

## Pointers for What Funding Agencies, Consultants, Grantees, Advocates and Universities Need to Know About Conducting an Advocacy Initiative:

### Lessons Learned from Managing and Providing Technical Assistance

#### Central Planning and Implementation

- As is the case with any national or local campaign, this project was complex and involved many independent players, consultants, coalitions, volunteers, participant sites and interactions among national and local media and local policy-makers. Recognizing this, the A Matter of Degree (AMOD) National Program Office (NPO) assigned its communications director to work full time on the project with a full-time assistant to coordinate the many contracts, conference calls, project meetings and staff site visits and to distribute information to participants and the media. The project would not have been possible without this central allocation of staff time and resources.
- Full implementation of the environmental management model requires significant technical assistance in strategy development and execution. This demands more resources than are typically allowed in most foundation or governmental advocacy programs. Development of media skills and resources and political experience are often underfunded or left out of technical assistance. Particularly regarding alcohol issues, these resources are generally not available in most communities or even states due to the limited size of the existing alcohol advocacy network, limited number of communications firms that understand advocacy and limited use of media advocacy.
- Although other advocacy areas (for example, tobacco control, antiviolence activities, environmental protection, and political campaigns) use similar skills, there has been little transfer of such skills from one area to the other at the local or national level. Attention needs to be paid to how activists can get beyond subject matter differences to identify and apply their skills in other areas.
- The package of skills provided by the technical assistance provider, Pan American Services (PAS), included political campaigning, working with the business and political communities, community organizing, research analysis, media advocacy and strategic planning. The staff they hired and allocated for this project were selected to have these competencies. They proved the effectiveness of using these skills for alcohol policy advocacy.
- Preparation time and resources to adequately prepare for advocacy activities are also rarely accounted for or funded. More time was needed to prepare the consultants (PAS) and site participants for their work within this prevention model. It is very challenging to bring outside consultants into a community and to expect them to know how that community operates (for example, how decisions are made, who the key people are and what the social interaction norms and rules of behavior are). Significant time must be devoted to help client, community and consultant foster a solid working relationship built on trust and common assumptions. Given the two-year scope of this project and its ambitious goals, there was not enough time allocated for this process.
- Furthermore, while there needs to be, and to some extent was, a group or projectwide process (that is, common discussion of plans, progress and problems), it also needs to occur within each site. The project would have benefited from more time spent with each site to create a clearer vision of how the initiative would play out. For example, one site did not at first understand that the consultants would be available if and when the site wanted them—that consultants were expected to adjust to site needs and schedules. (Normally, technical assistance recipients have to accommodate their activities to the consultant's schedule—whether it fits local timing or not.) Another site realized that many of the services to be provided by external technical assistance were already available locally (for example, coalition and staff members had many of the requisite skills). There may have been an even better outcome if each understood from the beginning the assets and capabilities of the other.
- All parties need to accept that the process of planning and conducting an advocacy initiative is developmental and therefore subject to differences of opinion about strategies, outcomes and required levels of participation. It became clear early in the process that a project needs frequent, open communications among the parties, (the grantees, central staff and consultants) to discuss what is working, what needs to be changed, and what

the mutual expectations are. This enables all parties to learn a great deal about the processes being developed through the project.

- A clear delineation of tasks and how all components interact is required for effective operation of such a complex initiative. This includes consultants, central program and site staff and participant organizations (for example, the funding agency or universities). How far each group can and will go (that is, politically, in allocation of resources) is important for all to know. Staff turnover also requires time for new relationships and common understandings to develop.

