



BUILDING COMMUNITY MOMENTUM

Turning worthwhile opportunities into informed leadership, credible support, and practical action.

Build the Coalition Before You Need It

Good projects need more than a good idea. They need enough of the right people to understand why saying yes makes sense.

A business wants to expand. A young farmer wants to build a livestock facility. A manufacturer is considering a new site. A developer brings an investment opportunity to the community. On paper, the project may make sense: jobs, tax base, farm viability, infrastructure use, or new economic activity.

Then the public process begins. Neighbors hear about it. Social media lights up. Questions become concerns, concerns become opposition, and suddenly decision-makers are trying to understand a complicated project while sitting in front of an angry room. **That is a terrible time to start building a coalition.** The work should begin much earlier.

1 Start with the people who matter to the decision

Coalition building does not mean immediately launching a public-relations campaign. Start smaller. Who needs to understand the opportunity? That may include economic-development professionals, elected officials, appointed leaders, agricultural and business leaders, institutional leaders, neighboring property owners, and respected informal influencers. In rural communities, formal titles do not always tell you who actually has influence. Ask: **Who do people listen to? Who will decision-makers call privately when they are unsure what to think? Who understands the history? Who could quietly stop this?** The objective is not pressure. It is understanding before positions harden.

ASK YOURSELF: Who needs to understand this opportunity before the broader community begins debating it?

2 Look for the win-win-win

A project proponent naturally sees the project's needs: **'I need approval to build this.'** Other people see different interests. A neighbor may see truck traffic. A commissioner may see tax-base growth. A planning commission member may see precedent. A farmer may see an opportunity for the next generation. A homeowner may see a view they do not want changed. Successful coalition building asks a better question: **How can this become a win for the project, a win for the community, and a reasonable outcome for the people most affected?** Legitimate concerns discovered early can lead to better entrances, screening, setbacks, drainage, traffic plans, operating practices, or simply better information.

ASK YOURSELF: Besides getting the approval I want, what would a reasonable win look like for the other people affected by this decision?

3 Listen before everyone chooses a side

There is a window early in most projects when people are still asking questions rather than defending positions. Use it. Sit across the table. Ask what concerns them, what they have heard, what they think you are missing, and what would make the project better. Then listen. This is not weakness. It is intelligence gathering combined with relationship building. You may discover a real problem, uncover misinformation before it spreads, or learn that someone's stated concern is not their primary concern. You may also discover that someone will oppose the project under any circumstances. **The earlier you know where people actually stand, the more options you have.**

ASK YOURSELF: Am I still at a point where people are willing to help improve the project - or have I waited until everyone is defending a position?



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4 Find the quiet opposition - and the quiet support

The loudest opponent is not always the most dangerous one. Sometimes the person capable of killing a project never attends the public meeting. They make three phone calls, speak privately with a commissioner, or tell a planning commission member, **'I just do not think this is good for us.'** Their influence travels through relationships. Silence should never automatically be interpreted as support. But the opposite is also true. Many people who think a project is reasonable will never voluntarily attend a contentious hearing. They have jobs, families, businesses, and cattle to feed. Meanwhile, every opponent may be in the room. Good coalition building surfaces **both opposition and support** before the formal decision.

ASK YOURSELF: Who has influence over this decision but has not told me what they actually think?

5 Give decision-makers confidence to say yes

Eventually the project reaches a planning commission, BZA, county commissioners, town council, or another appointed or elected body. Those people may be weighing millions of dollars, unfamiliar technology, land-use tradeoffs, regulations, and long-term consequences while dozens of angry citizens are staring at them. By then, coalition building should have done two things. **First, decision-makers understand the project:** economics, benefits, risks, tradeoffs, protections, and legitimate concerns. **Second, they know credible support exists.** A respected farmer, business owner, employer, community leader, or neighbor is willing to explain publicly why the project deserves consideration. That support gives the board confidence that a reasoned yes is not an act of standing alone against the community.

ASK YOURSELF: If I were sitting in that board seat tonight, would I have enough understanding - and enough confidence in the community support around me - to make a reasoned decision?

Build the Coalition Before the Controversy

A public hearing should be the culmination of the work - not the beginning of it. By the time a project enters the formal process, influential people should understand the opportunity, legitimate concerns should have been surfaced, reasonable improvements should have been considered, credible support should be visible, and decision-makers should be prepared to evaluate the project under pressure.

OPPORTUNITY	UNDERSTAND	LISTEN	IMPROVE	ALIGN	BUILD SUPPORT	PREPARE
Is there a worthwhile project?	Who needs to understand it?	What concerns and interests matter?	What can make the project better?	Where can interests overlap?	Who will stand up for it?	Are decision-makers ready?

The public meeting should be the culmination of the work - not the beginning of it.

IS THE COALITION READY?

INFLUENCE - Who actually matters? Who holds formal authority, and who influences the people who hold it?

INTERESTS - What does each party need? What are they protecting, hoping for, or afraid of losing?

DETRACTORS - Who could quietly stop this? Which concerns or relationships could become significant later?

IMPROVEMENT - What should we change? Which concerns reveal a real weakness in the project?

EDUCATION - Who does not yet understand the opportunity? Are important people forming opinions without enough context?

SUPPORT - Who is willing to stand up? Which credible people understand the project well enough to publicly explain why it deserves support?

READINESS - Is the project actually ready? Or are we filing an application and hoping everything works out?

If opposition organized tomorrow, have we done enough relational work that credible people would be willing to stand beside the project?

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Good projects do not succeed on their merits alone. They succeed when the right people understand the opportunity, legitimate concerns are addressed, credible support becomes visible, and decision-makers are prepared to make a reasoned decision under public pressure.

AgStrat helps communities, economic-development organizations, and project leaders build the understanding, alignment, and leadership readiness needed to move worthwhile opportunities through difficult community decisions. To start a conversation about preparing your community or project for the process ahead, contact virgil@agstratsolutions.com.

Understanding | Alignment | Coalition | Credibility | Momentum