

Strengthening Your Impact through Collaboration

Building collaborations increases your chance for creating change by building power in numbers, influence, and resources. Cooperating with other individuals or groups will allow you to bring your unique assets together to work towards a common, mutually agreed-upon goal. Simply put: the more people you can involve in your action or event, the bigger impact you can make.

Be Strategic on What Benefits You're Seeking and Contributions You Can Offer

Consider the following benefits you may want pursue as you decide whether/who to collaborate with:

- **Widen your reach.** Boost attendance at events, amplify publicity for activities, and bring in a diversity of voices to strengthen the message.
- **Set and accomplish bigger goals.** Different interpretations, experiences, and expertise can also offer a more comprehensive approach and ability to realistically set bigger goals. With the additional resources, volunteers, relationships, funding, etc., these goals can be accomplished.
- **Build credibility.** Different communities with the same concerns and message add credibility and shows solidarity. Bringing together your connections builds a positive reputation and can help boost your political clout and influence on policymakers.
- **Create community.** By joining forces, you and others will recognize that you are a part of a larger movement. Especially in a challenging political climate, having a shared space can revitalize those involved and allow for an exchange of knowledge and lessons among others engaged in the issues you're working on.

Common activities for collaboration include: pooling resources; hosting a public event; getting local press coverage; writing or sponsoring a published/public statement; working together on a research project or educational products; coordinating joint actions (e.g., call-in day, letters, meetings with legislators); or sharing news, intel, best practices and lessons learned.

There is a strong ethical and strategic value in working with others and ensuring that your efforts support relevant work of the local communities most affected by attacks on science-based safeguards, including those facing disproportionate health and environment hazards. Union of Concerned Scientists encourages you to do your homework on local environmental justice or public health equity-based groups in your area as you consider organizing activities or events to defend science-based safeguards. For more resources on how to learn about and foster effective collaborations with community groups, check out our toolkit at www.ucsusa.org/scientistsandcommunities.

Scout for Strengths

Within your collaboration, be sure to identify resources or skills needed to ensure you are making the most impact possible with your activity. The following are examples of resources you may find in three key areas:

1. **Within your personal network and affiliated groups.** Take stock of what like-minded members in your network are personally capable of, such as:
 - *Technology or computer skills.* These skills can help with the creation of websites and online event invites, advertising through networking or social media sites, as well as audio/visual needs at events.
 - *Design or writing skills.* There are a variety of writing skills that could be beneficial, such as the ability to write a press release or article, or to create a flyer or factsheet.
 - *Media contacts.* Whether it is paper, radio, television, or online coverage, any connection helps to garner media attention.
 - *Influential connections.* Relationships with businesses, celebrities, government officials, professional groups, or relevant societies/associations/organizations can be used to promote and add clout to you work.

2. **In your local community.** Your neighborhood has a wealth of possible connections to make when organizing, from event locations to co-organizers, including:
 - *Local relevant institutions.* Some religious institutions, organized cultural groups, women’s groups, local organization, or chapters of national organizations may bring additional perspectives and assets to the table.
 - *Popular community locations.* Scope out the possible scenes to organize an event for the most attention and reception possible. Keep in mind your target population and ultimate goal when deciding your activity locale.
 - *Local like-minded, active businesses.* Getting local businesses involved will allow for many new outlets for donation solicitation, bringing their political clout, publicizing your activity, or bringing together the community on the issue.
 - *Local public websites.* These are quick and easy publicity and outreach tools.

3. **In your academic institution.** If you’re a professor, academic researcher, or student, consider taking advantage of the variety of resources and opportunity that academic institutions offer:
 - *Supportive faculty.* Getting various different academic sponsors or co-organizers can result in a very well rounded, funded, and attended activity. There are various ways to engage your school beyond your personal professors. All it takes is a formal letter, a phone call, and/or a meeting appointment to make the connection. Consider affiliated institutes, expert guest professors, affiliated associations, and other relevant schools.
 - *Campus-based media outlets.* Conduct a full survey of the various ways to reach your academic community for education or publicity.
 - *Small grants.* Many schools have grant opportunities. Explore what grant options are available at your school and provide a project proposal for the possibility to have a full-funded activity.

Other Practical Tips for Positive Collaboration

- **Make explicit agreements on the specific activity and planned outcome.** Communication is key to a smooth and successful collaboration. It is important to be clear on the “what, when, where, who, and how” of the efforts you seek to partner on.
- **Choose unifying issues.** The most effective collaborations come together in response to a common issue and value. Make sure the development of group goals is a joint process, rather than one or two group representatives deciding on the goals and then inviting others to join.
- **Understand and respect each group’s self-interest and internal processes.** There must be a balance between the goals and needs of the collaboration and of the individual groups/people, as well as a respect for their specific systems and policies. Make sure to take everyone’s opinion and restraints into account and to use diversity to spur discussion, rather than as a source of division.
- **Structure decision-making and communication carefully.** Finding consensus is very important when making decisions in partnerships. The role of listening and discussion is essential to finding common ground—make sure that the lines of communication within the collaborations are inclusive and clearly understood.
- **Distribute credit fairly.** Recognize that contributions vary. Appreciate different contributions. Each partner will have something different to offer—volunteers, meeting space, funding, copying, publicity, leafleting, passing resolutions, or other resources. Each is important and warrant acknowledgement.
- **Celebrate and evaluate together.** Celebrate together on any accomplishments or successes you had. When debriefing the collaboration, ask yourselves: Did you achieve your goals? What lessons might you take away from this experience? Would you collaborate on another project?

If you have any questions as you explore a partnership or want to learn about scientific partners the UCS Science Network collaborates with, email ScienceNetwork@ucsusa.org.