

# **ACTION STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE COALITIONS**

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## INTRODUCTION

Susan Madison's report for the National Council on Disability (NCD), *Applied Leadership for Effective Coalitions*, (<http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/appliedleadership.html>) described how to form a coalition. Using real-life examples from current leaders in the disability movement, this report focuses on taking a coalition from its incipient stages to its ongoing activity stage.

The report is divided into three sections. Section One looks into goal setting and problem solving. Section Two addresses the nuts and bolts implementation problems faced by coalitions. Section Three concerns diversity in disability coalitions.

By using practical examples of current disability activists, combined with some theoretical applications, this report intends to assist disability coalition developers and organizers of any type of coalition, in making their coalition more effective.

## SECTION ONE: CONSIDERATIONS FOR DISABILITY COALITIONS

*If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else.*  
—Yogi Berra<sup>1</sup>

The problems faced by the disability community in forming coalitions is different than those faced by other types of coalitions.

According to Bobby Coward, head of the local Washington, DC chapter of American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT), “[t]he disability community tends to be—I hate to use this word—fragmented.” He went on to explain that the community has a tendency to divide itself according to type of disability, which makes it difficult to recognize common ground among all groups. Because they are all competing for the same scarce resources, each one wants their interests to be heard above the others. He stated, “Everyone has their own cause and objective and mission, and everyone wants their cause to be out front. Different groups have different strategies and mindsets, which makes it difficult for the groups to come to agreement on a common issue. As a result, we are not presenting the issues to public officials with a single voice.”

There are strategies that can be used to offset the fragmentation effect described by Coward. In today’s complex society, coalitions, if they are to be successful, must include proper planning strategies.

One of the first steps that can be taken is a problem analysis or needs assessment. According to Phyllis Jack-Moore and Nancy Hard:

Problem analysis or needs assessment can be viewed as the first of a number of related activities that, in turn, constitute the planning process. An orderly systematic approach to program planning suggests that we begin by asking: What is the problem? What are its facets and what are its causes? What are the characteristics of those who can be defined as having the problem? How many people are affected? Can they be located geographically?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yogi Berra, as quoted in *Political Quotes—Political Tactics, Contests and Campaigns*, <<http://www.hillwatch.com/politicalquotes/PoliticalQuotesHome.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup> Phyllis Jack-Moore and Nancy Hard, *Resource Handbook for Employer-Led Coalitions: A Community Capacity Building Initiative*, <[www.tec.state.tx.us/svcs/workfamch/whatworks.html](http://www.tec.state.tx.us/svcs/workfamch/whatworks.html)>.

A more detailed process for needs assessment was spelled out in A. J. Hahn's *Educational Intervention Model*. Hahn's process has eight steps:

Step 1: Recognize and express concern about the problem....

Step 2: Become involved and identify all players...

Step 3: Clarify the issue. Learn the extent of the problem and consider all sides. Remain open to new ideas by setting aside personal biases.

Step 4: Consider alternative solutions. Examine all alternatives and encourage coalition members to identify existing solutions and brainstorm new ones.

Step 5: Consider consequences for each alternative. Explore the positive and negative consequences for people on all sides of the issue. Doing nothing is an alternative.

Step 6: Inform others of the choice. Learn how public decisions are made, who makes them, and how citizens can participate in the process.

Step 7: Activate the choice. Provide input to policy makers, or carry out the plan.

Step 8: Evaluate the choice. Evaluation occurs informally throughout the process. Formal evaluation at the end of the project may lead the coalition into new concerns and problems.<sup>3</sup>

According to Jack-Moore and Hard, a needs assessment and the surveys associated with it “can be very costly in terms of time and resources. These costs are usually underestimated. Give careful thought to the data items and questions. For each question to be included, ask: What will the responses to this question tell us relative to the problems we are trying to understand...and ...[h]ow can we use this information?”<sup>4</sup>

When doing needs assessment, coalitions should not only perform an assessment of what the needs of their community are, but also how well they are serving those needs. Morley, Vinson, and Hatry suggest that coalitions do the following:

On an annual basis collect and tabulate data on the outcomes that your program or programs provide.

