area? Is it to serve as a photo opportunity? Is it to connect the candidate with local business people? Is it to expose the candidate to voters? Sometimes one event has several of these purposes; other times, the event will be tailored to meet one specific purpose. Whatever the case may be, a clear and informed choice on the purpose will define all of the other decisions that will subsequently be made.

**Step #3 in organizing a meaningful event is to determine the size and scope of the event.**

***Large-scale Events*** – An example of this size of event would be a fundraising dinner.

To have an effective large-scale event, you have to spend money to make money. Every detail is very significant, especially the invitations and decorations.

Oftentimes dinners and large fundraisers will charge a certain “ticket” or donation amount on the invitations. There are typically levels of tickets that a donor can purchase; make sure the highest level is the maximum legal donation limit for individual contributors. Of course, the highest level contributors should get more “perks” that evening than other donors, such as prime seating and a signed book. The ticket levels should be stratified appropriately and have value to the group of people you have invited, but be careful not to spend too much money and make it not worth the cost.

Look for vendors who support the candidate or organization and can offer goods or services in the form of an in-kind donation. Make sure you follow legal protocol and report any and all contributions that you collect at your event. And do not forget to recognize your donors' support and generosity if you are hosting a large-scale event!

***Medium-scale events*** – An example of this size of event would be a “watch” party to watch election results roll in.

When planning a medium-scale event, create an invitation list from all of the supporters and remember to show off your organization or candidate with their literature, signs, marketing tools, and email sign-up sheet.

## Organizing Meaningful Events continued

When you choose a venue, make sure it has all of the technological amenities you will need. For our example of a watch party, this would mean plenty of televisions to view different stations throughout the night. Make sure that seating is readily available and conversationally designed. This will be key as people will be waiting for the results and discussing the events of the evening.

In the case of organizing a watch party, be aware of the fact that the situation at the end of the night may not be fun at all. Therefore, have more than one plan for the end.

***Small-scale events*** – An example of this size of event would be a meet and greet or candidate coffee.

In this situation, you will not be planning something for hundreds of people. For each small-scale event, 15 to 25 people is a great turnout. The best part about hosting a small event such as a coffee or an evening dessert function is that the food and beverage cost is very low.

If you would rather not invite people into your home, or you want to do something a little more neighborhood-oriented, a block party or cookout is a great way to enjoy the summer weather and get a lot of attention. Find a place in your neighborhood where you won't block traffic, and even find fellow supporters who will go in on this event with you. Have a cooler of water and soda, again decorate with balloons, literature, signs—it's very easy. Grill some burgers and hot dogs and have a few people bring side dishes.

It is helpful to increase success if you tell as many people as you know about your event. In the case of a block party or cookout, make sure the whole neighborhood or precinct area knows about it through flyers, signs, and phone calls to neighbors. It is a great way for candidates to be visible and meet more constituents than they would at a smaller, more private coffee event.

# The Importance of Accountability in Democracy

*It is immensely important to be informed about your elected officials and their actions while in office.  
Yet holding our leaders accountable is a significant component of the government process  
that is sorely lacking in modern politics.*

*If elected officials truly do care what their constituents think,  
then it is necessary to tell them what you think.*

Part of good accountability is understanding your position by doing good research to firm up your beliefs in issues. Much research can be done online and is easily accessible. It is important for you to know that information is always available to you and you have rights to access much of the information you need.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a great research tool and requires the government to share information with citizens. With the FOIA, not only can you hold elected officials accountable by having information, you can hold government agencies accountable as well. It is yet another way you can be as informed as possible on the inner-workings of government. You can use this information to gather facts, data, and other valuable research for any projects you might be undertaking.

In recent years, wiki projects, or online projects that compile extensive information, have been useful in gathering some of this information about state and local government. Alternatively, if you come into useful research and information, it is a great idea to share it with others through wiki projects dedicated to increasing government transparency and accountability such as Sunshine Review. This not only helps keep your local government accountable for their accessibility, it helps others to utilize the resources for their own purposes.

**Get to know your legislators and officials:** Remember, most things passed in any level of government do affect you on some level, so it is vital that you understand what is happening.

- **Who are they?** Be knowledgeable about each and every level of government: municipal government, county officials, state legislators, other state officials, and national elected officials.
- **What is their background?** Again, pay attention to the resources available on the elected official or candidates' webpage, official government websites and those of organizations like Project Vote Smart.
- **What do they stand for?** Look at current issues and how they stood verbally and in their voting record. Research the platform your elected official ran on. Find out their specific stances through legislation they wrote or issues they pushed. Make sure you know exactly where you stand and what you are looking for in order to determine how the candidates represent you.

During election season, you can use local election offices to find out who is running. During the campaign season, take advantage of candidates' websites and the information they provide. Oftentimes, this is a great way to learn more about them and contact them effectively.

## The Importance of Accountability in Democracy continued

There are numerous online resources for accessing voting records, including:

- Information on national, state and local elections is available at [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org)
- A resource for government transparency information is <http://sunshinereview.org>
- National House and Senate information is available at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)
- A great source for statewide information on national politicians is [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org)

You can effectively contact state legislators by calling, emailing, writing, or making an appointment to visit with them at their office. Make sure to be polite and respectful and allow them to do their job in representing you. Also keep in mind that you can contact national legislators in D.C. through their local office or by using the email contact system on their official House or Senate website.

