

# **THE BUILDING OF NAPA VALLEY COALITION OF NONPROFIT AGENCIES**

**Aaron Crutison\***  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many human service agencies work in coordination and collaboration with their community partners toward a common shared vision. Generally, that shared vision captures the ways to strengthen individuals and families in their communities and neighborhoods. Currently, innovative and early intervention services have been dissipating due to many legislative reforms including welfare and health reforms across the country. The shift towards program accountability, state and local scrutiny, and pressure on future funding, requires that social service providers and their community partners rely increasingly on collaborative strategies to provide services.

Napa County decided to take a proactive approach toward collaboration. With increased competition for limited funds, many nonprofit agencies faced closure. In 1995, a group of executive directors representing several nonprofit agencies in Napa County, partnered with the Health and Human Services Agency to formulate a collective strategy that would enable the nonprofits to impact policies and funding streams more effectively. Napa County decided to build a coalition of nonprofits and coordinate a joint effort to plan with funders in their community.

## **FINDINGS**

In building a collaboration, it is important to realize that people and agencies frequently share interests, yet differ in ways to address them. The capitalization on shared interests among the nonprofits, public and private sectors in Napa County to create a united effort, is the significance of this case study. My journey through Napa's coalition of nonprofits helped me to identify key ingredients for building a nonprofit coalition. These ingredients are trust, collaboration, commitment, and consensus.

## **CURRENT STRUCTURE AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

San Mateo County has begun to collaborate with and support their nonprofit counterparts, organizationally as well as politically. Although Napa's group of nonprofits was initiated and led by the nonprofit community, the vision came from both the Human Services Agency's strategic planning process and the County Board of Supervisors. This vision fostered a series of cost-saving strategies to assist and support the immediate and basic needs of San Mateo's nonprofits.

As a result of the political support, a staff position in San Mateo County was created as well as the San

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Mateo County Council of Nonprofits. Although many of the providers that participate in this council are nonprofit health and/or human service providers, my first recommendation focuses on the presence of the directors of both Health and Human Service Agencies and/or their designees at the newly designed San Mateo County Council of Nonprofits.

**Recommendation 1:**

Create a forum in which the Human Service Agency and nonprofits build better relationships and share information.

The second recommendation reviews the Human Services Agency program manager's relationships with the nonprofits and other agencies. The director or the regional directors should be aware of community needs, particularly at budget times.

**Recommendation 2:**

Create an active role for Health and Human Service Agency directors within the San Mateo council of nonprofits.

Additionally, continue to support nonprofits through vendor agreement purchasing, training, and in advertising needs. These are immediate services that San Mateo provides which is an area Napa looks forward to embracing.

# **THE BUILDING OF NAPA VALLEY COALITION OF NON-PROFIT AGENCIES**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Nonprofit organizations provide a unique service delivery structure in communities. Unlike the capitalization of the private sector and the often-bureaucratic role of government services, nonprofits provide a distinct service that enhances the well being of their community, often in partnership with local public and/or private services. However, to continue to thrive in competition with other sectors, with limited resources, staff turnovers, and lower wage employees, nonprofits are often required to compete for a limited portion of the market. To counter many of these realities of nonprofit's, Napa Valley community of nonprofits, in partnership with Napa County Health and Human Services Agency, decided to combine their efforts as one voice, one community, and one coalition of nonprofits. From this core concept the Napa Valley Coalition of Nonprofit Agencies (NVCNPA) was born.

In this paper, I address: 1) the development and purpose of the NVCNPA, 2) its organizational structure, 3) membership, 4) affiliates' contributions, 5) benefits, 6) challenges, and 7) the coalition's impact on service delivery and operations. I will compare and contrast NVCNPA's efforts with that of San Mateo County's nonprofit relations and provide an outline for any agency interested in building a health and human services nonprofit coalition.

## **BACKGROUND**

Napa County is a small rural county of approximately 125,000 people, nestled away in the north-

ern part of the Bay Area. Agriculture and the wine and tourist industries are the primary business and economy of Napa Valley. As a result, Napa's economy, combined with its workforce, consists of low wage laborers who earn slightly more than minimum wage, and who require many social services. Many of the lower wage earners work in service occupations, and are primarily of Hispanic origin. Napa Valley continues to see a sharp increase in the diversity of its residents.

Additionally, political shifts in government services such as welfare, healthcare and managed care reform has and required systemic program changes. It quickly became apparent in Napa County that the small grass root nonprofits could not survive through this transition unless some reform took place to bridge services and agencies together. With limited resources the typical competitive bidding process only created animosity within the nonprofit community. This process was frequently seen as costly and overly bureaucratized. Because of the economic downturn, and depletion of social service dollars, many counties experienced an increase in social and health related challenges. Thus, in 1995, a group of executive directors representing several nonprofits in Napa County partnered with the Health and Human Services Agency to formulate collaborative strategy to impact policies that affect Napa County's ever-changing service delivery needs. This political shift required a change in how Napa County Health and Human Services Agency and its community partners addressed service delivery to the residents of Napa County.

