

## **ENVISIONING THE COALITION: THE NAPA VALLEY COALITION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR SAN MATEO COUNTY**

**Richard Holman\***

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **BACKGROUND**

San Mateo County and Napa County differ greatly in size and demographics. While Napa County is larger geographically, San Mateo County has almost 7 times the population of Napa County. The demographic differences are also striking. While San Mateo County has a population that is only 49% white, Napa County is overwhelmingly white (69%), per the 2000 Census. Moreover, whereas Napa County's population is spread throughout the county, San Mateo is more densely populated in areas surrounding the Bay, with many micro-communities made up of various ethnic groups.

#### **HISTORY**

Given these differences, how does each county provide the necessary health and human services to the population? In Napa, the functions are combined under one umbrella, the Napa Valley Health and Human Service Agency, while San Mateo County has split the Human Service Agency off from the Health Department. The differences in size of the counties allows for Napa to operate efficiently with one agency, whereas having two in San Mateo County makes sense.

While both counties contract with nonprofits to provide services, Napa County has built a strong relationship between the nonprofits through the Napa

Valley Coalition of Non-Profit Agencies. Begun in 1995 as a means to get nonprofit agencies to work together in building partnerships, the Coalition today has over 50 participating members, along with 27 affiliates. The Coalition's ability to work together has led to better access to funding sources, as well as to its being a stronger voice advocating for programs and services in the Napa Valley.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR SAN MATEO COUNTY**

Given the tough fiscal times we are now facing, San Mateo County needs to look at innovative ways to provide for human service needs. We need to look at building bigger, better partnerships with our nonprofits and community groups so that the burden of providing the continuum of care within our county can be sustained. The Napa Valley Coalition is an excellent model for what we can do in this county.

San Mateo County has the beginnings of a Napa Valley style coalition with the San Mateo County Council of Non-Profits. To date, 14 nonprofits are participating in this coalition, while more are actively being sought. I believe that the San Mateo Human Service Agency needs to promote participation in this coalition as a way to strengthen the ability to provide for human service needs within the county.

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- San Mateo County Human Service Agency to take a leading role in establishing a strong coalition working to enhance membership in the San Mateo County Council of Non-Profits and contract out to those members when possible
- San Mateo County Human Service Agency to take the lead in bringing funders together
- San Mateo County Human Service Agency should offer services to the San Mateo County Council of Non-Profits as a means to recruit members
- In time, an independent Executive Director should be hired to run the coalition in San Mateo County

- In time, incorporate coalition into a 501(c)3 charitable organization
- In time, regionalize coalition in order to manage scope

### **CONCLUSION**

Napa Valley has built a strong, viable coalition through time and work. I believe we could be successful in San Mateo County provided we put our time and will behind our efforts. The ability to speak with one voice to lobby funders can be a mighty tool when attempting to provide human service programs. The better our efforts at creating that voice, the better our results will be within the community.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

As part of my BASSC Executive Development class, I chose to visit Napa County to look at the Napa Valley Coalition of Non-Profits (the Coalition). I had heard a presentation on the Coalition, and as someone who has worked in a collaborative environment in employment services, I was interested to discover if such a collaborative effort could work within the human service area. My interest was heightened due to the increased strain on social services brought about by the budget problems faced by the state and the County of San Mateo. Would a similar approach work in San Mateo County? Why was it useful? I visited Napa County and met with the Executive Director of the Coalition, as well as members, to get a feel for what they do and how they believe it is working. I also had the opportunity to sit in on a board meeting, as well as a training offered by the Coalition. From this experience, I have come up with recommendations for San Mateo County Human Service Agency should we embark on a similar collaborative effort.

### **THE NAPA VALLEY COALITION: A BRIEF HISTORY**

In 1995, members of six private nonprofit agencies met with Dan Corsello, Director of Health and Human Services of Napa County, to discuss the difficulties facing nonprofit agencies and the viability of forming a coalition of nonprofits.

Today, over 50 nonprofit agencies in the Napa Valley are members of the Coalition, in addition to 27 Affiliate (non-voting) members. Agencies, such

as the American Cancer Society to the Boys and Girls Club of Napa Valley to Catholic Charities, are members of the Coalition. Each member pays .006 of their operating budget to belong to the Coalition, so a major financial stake is invested by the nonprofits in the Coalition. Members are represented by the Executive Director of the nonprofit or by someone appointed by the Executive Director. Affiliate members are in many cases organizations that will fund projects, so a non-voting membership protects against conflict of interest allegations.

The Coalition has multiple standing committees that highlight critical areas of need in Napa County, committees such as Housing, Parenting, Seniors, and Behavioral Health, to name but a few. The committees work on plans and projects in their service area, which are then brought back to the larger group for discussion and possible collaboration.

The Coalition is not immune to in-fighting or the negative dynamics that can surround any large group, such as feelings of favoritism and conflict of interest. Yet the nonprofits have managed to overcome this expected behavior to build a good working relationship and present a unified front to funders and the community. This cooperation has greatly enhanced their efforts to secure funding, aiding the disadvantaged populations of Napa County.