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<sup>3</sup> A. J. Hahn, as quoted in Georgia L. Stevens and Kathleen Ann Lodl, “Community Coalitions: Identifying Changes in Coalition Members as a Result of Training”, *Journal of Extension*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (April 1999), <[www.joe.org/joe/1999april/rb2.html](http://www.joe.org/joe/1999april/rb2.html)>.

<sup>4</sup> Jack-Moore and Hard, <[www.tec.state.tx.us/svcs/workfamch/whatworks.html](http://www.tec.state.tx.us/svcs/workfamch/whatworks.html)>.

Collect information on the persons or conditions that you are trying to affect at both the end of your effort and at some time after your effort has been concluded so that you can track the effects of your efforts over time.

Survey whether your clients are satisfied with the overall services provided by your program and specific services rendered.<sup>5</sup>

While most coalitions are formed because of local issues, and stay locally-based, sometimes coalitions that begin locally can have national effects. An example of a local movement having national effects is that of the Gallaudet student uprising. In 1988, when a new president of Gallaudet was named, the Board of Trustees named a hearing person. Students and administrators were outraged and began an impromptu protest, which eventually led to I. King Jordan, a Gallaudet professor who is deaf, being named president. This successful advocacy effort was one of the forerunners of the coalition to achieve passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990.

A more recent example of a successful coalition was cited by both James Ward, Director of Public Policy at the National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems and Andrew J. Imparato, President of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD): “March for Justice,” which took place on October 3, 2000. This was the largest gathering of people united in support of disability rights ever assembled in Washington, DC. In addition to leaders of the disability community, such as Justin Dart, the march also attracted leaders of the civil rights movement in other communities, such as Jesse Jackson and Martin Luther King III. Imparato added, “[w]hat was exciting for me is that you had ADAPT, National Council on Independent Living, AAPD, the Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities, and the broader civil rights community focusing around a specific message directed at the Supreme Court, around election time. It was a great time to do that, a great issue to organize around, a way to educate our grassroots about the importance of the *Garrett* case—which made it easier for us to get mobilized around the *Sutton* case. I think that people who participated from the civil rights movement were energized by it also. They saw the power of the disability community coming together and uniting around issues of justice and civil rights. It wasn’t an ‘us versus them’—fighting or arguing for the same things—it was a ‘we’.”

March for Justice focused on the commonalities in the disability community, instead of the differences. It was a functional coalition. Andrew Imparato, when discussing the formation of effective coalitions stated, “What I look for in a functional coalition is the issues that coalition is organizing around, good leadership, lines of communication, and good means of resolving differences of opinion if they exist around particular issues. People also need to take ownership

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine Morley, Elisa Vinson, and Harry P. Hatry, Outcome Measurement in Nonprofit Organizations: Current Practices and Recommendations, Executive Summary, copyright 2001, <[www.independentsector.org/programs/research/outcomes.pdf](http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/outcomes.pdf)>.

and help set the agenda — perhaps through a steering committee — but it should have the backing and support of the other coalition members.” March for Justice met these criteria.

Besides defining what the goals of the coalition are, they must have certain characteristics. According to Bell, Smith and King, coalitions must be:

**Believable** — They should describe situations or conditions that the coalition believes can be achieved. Avoid the “pie-in-the-sky” goals that members do not believe nor find achievable. According to Imparato, coalitions often come together when people are passionate about the issues involved. However, the most successful coalitions are based on an outcome-oriented approach around specific issues. Members should be made to focus on the merits or drawbacks of a particular policy or issue. The more grandiose the vision of the coalition, the more likely it is to get bogged down.

**Attainable** — It should be possible to accomplish the goals in the designated time. Professor Frank Bowe of Hofstra University cited the work for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as an example. “Section 504 had the potential to dramatically affect the lives of all of us, whatever the disability(ies) and wherever the person lived and whatever the person's SES and life circumstances. It was something that had a reachable end, in a foreseeable period of time.”

**Tangible** — The goals should be understandable or realized. According to Thomas Lee McKeithan II, a Washington, DC disability activist and chairman of the State Advisory Panel on Special Education for the District of Columbia, “[w]hat coalitions need most is a clear set of goals, a strategic direction, an idea of the desired outcomes and a way to measure how effective you have been in achieving these outcomes. As an outgrowth of that, you need a public relations or marketing strategy to communicate these goals, and of course nothing can occur without a strong funding mechanism or operating budget. However, agreement upon clear and specific goals must come first.”