### Site Planning and Preparation

- It is critical that grantees possess or gain the skills necessary to move policy goals forward in the community. Familiarity and comfort with operating within a community political system as well as solid strategic thinking skills are requirements (in this case that was especially true for many university staff). A lot of attention should be paid to identifying the types of skills and orientation to social change before staff are selected. Many of the skills and tasks required by this initiative were new and often uncomfortable for existing university staff. Traditional health education, advertising and student services skills are not sufficient for this type of university-community work. Some dived in and learned the necessary skills; others remained uncomfortable but recognized that university and community policy arenas operate quite differently. Consultants, central and site staff and community volunteers have all agreed that we need new tools for the recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers to work in environmental change, especially advocacy projects. Training can help new staff, but the most effective advocates come with a pre-existing, fundamentally sympathetic understanding of what needs to be done and why. Trying to train those with a different professional orientation takes a great deal of time and is often not effective.
- It is vitally important that recipients fully understand the model of technical assistance being provided and its implications for their work and that of their coalition partners. Greater grantee involvement in the development of the technical assistance package would have ensured better understanding of what the assistance involved from the start.
- Technical assistance must be flexible to address the local capacity of participants and the local community environment. Initial assumptions in this project that all sites receiving intensive technical assistance needed similar support and that all were equally ready to work with their respective communities were quickly corrected. In addition, whereas an intense, in-person form of assistance was needed initially, most sites quickly moved to fewer on-site contacts with consultants and more assistance via electronic means, faxes and phone calls. Whereas early services focused on broader strategic planning and basic advocacy skills training, later assistance centered on specific needs. A specific need might be assistance in improving communications resources (such as press releases or issue briefs), or it might be explaining how to reach new population targets (such as certain neighborhoods or specific community groups). Throughout the project, all participants and central staff expressed a need for research, data, synthesis and advice about various alcohol policies and alcohol-related problems. No national resource currently has the capacity to make this readily available.
- The whole process would have been significantly enhanced if the technical assistance providers had conducted a formal readiness assessment with each site as the first order of business. It was a mistake to assume that all sites were at about the same place relative to moving forward and, therefore, that all were equally ready for media advocacy and broader policy work within the community. Sites had varying understanding of fundamental environmental prevention and how various components, such as media advocacy, can support policy passage. Some were ready to be or were already engaged in media advocacy, while others needed to develop broader community involvement as a first step. A project timeline is needed that allows the consultants to become familiar with each site before beginning formal readiness assessment and the technical assistance process. Site project staff must be open to working with consultants.

## Planning and Implementing Public Communications Activities

- Few media firms have the media advocacy and collaborative skills necessary to develop and execute a national or even local media campaign to support the environmental management work around high-risk college drinking. Even fewer firms are free of alcohol-industry clients who could compromise their effectiveness on this issue.
- It is very difficult to define a national media campaign that will also support all or most of the local policy activities in a timely manner without interfering with them. While the national media campaigns conducted under this project dovetailed well with the local activities of several grantees, the content was not applicable to all grantees. To create a national communications initiative that reaches down into the local media requires very careful selection of issues that raise controversy (that is, create a “buzz”) at the national level but are relevant to local advocates. Usually this means a broader, more fundamental selection of issues at the national level (for example, alcohol advertising, Spring Break, or concerns of parents) that can then be massaged or interpreted for local media and policy objectives.
- To create such an impact requires taking chances—on issues and by organizations—and being aware of what other organizations are doing (to better collaborate and to avoid competing issues). This can reap huge rewards, even if it is not consistently done. For example, the use of a highly visible and expensive *New York Times* advertisement to pressure NBC to decline liquor ads, accompanied by a dedicated Website for activists, was a major tactical change for the initiative’s national staff. The staff intensely debated this tactic as well as its content and the political impact and fallout. As it turned out, the tactic reaped huge rewards and contributed to a national policy victory. In addition, NPO staff closely collaborated with a wide range of policy, parent, and religious groups in this campaign. All participants actively shared their resources, took individual actions in coordination with other groups and willingly shared the credits for victory. A similar effort, rushed into without building alliances, consulting with allies, or having a carefully thought-out strategic plan, resulted in much more limited impact and some negative consequences.
- Initially the project assumed that university communications offices would provide media advocacy support for local community policy changes. This proved to be difficult for several reasons, including public relation concerns by the university. Many university and consulting communications offices are experienced in managing and reducing conflict, to make their clients look good but not in being advocates. The most successful media advocacy ultimately came from grantees with well-established campus-community coalitions that could “own” the media advocacy output.
- Communications and media advocacy consultants need a great deal more information about the capacities, skills and willingness to participate of the groups they are hired to help. This would enable the consultants to better tailor their services and products and to have more reasonable expectations of what the likely outcomes will be. For example, consultants were not always sure that the site participants had the media savvy needed for a particular effort or how much risk the participants were willing to take.
- Substantial resources were allocated in the central technical assistance budget to design an interactive Website for communications between all participants (central office, consultants and site staff) and to enable the project to share its experiences initially with other sites not participating in the advocacy initiative and later with other groups. The experience, however, showed that despite the availability of such tools, time for using them was not available and often not a high priority for most sites. In some cases, using these resources created time and work pressures (that is, it was perceived as another task or another writing task). This confirmed what a number of participants had observed in other settings:
  - Listservs appear to be more effective for fostering sharing among a group of geographically and institutionally dispersed staff and advocates.
  - Only a few individuals have or are willing to commit the time to actively participate in a more participatory communications format.
  - The primary users expressed a need to quickly find policy information and a need for assistance in conducting and synthesizing research on a particular policy or topic.