An effective way to monitor your local school boards, city councils and county commission is to attend their meetings. You will be amazed by how influential you can be just by showing up at county commission, school board and city council meetings. This is a very effective way to get the attention of municipal and county officials who may not realize that their constituents are paying attention to what they do.

**Here are some examples of other available resources to educate you more about your local, state, and federal government:**

- Think tanks, non-profit research (Cato, Heritage, Sam Adams Alliance)
- Periodicals (magazines, blogs, news sites)
- Books
- Online resources (wiki projects, official website)

Remember, your elected officials live in your neighborhoods and communities and are far more accessible than you might realize.

Finally, do not be shy about discussing your efforts to keep your elected officials accountable with your friends and family. Get them interested, and encourage them to be involved as well.

# Successfully Using Traditional and New Media

## *Successfully Writing Letters to the Newspaper Editor and Opinion Editorials*

On any given day, newspaper editors receive hundreds of submissions, so making your submission stand out will increase the chances of getting it published. These tips will help:

- Include your full name, city and state of residence, and a daytime phone number, as newspaper editors will want to call you to confirm your submission. And if you have any titles or experiences that particularly qualify you to write about a particular issue, be sure to include that information as well.
- If you are referencing a previously published item, be sure to include the title of the piece and the date that it ran so the editor and readers will understand where you're coming from. If possible, submit letters within 24 hours of when whatever you are responding to was published.
- Be concise. Most newspapers have a word limit on letters to the editor and opinion editorials. The shorter your letter is while still encapsulating your points, the greater the likelihood is of it getting published.
- Be direct, clear, and simple. Keep your sentences and paragraphs short and easy to follow. Don't use long, flowery words that require the average reader to grab a dictionary.
- Have fun. Use humor— you can even be sarcastic, just be careful not to be mean.
- Be creative – steer away from overused clichés and well-known puns.
- Be personal. Use your own personal experiences and stories to strengthen your argument. This makes your letter more interesting and freshens the debate.

## *Successfully Using Social Networking Tools*

Social networking tools are becoming increasingly important in mobilizing like-minded activists, integrating volunteers and raising money. Facebook.com is a site that allows users to create profiles, upload photos, add friends, join groups and invite friends to events.

Creating a Facebook® group allows candidates or organizations to disperse information quickly and efficiently to large groups with a single click. Additionally, Facebook® events allow users to create an event and invite people to it. Events can be created for neighborhood fundraisers, Get-Out-The-Vote efforts, door-to-door canvassing, sign parties and much more.

Facebook® is most useful when users have well-developed friend bases that can be tapped quickly and effectively. Setting up a well-rounded profile can take about two hours and setting up groups or events takes as little time as ten minutes. Events can be created for neighborhood fundraisers, Get-Out-The-Vote efforts, door-to-door canvassing, sign parties and much more.

## *How to Be Effective in the Blogging Community*

Blogging offers great opportunities for local leaders. A well-run blog can share information on key issues, keep people interested in your project, help you to connect with like-minded leaders, and strengthen your messaging. To start a blog of your own, register for free online at [www.Blogivists.com](http://www.Blogivists.com), an online community of liberty-minded bloggers. Link to blogs that discuss topics you're

## Successfully Using Traditional and New Media continued

interested in and connect with other bloggers via email. When you're writing for your blog, use the same writing style as you would for a newspaper, as discussed above, and try to offer your readers information that is new and timely. Give the facts about a story or an issue, but also give your opinions. People read the news for facts, they read blogs for opinions.

Post original content and links as often as possible. Spread the word and connect with others by linking to other blogs, and emailing other bloggers. Be interesting and confident—there are many blogs in the “blogosphere” all competing for attention and readership. That means that you must have something to say, and get right to it! Keep it short and straight to the point when you're writing for your blog.

It is also important to note that you can be involved in the blogging community without having to start a blog of your own. Many newspapers have websites with blogs or post letters to the editors as “blog posts,” allowing readers to comment; you can become active commenting on others' blogs, or even send a local blogger information to write about. This is an excellent way to shape the conversation.

### *Successfully Using Wiki-Projects*

Wikis are essentially websites with content that is created and edited by visitors. This gives you, the viewer, a tremendous amount of power because you are able to edit and define exactly what movements, legislation, organizations, and even ideas mean. Here are several Wiki-projects that need your involvement to help them grow and thrive:

- SunshineReview.org: deals with government transparency and accountability
- Judgepedia.org: deals with all things judicial
- Ballotpedia.org: deals with electoral issues such as ballot and referendum initiatives
- WikiFoia.org: deals with the Freedom of Information Act

Wiki projects offer you a tremendous amount of power because you are able to edit and define exactly what movements, legislation, and even ideas mean. Wiki projects are quickly becoming some of the most useful tools liberty-minded individuals have to make politics and government accessible. Wikis are powerful because they are dynamic and changing, but they depend on active, engaged citizens to drive their development. This is an important and easy way to make a difference, and anyone can do it at their computer. Here's how:

- Research your local government transparency and accountability and update WikiFoia and Sunshine Review.
- Check into your local judges and edit the available information about them on Judgepedia.

For learn more about wiki projects, attend a full day activist training or you can visit [http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/Sunshine\\_Review:Tutorial\\_%28Format%29](http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/Sunshine_Review:Tutorial_%28Format%29).



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