**On a timetable** — A completion date should be included in the goal statement. Elizabeth Priaulx, Community Integration Specialist with the National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems (NAPAS), stated the following: “[s]ometimes coalitions don’t have a clear mandate. They need specific goals and clear timeframes. If coalitions get together on an amorphous goal, they can meet week after week without making progress, since there is nothing to force them to make decisions. People don’t want to come to meetings and feel like they are wasting their time: this leads to frustration.” She suggested that the job should be defined and broken down into discrete pieces. For example, a goal could be to lobby a state legislator to propose legislation on *Olmstead* by a particular date. Everyone knows the goal and the time limit. Or, a goal could be broader in scope: to develop principles that will drive the coalition’s plan. Everyone can then work toward

defining these principles.

**Win-Win** — The goals must allow all members of the coalition to be successful<sup>6</sup>. James Ward stated that people must feel like they are involved and making an impact. People also need to be recognized for their work. He added, “A coalition isn’t just about a bunch of organizations signing on — it isn’t just a list of groups. People from the groups need to be involved hands-on.” Frank Bowe alluded to a similar point: “Coalitions probably most need goals that are (1) truly cross-disability and (2) not stepping on the toes/priorities/goals of any member group. This is huge. If you have that, the other things on your list will follow pretty naturally; if you lack it, the coalition will never get started.”

While listed as separate characteristics, ‘believable’ and ‘attainable’ are often dependent upon each other. In other words, a goal to reform state disability policy, while believable, may not be attainable, due to the size of the coalition. A coalition of 2,000 people may be able to have impact at the state level. A coalition of 10 people probably will not. Prialux states, “The larger the coalition, the more difficult it is to gain a consensus. Sometimes when the groups are too large, they split off into smaller subgroups that develop a consensus. The problem with this, however, is that the smaller groups may not represent the views of the entire coalition.” An example of this is a conference she recently attended on how to include people with mental health needs in *Olmstead* planning: “The smaller subgroups developed a consensus. However, consumers who were not part of the smaller subgroups were skeptical. They questioned how the consensus was reached, since they were not invited to the meeting. They were concerned that their needs were not adequately represented in the consensus — that once again, someone else was speaking for them.”

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Bell, William Smith and Jeffery King, “Coalition Goal Setting”, Ohio State University Fact Sheet, <[www.ohioline.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ohioline/bc-fact/0004.html](http://www.ohioline.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ohioline/bc-fact/0004.html)>.

## SECTION TWO: IMPLEMENTATION NEEDS FOR SUCCESSFUL COALITIONS

*"Okay, you've convinced me. Now go out there and bring pressure on me."*  
—President Franklin D. Roosevelt, (In response to a business delegation)<sup>7</sup>

Once a coalition has successfully set its goals, it needs to take the next steps of fundraising and media development. Smith and Siek state that there are six steps to raising money:

Step 1: Set program goals....

Step 2: Inventory all your resources.... Develop a specific list of names, individuals, civic organizations, political organizations, media, businesses, etc.

Step 3: Develop a fundraising campaign...use...as many fundraising techniques as are necessary to move toward that ultimate [fundraising] goal. A well-constructed fundraising campaign should consist of four parts:

**Vision** of the organization;

**Cultivation** of persons you intend to solicit for funds;

**Solicitation** for funds;

**Recognition** of your donors.

Step 4: Assess your financial and personnel needs...to reach the fundraising goals.

Step 5: Implement fundraising activities.... Development activities must be planned to support the programs....

Step 6: Evaluate your results. Assess what went well and what went badly.... Did you reach the goals? How much money did you raise before expenses?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as quoted in "Political Quotes — Lobbying",  
<<http://www.hillwatch.com/politicalquotes/PoliticalQuotesHome.htm>>.

