THE SCAN FOUNDATION

Perspectives On:

Social Action in California

June 2010

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INTRODUCTION

The SCAN Foundation (Foundation), through AGEnts for Change, is engaging in efforts to build a community of constituents and advocates with the goal of improving long-term care (LTC) services in California. This engagement has two major components. The first component is the development of a "California Collaborative", made up of aging and disability advocacy organizations and groups, who will meet regionally and on a statewide level to form a consensus around key LTC policy, and the design of a comprehensive, seamless LTC delivery system. The second component is the engagement of service provider organizations and their volunteers in social action. The Foundation plans to support this engagement by building upon and expanding existing civic engagement movements to include social action in relation to home-and community-based services for seniors and caregivers.

Civic engagement can be defined as: "Encompassing a set of actions wherein persons participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community."[1] This can include individual volunteerism, paid work and/or participation in civic engagement campaigns in the community.

Engagement which involves advocacy is a growing area within civic engagement and has been termed "social action." Social action can be defined as: Individual and collective actions intended to identify and address issues of public concern.

Goals of AGEnts for Change

The Foundation plans to support social action through its AGEnts for Change initiative, which includes the release of two Request For Proposals (RFP) addressing three overarching goals:

1. To strengthen the infrastructure of community service provider organizations and assist them in identifying their role in and the opportunities for using volunteers to engage in social action as part of creating a community of constituents and advocates for LTC reform.

2. To support the development of a community of constituents, including seniors and caregivers who engage in social action to improve home- and community-based services, as part of a larger social movement.

3. To utilize leading-edge technology and communication to support, enhance and strengthen the development of a social movement in California.

[1]American Society on Aging (May 2010) http://www.asaging.org/asav2/civiceng/index.cfm

Perspectives Papers

As part of the development of its 2010 Fall RFP, the Foundation commissioned a set of white papers, ***Perspectives on: Social Action in California***, which include:

Components of a Successful Volunteer Program
Janet Seckel-Cerrotti, Executive Director, FriendshipWorks'

The Value of Engaging Seniors and Volunteers in Advocacy
The Women's Foundation of California

Expert Panel Summary: Enhancing Social Action for Older Adults Through Technology
The Center for Technology and Aging: Public Health Institute

Strengthening Nonprofit Advocacy
Gary D. Bass, Founder and Executive Director and Lee Mason, Director of Nonprofit Advocacy, OMB Watch

Overarching Advocacy Issues Related to Aging and Solutions & Where and How Community Based Organizations Can Play a Role in the Larger Advocacy Community
Rigo J. Saborio, President & CEO, St. Barnabas Senior Services

These papers provided the intellectual framework for the development of the RFP. It is the Foundation's hope that they will provide guidance to proposing organizations in the development of their projects, and furthermore that they will inspire the work of many other individuals and organizations who plan to or are engaging in social action.

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Components of a Successful Volunteer Program

Janet Seckel-Cerrotti, Executive Director
FriendshipWorks'

At one time, it was thought that all that was needed in order to run a successful volunteer program was to round up some people who wanted to do good work and to turn them loose on a project that needed doing. Over the last 25 years, we have discovered that inadequately structured and managed volunteer programs lead to dissatisfaction, burnout, and high turnover. In fact, inadequate screening, training, and supervision of volunteers can even harm, rather than help those in need of assistance. Professionally managed volunteer programs effectively channel the energies and skills of the unprecedented numbers of people from all walks of life currently seeking to donate their time in order to make the world a better place.

The following provides an outline of key components to create a volunteer program.

To start, maintain, and grow a volunteer program, requires:

1. An identifiable need or problem.
2. A solution where people from the community can be drawn to help, to participate, to make a difference, and to make an impact or solve a problem.
3. An understanding of all stages of the volunteer management process and the ability to apply this knowledge to the practice of managing volunteers.

Needs Assessment

Many formal needs assessment tools are available to guide the process of gathering information which is necessary to lay the groundwork for a new volunteer program. It is important to research the strengths, challenges, and history of the community (however you are defining the "community" to be served by your program) in relation to the need you are seeking to address (e.g. providing friendship and care for elders). Gauge the community's receptivity to what you hope to offer and gather a variety of opinions about what is needed.

Clarifying the Mission / Creating a Mission Statement

The conceptualization, or articulation of the problem or need should lead towards creating a mission statement for a new volunteer program.

A mission statement should be created which clearly describes the need the program will address. (e.g. "To reduce social isolation, enhance quality of life and preserve the dignity of older and disabled adults in the Greater Boston area".).

Second, a statement should be added about the means through which the problem will be addressed (e.g. we do this through the dedicated efforts of a network of trained volunteers of all faiths who provide friendship, advocacy, education, assistance, and emotional support.") This second sentence is not actually part of the formal mission but as a whole, this statement is a concise and accurate description of the program's identity.

Forming a Committed Board/ Staff/Committees

It is vital to have a strong Board of Directors, staff and as well as a committee committed to the program and available for ongoing support. The board should represent the community and have a clear understanding of its role in the oversight of the program.

It is the board's responsibility:

- To ensure that the coordinator and staff are staying on mission.
- To ensure continuity of the program by raising money and allocating funds for it.

Setting Goals and Objectives

Once the program's needs assessment and mission statement are complete, the board should set goals and objectives for the program. The goals should be challenging but not unrealistic and should be objectively measurable. (e.g. "The goal for the next 12 months is to recruit, train and place 20 volunteers to do medical escorts for 40 elderly in Modoc County."). As the program develops, organizational goals should be set for areas such as fundraising, program evaluation, marketing, and collaboration.

Hiring a Coordinator

The first hire should be a coordinator—almost always a staff person—to oversee and coordinate the volunteer program. This staff position should minimally be a half-time (20 hour/week) paid position with a job description primarily consisting of volunteer recruitment, placement, support and training. It does *not* work well to tack the role of volunteer coordinator onto an existing job description, as the volunteer program won't get the attention it requires to thrive.

The volunteer coordinator will be the face of the program (along with the executive director, if the volunteer program is part of a volunteer agency). *This person and the support they are given to do the job well are the most critical piece of the success of the volunteer program.*

Qualities of a successful volunteer program coordinator:

- Possesses personal warmth
- Is open to new ideas and change
- Likes people
- Treats all people as equals
- Cares deeply about the mission of the organization
- Is an excellent listener
- Possesses a "can-do" attitude
- Is well-organized

In addition, it is becoming increasingly important for the program coordinator to either have decent technological skills or to build a "tech team."

If the volunteer program is part of a larger business (e.g. a firm or hospital), the program coordinator and the volunteer program need to be respected within the organization, with a status comparable to that of other departments. One of the best ways to undermine a program's efforts and ability to succeed is to treat either the program or its coordinator as second-class citizens within an organization!

Opportunities and Challenges: Recruiting Volunteers Who Reflect the Diversity of Those Served.

There is an abundance of resources to help programs in their pursuit of broad diversity goals. What follows are some key points related to one piece of an overall diversity strategy: *recruiting volunteers who reflect the diversity of those who are being served.*

To reflect those being served may refer to race, socio-economic status, age, gender, or other demographic characteristics, or it may refer to having shared a particular kind of life experience—e.g. having been homeless, having a family member with Alzheimer's, being an immigrant. Pursuing this type of diversity can greatly enhance the quality of services offered. It is also a complex, long-term undertaking. The Board must address the issue and identify which types of diversity are most relevant to the type of services they are offering and to the population being served.

For example, the agency may decide to provide volunteer medical escorts for Spanish-speaking elder patients going to doctors' appointments. The volunteers would clearly need to mirror the clients by being Spanish-speaking. It might or might not also be important that volunteers share other client characteristics, such as age, country of origin, income level, neighborhood, or types of health concerns or conditions.

Once the decision is made to recruit volunteers who share demographic characteristics or life experiences with those being served, a concrete strategy needs to be put in place with a clear, stated objective and significant investment of time and resources. Finding specific types of staff or volunteers is very time-consuming and should be treated with the same level of seriousness and thoroughness as any project, including research, and creation of a strategic plan with a time table.

Make a commitment.

It is especially important to understand the need for commitment and time from the board and the need for a funding stream to make such a project viable (2-3 years). This is especially important if the population to be served is "new" or the project's expanded scope is "new" to the organization.

The program must adapt whenever necessary.

When evidence shows that the program is not going in the right direction or that a change in expectations is needed, then change direction. Don't be embarrassed about not anticipating or knowing everything at the start – adapt because something new has been learned, not because of impatience.

Make sure that outreach materials reflect those to be served and recruited.

People need to see themselves in the pictures, symbols and language used in brochures, web sites, and other outreach materials or the materials will not be speaking to them. Recruitment is different for different populations.

Have a presence in a neighborhood where you seek to serve residents and to recruit volunteers.

The program need not have a physical office in that neighborhood — though that would be ideal — but whenever possible, meet people where they are rather than always asking them do the traveling. It is a show of respect and good faith.

Hire or recruit a volunteer leader who is from the population you are seeking to recruit.

For instance, to reach out to Latino elders, it is best to hire or have as a volunteer leader someone who is both fluent in Spanish and who is bicultural—someone who is Latino or who has spent enough time in Latin American countries. The "volunteer leader" position being discussed here is an outreach/liaison/project coordinator role which is separate from that of the overall volunteer program coordinator, whose role and qualifications are discussed in the section on "Hiring a Coordinator."

Above all else, have cultural competence, humility, listen, learn, adapt, and continue to grow in your understanding of other's values and life experience.

(For a deeper explanation of what cultural humility means, see: http://www.partnershipsforolderadults.org/resources/levelthree.aspx?sectionGUID=77e17bd-fale-4253-8d6d-34d808334fb0)

Record Keeping

Know what records are important to keep, and have a way to store and use them. A good database about clients, volunteers, donors, events, referral sources, etc., is essential. Be diligent in keeping records about everything from client demographics to programmatic procedures and agency policies. Know what should be kept confidential and ensure that the confidentiality is maintained.