## Individuals Interviewed for the Advocacy Initiative Case History Report

### Building Responsibility Coalition of the University of Delaware and the City of Newark

Bob Ashley, owner, The Deer Park, Newark

Tracy Bachman, AMOD program director, University of Delaware

John Bishop, associate vice president for counseling and student development, University of Delaware

Jerry Clifton, city council member, Newark

Gerald Conway, chief of police, Newark

Cynthia Cummings, associate vice president for campus life, University of Delaware

Rick Francolino, student, University of Delaware

Ron Gardner, former mayor and cochair of the Taking Responsibility Coalition Coordinating Council, Newark

Mary Hempel, director of university public relations, University of Delaware

Casey O'Brien, student, University of Delaware

Chris Rewa, city council member, Newark

Roland Smith, vice president for student life, University of Delaware

Larry Thornton, director of public safety, University of Delaware

Richard Waibel, chair of the Building Responsibility Coalition Community Outreach Task Group, Newark

### Stepping Up Coalition of the University of Iowa and Iowa City

Michael Brotherton, sergeant, Iowa City Police Department

Carolyn Cavitt, interim director,<sup>1</sup> Stepping Up Project, University of Iowa

Jim Clayton,<sup>2</sup> owner, Soap Opera, Iowa City

Sarah Hansen, campus health administrator, University of Iowa

Dale Helling, assistant city manager, Iowa City

Phillip Jones, vice president, student services, University of Iowa

Troy Kelsay, sergeant, Iowa City Police Department

Mary Khowassah, director of student health services, University of Iowa

Keith McCoy, graduate student and resident assistant supervisor, University of Iowa

Steve Parrott, director of community relations, University of Iowa

Dan Patterson, graduate student, University of Iowa

Julie Phye, director,<sup>3</sup> Stepping Up Project, University of Iowa

Lynn M. Walding, administrator of the state Alcoholic Beverage Division, Iowa Department of Commerce, Ankeny

J. Patrick White, Johnson County attorney, Iowa City

### NU Directions of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the City of Lincoln

Tom Casady, chief of police, Lincoln

Jesse Goodsell, vice president, Pan-Hellenic Council, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2002–03

James Griesen, vice chancellor for student affairs, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Bob Jergensen, owner, P.O. Pears, Lincoln

Linda Major, director for student involvement, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Polly McMullen, executive director, Downtown Lincoln Association, Lincoln

Beverly Neth, director, Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles, Lincoln

<sup>1</sup> Ms. Cavitt became codirector in 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Clayton became codirector of the Stepping Up Coalition in 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Ms. Phye served through the 2001–02 academic year, then was promoted to another position on campus.

Joel D. Pedersen, attorney, City of Lincoln Law Department

Joel Schafer, president, Association of Students at the University Nebraska-Lincoln, 2000–01

Mitch Walden, president, Inter-Fraternity Council, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2002–03

Tom Workman, associate director, NU Directions, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

### **Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment of the University of Vermont and the City of Burlington**

Dean Batt, former vice president for student affairs, University of Vermont

Gene Bergman, assistant city attorney, Burlington

Peter Clavelle, mayor, Burlington

Enrique Corredera, director of university communications, University of Vermont

Andrew Flewelling, AMOD program manager, University of Vermont

Marty Mathison, co-owner, Rasputin's Bar, Burlington

David Nestor, vice president for student affairs, University of Vermont

Paula Niquette, investigator, Vermont Department of Liquor Control, Burlington

Tom Perras, director, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs, Vermont Department of Health, Burlington

Gail Champnois, director of city relations, University of Vermont

### **Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse, American Medical Association (National Program Office for The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's A Matter of Degree Initiative)**

Richard A. Yoast, director

Donald Zeigler, deputy director

Danny Chun, director of communications

Sandra Hoover, deputy director (1996–2002)

Lisa Erk, director of communications (1997–2002)

### **Pan American Services**

James Baker, president

Dennis Alexander, senior policy strategist

Edward Sypinski, senior policy strategist

## **Resources for Campuses and Communities**

### **American Medical Association's A Matter of Degree**

[www.alcoholpolicysolutions.net](http://www.alcoholpolicysolutions.net)

This extensive Website includes information on all the AMOD sites and archived materials from the initiative, including policy briefs, press releases, polls, studies and papers. It also has direct links to all the AMOD sites as well as a number of other resources, such as alcohol control boards, the Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth and the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention.

### **Building Responsibility Coalition of the University of Delaware and the City of Newark**

[www.udel.edu/brc/](http://www.udel.edu/brc/)

### **Stepping Up Coalition of the University of Iowa and Iowa City**

[www.uiowa.edu/~stepping/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~stepping/)

### **NU Directions of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the City of Lincoln**

[www.nudirections.org](http://www.nudirections.org)

### **Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment of the University of Vermont and the City of Burlington**

[www.uvm.edu/~ccqle](http://www.uvm.edu/~ccqle)

### **Other Resources**

#### **U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention**

[www.edc.org/hec](http://www.edc.org/hec)

#### **College Alcohol Study, Harvard School of Public Health**

[www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas/)

#### **College Drinking: Changing the Culture National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism**

[www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov](http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov)