

The 72-Hour Post-Loss Protocol

Most coalitions that die do so in the three days after a loss, not the three months after. Three to do. Three to avoid. Wait for the calmer week before any structural decisions.

DO — WITHIN 72 HOURS

Send personal thank-yous. To board members who voted with you, staff who treated the process with respect, the 3–5 members who carried the most weight. Infrastructure, not performance.

Preserve the record. Archive every comment, news clipping, email, piece of testimony. The complete file becomes the next campaign's historical reference.

Schedule ONE 1:1 for next week. Coalition member, aligned board member, or a parent you haven't had a relational meeting with. Reaffirm one relationship while everything still feels raw.

DO NOT — IN 72 HOURS

Publish anger. If you must draft it, draft it — do not send for 3 days. Most don't survive the second read.

Disband. No structural decisions for at least two weeks. People who threaten to quit in the 72hr after a loss almost never quit in the calmer week that follows.

Blame internally. Coalitions tear themselves apart over who failed to make which phone call. The post-mortem comes LATER, in writing, with structure. Not in the group chat at 11pm.

Draft your first thank-you note (5 lines)

To: _____ (board member / staff / coalition member)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6-Month Post-Mortem + Next-Cycle Re-Entry

Six to eight weeks after a loss, the question changes from "how do we survive this?" to "what did this loss teach us we can use?" Coalitions that run this in writing come back stronger.

The 5-box post-mortem template

1. What we asked for vs. what we actually got

Often the loss is partial. Name the partial wins explicitly — they're real, and they're recruiting tools.

2. Who moved toward us

New members, board members who hardened our direction, staff who became quietly cooperative, community orgs that endorsed.

3. Who moved against us, and why

Specific people, specific arguments that hurt. Not to relitigate — to know what to prepare for next time.

4. Our weakest argument

The talking point that produced the most pushback, the data point that turned contested, the framing that gave opponents an opening. Identify, retire, or replace.

5. Our strongest moment

The one comment that moved the room, the one testimony cited from the dais. Build the next campaign around that voice and that frame.

Next-cycle re-entry plan (3 lines)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The long arc

Board terms turn over. Staff rotates. Issues return. The board that voted against you in May 2026 is not the board voting in November 2028. Patient coalitions re-enter the next cycle from a stronger position. You do not stay losers.