<sup>8</sup> Penne Smith and Gregory P. Siek, "Building Coalitions: Extra Resources for a Coalition — Notes on Fund Raising and Grant Writing," Excerpted from *Building Coalitions* developed by The Ohio Center For Action on Coalition Development for Families and High Risk Youth, Richard Clark, Ph.D., Director, 1992, <[www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/child/newsarticles/SAC543.html](http://www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/child/newsarticles/SAC543.html)>.

Government and foundation grants are a major form of funding for nonprofits. However, grant writer Martin Rickler says of nonprofits, “You may have started out as a humane cause, but you’re not going to succeed unless it’s a business.” In other words, it is just as important for a nonprofit to have a strategic plan for the funds being solicited from the public as for a business trying to raise capital. However, nonprofits are not used to thinking in those terms.<sup>9</sup>

According to Smith and Siek, “There is no magic in fundraising. Above all, you need to be a good planner, organizer, manager and marketer. When these skills are combined with enthusiasm and common sense, you will be successful.”<sup>10</sup> Jack-Moore and Hard state that fundraising should be tailored to the unique circumstances in each individual community, and that this should be researched appropriately.<sup>11</sup>

### **Public Relations**

Along with fundraising, an important tool that must be used in the development of any coalition is that of public relations. According to Brahm and Griffiths, publicity of any public relations program must go through nine stages.

- Unveil the program —not once but literally hundreds of times.
- Promote the ad campaign behind the program.
- Tell the story of people who developed it.
- Report on community acceptance.
- Report on community reactions.
- Tell the story of the program’s success.
- Emphasize advantages to the community.
- Report on trends.
- Tell success stories of other states and communities.<sup>12</sup>

Poppy DeMarco Dennis believes that image counts. She states, “Cultivate and protect the image of your group. People will take you more seriously if you look professional.” Volunteers with

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Rickler, as quoted in Bob Curley’s “Grant Seeker, Know Thyself,” distributed by Join Together, date posted: July 10, 1996, < [www.silcom.com/~paladin/curley.html](http://www.silcom.com/~paladin/curley.html) >.

<sup>10</sup> Smith and Siek, <[www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/child/newsarticles/SAC543.html](http://www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/child/newsarticles/SAC543.html)>.

<sup>11</sup> Jack-Moore and Hard, <[www.tec.state.tx.us/svcs/workfamch/whatworks.html](http://www.tec.state.tx.us/svcs/workfamch/whatworks.html)>.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Brahm and Margaret E. Griffiths, “Mobilizing the Community”, Ohio State University Fact Sheet, <<http://ohioline.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ohioline/be-fact/0010.html>>.

skills in graphic arts can help design the coalition's letterhead, logo, and business cards. Also, it helps if the coalition has supporters or directors who are respected in the community.<sup>13</sup>

According to Jack-Moore and Hard, "When creating a successful public relations campaign, one must create a design or logo for the organization which can be easily identifiable to the members and other recipients of information."<sup>14</sup>

A perfect example of a logo or slogan for a nonprofit public relations campaign is that of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF): "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." Introduced by UNCF and the Ad Council in 1970, the campaign has run for over thirty years and has raised over \$3 billion for college scholarships for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Another striking visual created by the Ad Council was the ad about pollution, featuring a Native American with a tear in his eye, watching a person throw refuse out of a car window.

In the political world, recent slogans such as Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America" and currently, the Social Security "Lock Box", have emerged as easily understandable slogans for supporters to rally around.

When addressing an issue, a coalition must create a clear and understandable message for its supporters.

According to Murchi, there are four components of a successful communications campaign: volume, targeted, multiple, and subject.

Volume means having many different constituents communicate with a person or group on an issue of concern. An example is sending a petition with many signatures to a local government official.

Targeted means that the communication comes from people or groups who are important to the individual receiving the communication. For example, a member of Congress will pay more attention to letters from individuals in his or her district than to letters from the general population.

Multiple refers to using various means of communications to get one's point across. For example, rather than writing letters alone, concerned persons could use the phone, fax, email, public media (newspapers, journals, radio, television), billboards, and so forth.

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<sup>13</sup> Poppy DeMarco Dennis, contributing writer to Reproductive Health and Rights Center, "Articles on Coalitions: Hints for Amateur Campaigners", <[www.choice.org/10.coalitions.9.html](http://www.choice.org/10.coalitions.9.html)>.