### **WHY A COALITION?**

The value of the Napa Valley Coalition has been reported in previous BASSC essays. Briefly, by building the Coalition, duplication of services has

been reduced and more resources are being used to fund community programs. In addition, the Napa City Council, which historically had not given any funding to private nonprofits, funded building repairs to nonprofit agencies totaling \$750,000 over three years. These repairs enabled the nonprofits to conduct business in a safe, healthy environment.

The Napa Valley Coalition is also a recognized 501(c)3 charity, allowing the Coalition to raise funds to provide services and training. Therefore, the Coalition, in addition to providing mutual support and an opportunity to collaborate, now has a financial backbone that enables the Coalition operating room of its own.

The Coalition is also able to use its “clout” to secure funding. With over 50 participating nonprofits, and millions of dollars in revenue serving over 45,000 clients yearly, the Napa Valley Coalition has a major say in the continuum of care for the region.

Still, why belong to the Coalition? Why pay to participate when there are no guarantees that anything will come of it? Jim Featherstone, Assistant Director of the Napa Valley Health and Human Services, offered many reasons. Mr. Featherstone argues that many nonprofits work against each other by going after the same piece of pie. Many “mom and pop” nonprofits were going under due to this competition and to the duplication of services. The resources used just to secure funding were driving the actual dollar amount used for assisting clients down to almost worthless amounts. By becoming part of the Coalition, nonprofits can work together, or learn to leave money on the table if the possibilities exist for future monies. The Coalition is also beneficial in that it is more proactive in terms of projects being funded. Previously, a need was identified with a proposal on how to address it. A

request for proposals then went out, with multiple nonprofits eagerly chomping at the same piece of pie. At the Coalition, proposals can come from nonprofits for a need they have identified. Nonprofits can then collaborate, identify funding streams and apply for money.

A good example of how this works happened at a Coalition Board meeting I attended in February. After introductions and board business, members were invited to share information about ongoing or new projects. One such project was presented regarding a drug treatment program for women. Group and individual counseling services were to be provided to Latina women at no cost. At the same meeting, a representative from First 5 announced that they had some small grants, under \$5,000, they were offering. A childcare provider then said that with the grant from First 5, their organization could provide the childcare on site for the Latina women receiving counseling. This example beautifully illustrates the value of collaboration, and how, when everyone comes to the table, needs are addressed in an efficient manner.

More benefits of the Coalition:

- Creating and fostering an inclusive environment
- Having the ability to work with agencies that might not otherwise work with government agencies
- Having the ability to train nonprofit partners
- Developing the opportunities for collaboration

Another illustration that shows that belonging to the Coalition has tangible benefits can be seen in the unified training the members are provided. While visiting Napa, I had the opportunity to participate in a Coalition-sponsored training on how to organize a Board of Directors. This well-attended training gave valuable insight as to how to recruit a top-

notch Board. Members who attended each shared experiences of working with an ineffective Board and expressed satisfaction with the content and delivery of the training.

One additional illustration of the Coalition's effectiveness in being out front of the issues can be seen in a questionnaire recently sent members. This survey is attempting to identify the 30 greatest areas of need in Napa County, as seen by members of the Coalition. From the information gathered, projects are identified and funding sought for collaboration to address the issue. By sharing the information, the group works together to identify the needs, making the decision to collaborate with partners easier. As Bill Chadwick, Executive Director of the Coalition explained, when everyone comes to the table, everyone knows how much food is there.

#### **CAN IT WORK IN SAN MATEO?**

Would such a coalition work in San Mateo County? Would the differences in our demographics preclude us from duplicating the success of the Napa Valley model? As I thought of the Napa Valley Coalition, I tried to envision how that would work here. Can San Mateo County Human Service Agency assist in building a working coalition along the lines of the Coalition of Napa County? I contacted Kitty Lopez, Executive Director of the Samaritan House who has been working on this idea, to get her thoughts. I also spoke to Carilee Pang Chen, Program Coordinator for the San Mateo County Council of Non-Profits, to learn what we are doing in this area. From speaking to them, I have come up with a few ideas about how to jumpstart efforts already underway, as well as to give my recommendations as to how I see a collaborative working in San Mateo County. First, a few demographic points help to illustrate why San Mateo County

needs to think of structuring a coalition differently than Napa County.

The most striking difference between the two counties lies in their size. The popular misconception would say that San Mateo County is geographically larger, but according to the 2000 Census, Napa County has 753.7 square miles with a population of 124,279. San Mateo County has 449.1 square land miles with a population of 707,161 per the Census of 2000. The majority of San Mateo County residents live along the San Francisco Bay, whereas Napa County's population is spread more about the county. However, even though San Mateo's population is concentrated in a smaller geographic area, the ethnic breakdown and diverse nature of the county allows for many micro-communities within these concentrated areas. Each of these micro-communities has needs that may be endemic to the area as well as greater needs shared by the community at-large.

