

# Recognizing and Selecting Allies\*

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## What are allies?

To have allies is almost as important as to have a cause to fight for. If you're the only one believing in and fighting for your cause, it's still a noble thing to do, but you probably won't go far with your ideas. You need people to support you, believe in a common cause and help to make it succeed.

Allies are people, or groups of people, who have the same interests as you, or the capacity or resources to help you. You may be thinking, "But few groups are completely in tune with our interests; how can we identify our real allies?" The sections below are designed to help you answer that question.

## Why do you need allies?

The simplest answer is because allies can help you achieve your mission. Allies may be willing to share their resources and information with you in order to achieve a common goal. With more people working together for an issue or goal, the community or those you want to change are more likely to pay attention.

Let's suppose you are the quarterback during a football game and it's a tie game so far. Who would you pay more attention to--one person cheering for you in the stands or a whole crowd of people, yelling, screaming and generally making a lot of noise? When it gets right down to it, the more help and support you have--the more allies--the more you can get accomplished.

## How do you find allies?

The easiest way to start recruiting allies is to see who is already out in the community--either those working directly on your specific issue or those working on similar or overlapping issues--who might be interested in working together with you on your issue. One method to help you find out who those groups might be is to request copies of local community resource directories from organizations such as United Way, a local social service organization, city government departments, the Chamber of Commerce and neighborhood assistance programs. If you can't find an existing resource directory for your issue, your group can begin to create your own customized directory, using the

\*Adapted from "Community Toolbox: Recognizing Allies" (Part I, Chapter 30, Principles of Advocacy). © 2000, KU Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development, University of Kansas. Retrieved 8/20/02 from the KU web site: [http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/EN/part\\_1009.htm](http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/EN/part_1009.htm). Used with permission.

yellow pages and city and county government pages of the local phone book and Tool #1 below ("*Community Resource Inventory for Recognizing Allies*"). In creating an inventory of potential allies, some of the questions you will need to address are:

- Who is doing something about this issue in the community already?
- Who is working on a closely related issue in the community already?
- What are they doing?
- How is it going?
- Which strategies are they finding to be effective?
- In what ways could you collaborate and work together?
- Who else might be interested, even if they're not already working on the issue?

To expand your inventory list further, you can use the "snowball technique." Starting with one of your known allies, ask them to list several other groups that either are already working on your issue or who might be interested in helping your group. Continue this process, asking each of the allies to identify more potential allies until you have a large enough pool of prospects.

An alternate method is to write down various sectors of your community--businesses, faith communities, health care organizations, educational institutions--and then identify one or more organizations or groups within each sector to contact as potential allies.

### **Do you and your allies care about the same things?**

When you first begin searching for allies, you may feel lost. You know from your resource inventory that there are a few groups out there working on the same or similar issues but you may feel you need to know more about them before you recruit them as allies or collaborators on a project or campaign.

The first question to ask in selecting potential allies is, "Who cares about the issue enough to join in and help me?" The people and groups who care about your issue are people who face the same problem. They are the ones who are likely to approve or to benefit if you are successful in achieving your aims. Usually, the more a group has to benefit from your success, the more willing they will be to help or cooperate with your group. Likewise, a group with a lot to lose will often do their best to oppose your aims.

In reality, outside groups often have both something to gain and something to lose by helping you. Often, a critical factor in determining whether or not a potential ally is willing to join or support your efforts is whether or not the benefits outweigh the costs. Costs are not just money; many other less tangible factors such as prestige, group identity, time constraints, competing goals and interests, and staffing resources may enter the equation.

To help you decide whether or not to approach a potential ally about joining your group, you can conduct a preliminary risk/benefit analysis using Tool #2 below ("*Potential Allies' Risks versus Benefits Table*"). Conducting a risk/benefit analysis involves brainstorming answers to three sets of questions:

1. Whose problem is it? Which groups or stakeholders are likely to be affected by the problem or issue your group has identified?
2. What are the potential benefits for each stakeholder? What will they gain by helping you?
3. What are the potential risks each stakeholder faces? What might they lose by helping you?

Outlining the potential benefits and risks for each stakeholder provides you with a framework for identifying potential allies and developing a strategy for soliciting their support or cooperation. In general, a stakeholder with more benefits than risks will be easier to recruit as an ally. A group that will not benefit from helping you should probably be avoided, at least early on in the process of building alliances. For those with mixed benefits and risks, you may be able to find a way to eliminate or minimize the risks the group faces or to maximize the benefits they will receive by joining your group or supporting your efforts.