Evaluation

Evaluation should include numbers — is the agency or program meeting goals and qualitative outcomes? Is it accomplishing what the board set out to do? Depending on your mission and your program, outcomes may be may be difficult to measure. A volunteer program evaluation should measure not only how the lives of your constituents have been changed but also it should assess the satisfaction of the volunteers. If the evaluation is related to how cost is affected by volunteer turnover, examine how long the volunteers stay, what factors make some stay longer than others, or are there certain cohorts of volunteers that stay longer. This information can help you decide where your recruitment and training efforts are best placed, or whether you should reexamine the program policy about retention.

Staying on Mission

In most literature this would be called perseverance—but a better word is "sticktuitiveness". It is critical to keep at the work because it is a building process. Adapt when necessary but stay on course and at all times keep the program or agency mission at the forefront of all decisions. For example, an agency should not indiscriminately apply for grants that are on the periphery of its mission. This does not negate the necessity of survival. A new program will not have forever to prove it can "produce." But if survival means the agency is not doing what it set out to do, it needs to either change the mission or shut down.

Volunteer Screening and Recruitment

The most important element in the creation and continuation of a successful volunteer program is, of course, the volunteers themselves. Each volunteer, like each staff member is a face and a voice of the program; volunteering is a job. Though people tend to bring the best of themselves to their volunteer position, a good volunteer program does not say yes to everyone who walks in the door. Some people are just not suited for the work or position in a particular program. It is important that a volunteer program be open to everyone, but discernment is a vital part of effective volunteer coordination. Reference checks, criminal background checks (where needed by law or a program deems important) and the coordinator's "gut check" are imperative. In general very few people should be turned away but if they are, they should be directed to another more appropriate volunteer opportunity whenever possible.

How volunteers are recruited will depend on who is being recruited. If recruitment is from the general public, then a wide array of media and approaches should be tried. This includes postings on the Internet and in neighborhood newspapers, placing fliers in libraries, ice-cream shops, and laundromats, conducting outreach to civic and religious groups, having a table at a county fair, introducing your program at workshops and conferences you attend when appropriate…the possibilities are endless. It is best to select several, if not all of these venues and continue to market. Even the most successful corporations in the world still advertise, and when needed, refresh their marketing message.

If recruitment is for a specific group of people – e.g. Spanish-speaking residents or retirees - then go to the organizations, associations and media that are likely to reach these communities. And, seek out specific key leaders in the community who are centrally involved with the folks in the target audience. In many ethnic communities, for example, word of mouth and getting the ear of respected leaders (formal and informal) may be the key to recruitment.

Orientation and Training for Volunteers

Build an orientation and training that gives volunteers the information they need. Provide each volunteer with a job description and a volunteer manual and training which includes practical information, "do's and don'ts," guidelines for setting limits, and resources for accessing support. Volunteers should be regarded as just as important as any employee. Both paid and volunteer workers need clear objectives, a support system, understandable policies and procedures, a "point-person" or supervisor, and a clear and safe way to communicate problems.

The provision of group support and education after the initial training depends on the organization's culture, its internal and external environment (rural/urban, formal/informal, large/small) and what ages and situations the volunteers tend to come from. For example, if the volunteers are mostly retired, they may enjoy and welcome opportunities to have gatherings with other volunteers for further education and support. On the other hand, volunteers who are full-time working people may want and only be able to attend the essential sessions that enable them to take on their volunteer role.

Sustaining and Thanking Volunteers

Just like every employee, every volunteer is not the same. Have a variety of ways of nurturing volunteers. Making sure that they have the resources and support to succeed in whatever they have taken on, is key. Keeping in touch either by phone, email, mail, texting, and/or social media is important. Thanking people is always important – not only to sustain volunteers but also to let people know the time, talents and care that they are putting forth on behalf of your cause and/or the people you serve is appreciated. Thanking can happen in myriad ways and many ideas for volunteer appreciation can be found on the web or at community seminars.

Conclusion

As you can see from this outline, there are many factors at play in the success of a new volunteer program. By following the guidelines in this document and demonstrating a strong commitment to success, a new program can begin to effectively channel the enthusiasm and diverse skills of people from all walks of life.

Volunteer appreciation can go a long way towards improving morale and strengthening devotion to your cause. Here are just a few of the very different ways that volunteers can be thanked and feel appreciated:

- Seek their advice
- Recognize your volunteers in your newsletters and/or on your website
- Bring them together for a thank you event
- Have coffee or lunch one-on-one
- Send them a personal thank you note. Make sure to be specific about what you appreciate about them or how they have changed someone's life
- Give a gift of some kind, a certificate of appreciation
- Send them birthday cards
- Ask them if there is some other way they would like to be involved in the work of your program, give them a chance to learn something new, or to be involved in a new way. Even if they don't want to, they will appreciate being asked.

The Value of Engaging Seniors and Volunteers in Advocacy

The Women's Foundation of California

Californians over the age of 65 are rapidly increasing in number and diversity. Older adults, especially elder women, are increasingly vulnerable because of financial and health constraints related to age and their roles as caregivers. The global economic downturn, state budget crises, and the reduction in federal and state resources for older populations further stress the well-being and economic status of older adults. However, these negative trends do not affect older adults alone; they affect every person who is caring for, sustained, nurtured, or inspired by them.

This paper provides an example of the value of engaging seniors and volunteers in advocacy through the Women's Foundation of California Elder Women's Initiative launched in 2008. In partnership with The California Endowment, the UCSF Institute for Health & Aging, New America Media, the California Commission on the Status of Women, and the Insight Center for Community Economic Development, the Foundation seeks to build a movement led by diverse elder women and their allies to change policies so that all Californians can age with well-being, dignity, and economic and health security.

This paper examines aging and its particular impact on women and shares findings and recommendations from the Elder Women's Initiative efforts, including the community listening sessions, an assessment of the political climate and policy advocacy training for advocates on elder women issues, to fulfill the vision of a California where all women can age with health and dignity. The Women's Foundation of California hopes that through sharing this initiative other communities can learn from our work and develop campaigns as part of The SCAN Foundation's AGEnts for Change initiative.

Framing Aging as a Gender Issue

Although everyone gets older, aging is a women's issue for many reasons.[1] Women have disproportionately higher poverty rates, a longer life expectancy, more family responsibilities, workplace discrimination and fewer work opportunities, which means that they have fewer opportunities to accrue financial resources over their lifetimes. Elder women and elder women of color are more dependent on government programs and benefits than are elder men.[2] Women's dependency on public benefits and programs increases when, widowhood, divorce, retirement and associated declines in economic, health and mental health status are factored in.[3] Elder women who have never married are two to three times more likely to be uninsured or to rely on public programs such as Medicaid when compared to elder married women.[4]

Dependency on state and federal aid programs makes elder women more vulnerable to fiscal crises, budget cuts and changes in state and local policies. Cuts in health and social services programs and benefits have a greater negative impact on elder women.

Key Issues for Elder Women

Two key issues of the Elder Women's Initiative include elder women's increased vulnerability to financial and health problems and the keys to supporting their quality of life include economic security and access to comprehensive and affordable health care.

Economic Security

Economic security in old age is a particular concern for women. Many elder women have experienced a lifetime of lower wages due to workforce discrimination and work gaps resulting from family and child-rearing responsibilities. Furthermore, women's overall incomes decline with age. Elder women who have adequate incomes at the beginning of their working lives often slide into poverty in their later years, and some women who become widowed see their incomes dwindle to half the former amount as they grow older.

For elder women in California, the state's high cost of living creates an additional challenge. The extent of the challenge is clearly indicated by data from the California Elder Economic Security Standard Index (Elder Index), which calculates the annual cost of meeting basic needs—housing, food, out-of-pocket medical expenses, transportation and other necessities—for retired older adults in each county in California. Findings from the Elder Index show that the average minimum income needed by an older Californian who is a renter is $21,011[5] and that the average elder woman living alone needed more than $3,000 to reach the economic-security threshold in low-cost counties and $10,000 in high-cost counties.[6]

Access to Comprehensive and Affordable Health Care

Access to health care is strongly connected to economic security. Economic constraints prevent elder women from addressing all of their health care needs and poor health drains their economic resources. Gender, racial, and ethnic inequalities persist for health insurance coverage, out-of-pocket expenditures and access to health care services.

Elder women's health is also affected by lack of health care coverage in the years preceding Medicare eligibility. In California 17 percent of women ages 45–54 and 12 percent of those ages 55–64 are without health insurance, and the statistics are even higher for women of color.[7] Once they become eligible for Medicare, women encounter the limitations faced by all participants in the program. In 2002, for example, Medicare covered only 45 percent of beneficiaries' total medical and long-term care expenses[8], and approximately 1 in 10 older beneficiaries had more than $5,000 in out-of-pocket expenses.

Building a Movement for Elder Women's Advocacy

Women in California play crucial roles as caregivers, wage-earners, advocates and contributors to the economy and when women thrive, so do their families and their communities. Their lifetime of experience gives them a unique understanding of the world.[9] Harnessing the energy of older women to revitalize a movement of women working for positive social change, provides an opportunity to enhance the well-being of these women and results in the strengthening of families, communities and society as a whole.

Elder women and their allies have a critical role as stakeholders in policies that affect all older adults in California. The Women's Foundation recognized the need for advocacy in this area and created the Elder Women's Initiative in partnership with The California Endowment, the UCSF Institute for Health & Aging and New America Media. The California Commission on the Status of Women and the Insight Center for Community Economic Development joined with the partners as collaborators. Launched early in 2008, the Initiative has two long-term goals:

1. To build a movement led by elder women and their allies from diverse communities that challenges and redefines the current state and perception of aging in California.

2. To lead policy change that ensures all Californians have the option to age in their own homes with well-being, dignity and economic security.

To make this vision a reality, the Initiative took a community-based approach and employed a range of methods for reaching out to supporters, gathering information and building the elder women's movement, including:

- Community listening sessions in Northern, Central and Southern California. Over 350 elder women and their allies were invited to Speak-Outs, where they talked about the issues they face, the strengths that they and their communities have to offer, and how to build a constituency for a movement of elder women (see results below). Participants in the Speak-Outs reflected a diversity of ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as a wide geographical distribution, including rural, suburban and urban communities.

- Mapping policy and advocacy efforts related to diverse and vulnerable elder women in California. Researchers from the Institute for Health & Aging assessed the policy landscape and the potential for elder women and their allies to engage in a movement to change the systems that affect their lives using focus groups and telephone interviews with key state leaders in aging and women's issues.

- Developing advocacy training for elder women and their allies. The Women's Foundation of California incorporated a new cohort focused on elder issues as part of the yearlong advocacy-training program of its Women's Policy Institute.[10]

Results of the Speak-Outs: What Elder Women and Their Allies are Saying

Changing Society's Views on Aging

Participants in the Speak-Outs were united in advocating for a cultural shift in the way society regards elders, and highlighted the need to redefine aging and promote respect for elder women. Participants stressed the importance of valuing the assets, strengths and contributions of elder women as a vital step in this process of cultural change and began reframing the role of elder women by characterizing them as mentors, role models for youth and community treasures.

Participants expressed concern about the ways elder women are marginalized, including their loss of social recognition and the lack of attention to their issues within the wider community. In response to such challenges, participants brainstormed a number of ways to transform attitudes about elder women in the

United States. One approach that could make a significant positive impact is civic engagement for elder women, which would identify older community members as highly valuable and readily available for filling skills gaps. A speaker at the Bay Area session characterized this approach as a chance to "promote assets of aging, not the crisis of society."

Participants also saw civic engagement as a means for elder women to build self-esteem and assist other elders. Speakers underscored the benefits that come from volunteering with advocacy organizations. Others called for volunteer opportunities in peer mentoring, noting that many elder adults are more comfortable receiving information from those with whom they have equal standing. Speakers also suggested that elders with computer skills could help their peers learn to use e-mail and the Internet as a way to strengthen connections among elders and increase their knowledge about aging.

Engaging Elder Women in Building the Movement

Participants in the Speak-Outs made it clear that they were aware of the legacy of elder women who have been largely influential for decades in creating positive social change. The commitment to social justice, advocacy and policymaking wisdom of these women is clear in the accomplishments of the feminist movement, the civil rights movement, the LGBT movement, the labor movement and other progressive movements.

Personal perspectives also demonstrated the belief that solutions to the challenges of older women are found in their individual and collective lives. Their creativity and experiences provide a strong foundation for building a movement to advance well-being, dignity and economic security for all elder women in California.

Speak-Out participants voiced strong support for an initiative to bring the wisdom of elder women into the movement for policy reform. Speakers emphasized the importance of building broad coalitions, honoring interdependency and ensuring the involvement of elders from diverse and vulnerable groups, including immigrant and refugee women, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, women with low incomes and women who live in rural areas.

Including Intergenerational and Other Partners in Movement Building

Participants from a wide range of communities at the three regional Speak-Outs agreed that diversity and inclusiveness are a source of strength. The elder women's movement must be intergenerational and cross-cultural, must actively involve allies across many lines of difference and must welcome the support of biological and chosen families, friends and neighbors of elder women. Speakers noted that this movement can be reframed as a family-first agenda—helping elders is synonymous with helping families and their communities.

By facilitating collaboration and community building among women of many generations and of different social groups and organizations, the regional listening sessions created a critical mass of advocates. Each participant brought her own set of distinctive skills and experiences which laid the groundwork for a new network poised to have a far-reaching impact.

What Policymakers and Advocates are Saying: Results of the State-Level Interviews

The Elder Women's Initiative also mapped statewide policies related to elder women and assessed the possibility to build a statewide movement for elder women's advocacy. Collaborators held a focus group with state-level leaders in aging and women's issues in Spring 2008, and researchers conducted focus groups and telephone interviews with state-level policymakers and advocates in Summer 2008. The following provides a summary of the findings.

Building the Movement for Elder Women's Advocacy

State-level advocates and policymakers agreed on the need to build a movement for elder women's advocacy, including the need to create a broad coalition and reach out to untapped allies such as business, labor and unions, as well as significant staffers within the state administration. Both groups emphasized that the coalition would need to foster a bipartisan support for helping elder women obtain affordable health care and achieve economic security. They also identified the need to promote dialogue among all the stakeholders and emphasized the need to address women with low incomes.

Policymakers raised several other issues that must be factors in building an elder women's advocacy movement. They noted that bipartisan efforts on aging-related policy have been lacking in recent years and, to address this problem, the policymakers called for legislative champions to set the agenda on elder issues and build bipartisan support and partnerships with unlikely allies.

State leaders also discussed using policy to frame the needs of elder women as another viable strategy, Advocates described several key themes, such as closing gaps between what women have and what they need and preparing a stronger safety net. They also mentioned the importance of educating both legislators and the public about policy proposals to meet elder women's needs and noted education efforts like this would require better data from the research community on health and economic problems related to aging.

Lessons Learned From Past Movements

Policymakers and advocates cited lessons learned from past movements for progressive policy as a key piece of developing an elder movement strategy. Participants described patience and commitment as key pieces for accomplishing policy change. They also stressed the importance of bringing elder women's issues to the attention of legislators, particularly women legislators.

Policymakers thought it was critical to bring political and community leaders who understand current conditions within state politics together to build consensus, a condition necessary for any policy change to happen. Advocates, on the other hand, concentrated on building bridges outside traditional elder women's organizations, such as the Gray Panthers and the Older Women's League (OWL). They envisioned new sources of advocacy as arising among retired women, union members and the women's movement.

Advocates offered further lessons from the past with regard to addressing issues such as invisibility and sexism, as well as approaches to coalition building among labor and unions.

They noted that the realities of daily life for women in the workforce or women caregivers could inform the movement and politics at the local level. They added that a unified movement with a diverse base of support could influence how policymakers view the issues and inform voters about the issues women face as they age.

Strategies for Change

Policymakers and advocates noted that meeting with and advising legislative staff about specific legislation is vital to advancing policy change. They also suggested connecting with the business community, empowering citizens to advocate on their own behalf and educating local elected officials. Policymakers emphasized focusing on small, positive steps as a means of working toward long-term goals.

Both policymakers and advocates believe a strategic, long-term plan is paramount for the Elder Women's Initiative. They agreed that a policy plan must use power analyses, clearly define the problem, have realistic goals and embody stated values. They also agreed that putting together a larger policy platform by promoting several smaller policy changes may prove to be the most strategic and effective approach.

Ultimately, the policymakers and advocates recommended that the Initiative develop a strategic approach to build an elder women's movement and achieve its goals. The most feasible way to create policy change is to promote incremental changes and redefine problems and solutions in a way that sets the priorities for action. State leaders noted that key to this approach is a diverse, engaged base of community supporters. The movement's success requires using the diverse experiences and skills of women of all generations who work together to change policies affecting the lives and prospects of elder women in California.

Conclusion

Momentum is increasing around the promising work of the Elder Women's Initiative. The Women's Foundation of California has begun to facilitate policy and systems change led by elder women and their allies to benefit all women, families and communities. The foundation will continue working with community-based organizations to build the constituency for this movement across the state and country. Simultaneously, the Foundation will support elder women and their allies in their leadership roles to create beneficial policies for aging communities.

It is critical to find ways to engage older adults in community life, civic discourse, and policy development and advocacy at the local and state level it we want to create policies that support our aging population. California's reputation as a bellwether state means that efforts to recruit older women to join an intergenerational movement on elder issues can serve as a learning lab for other states and those successes here will have far reaching effects across the country. Most important, the Women's Foundation own track record with the Women's Policy Institute confirms our belief that changing policy requires many people, working on multiple tracks over many months. By continuing partnerships with non-profit organizations, funders and political leaders throughout California and the country, we can successfully advance policies that enable everyone to age with well-being, dignity, economic security and health security and in the place they choose.

Acknowledgements

Through the Women's Policy Institute, a innovate policy training program started by the Women's Foundation in 2003, the Foundation has trained advocates in policy and leadership skills to mobilize constituencies and pass legislation in California. Since 2008, the Foundation has supported the work of 12 multi-generational advocates on aging justice issues in California. In Fall of 2010, the Women's Foundation of California will also support the replication of the Women's Policy Institute specifically on aging issues through four planning grants, thanks to the generous support of The Atlantic Philanthropies.

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Endnotes

[1] Weitz, T., & Estes, C. L. (2001). Adding aging and gender to the women's health agenda. Journal of Women and Aging. Spring; 13(2): 3-20.

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Expert Panel Summary: Enhancing Social Action for Older Adults Through Technology

The Center for Technology and Aging: Public Health Institute

Foreward on the Technology Summit Expert Panel Event: “Enhancing Social Action for Older Adults Through Technology”

This report is a summary of The SCAN Foundation supported Technology Summit: Enhancing Social Action for Older Adults through Technology, which took place on May 5, 2010 in Oakland, California. The purpose of the Technology Summit was to discuss the strategic role of information and communications technology to enhance social action and advocacy for older adults. This event was organized by the Center for Technology and Aging, a grantee organization of The SCAN Foundation that is devoted to the diffusion of technology to help older adults live independently. The Technology Summit convened a panel of experts in the fields of technology, aging services, and social action to identify opportunities for technology to facilitate social action for older adults, strategies for the implementation of technology in conducting advocacy, examples of successful technology applications for social action, and emerging trends in this area.

Please refer to the full Expert Panel Report, “The SCAN Foundation Technology Summit: Enhancing Social Action for Older Adults Through Technology” for additional details. The full report contains an expanded summary of the panel content, opportunity areas for The SCAN Foundation and its grantees, five case studies on successful use of technology for social action, technology profiles, data on technology use for older adults, and panelist biographies.