Diversity within the two counties also plays a part in how we must address the needs of the community. Of the 124,279 people in Napa County, 85,932 self-identify as Non-Hispanic White Alone, or 69.14% of the population. In San Mateo County, that number is 352,355 out of a population of 707,161, or 49 % of the population. Cultural norms and practices must be respected in order to address the needs of the community. To that end, there are community groups and nonprofits to represent the diverse cultures within the community. San Mateo County has over 650 nonprofit agencies representing the needs of the community. With so many nonprofits competing for an ever-dwindling source of funds, the imperative for collaborative efforts becomes clear. Is there a way to get everyone to the table? How do you convince a nonprofit, whose very business is solicitation of funds to provide services,

that the common good is better served by allowing another nonprofit to obtain funds? As Bill Chadwick has said, the most difficult part of the collaborative process is to leave money on the table for another agency. In addition, the question many nonprofits bring up when asked to join a collaborative is, “What is in it for me?”

These are some of the questions that will need to be answered if a strong coalition of nonprofits is to work in San Mateo County. San Mateo County will need to show the advantage of working within a collaborative environment to the nonprofits. We will need strategic direction and an organizational structure that, over time, will allow a collaborative of this size to work in San Mateo County. Below, I have recommended some short- and long-term goals, with discussion to follow.

#### **SHORT-TERM GOALS**

- San Mateo County Human Service Agency (HSA) should take a leading role in establishing a strong coalition, working with the San Mateo County Council of Non-Profits to enhance membership and contracting with members to provide services, when possible.
- San Mateo County HSA should take the lead in bringing funders together.
- San Mateo County HSA should offer services to the members of the San Mateo Council of Non-Profits to enhance recruitment efforts.

#### **LONG-TERM GOALS**

- Hire an independent Executive Director for the San Mateo Coalition.
- Create a Board of Directors to be comprised of community members without ties to collaborative members or funders.
- Incorporate the coalition into a 501(c)3 charitable organization.

- Regionalize collaborative, with regional representation on the county-wide collaborative.

#### **DISCUSSION**

The benefits of having a collaborative are obvious. The work lies in convincing nonprofits that it is in their interest to join. I believe the way to bring nonprofits in is through the funders. If we can coordinate with the funders to work only with members of the coalition, we force the hand of nonprofits as to whether to belong. If you want the money, come to the table. As an organization that works and contracts out extensively with community groups and nonprofits, San Mateo can use the bully pulpit, if you will, to ensure more participation in the Coalition.

San Mateo County HSA can also spur membership in the coalition by offering services and space to nonprofits and community groups. By offering these groups the opportunity to receive services, such as free training, space to conduct business, or even grant-writing assistance, more groups would be willing to participate in the coalition as they see immediate tangible benefits.

By achieving these short-term strategic goals, the long-term goals can then be addressed. As the coalition reaches greater capacity, an independent Executive Director, not beholden to agencies or funders, should be appointed. By having an independent voice leading, feelings of favoritism or conflict of interest can be eliminated. This will also allow San Mateo County Human Service Agency to take a less active role within the coalition. As the coalition grows, importance will be placed on the independence of the entity, ensuring that it is not looked on as just another branch of the Human Service Agency.

To further that independence, the coalition should strive to be recognized as a 501(c)3 charitable organization. This will allow the coalition to raise funds, allowing programs to spring out of the coalition, driven by the coalition, and funded with money raised by the coalition.

Finally, as the coalition grows into its full potential, regionalization should be looked at as a way to keep the coalition operable. As mentioned earlier, San Mateo County has over 650 potential nonprofit members. Should the coalition be successful in attracting members, the numbers could make getting anything accomplished almost impossible. To prevent this, I would suggest regionalizing the collaborative effort, with designated regions creating their own Coalition of Non-Profits. Each region could then elect representatives to sit on the Countywide Coalition. Additionally, regional representatives could sit on the committees formed by the larger coalition, which will help ensure that regional nonprofits have a voice in the process. As indicated, some problems are endemic to the area, but most cross all boundaries to affect the community at-large. By bringing program ideas from the regions to the main body, collaborative efforts can be explored to expand a project across the county.

### **CONCLUSION**

The experience of Napa County in building and maintaining a coalition is an excellent blueprint for San Mateo County. Although different in both size and diversity, with time and effort San Mateo County can develop a similar collaborative process with our nonprofits and community partners. The greatest challenge lies not in the size of our county, but our willingness to make a coalition work. This will take time, leadership and a firm vision. We should not attempt to duplicate the model set forth

by Napa County, we should adapt the experience of Napa County into a model that will work for us. This is why a regional approach, in time, makes sense to me.

Public funding will no longer support the many areas of service delivery needed within the community. This is the primary motivator for moving to a more complete collaborative approach to human service needs. San Mateo County Human Service Agency already has a head start in the relationships we have built with our community partners. Now we need to capitalize on those relationships and build a collaborative infrastructure that will serve the community effectively in the years to come.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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