## **THE BUILDING PROCESS - ESTABLISHING A SHARED VISION AND PURPOSE**

In 1995, the nonprofits met to see if there was interest in establishing interagency support and a political base for nonprofits providing health and human services in Napa County. Of the twenty (20) agency directors who were invited to this initial gathering, fourteen (14) directors attended to begin the exploration of this concept.

Nonprofits typically competed for similar services, and did not coordinate services and/or budgets. Napa County Health and Human Services Agency, along with its community partners, generated a shared vision statement that incorporated its belief in community services. One segment of their definition that I would like to highlight, reads as follows:

*The vision dictates that all of us in the community share common beliefs and philosophies of how people should be treated, although we will and must disagree on the methods for achieving our goals. For in disagreement and conflict come creativity, new paradigms, ideas and challenge. The organization must be a cauldron of new ideas, challenges, inclusiveness and commitment to our community.*

Based on the concept that each nonprofit agency represents a unique service to its community residents, the coalition established trusting relationships that facilitated the development of a shared vision. Everyone agreed that without the joint efforts of the nonprofits, it would have been difficult to survive the changing economic and political tides. It was decided that in order for the coalition to be effective and act quickly, only decision-makers such as executive directors and/or directors of

member agencies should serve as representatives. The purpose of the Napa Valley Coalition of Non-profit Agencies is to provide a countywide membership association of Health and Human Services Agencies nonprofit organizations providing advocacy, sharing information, services, and research to educate its members and the community. NVCNPA has over 55 agencies. NVCNPA works in partnership with foundations, businesses, and governments to strengthen its nonprofit infrastructure and service delivery, as well as provide information and benefits to its membership and community.

## **NVCNPA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

As the coalition attracted increased agency participation and its began to impact policy decisions, it became apparent that participating agencies wanted a more formal organization. Members decided to incorporate and began the process towards a 501(c) 3 status. In the interim, the coalition established a paid position, subsidized partially by Health and Human Services for an interim executive director. No formal elections were held, and anyone could serve on a committee or in a vacant position. The coalition is now able to secure a grant to allow for the hiring of an executive director. The executive director also reports to the executive committee and develops the infrastructure and organizational capacity of the coalition. The executive director represents the coalition at community, state and federal levels while advocating on behalf of Napa County's diverse populations. The coalition consists of an executive committee and twelve (12) additional committees. (See Appendix 1)

Each committee has a chair and vice-chair. The meetings are held on a monthly basis and generally rotate around the county. Some standing committees are more active than others at this time of this

report. At the general monthly coalition meeting, a brief report is given from the chairs and other members representing specific committees.

### **AFFILIATES (ORGANIZATIONS IN THE COMMUNITY THAT ARE NOT NONPROFITS)**

There are many private health and human services providers in Napa County. Realizing the important role of private providers, it was decided that these agencies could join the coalition as affiliates.

Affiliates are non-voting participants in the coalition, but provide a critical aspect of service delivery, funding and advocacy. A full roster is available from CNPA at PO Box 10061, Napa, CA 94581.

### **BENEFITS FROM MEMBERSHIP AFFILIATION**

Several benefits emerged from building a coalition of nonprofits. Many nonprofits had a small number of staff, some had less than 10 employees. Many agencies relied on volunteers to meet their service goals. Others operated on a small budget and had to rely on that budget to address costly operational challenges throughout the year. Many nonprofits devoted much personnel time to developing and writing grants, competing with neighboring agencies for monies.

Through its collaborative process Napa Valley Coalition of Nonprofit Agencies began to address many of these issues. Very costly services such as health care and dental benefits, are now affordable through the coalition affiliation because of its size. Agencies with more than fifty (50) employees can access better health and dental plans than nonprofits with fifty (50) or fewer employees. (Many of

Napa's nonprofits fall below 50 employees). Access to these services has been a tremendous benefit to nonprofit members of the coalition.

NVCNPA has enhanced its service capacity by identifying funding resources and grant lists that target service priorities for nonprofits on the coalition. This method entails identifying a grant writer or team to develop and process the grant. This has enabled many of the smaller nonprofits to continue to provide services to the community without having to devote personnel to grant development.

The executive director of the coalition would like to devote more attention to education and training. The idea is to provide a series of low or no-cost educational trainings and workshops for nonprofit members covering topics such as best practices/proven methods, fundraising, technology, management and public policy. Although many of these workshops are available, often, they are inaccessible to nonprofit employees due to cost. Once again, membership has its privileges.

Another benefit to members and the public is the access to information and services via the internet that the coalition provides. Currently, the NVCNPA has information on the internet listed under bayberryinc.com, which provides information about the coalition as well as reports from each standing committee. Some of the committees have yet to meet and others are not posted due to committee development issues. Nevertheless, I was able to access several committee reports to get updates on committee plans and issues. I found this information to be valuable. NVCNPA would like to expand its website and provide a database of information on Napa Valley community services.