<sup>14</sup> Jack-Moore and Hard, <[www.tec.state.tx.us/svcs/workfamch/whatworks.html](http://www.tec.state.tx.us/svcs/workfamch/whatworks.html)>.

Subject refers to tailoring the communications to someone who can have an impact on the issue at hand. Usually it takes the form of a letter written by a professional organization with deep knowledge of the issue. Specific points and solutions should be addressed as much as possible.<sup>15</sup>

### **Maintaining a Healthy Coalition**

According to Priaulx, building a coalition initially is easy, but maintaining it is difficult. For example, breaking down a large coalition into smaller taskforces, while valuable, could also create more problems than it solves, if not handled correctly. Taskforces that are formed around particular issues can make better use of subject matter experts than a large coalition can, since not everyone can be an expert in everything. However, in Priaulx's experience, the taskforces, rather than the issues, ran the risk of becoming the focus of the coalition: "Some wouldn't meet, and some would meet more frequently than others. People would compete with each other to be on particular taskforces." In addition, discrete taskforces tended to produce discrete recommendations. Says Priaulx, "The coalition would get 20 recommendations on housing, 20 recommendations on transportation, 20 on employment. However, they were not prioritized, and there was no means of bringing everything together. This would sometimes result in submitting 60 individual recommendations to a legislator." She went on to say that it would be much better for the group to determine how to present the recommendations to the legislator, in order to ensure that its interests are accurately represented. Otherwise, group members run the risk of having the legislator pick and choose among the recommendations that would best fit in with his or her political agenda. Priaulx cited an example of an *Olmstead* plan that was presented to one of the states by a coalition — a plan that had six pages of dissents attached, rather than a coherent and cohesive message.

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<sup>15</sup> Gordon W. Murchie, "Developing a Communications Strategy for the Wine Industry," Wines and Vines, June 1999. Search for article conducted via [www.findarticles.com/cf\\_0/m3488/6\\_80/54926738/p1/article.jhtml](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m3488/6_80/54926738/p1/article.jhtml).

Once a coalition is started, according to Driscoll, Novik and Wolff, it needs administrative support. The authors list several examples of support systems that coalitions need to create in order to survive and thrive: ongoing research in the program areas, creation of specialty items such as newsletters and brochures, creation of bookkeeping systems, and a “shoulder to lean on and ‘gossip center’, enabling coalition staff to feel that they are part of a work community — connected, supported, and never alone.”<sup>16</sup>

Gillian Kaye expands on this concept of community by describing what she calls the “Six R’s of Participation.”

**Recognition:** People want to be recognized for their contributions.

**Respect:** By joining in community activities, people seek the respect of their peers.

**Role:** In a coalition, members need to feel that their unique contribution (a.k.a. role) is appreciated.

**Relationship:** By this, Kaye means the relationships that are formed when people join organizations. They join either for private reasons, public reasons, or to make a personal connection to a so-called “power player” in the coalition. By being part of a coalition, people expand their personal networks by meeting members of other coalitions with similar interests.

**Reward:** Organizations keep members when the rewards of being a member outweigh the time invested in the organization. Different members require different rewards. Leaders of the coalition must identify members’ interests and motivations.

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<sup>16</sup> Christine Driscoll, Neil Novik, and Tom Wolff, “The Care and Feeding of Coalition Leaders,” <[www.ahecpartners.org/resources/documents/cb/care\\_and\\_feed.shtml](http://www.ahecpartners.org/resources/documents/cb/care_and_feed.shtml)>.

**Results:** As Kaye states, “Nothing works like results! An organization that cannot deliver the goods will not continue to attract people and resources.” This ties in with the attainable goals mentioned in the previous section regarding the process of goal setting. If an organization has goals that can be attained, it will usually be regarded as a success.<sup>17</sup>

DeMarco Dennis describes ways of motivating volunteers to take the coalition’s goals seriously. Strategies include developing a written timeline, referring to it at each meeting, and updating it as needed. It may even be necessary to pay an organizer a nominal fee to take charge of major activities. This person can make sure the schedules and deadlines of the group are adhered to.<sup>18</sup>

### **Effect of Electronic and Information Technology on the Building of Coalitions**

Much has been written about the effects of Electronic and Information Technology (E&IT) on the lives of people with disabilities and how it has improved communications across all disability constituencies regardless of their geographic location.