The Technology Summit panelists were as follows:

- **Richard Adler**
  Research Affiliate, Institute for the Future
- **Tyrone Grandison**
  Program Manager for Core Healthcare Services, Healthcare Transformation Group, IBM Services Research
- **Evonne Heyning**
  Interactive Producer, TechSoup Global
- **Rey Muradaz**
  Founder, Interactive Aging Network
- **Paola Tonelli**
  Executive in Residence, UC Berkeley’s Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology
- **Cecili Thompson Williams**
  Outreach Director, Campaign for Better Care at National Partnership for Women & Families

Moderator:

- **Dr. Molly Coye**
  Senior Advisor to the Public Health Institute

Technology Summit Summary

The rise in the use of information and communications technology, and the explosion of social media technology platforms and applications, offer exciting possibilities for promoting the use of technology in social action. This opportunity is especially relevant for older adults, who have traditionally not utilized technology for grassroots organizing and representation. Technology represents a significant opportunity to organize, engage and mobilize older adults on an array of issues. The goal of this Technology Summit was to convene experts in the fields of technology, aging services, and social action to discuss ways that technology can be best used to facilitate advocacy efforts for older adults over the next 2-5 years.

The Technology Summit addressed a variety of questions on how to best promote the use of technology for social action among older adults, including both technology-specific considerations as well as issues specific to older adult users and the organizations that work with them. The resulting discussion focused on three major themes related to achieving this goal: technology, user considerations, and policy issues. Each is discussed in more detail below, with an emphasis on how they can be used to enable social action among older adults.

What will be the most important factors in promoting technology for social action?

The panel identified the following key factors for this purpose:

- Ease of use of technology
- Appropriate technology for older adults
- Ability to access information through connection to the "cloud"
- Personalized experience for older adults
- Natural fit of technology in terms of audience, medium, and workflow
- Presence of local champions for technology

Technology

A natural starting point in considering how to use technology to enhance social action for older adults is the design, applications, and trends relevant to the technology itself. Though technology is not currently widely used by older adults for social action, the growth of technology platforms, applications, and audiences demonstrates its tremendous potential for social action. Technology can serve a valuable role along the continuum of social action through providing opportunities to integrate three key functions in social action: recruitment, engagement, and mobilization. However, the online engagement function is the one that currently has the most room for improvement, due to the difficulty in reaching those who are not yet engaged in a particular issue. In addition, with the large quantity of data available and being generated in this field, there is a need for the creation of filters or other mechanisms to assist older adults in navigating this information to find relevant social action causes (as well as for other purposes).

The rapid expansion in technology platforms and applications will help advance their use for social action. In particular, examples of promising technology platforms include the simple-to-use iPad, video (through the Flip Camera and similar technologies), smart phones and text messaging, and social networking and virtual worlds. In terms of the path of technology development, three major trends will affect its future: an increase in the amount of data and the capacity to analyze it, the integration of multiple technology platforms, and an increase in embodiment as a result of advanced user interfaces and immersive technologies.

User Considerations

As older adults are typically late adopters and sometimes face unique challenges in using technology, the user experience is an important consideration in understanding technology use for social action. The most important factors in making technology accessible and useful for older adults in social action include the following:

- Ease of use in technology design
- User-centric design that meets the needs, interests, and wants of older populations
- Leveraging learnings from technology use in other fields and existing applications
- Personalized engagement strategies (including offline strategies)
- Transparency on data and privacy issues related to technology use
- Technology champions as advocates for technology use
- Ability to reach ethnic minorities and lower socioeconomic classes

Policy Considerations

While technology factors and user considerations are both extremely important in designing appropriate technologies for older adults, policy developments are a very important element in driving the use of technology on a widespread scale. Some of the key policy considerations for this area include the following:

- Expansion of broadband and mobile access, particularly in rural areas
- Systems that encourage open innovation in the development of infrastructure technology
- Addressing privacy and data security concerns
- Coalition building among nonprofit groups

Opportunity Areas for The SCAN Foundation and its Grantees

This section addresses common challenges that nonprofit organizations face in the implementation and use of technology. It also explores specific opportunity areas for The SCAN Foundation in working with organizations to improve the use of technology for social action for older adults.

Organizational Challenges in the Use of Technology for Social Action

- **Resource Constraints:** A dedicated budget, even a small one, for technology-enabled initiatives is often necessary for proper implementation of technological solutions. Unfortunately, currently the budget of nonprofit organizations to implement technology solutions is usually limited or nonexistent; such organizations often have few resources, in terms of both money and people. Although organizations such as Tech Soup (which complies affordable technology resources for nonprofits) are good examples of organizations that can assist these nonprofits, the challenge remains the need to raise dedicated financing for successful technology implementation for recruitment, engagement, and mobilization functions in social action. Most nonprofits also do not have the personnel resources on staff to assist with the technical implementation and operation of projects, and rely on volunteers within their community to provide that, which can be very difficult to find.

- **Capacity Building:** The lack of personnel with the time and capability to incorporate technology in projects presents challenges for organizations (particularly smaller ones) to build and maintain their technology capacity. This can lead to misfires that reflect poorly on the organization, such as setting up a Facebook or Twitter account only to update it on an all too infrequent basis. In particular, organizations in rural areas face even greater human resource challenges in their ability to attract and retain staff. While online training may help towards overcoming this issue, it is still not the most effective way to impart knowledge. Organizations could also look to empowering technology-savvy people within the organization as an official manager of the company's Facebook, Twitter, or other technology initiatives. It is also important to build into the planning phase the fact that not all technology users are equal, and to keep in mind that the learning curves involved for each organization will differ as a result.

- **Leadership:** Organizations also need to have organizational and board-level leadership that understands and supports the strategic role of technology in meeting its mission. Organizational and board leadership is crucial to successful technology planning and implementation. Support among the leadership will provide support to the staff to take the necessary steps, and empowers them to be more creative and effective in their use of technology. Having leadership that understands the value of technology, and is not afraid to fail, is a key but often missing element of successful technology adoption by nonprofits.

Recommendations for The SCAN Foundation in Working with Grantees

In considering how The SCAN Foundation can work with grantees to help them better use technology, the panelists had the following recommendations:

- **Share technology best practices and resources, and promote collaboration among grantee organizations:** Nonprofit organizations often lack both the financial and human resources, as well as the practical knowledge about how to access and use resources available to them. As a result, having clear and actionable information available on practical resources, guidance, and tips on technology use would greatly assist these organizations in their efforts to use technology more effectively. A funding organization such as The SCAN Foundation could support efforts by convening forums on the subject (such as the Technology Summit), forming an advisory board for grantees, developing information resources, encouraging collaboration between organizations, and helping organizations share best practices among each other. Another area of importance is encouraging collaboration between organizations that develop applications, as currently drivers for collaboration do not exist. More frictionless collaboration between developers is needed (such as iPhone applications with similar functions).

- **Carefully vet organizations in regards to their technology use and planning:** It is important to carefully vet prospective grantees in their readiness to use technology, in particular through reviewing their current and future plans for technology and their leadership and capacity for supporting technology use. Possible criteria to use in evaluating their readiness may include review of their strategic planning around technology, or their process for determining their target audience's level of online and offline engagement. In addition, it is important to not only talk with the executive leadership, but also the staff itself to determine the level of commitment to technology throughout the organization. Another part of assessing technology readiness looking at the organization's past use of technology what they have already done for free, such as using tools such as Facebook or Twitter. Funders should also pay attention to the smaller things about the way an organization conducts business, such as how they schedule meetings and use email, as a basic benchmark for these organizations' technology competency.

- **Empower intergenerational initiatives and caregivers:** A successful method for introducing technology in initiatives benefiting older adults is to encourage intergenerational and caregiver-related programs. These individuals can serve as powerful technology champions for older adults. Experience from experts suggests that the best programs typically empower intergenerational relationship building around technology use, such as empowering teenagers to help their grandparents. The use of familiar trainers builds confidence, and collaboration tends to be much more successful at maintaining long-term engagement. Reaching older adults through their trusted family members and caregivers can help older adults themselves succeed in using technology. In addition, these initiatives should communicate to older adults that their voice is valued, and help them learn skills that allow them to independently create content such as videos and blogs. These family members and caregivers need not necessarily be trainers themselves in all cases, but can also act as important enablers in connecting older adults with the necessary resources.

- **Focus on user benefits/outcomes from use of technology in meeting social action goals:** People in general, but older adults in particular, rarely use technology for the sake of using technology, but rather as a means for meeting needs or realizing desired benefits. Focusing on end goals is essential for community-based organizations to engage older adults. Organizations should create case examples or models of technology use that demonstrate its benefits, which in turn encourages its use. Organizations can also identify "technological alternatives" to offline activities that older adults enjoy as a means of engaging them (for example, getting news from the iPad rather than reading a newspaper), and focusing on the interactive benefits of using a technological approach. In regards to social action, the focus has to be on finding issues that are directly relevant to older adults' lives because it creates immediate buy-in and engages them. Technology must be easy to use and affordable, but what makes it ultimately powerful is producing a specific result. Meeting a goal by using technology is a powerful reinforcement of the behavior that leads to continued use of technology.

- **Use personalized communications approaches involving both online and offline strategies:** One of the most effective ways of reaching older adults is through a personalized approach. Many older adults may be wary of technology and not used to electronic communications to the same extent as other age cohorts. An identified need among older adults and their caregivers is their preference for personal communication that is both interactive and engaging. This helps to ensure that older adults feel personal identification with a social action cause. Therefore, it is important to identify complementary strategies that effectively engage people both online and offline. Expert experience suggests that it is much harder for someone to disengage from a cause if there is also an offline strategy, such as a phone discussion, compared to just running an online campaign.

- **Improve public perception of older adults and technology:** To make widespread progress in this area, it is also very important to improve the public's perception about older adults and technology use. Efforts to engage the public about how older adults are using technology can help build confidence among older adults. Older adults need to be reassured and empowered with the knowledge that their participation in social action, through the use of technology, can bring tremendous value to the issues they care about.

- **Improve understanding of older adults' technology use:** Similar to improving public perception of older adults and technology, it is also important to improve understanding of older adults' use of technology and where gaps remain. Better understanding of older adults' needs, interests, and wants will help to design truly effective technologies for this population. More data about older adults' technology usage patterns and motivations can certainly help make progress in this area, such as through initiatives like mapping older adults' online activities and seeing what problems they and their caregivers perceive in technology use. It is also important to be able to have older adults provide feedback on these issues, as developers often do not have an opportunity to hear from the actual older adult users themselves.

