



# Collaborating with the Community

## Steps to Finding Coalition Partners (Likely & Unlikely)

1. Talk to your Chapter Chair and members of your Chapter's Executive Committee about the benefits of getting involved in coalition work.
2. Find out which associations, organizations, and community groups are already engaged in immigration advocacy in your state. Some natural coalition partners will be easy to identify (Immigrant Rights Groups, immigrant business owners, the Chamber of Commerce, etc...) others will be more difficult, but are just as important to reach. These might include your local Church, small businesses in your community, neighborhood associations, City Council members, etc...

“My goal is to convert the unconverted, preaching to ethnic Chambers is preaching to the choir. I want to increase the pro-immigration reform network by focusing on mainstream Chambers.”
3. Thinking about your goals and who the decision makers are is critical when deciding who to reach out to when starting a coalition.
4. Identify influential individuals in your community who may be able to help you make connections with potential coalition members. Always ask one contact to introduce you to others who may have other potential contacts. A personal connection will make beginning a coalition much easier. It's worth considering your own professional and personal networks – if people know that you're looking for allies you're more likely to find them. Even using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter can help you reach people you might never have thought of otherwise.
5. In addition to being a great messenger for immigration reform yourself AILA advocates are uniquely positioned to engage key spokespeople in the immigration movement. As attorneys, you regularly interact with individuals from different sectors of your community – maybe some of your clients are employers who have an interest in raising the cap on H-1Bs or they are hospitals that need more nurse, or perhaps you represent refugees and asylum seekers – you have access to individuals who have a valuable and possibly persuasive perspective on the way that U.S. immigration laws impact their lives.
6. Set up one on one meetings with as many people as you can to start identifying common areas of interest and shared values around immigration. These areas might be very different for different potential partners (i.e. business vs. a Church). Focus on the distinct strengths different organizations can bring to the immigration cause and how each can be enhanced by working together on a shared strategic plan.
7. Be sure to promote your strengths as an AILA Chapter. Other groups may not be clear about the way that AILA Chapters can enhance collaborative advocacy efforts and they may be unfamiliar with the type of work you do for immigrant communities – beyond specific casework.
8. Always leave a meeting with clear follow up plans to ensure a continuity of the relationship.