Frank Bowe believes that electronic technology can be used to break down the environmental barriers that people with disabilities face. He stated, “Just getting people together for a meeting can be very difficult...mostly because of barriers of communication, transportation, etc., AND because those barriers consume so much energy. It is much, much easier to communicate today than pre-1990, due to e-mail, instant messaging, etc., and in another five years it will be even easier (e.g., video conferencing will mature and become affordable).”

Jim Ward of NAPAS stated that the “impact of electronic technology is huge, especially in terms of getting information to large numbers of people quickly, and getting them to respond back. It is a powerful means of establishing a dialogue between people regardless of their location. It eliminates the distance between people.” Recently, NAPAS, in association with Wired on Wheels and other disability groups, started ADA Watch. As described on their Web site, [www.adawatch.com](http://www.adawatch.com), ADA Watch is a “nonprofit informational online network designed to activate the disability community's grassroots in response to threats to civil rights protections for people with disabilities.”

Ward explained that information technology is what distinguishes ADA Watch/Wired on Wheels from other coalitions. “ADA Watch/Wired on Wheels is one of the first disability coalitions to be established on the premise of building an Internet community”.

Bowe elaborated on what he called the “awesome power” of communication technologies:

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<sup>17</sup> Driscoll, Novik and Wolff, <[www.ahecpartners.org/resources/documents/cb/six-r/shtml](http://www.ahecpartners.org/resources/documents/cb/six-r/shtml)>.

<sup>18</sup> DeMarco Dennis, <[www.choice.org/10.coalitions.9.html](http://www.choice.org/10.coalitions.9.html)>.

“We've seen how just two folks in California could mobilize the nation to pass work incentives legislation (SSI, Medicaid); how education advocates could generate more than 1,000 letters to members of Congress within a week or so on some hot-button issue like discipline. I would have had to have a staff of 100+ working 24/7 to pull that off back in the 70s. Given that people have the technology (basically, PC connected to the Internet), this is do-able and it is accessible to most of us.”

However, as proposed by NCD in its report *The Accessible Future*, access to assistive technology should be treated like a civil right for people with disabilities. If the technology cannot be accessed, then people with disabilities will be even farther behind the societal and technological curve.

According to McKeithan, information technology plays a very important role in the formation of coalitions, because it is an efficient and effective way to communicate with a large number of people. He stated, “my vision is that the panel (State Advisory Panel on Special Education for the District of Columbia) will be an ‘e-panel’: that is, everything we do will be on the web. The public can access the Web site and see the panel at work.” He recognized that although electronic technology is an effective tool, it is a tool nonetheless. First, the coalition should make sure that it has a framework, has identified its internal and external stakeholders, and is able to measure its progress. Only then can electronic technology be used to communicate with the right set of players.

Imparato feels that while e-mail is playing an important role in coalitions, improvements can be made. “More and more, e-mail is, for me, the most effective way to communicate with a lot of people around a focused message. It’s cheap, you don’t have to worry about it getting mistranslated, and it is relatively easy to reach people. However, I don’t think that the disability community as a constituency is as sophisticated in our use of email to generate activism as we could be. For example, one of my pet peeves is that I get the same email messages from seven different sources. Perhaps an umbrella listserv could be developed to figure out how much overlap there is among disability listservs, and do something to reduce this duplication of effort.”

### SECTION THREE: DIVERSITY IN DISABILITY COALITIONS

*“We must work together to create political coalitions  
or we will become a nation of tribes.”*

Wilbur Rich, Wellesley College Professor of Political Science<sup>19</sup>

As the demographics of American society change, coalition developers will have to deal with issues of diversity, both in terms of different cultures and different forms of disability. Each poses its own unique set of challenges.

According to Smith, Miller, Archer, and Hague, “The first phase of making the most of diversity is to make a concerted effort to become aware of what dimensions of cultural diversity exist in an organization.”<sup>20</sup> They make the point that diversity actually makes coalitions stronger and more widely accepted in the community because many different constituents are represented, reducing the chance of animosity (“us versus them”).