- **Encourage application vetting, development, and innovation (technology, policy, legal):** To expand interest and new efforts in this area, organizations can consider supporting initiatives such as an innovation competition on technology applications for improving the social action of older adults (perhaps through partnering with a technology platform such as Apple's iPad), or other research and development support. Such development efforts could involve support for multidisciplinary research programs involving nonprofits, academic research centers, and commercial technology vendors. In addition, application development could also include more targeted search capabilities for iPhone and other applications, as being able to search by functionality or by "what people like me are using". This would be particularly helpful for those older adults who are wary about technology in the first place. However, a cautionary note on application development is that there should be also be a focus on vetting existing applications and finding success stories and best practices related to them, as older adults are typically late adopters to technology. In addition to technology development, innovative approaches are needed in creating advancements around policy (particularly related to access and infrastructure) and law (particularly around privacy) to promote broader technology use in general. Without widespread broadband infrastructure and the proper privacy protections, some older adults will be either unable or unwilling to use online technology at all, including for social action.

Acknowledgments:

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The SCAN Foundation Program Officer for this initiative is Erin Westphal. This event and report were prepared by The Center for Technology and Aging. Contributors include Ange Wang, Andrew Broderick, David Lindeman, Lynn Redington, Valerie Steinmetz, and Margaret Whelly.

Strengthening Nonprofit Advocacy[1]

Gary D. Bass and Lee Mason[2]

Nonprofits in the United States are the envy of nongovernmental groups worldwide. One of the reasons is the role U.S. charities play in advocating for change. Whether it is about a local school board issue, a state policy regarding home health care, or national immigration reform, two things are certain. First, nonprofit organizations will be involved in the debate on the issues, and second, society will be just that much better off because of the charitable sector's engagement.

If civic participation is the essence of democracy, then nonprofit advocacy is the building block that frames democracy. Since the founding of this country, nonprofits have played an active role in promoting social change and challenging unfair practices and policies. For virtually every major national policy, nonprofits have been part of the inner circle in providing ideas, lobbying, and generating research that shaped that policy. At its core, the nonprofit sector is devoted to making improvements for the common good, and advocacy has been among its most potent weapons.

Yet for many nonprofit leaders, advocacy is viewed negatively. Some of this makes sense in the aftermath of the 2006 conviction of disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff and subsequent convictions of others associated with him. Lobbying today brings up negative images of money, politics, and influence peddling. But the negative perception of lobbying and advocacy existed in the nonprofit sector long before Abramoff. One study, using the words "lobbying," "advocacy," and "education" in a question describing their activities in influencing policy makers, showed nonprofit leaders were extremely uncomfortable calling their activity "lobbying," were somewhat more comfortable with calling it "advocacy," and were much more comfortable calling the activity "education." In follow-up focus groups with nonprofit leaders in that same study, nonprofit executives would twist themselves into a pretzel to avoid words like "lobbying" and "advocacy." The winner may have gone to a Sacramento, California, nonprofit executive who described lobbying state legislators as "impact analysis."

Even for many who say advocacy is vitally important, it is often not done because it is perceived as too intimidating or is seen as a luxury. Nonprofit leaders are confronted with a barrage of daily "crises," ranging from funding to personnel to operational issues, leaving little time for advocacy. This is particularly true for the service delivery nonprofit, where daily activities overwhelm even the best intentions to advocate on behalf of the programs or people being served.

With these challenges in mind, this paper describes what nonprofit advocacy involves, explains how advocacy can strengthen the mission of an organization, and concludes with steps that a charitable leader can take to make advocacy the ordinary instead of the extraordinary.

What Is Advocacy?

Advocacy describes a wide range of expressions, actions, and activities that seek to influence outcomes directly affecting the mission of the organization and the lives of the people served by the organization. Advocacy is an important function of most organizations, and all nonprofits advocate to varying degrees. For some, advocacy is the focus of their work, while other organizations may use advocacy periodically to respond to issues pertaining to their missions.

Advocacy can include media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing research, polling, or filing law suits or friend-of-the-court briefs. Even commenting on proposed regulations or policies is a form of advocacy. In other words, advocacy is much broader than lobbying.

Yet, too often, lobbying and advocacy are perceived as synonymous. In fact, lobbying is narrowly defined by the Internal Revenue Service as attempts to influence legislation at the local, state, or federal level. Thus, discussions of broad policies or efforts to influence executive branch actions, for example, are not lobbying communications. Lobbying always involves advocacy, though advocacy does not always involve lobbying.

While there is no official definition of advocacy, Ohio State University Sociology Professor Craig Jenkins has defined advocacy as "any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest."[3] Jenkins' definition, often widely embraced by those studying nonprofit advocacy, means that activities undertaken by nonprofits to influence structural and power inequities, whether directed at government or other power elites, is considered advocacy. Hence, not only are efforts to get the government to change its behavior considered advocacy, but so too are corporate accountability projects and environmental efforts targeting corporate behavior.

It is important to note that there is no legal restriction on any advocacy activities charitable tax exempt organizations may undertake – with the exception of electioneering and lobbying. Charities are prohibited from electioneering and are limited on the amount of lobbying they can undertake.[4] However, even with the lobbying restrictions, few nonprofits are likely to exceed the permissible limits. Moreover, only lobbying activities need to be monitored and reported to the IRS.

Let's describe some examples of permissible advocacy activities for charitable nonprofits.[5] We have used the "advocacy cycle" developed by Bass (see Figure 1) to characterize different types of advocacy activities.[6] Although Figure 1 is drawn as a circle, advocacy is not cyclical, with one thing leading to another. Rather, it can be amoeba-like, moving from one type of activity to another, back and forth, with nonprofit leaders employing strategies in ways that make sense for the particular issue and circumstances. No single nonprofit is likely to tackle all types of advocacy activities; instead, nonprofit leaders tend to be more skilled at selected types of advocacy. However, the effective leader also knows the importance of all types of advocacy activities, thinks strategically about the application of each, and knows who to rely on for such actions.

Research provides the foundation for policy positions. Too often, the excellent research conducted by nonprofits is not considered advocacy. But applying and utilizing research is an essential advocacy tool. It, after all, helps to identify possible policy problems that need to be addressed. Most often, people think of advocacy as various types of campaigns, such as letter-writing, protesting, petitioning, awakening power, coalition building, or lobbying. But note in the Figure One advocacy cycle that campaigns are only one category of advocacy activities.

Although we have listed organizing as one type of advocacy activity, many organizers would object to that classification. At the heart of organizing is empowering others to speak for themselves. Thus, the organizer helps people identify issues and concerns that are important to them but never attempts to speak for the people. According to Dave Beckwith, the executive director of the Needmor Fund, "Community organizing is the process of building power through involving a constituency in identifying problems they share and the solutions to those problems that they desire; identifying the people and structures that can make those solutions possible; enlisting those targets in the effort through negotiation and using confrontation and pressure when needed; and building an institution that is democratically controlled by that constituency that can develop the capacity to take on further problems and that embodies the will and the power of that constituency."[7]

Beckwith distinguishes advocacy from organizing by noting that advocacy is "characterized by doing FOR people." (emphasis not added) Thus, advocacy is perceived as nonprofit organizations speaking on behalf of others or launching an action agenda that tries to cajole others to join that agenda. While we concur there is a world of difference in purpose and style between organizing and advocacy, both are about creating social change and trying to "influence the decisions … on behalf of a collective interest," as Jenkins notes. Thus, we consider both in our list of advocacy activities.

Nonprofit advocacy also includes efforts to ensure that policy is executed in the manner it was intended. For instance, when legislation is enacted, nonprofit groups will often monitor the implementation and enforcement of that policy. This moves into administrative advocacy: commenting on rulemakings, tracking enforcement, and participating in governmental advisory committees and other meetings of decision makers.

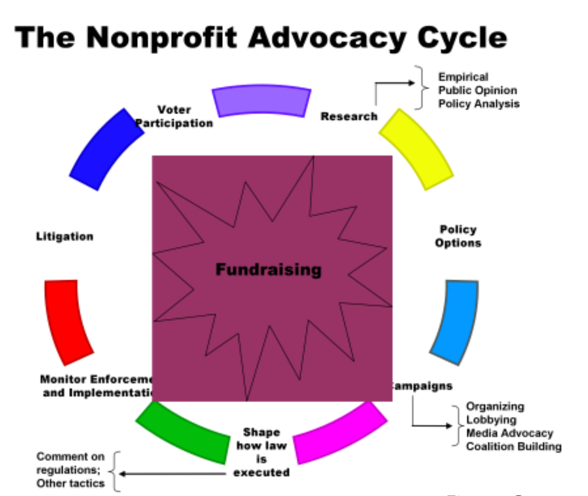

Figure One

If working through legislatures and executive branches does not accomplish the desired results, litigation is always an option. Advocacy includes suing the government or powerful companies. It also includes filing friend-of-the-court, or amicus, briefs to highlight important concerns. At times, nonprofits will make a campaign out of amicus briefs with sign-ons and media advocacy.

Charities are also permitted to engage in nonpartisan activities, but not electioneering. For example, nonprofits can conduct voter registration drives and candidate forums and can craft and distribute voter guides and more if done in a manner that does not support or oppose a particular candidate or political party. This is one area where the IRS rules could be improved, because the determination of what you can and cannot do is based on the "facts and circumstances" of each case. Accordingly, it may be advisable for charities to get legal advice from experts if engaging in nonpartisan political activity.

There are no start and stop periods to advocacy. Advocacy needs to be infused into all the activities of a charity. Moreover, victories and losses are temporary. For example, failing to get a state law enacted in one year may only be the beginning of a longer strategy to get the law passed. Similarly, successfully getting a bill enacted simply moves the advocacy target to implementation of the law. Even when the law is fully implemented, research, monitoring, and service delivery experience will likely suggest ways to improve the program or law. The secret to successful advocacy is com¬mitment and persistence — never giving up and never flaunting what appears to be a victory. Celebration is appropriate, but only to re-charge the batteries and get back into the battle.

Those who are new to the sector may believe that advocacy is too complex to master, perhaps a bit tainted and maybe even illegal. We need to start a collective chant: Advocacy is legal. (Well, maybe you can develop a better chant!) Once over that hurdle, most people find that advocacy is not difficult to learn and that the organizing and lobbying skills they already possess are easily transferred to influencing the decisions of the "institutional elite" in order to benefit the people and missions they serve.