## CHALLENGES

One of the most important challenges is building trusting relationships with others. It is critical that nonprofits develop and build trusting relationships that will enable them to define common interests, values and goals. Because some nonprofits are not affiliated with the coalition, the coalition has had to work through some difficult situations on an agency-by-agency basis. This situation has not occurred frequently and has not presented any serious harm. Consensus decision-making is an accepted and agreed upon practice by the coalition members.

Another challenge is the time commitment required for the day-to-day operations of the collaborative. Participation in collaborative relationships and ongoing participation on coalition committees often takes many of the executive directors away from their agency positions to. This challenge increases an existing rigorous work schedule. Many directors are taking a less demanding role in the future developments. There is a need for more members in the coalition to take a more active role in shaping the coalition's future.

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

The NVCNPA has created a strong voice in the local community and political climate of Napa County. Since its emergence, many community agencies have solicited directions and guidance from the coalition prior to making key policy decisions. Entities such as the Board of Supervisors, funders, grant makers and the director of Health and Human Services all have at one point or another sought and depended on information from this body. There are several examples that demonstrate the effectiveness of the coalition's role in planning

and policy decisions. One is the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Committee.

The CDBG Committee, chaired by Lori Pesavento, Executive Director of Family Service of the North Bay, consists of a 13-member committee charged with developing a strategy to access the Housing Authority facility improvement/rehabilitation dollars. Because the CDBG Citizen's Committee focuses primarily on issues such as city sidewalk repairs, handicap access ramps, and playground facilities, nonprofit facility improvements were not considered a priority. The NVCNPA strategically identified facility improvement needs, and prioritized a list of agencies requiring immediate repairs through a two-year tier process. This process demonstrated the trust, and community of nonprofits working together for a common goal. Because of their efforts, the CDBG Citizen's Funding Recommendations committee funded the coalition.

## NAPA AND SAN MATEO COUNTY – THE CONTRAST

Unlike Napa's vision, San Mateo's was generated and driven from a political base. This political base was the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors (BOS). In 1997, the BOS developed innovative ways to support nonprofit agencies throughout the county. Because of this support, a full time staff person, Pat Black was hired specifically to provide county support to nonprofits. Nonprofit agencies began meeting, and as a result formed the San Mateo County Council of Nonprofits. Their purpose is to continue to develop the San Mateo Council of Nonprofits agencies and serve as a voice for the sector as well as a support system for each member.

County agencies were able to provide immediate

support to the nonprofits through purchases, training and advertising. Participating nonprofits are able to take advantage of the purchasing power of the County for items such as office supplies and janitorial services. This has created substantial savings for the nonprofits. Nonprofits are allowed to enroll their employees in County Employee Training Programs designed to assist employees with career development, advertise available positions on the County's website under Employment Opportunities, and collocate nonprofit agencies to minimize rental space cost. San Mateo County has been exploring the acquisition of real property for nonprofits. Currently, both Napa and San Mateo County Nonprofits are exploring 501(c) (3) status.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY**

The Human Services Agency has enjoyed a committed and collaborative working relationship with its community partners since it renewed its community relations strategies plan in 1992. The community partners played a major role in the agency's strategic planning efforts. However, because of the agency reorganization, the regional provision of services, and the creation of the San Mateo Council of Nonprofits, I propose the following two recommendations:

#### **Recommendation (1)**

Within the San Mateo council of nonprofits, program managers are responsible for agencies within their regions. To better foster these relationships, a forum should be provided to generate community information and provide community updates to the regional directors. The Human Services Agency has a similar forum in place; however, it can be greatly

improved. Information might be provided by the program managers on a monthly or quarterly basis to the regional directors, so that there are no surprises during the budget period.

#### **Recommendation (2)**

The San Mateo Council of Nonprofit is an important vehicle for sharing community information. Nevertheless, the directors of both the Human Services Agency and Health Services Agency, or their designees should have a more active role on the council. Building a council without active Health and Human Services involvement could compromise efforts to bridge and align programmatic strategies. To date, both directors' roles have been minimal, and I recommend that participation on the council is essential. There are no fiscal impacts with the proposed recommendations.

### **CONCLUSION**

Napa presents a realistic and practical approach towards building a successful nonprofit coalition. Napa coalition members were able to build upon community relationships and remain focused on common goals. There are many benefits and very few challenges. Communities can learn from this example and adapt it to their local needs.

Although there are common mistakes that block such progress, every community has its own issues and challenges. The challenge here is to learn how to work together effectively, be flexible and allow for new circumstances while staying focused on a shared vision. This insight helped the collective partners overcome layers of resistance embedded in the community when it was presented with systemic change.

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**Appendix 1**  
**NAPA VALLEY COALITION OF NON-PROFIT AGENCIES**  
**COMMITTEES**

- Community Development Block Grant Committee
- Parenting Committee
- Public Relations Committee
- Economic Impact Committee
- Education Committee
- Behavioral Health Committee - (Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health)
- Alzheimer Coalition Committee
- Disability Committee
- Safety-Net Food Services Committee
- Health Access Committee
- Housing Committee - (Continuum of Care)