According to the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth Web site, “Cultural Diversity, or Multiculturalism, as it is sometimes called, is a process designed to promote awareness, understanding, and appreciation among people of various cultures. Our ethnicity, race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability—as well as other visible and invisible aspects—make us all unique individuals with different contributions to make to societies of which we are a part.”<sup>21</sup>

A way to foster cultural diversity in coalitions is through the use of a “common ground standpoint.” Instead of debating opposing points of view in hopes of establishing a “winner” and “loser”, this process seeks a “win-win” solution by instituting a dialogue to explore difficult questions together. Jacksteit and Kaufman described this process as “a matter of emphasis, focusing attention on areas of commonality rather than on areas of difference.... It is an effort to reach understanding, not necessarily agreement.”<sup>22</sup>

Bobby Coward of ADAPT believes that coalitions need structure and accountability in order to

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<sup>19</sup> Quotation found on following Web site: <members.aol.com/NancyDS/political.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Bill Smith, Ann W. Miller, Thomas Archer, and Carla Hague, “Working with Diverse Cultures,” Ohio State University Fact Sheet, <www.ohioline.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ohioline/bc-fact/0014.html>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.umassd.edu/studentaffairs/msa/culdiv.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Jacksteit and Kaufman (1995), as quoted in Jack Levy’s “The VENN View of Diversity: Understanding Differences Through Similarities,” *International Education Webzine*, <www.iteachnet.org/April97/VennDiversity\_JackLevy.htm>.

be successful and avoid having one group try to dominate the other. “When the political leaders see the community uniting and willing to work together, it sends a very powerful message.” ADAPT is a volunteer-based grassroots organization. Although some members may be in key positions with prominent disability organizations, the board of ADAPT emphasizes holding individual members to their personal word to take responsibility for specific projects.

In addition, states Ward of NAPAS, there needs to be a synergy between the groups forming the coalition, with each group having its own particular strengths to bring to the table. In the case of ADA Watch/Wired on Wheels, it was a coming together of grassroots advocacy (ADA Watch) with, in this case, America Online (the sponsor of Wired on Wheels). ADA Watch had grassroots support but lacked adequate infrastructure and funding; Wired on Wheels had infrastructure and funding but was missing the grassroots support. Together they could do more than either could do alone, in terms of reaching out to the community through a Web site.

One way to improve the functioning of organizations is to look beyond one’s own culture, or to “think out of the box.” The organization Common Cause has a philosophy of “no permanent allies and no permanent enemies.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, they believe that the full scope of an issue should be examined. Furthermore, an organization should not hesitate to contact other organizations that have taken opposing stands on issues in the past. They may eventually be useful in addressing the issue currently at hand.

Andrew Imparato of AAPD does not think that disability coalitions face barriers that are any different from other coalitions. He feels that the biggest barrier in the disability community is “turfism” — that is, the organizations feel that certain issues are theirs alone to champion, and they do not necessarily want other organizations intruding on them. Existing coalitions tend to be threatened by the formation of new ones for the same reason. But, this is not unique to the disability community — it exists in other constituencies as well.

McKeithan stated, “Our issues are the same —healthcare, quality education, gainful employment, housing.” However, instead of looking at them as “disability-specific issues”, disability organizations look at these issues in terms of how they impact the particular focus of the organization.

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<sup>23</sup> Common Cause Web Site, <[http://www.commoncause.org/get\\_involved/audiences-1-htm](http://www.commoncause.org/get_involved/audiences-1-htm)>.

## CONCLUSION

By using real-life examples from current disability activists, this report, combined with Madison's *Applied Leadership for Effective Coalitions*, provides a roadmap for successful disability coalition building.

The hard part of using any roadmap is not reading it, but following it. The examples provided by various disability leaders show that there is more than one way to create a roadmap for successful coalitions. However, in order for a coalition to be truly effective, its members must not only motivate its staff and volunteers effectively, but also remain focused on its core issues. Communication strategies and cultural diversity within the disability community are adjuncts and concomitants to a successful coalition.

To quote Henry Ford, "coming together is a beginning, staying together is a process, and working together is a success." It is the author's hope that this paper will help to make future coalitions more successful and effective.