One final comment on definitions. Nonprofit advocacy is different from similar activities undertaken by the for-profit sector. Nonprofit policy participation is in the public interest, regardless of whether it is in pursuit of conservative, liberal, or non-ideological objectives. In contrast, for-profit sector lobbying usually has a private pecuniary gain as its motive. While policy participation by all parties – nonprofit and for-profit – is an essential ingredient of democracy, there is still something special about nonprofit participation that should be strongly encouraged and supported by our national leaders.

Why Be an Advocate?

Every day, the nonprofit sector provides services to communities throughout the nation, including, but not limited to, after-school programs, health education, HIV/AIDS education and prevention, food pantries, elder care, advocating for environmental change, arts and humanities education, and providing legal representation for citizens. In every community across this country, on topics from A to Z, nonprofits are an essential part of the fabric of American society and to the health of the community.

Nonprofit and voluntary activity is 7.2 percent of the U.S. GDP, compared to the construction industry, which is only 4.4 percent of GDP.[8] Additionally, the nonprofit sector has a total revenue that increased by 54 percent between 1995 and 2005, and it employs over 9 million people, or 7.2 percent of the share of the workforce in 2004.[9] Additionally, 29 percent of citizens were engaged in nonprofit volunteering in 2005, and half of the 76 million baby boomers are expected to volunteer upon retirement.[10] Nonprofits have a stake in public policies and the governmental budget; the sector is awarded more than $300 billion each year by federal, state, and local governments, with approximately 31 percent of nonprofit revenue coming from governmental sources.[11]

Notwithstanding the potential manpower and political clout of the nonprofit sector, as a sector, advocacy is inconsistent and intermittent. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, lobbying by the nonprofit sector at the federal level paled in comparison to other industries, even through the sector is larger. In 2009, 422 nonprofits spent $42.6 million and employed 1,005 lobbyists. By comparison, civil servants/public officials – an industry not often viewed as big lobbyists – spent $83.6 million in 2009 and were near the bottom of the top 20 industries lobbying. Business associations, the second largest industry, dwarfed nonprofit lobbying with $183.1 million spent.[12]

There are many reasons for nonprofits to engage in advocacy. Some may be motivated by moral, ethical, or faith principles. Others may be moved by the people served or issues addressed. Some respond to attacks on their organization or issue area. Yet others may engage to protect an asset or interest, such as funding. In all cases, engaging in advocacy will help the charity move closer to accomplishing the mission of the organization.

What You Can Do to Strengthen Advocacy

Advocacy is like exercise. Do it regularly and you stay healthy. Do it regularly and it becomes ingrained into daily behavior. Do it regularly and it rubs off on others.

Advocacy is also like exercise for those who aren't active. Doing it irregularly is uncomfortable, and doing a lot quickly can make you achy the next day. This may be why groups that suddenly jump into advocacy – usually because they are under attack – stop after the attack is over. They simply aren't in shape, and the intense advocacy is too exhausting. So start slowly and build up your civic engagement muscles.

To get yourself and your organization into advocacy shape, we have identified five steps to take.

1. Create an environment where advocacy can flourish.

If the leaders of the organization, particularly the executive director, don't demonstrate strong, consistent support for engaging in public policy matters, advocacy will never flourish. This is particularly true for small and medium-sized nonprofits.

There are many ways to create a supportive climate for advocacy within the organization. But two factors are important: discuss and reward advocacy. For example, in staff meetings, does the executive director encourage discussion of advocacy issues? Are staff rewarded for engaging in public policy matters? Are the development staff involved in advocacy efforts so that they can weave those activities into fundraising activities? Advocacy is a team sport, and all staff can help.

A healthy environment for advocacy may also mean taking risks. In our research, it was not uncommon for executive directors to say that they supported advocacy. On probing them for examples, they were very conservative, mostly supporting only "safe" activities. One director considered articles in a quarterly newsletter as advocacy. When asked if the director shared the organization's position with state officials, he said only to the extent that they read the newsletter. Advocacy means being publicly engaged in issues.

This may be uncomfortable for some board members. In our research, board members tended to be very risk adverse. One board member of a local nonprofit in Texas said she had a "fiduciary responsibility" to the organization. Why should the organization criticize a politician when the organization is reliant on government funding?, she added. Meanwhile, the city was discussing the elimination of a program central to the organization's mission.

This means creating a positive climate within the organization is not simply a staff leadership issue; it is also a board issue. Given the antipathy many board members seem to have toward advocacy, involving board members in understanding why advocacy is intrinsically tied to the organization's mission will likely help create a legacy of organizational support for advocacy. This can be done by discussing advocacy at board meetings or creating a governmental affairs committee, for example. Our research found that organizations that have board committees that address public policy issues are significantly more likely to engage in public policy matters and with greater frequency than those without such a board committee.

2. Establish procedures within the organization that make policy decision making easier.

Even when there is an atmosphere conducive to advocacy, the organization must have a streamlined decision making apparatus so that the organization can be nimble enough to decide whether to act and, if needed, take quick action. Too often, nonprofit organizations have no clear procedures for making policy decisions, or they have extremely complex decision making processes, making it very difficult to engage in advocacy. Our research found many charities where the board had to approve staff actions on policy matters. Unfortunately, most boards only meet quarterly, which, of course, stifles immediate action and sometimes means the charity has to sit unnecessarily on the sidelines.

An ideal situation is where the board sets broad policy direction, leaving it to the executive director to establish and execute day-to-day policy decisions to support the board's views. But if the board feels it must be involved in policy decisions, then the board must develop the needed expertise to make policy decisions on short notice. Board committees should be prepared to meet via conference calls or virtually through e-mail, rather than physically, to expedite decision making. And board committees should be authorized to make decisions between board meetings.

Our research also found that organizations in which the executive director had a high degree of influence in government relations decision making, but did not have responsibility for carrying out day-to-day advocacy tasks (see next item below), were significantly more likely to engage in public policy and with greater frequency. So, once again, the ideal situation is where the executive director has the authority to make decisions on policy matters.

Even if the executive director is given authority to act on advocacy matters, staff need to fully understand the decision making structure so that they know how to get a decision about government relations.

For nonprofits that receive government money, special consideration should be given to creating the best internal structures that enable advocacy. For example, no project staff receiving government money and who might be involved in lobbying should be 100 percent funded through the government grant. This is because government funds cannot be used for lobbying purposes (unless specifically authorized by law).

3. Make sure at least one person in the organization has advocacy responsibility — but make it someone other than the executive director.

As might be expected, assigning public policy responsibility to at least one person in the organization significantly increases the likelihood that the organization will engage in public policy. This responsibility should be built into the person's job description and made well-known to others in the organization.

After assigning so much importance to the executive director to be supportive of advocacy and to have the authority to make advocacy decisions, now we will limit the role of the executive director. Our research found that the executive director is the worst person in the organization to have the primary, day-to-day responsibility for conducting public policy activities. Organizations that assign public policy responsibilities to anyone other than the executive director, including a lobbyist outside the organization, other staff members, board committees, or even volunteers, are more likely to lobby and testify and with more consistency.

This makes sense, given that the executive director often has a broad range of duties to perform or oversee, including fundraising, personnel matters, and program functions. To the extent that the executive director also tackles public policy matters, advocacy activities are likely to be moved to the back burner as other functions are addressed. Accordingly, it makes enormous sense to assign day-to-day public policy responsibilities to someone other than the executive director, leaving it to the executive director to set overall direction.

4. Belong to associations that represent you before government.

Joining an association that speaks out on public policy issues is linked to whether an organization engages in public policy itself. Those joining associations engage in more direct lobbying, indirect lobbying, and testifying, and do so with greater frequency than those not joining associations. This factor is particularly strong for those who join national associations, but it is also true for those who join state associations. This suggests that nonprofit executives should structure annual budgets to reserve funds for joining associations that engage in public policy.

5. Get training.

Above, we said that advocacy is like exercise. Well, if it were like riding a bike, most would agree it is easy, but the first time is really hard. Thus, the best step is to get training and technical support. Here are five areas where training and technical assistance might prove useful:

- **Why engaging in public policy is important.** Not surprisingly, our research showed that motivation is the primary reason why charities decide to engage in advocacy. Whether this is mission-related or another reason, the motivation must be internalized by the leadership of the organization. We found that even though charities said the number one barrier to advocacy was financial resources, if they had additional resources, they would put it toward other organizational functions unless there were motivated to engage in advocacy.

- **Organizational capacity building.** Organizations that specialize in nonprofit management are becoming more aware of the need to apply their expertise to helping nonprofits create the right type of organizational structure (e.g., board role, staff responsibilities) to engage in advocacy. Finding management consultants knowledgeable about advocacy can make a world of difference for the future of the nonprofit organization.

- **How to advocate and lobby effectively.** Fortunately, there are many services and consultants today to help you be the best advocate possible. For those on a tight budget, there are excellent resources on the Internet, many available through state nonprofit associations. OMB Watch's own NPAction.org provides a one-stop shop that may be helpful. Other websites, such as the Nonprofit Good Practice Guide (www.npgoodpractice.org), which is a project of the Philanthropic and Nonprofit Knowledge Management Initiative at the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership, provides an excellent collection of articles and tools. There are also useful books to assist on various nonprofit advocacy issues, such as one by Marcia Avner that provides tools and tips on lobbying and advocacy at the state and local level.[13] There are also helpful resources on nonprofit media advocacy and communications strategies, which are essential to effective advocacy.[14]

- **Training on civics and policymaking.** Being an effective advocate also means understanding how policymaking works. Nonprofit leaders may need help in basic civics lessons, including how our three branches of government work, how a bill becomes a law, how government works at the local, state, and federal levels, and information about basic tools for influencing public policy. Nonprofit leaders also could use a refresher course in what happens once a law is passed, including how to monitor and comment on regulations.