### **Which ally should you contact first?**

As you develop your list of allies, you may discover there are more potential allies than you can even begin to contact. How will you decide which group(s) to contact first?

One way to prioritize your list is to rank them by the amount and kinds of strength or power they can potentially bring to your group or your cause. Tool #3 below (the "Types of Power Chart") offers a list, explanation and examples of some of the types of power allies may possess. You can use the "Types of Power Chart" to complete an "Ally Power Grid" (Tool #4) for each of potential allies on your resource list. Analyzing a group's power gives you an approximate measure of how useful or effective that group will be in helping you to achieve your goals.

Using the Ally Power Grid involves three steps:

1. Complete a separate grid for each ally whose power you wish to examine.
2. For each type of power listed in column one, assess how much of it your ally possesses (e.g.--none, a little, a lot) and then list out specific events, facts, evidence or examples that demonstrate the ally's power.

- Determine the most effective allies for your group by looking at which have more types of power overall or which have the kinds of power most relevant to your needs. That is, if you really need an ally with money, then an ally with special appeal may not be particularly useful at this stage.

### Sample Entries for Ally Power Grid

Type of Power	Power Appraisal (How much of this power do they have?)	Example, Evidence, Supporting Facts
Members	They have a lot	The group has 200 active members.
Financial/practical resources	Have little money to donate but offer free meeting space.	The organization has declined to donate money for the last three years but lends its conference room free of charge to community groups in the evening.
Credibility	Very credible	The group has an excellent reputation among local agencies and its trainings are always well attended.
Skills	Excellent technical skills	They offer free consultation on using e-mail and Internet resources for campaign organizing.

Is it necessary to complete an Ally Power Grid for every ally you want to consider? Probably not. But if you have the time and sufficient group members to work on it together, it can be a great advantage. If your time is limited, you can complete the grid only for potential allies about whom you are uncertain or when you are looking for an ally with particular strengths or types of power. As your project or campaign progresses, you may find that you need additional allies with special kinds of expertise or with unique bargaining skills. You can always go back to your Community Resource Inventory and pull up the names of groups you may not have had time to consider fully in the past.

## Tool #1: Community Resource Inventory for Recognizing Allies

Source of Allies	Potential Allies	What are they doing? (or what could they be doing on the issue?)	Contacted?
Groups already working on the issue in your community			
Groups working on related issues.			
Phone book			
Local government offices and directories			
Social service directory			
Business or Chamber of Commerce directory			
Neighborhood assistance groups			
Friends, family, work colleagues			
Other sources			

## Tool #2: Potential Allies' Risks versus Benefits Table

<b>Whose Problem Is It?</b>	<b>What are the benefits?</b> What do they gain if you succeed?	<b>What are the risks?</b> What might they lose if you succeed?
Stakeholder 1		
Stakeholder 2		
Stakeholder 3		

## Tool # 3: Types of Power Chart

<b>Type of Power</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Members</b> How many members or volunteers does the group have?	The more members a group has, the less likely it is to be ignored.	A group with 500 members shows up at a school board meeting.
<b>Financial/Practical Resources</b> Will they contribute money or other tangible resources?	Donated funds and other resources are needed to achieve community goals.	The local teachers' union donates funds to your program.
<b>Credibility</b> Are they considered trustworthy and credible advocates for your issue?	A group with enduring ties and positive recognition within the community will help bring credibility to your group and deflect opposition.	A faith community group invites your group to speak to their members about violence prevention.
<b>Network</b> Are they part of a large, organized network?	A group already connected with other groups will have financial resources, credibility and access to power that single groups don't have.	A broad network of diverse communities of color lobby state legislators for policy changes to support women's and immigrants' rights.
<b>Skills</b> What special skills do they offer?	A number of different skills (technical, legal, advocacy, business, organizing, etc.) are needed for community action and change.	A local advertising firm offers to donate their services in designing a brochure or creating PSAs for your group.
<b>Newsworthy</b> Are they newsworthy or well connected to attract favorable publicity?	Some groups may have connections with the media that can help attract positive attention to your cause as well.	An activist group for children's rights that recently won a special human service award offers to hold a joint fundraising event.
<b>Other</b>		