- **Training on laws and regulations.** Our research found that most nonprofits have only a rudimentary understanding of laws and regulations covering nonprofit advocacy. We think it is very important to understand these rules, but this is not the first place to start. The first place is to better understand why engaging in advocacy is important to you and your organization. Table 1, below, shows how charity leaders responded to a survey question about advocacy.

Table 1. Nonprofit Understanding of Advocacy Rules

(Correct answer indicated by X)

There is a good deal of confusion about whether activities by nonprofits relating to the policymaking process are permissible. Based on your understanding, can your organization:	Yes	No	% Correct
Use government funds to lobby Congress		X	93.6
Talk to elected officials about public policy matters	X		91.1
Endorse a candidate for elected office		X	87.4
Take a policy position without reference to a specific bill under current regulations	X		81.8
Support or oppose federal regulations	X		79.3

The results demonstrate three high-priority areas for training:

✔ Government grant rules on lobbying. Although roughly one-third of nonprofit revenue comes from government, half of charities that responded to our survey did not know they could engage in advocacy if they get government grants. Furthermore, focus groups show that understanding of lobbying restrictions under government grant rules is very poor.

✔ Tax rules on lobbying. Nearly 30 percent of nonprofit respondents do not know they can lobby and advocate. Moreover, focus groups reveal that understanding of the laws and regulations is not very good – even among those who are very engaged in public policy.[15]

✔ Voter engagement initiatives. Nonprofits need to better understand the rules concerning political activity. While most nonprofit leaders know they cannot endorse or oppose a candidate for office, 43 percent of our survey respondents incorrectly thought they could not sponsor a forum or debate featuring a candidate for elective office.

Final Comments

The main message you should get from this article is that advocacy is legal and not a heavy lift. For nonprofits, advocacy is one of the most powerful weapons to achieve our missions.

In a study of high-impact nonprofit organizations, Leslie Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant say that high-impact nonprofits have an uncommon focus on outcomes and results and the drive to do what it takes to succeed. Their research found advocacy was the first among six practices that are essential for high impact nonprofits. According to Crutchfield and McLeod Grant, "In a nutshell, organizations seeking greater impact must learn how to … work with government and advocate for policy change, in addition to providing services…"[16] High-impact nonprofits, the authors write, lead by example, adapt to move their agenda forward, and never stand still.

Now more than ever, there is need for such high-impact nonprofits. With federal and state budgets in long-term crisis, with so many people in need and limited prospects for decent-paying jobs, with climate change issues looming, with major immigration policies unsettled, with health care implementation only beginning and uncertain, and with so many other issues nonprofits work on bubbling to the surface, it is vitally important for our sector to seize approaches that hold the possibility of achieving real systemic change.

In many situations, nonprofits are the only players who know whether programs are working. Without our voice, government decision-makers will be forced to make decision without adequate information. Advocacy is a way to help decision-makers make better decisions.

If advocacy is legal, not hard to do, makes your organization more effective, and there are major issues to tackle, what are you waiting for? Let's turn the extraordinary into the ordinary.

Endnotes

[1] Prepared for the SCAN Foundation and based on research described in the 2007 book Seen but not Heard: Strengthening Nonprofit Advocacy by Gary D. Bass, David F. Arons, Kay Guinane and Matthew F. Carter, which is available at http://www.amazon.com/Seen-but-not-Heard-Strengthening/dp/B001BX8EM6/ref=sr_1_6?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1274647761&sr=8-6 or the Aspen Institute. When we discuss "our research," we are referring to this research.

[2] Gary D. Bass is the founder and executive director of OMB Watch, a research and advocacy nonprofit that addresses government accountability and public participation. Lee Mason is director of nonprofit advocacy rights at OMB Watch.

[3] Jenkins, J. Craig. "Nonprofit Organizations and Policy Advocacy." In The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook, edited by Walter W. Powell, p. 297, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

[4] Charities may not lobby more than a substantial part. Since the definition of "substantial" is not clear, Congress passed another option in 1976, called the "expenditure test". A charity has to elect to fall under the expenditure test, and the rules are very clear about how much a charity can spend on lobbying. Lobbying is divided into direct lobbying expenditures and indirect (or grassroots) lobbying expenditures. For information on the expenditure test, see the Internal Revenue Service guidelines at http://www.irs.gov/charities/article/0,,id=163394,00.html

[5] See, for example, Reid, Elizabeth J. "Understanding the Word 'Advocacy': Context and Use" in Advocacy and the Policy Process: Structuring the Inquiry into Advocacy (ed. Elizabeth J. Reid), Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2000.

[6] Bass, Gary D. "Advocacy in the Public Interest," in Essays on Excellence, Georgetown University: Center for Public and Nonprofit Leadership, 2009, at http://cpnl.georgetown.edu/pages/essays_on_excellence.cfm.

[7] Beckwith, Dave and Cristina Lopez. Community Organizing: People Power from the Grassroots, written for Center for Community Change: Washington, DC and revised for the European Community Organizing Network (ECON), Jan. 2010, at http://comm-org.wisc.edu/papers97/beckwith.htm.

[8] Salamon, Lester M., Megan A. Haddock, S. Wojciech Sokolowski, and Helen Tice. Measuring Civil Society and Volunteering: Initial Findings from Implementation of the UN Handbook on Nonprofit Institutions Working Paper No. 23, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Center for Civil Studies, 2007.

[9] National Center for Charitable Statistics. The Nonprofit Sector in Brief: Facts and Figures from the Nonprofit Almanac 2007, Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2008.

[10] Zedlewski, Sheila R. and Barbara Butrica. Are We Taking Full Advantage of Older Adults' Potential? Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2007.

[11] Aspen Institute. Mobilizing Change:10 Nonprofit Policy Proposals to Strengthen U.S. Communities. Accessed at http://www.aspeninstitute.org.

[12] All 2009 figures are available from http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/top.php?showYear=2009&indexType=i

[13] Avner, Marcia. Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations: Shaping Public Policy at the State and Local Level, Fieldstone Alliance, 2002.

[14] See, for example, Bonk, Kathy, Emily Tynes, Henry Griggs and Phil Sparks. Strategic Communications for Nonprofits: A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media, Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2008.

[15] Here are some useful organizations (in alphabetical order) that provide training or materials on nonprofit lobbying rules: Alliance for Justice: http://www.afj.org/for-nonprofits-foundations/about-advocacy; Independent Sector: http://www.independentsector.org/lobbying_rules; OMB Watch's NPAction: http://www.npaction.org; Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest: http://www.clpi.org; Minnesota Council of Nonprofits: http://www.mncn.org/advocacy.htm.

[16] Crutchfield, Leslie R. and Heather McLeod Grant. Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits, Jossey-Bass, 2008, pg. 6.

Overarching Advocacy Issues Related to Aging and Solutions

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Where And How Community Based Organizations Can Play A Role In The Larger Advocacy Community

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There are a number of major issues related to aging that have been identified as high priority over the years—from health care to housing, from politics to business; but in light of the projected increase in the elder population and as this aging population becomes more racially and ethnically diverse and poor, three overarching issues become paramount and will be the focus of this paper:

1. Evisceration of aging home and community based health and social service safety-net programs that allow multi-ethnic and low income aging seniors in California to age in place;
2. Lack of unified advocacy support among generations for health and social service safety-net programs for multi-ethnic and low income aging seniors in California; and
3. The need for legislative champions and a well-connected statewide system of advocates

One third of all Americans are expected to reach age 50 this year (2010) and the U.S. population 65 and over is projected to double within the next 20 years (National Institute of Aging, 2006). Aging not only occurs to nations and individuals, but it also happens to states and their communities. California is no exception.

The rapid aging of California's population represents a demographic imperative that cannot be ignored. California's older adult population is expected to increase by 172% by 2040, with most of the growth occurring in the coming 20 years. The greatest growth will be among the oldest Californians, those 85 years and older, whose number are projected to grow 200% over that 40 year period. By 2040, the ratio of the elderly to adults under the age 65 will have increased by 80%. The confluence of decreased fertility, expanded longevity, falling mortality, and the redefinition of what it means to be older is creating a unique phenomenon, which some have described as an aging "tsunami."

California's elderly population will become increasing Hispanic and Asian American over the foreseeable future, as the result of population aging and continued immigration. The fastest-growing ethnic group will be elderly Hispanics, whose numbers will nearly triple in the next 20 years. The slowest-growing ethnic group will be non-Hispanic whites, whose numbers will still increase, but only by 50% during that same period. By 2050, Hispanics will be the largest ethnic group among California seniors .

At a time when the sheer number of older adults and the diversity among the aging population in California is growing by leaps and bounds, the old-age safety-net programs and services for this population continue to experience an all out assault. It is true that significant investments have been made to address the rapid increase in the size and diversity of this population, but services are fragmented, or in some cases irrelevant, to future cohorts of older people. There exists a lack of planning, coordination and involvement in efforts at the local level to sustain best practices, strengthen the service network, and build on innovation. This is clearly not the time to decrease the old-age safety-net programs and services.

According to a report by the California Policy Research Center, University of California, Berkeley, titled, Strategic Planning Framework for an Aging Population, 2003, California's current ability to provide health and mental health care, social services, safe housing and transportation is already inadequate. Consequently, it behooves California's state leadership to reverse its course and provide the necessary support required to meet the needs of the future.

To achieve the above, it will be imperative to have public support. Unfortunately, there is a division among the California populace in their willingness to support such efforts. There are a great number of Californian's, including older adults, who believe in reducing the role of government in protecting elders and meeting their needs, and leaving their well-being more dependent on individual decisions and the unpredictability of the market.

Without effective political leadership, little can be done. Unfortunately, over the past 25 years, there has been limited legislative or administrative leadership on the subject of aging at the state level. As a result, there's been a decline in support for aging programs. Further, there's been an obvious absence of a unified voice among aging groups representing the needs and interest of older adults, particularly low income, multi-ethnic and multicultural older adults at the regional and state level. If aging advocacy is to be successful, aggressive action must be taken to build coalitions.

From an advocacy standpoint, three things will need to happen for these issues to be addressed successfully. First, all generations from young to old and from diverse backgrounds and diverse points of view (i.e., ideological, gender, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic) will need to join forces and mobilize in efforts to preserve the aging health and social service safety-net programs. Second, champions will need to be identified and elected to serve in the administration and legislature and they will need to push forward legislative and budget policies that are favorable, and defeat those that are detrimental, to multi-ethnic and low-income aging seniors in California. Third, establish statewide aging council or alliance comprised of regional coalitions that offers a unified, powerful voice to achieve change in understanding among important public officials who have the power and influence to make the adoption of change possible.

The graying of California and its diversity will have profound implications on all aspects of our society—from health care to housing, from politics to business. By effectively addressing the three overarching issues defined above, we will successfully promote aging related policy and funding in California. Moreover, we will make our publicly-funded home and community-based, long-term care system more efficient and effective.

Advocacy Issues:

Budget Cuts — Evisceration of aging home and community based health and social service safety-net programs that allow multi-ethnic and low income aging seniors in California to age in place

Today, California faces a dangerous paradox: while the aging population continues to rapidly grow, its safety net faces proposed elimination. There is a dramatic shift away from policies that support older persons and their families. The concerns related to the adequacy of the long-term care system, in particular, existing home and community based services for meeting the demands of older persons and their families, are now surpassed by a more grim reality — an expanding systematic breakdown in the system of care.

Although advocacy efforts have been significant over the years (particularly in California), today, we are fighting an all out assault and trying to preserve what little remains of a safety net for our most vulnerable elders and to meet the needs of the huge boomer generation so near its retirement.

With the rise in conservatism, advocacy in the field of aging has become a challenge. Political leaders have become very active in putting forward policies to save, modernize, and improve policies on aging. Yet many of the specifics in their policy proposals amount to dismantling the old-age safety net by reducing the role of government in protecting older adults and meeting their needs, and leaving their well-being more dependent on individual decisions and the unpredictability of the market.

According to a report from the Congress of California Seniors (CCS), last year's 2009-10 budget included several program reductions and eliminations. Specifically, there were reductions to the Supplemental Security Income/State Supplemental Payment (SSI/SSP), the Caregiver Resource Center state funding was cut by more than 50%, and both the Department of Aging's Linkages Case Management Program and the Community-Based Services Program (impacting 35,000 seniors) were eliminated. More restrictive eligibility criteria for adult day health care programs were proposed to be implemented in March 2010, but did not come to pass given a temporary court injunction. In addition, last year's budget changes increased the cost that 9,000 seniors and persons with disabilities have to pay before they became eligible for In Home Supportive Services (IHSS).

The 2010-11 budget proposal, presented in January by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's office, would eliminate or drastically reduce programs that help low-income older Californians remain safely in their homes, including IHSS, SSI/SSP, adult day health care, Medi-Cal and Cash Assistance for Immigrants. According to a UCLA study supported by The SCAN Foundation, these proposed reductions would weaken community supports to levels not seen for almost 30 years.

The cuts will make it much more difficult for many older adults to continue to live safely in their own homes, create hardships for their families, lead to a loss of jobs and health insurance by direct service providers, and close many adult day care centers. The expense resulting from the increased use of emergency rooms, hospital in-patient care, and nursing facilities are likely to erode the financial savings of the proposed reductions.

Many groups and individuals are voicing dissatisfaction with the budget cuts, as these reductions will primarily have a significant impact on one of the most vulnerable populations that is dependent on public programs. In particular, these people are older, impoverished, in poor health, isolated, ethnically and culturally diverse, speak limited English, have an inadequate education, worked in low-skill jobs without retirement pensions, and do not own their own homes. Yet, simply trying to stop the budget cuts is not enough. Every year that budget cuts are proposed, some get through and further shred the safety-net programs that affect the low-income, poor, and elderly.

We need to reduce or ameliorate inequities in well-being and ensure access to available resources by all older Californians. California's seniors and persons with disabilities, and their families and those who help them remain in the community deserve public policies that serve long-established human service goals. However, we will need public support, and in particular greater support, among older adults with disparate view points on this matter.

Lack of unified advocacy support within and among generations for health and social service safety-net programs for multi-ethnic and low income aging seniors in California

There is a lack of understanding and acceptance of the realities of longevity and collective solutions to aging-related issues among the public. The California populace is deeply divided on aging policy issues. There are a great number of Californians, including older adults, who believe in reducing the role of government in protecting elders and meeting their needs, and leaving their well-being more dependent on individual decisions and the unpredictability of the market.

Older adults may vote, but its growing diversity often muffles its potency. As the older population becomes more economically, ethnically, culturally, and geographically diverse, so do their politics. There is no aging political monolith to fight against the assault on old-age safety-net services and support. Collectively, older people are no more supportive of government benefits for the elderly than are younger adults. Older people who are poor, or who feel financially troubled, are more likely to support old-age government benefits than those that are prosperous and financially secure. The desire of advocacy groups wanting to mobilize the elderly around aging issues will need to find a way to confront and overcome conflicts among older populations.

The need for legislative champions and a well-connected statewide system of advocates

In the early 80's, advocacy for aging services was strong in California which helped to produce a thriving aging network of service programs at the state and local levels. However, over the last decade, we have seen the opposite occur as aging programs and policies have devolved.

Over the years at the national level, the aging community has lost many visible heroes in Congress like the Honorable Claude Pepper and Edward R. Roybal. They led the mandate rooted in the War on Poverty. They, and many others like them, built the political will across party lines to institutionalize the social contract, protective policies and practices that we see threatened today. They stimulated a national debate to advance nonpartisan pragmatic solutions on behalf of the most vulnerable in our nation. Theirs is a legacy of deliberate public policy choices that influenced the life-course of older persons.

At the state level over the past 25 years, there has been little strong legislative or administrative leadership on the subject of aging. There has been no aging advocate since Senator Mello. Present day circumstances demand revitalized momentum to redefine a public policy agenda that reaches into the future as previous leaders once did. We need champions to consistently support aging policies designed to improve the health and long term care of older people and to use their political power and moral persuasion to engage other state legislators.

Further, there are well known and resourceful organizations representing older adults in California like AARP, CCS, Alzheimer's Association, California Alliance of Retired Americans (CARA), a California grassroots senior advocacy organization representing over 850,000 seniors and their families, and other groups. However, the respective advocacy work of these statewide advocacy consumer organizations has been mostly in isolation. Working in silos has limited their ability to efficiently leverage each other's resources in advocating on behalf of older adults, especially those with low incomes.

If aging advocacy is to be successful, action must be taken to unite the efforts of these groups and have them work alongside regional home and community based service providers, and other interested stakeholders.

Solutions:

What can advocates do to derail this political trend toward dismantling the old-age safety net?

To make progress on aging related issues, three things will need to happen:

1) Mobilize older adults from diverse socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, and age backgrounds to join forces and engage in advocacy for elder issues;
2) Identify and build champions in the administration and legislature (term limits have led to the loss and dearth of champions);
3) Form a unified, powerful voice through a statewide aging council or alliance comprised of regional coalitions to achieve change in understanding among important public officials who have the power and influence to make the adoption of change possible.

Unite Aging Cohorts:

The need for services is not uniform throughout the aging population in California. Not all older people are vulnerable. Nor are they united in any particular prescription for social reform. To stay relevant and responsive, advocacy will need to reflect this reality.

To unite and thus mobilize all generations as one, it will be imperative to gain support and empathy from the population at large for aging-related issues by way of an education campaign accomplished through grassroots organizing and networking among aging focused organizations, such as AARP, Congress of California Seniors, CARA, community based organizations, disease specific groups, foundations, media and others.

Constituency organizing and mobilization involve targeted culturally appropriate educational and informational briefings designed to increase awareness, sensitivity, networking and leadership building around the issues. These convening events, like community town halls and forums where a cross-section of the community can attend, are generally family oriented. Senior centers, churches and recreational sites are common locations for mobilizing events. These efforts should be inclusive of the entire community - local schools, educators, hospitals, clinics, law and fire enforcement, and businesses. Constituents can be involved in annual federal, state and local lobby days, give testimony, gather testimonials, storytelling, utilize media, letter writing campaigns and direct approaches to policymakers to advance policy.

Build Champions:

Aging advocacy needs to find its voice. We must identify and support a new set of champions to carry the advocacy message at the state and local levels. One champion for all elders will not be effective in the coming years. It is important, therefore, to nurture potential advocacy champions who can address a wide range of issues and represent a diversity of target populations. When seeking advocacy champions, we will need to recruit from and build support on both sides of the aisle.

Currently, there are many policymakers who, at times, are uninformed or misinformed about the older population and the impact of aging programs. In fact, some may even have incorrect positive or negative stereotypes about older adults and the aging process. It is imperative that advocates and future advocates be sensitized and have a command of the diverse and complex issues that currently define age-related policy. As such, we will need to have individuals who are well informed and can carefully analyze and provide intelligent responses with passion to campaigns designed to cause intergenerational conflict or foster negative public opinion about public programs or older persons.

Unfortunately, given term limits, few policymakers will be in office long enough to become educated. That is why we need to develop a mechanism to identify potential legislative leaders at the grassroots level before they launch their campaigns, or prior to their being elected, and educate them about the issues related to aging. Often times these potential future champions can be identified and recruited from the legislative staff ranks in local district offices. Work should be focused on reaching in to these offices with a well-organized education strategy.

Form a statewide aging council comprised of regional coalitions:

If aging advocacy is to be successful, aggressive action must be taken to build coalitions, rather than just give lip service to the idea. We must build leadership support resources for the state or grassroots levels. We need to build a formal structure to train and support such regional-based advocacy across the state. Finally, we need to find a way to utilize the Internet and other tools to build a strong state advocacy community built upon regional networks.

It is imperative that a statewide coalition comprised of aging advocacy consumer groups, disease specific groups, caregiver groups, service providers and organizations for which the well-being of older people is a priority is built. While such coalition building can occur at all levels, local groups can have the greatest potential of effecting change and helping to create healthy aging communities that benefit all stakeholders.

The organizations that are based on mass memberships of older people have the greatest potential for political power, because their members are part of the latent constituency of older voters, which, in principle, might be influenced by their parent organizations such as AARP, CARA and CCS. To counter the agenda that seeks to dismantle the safety net of old-age programs, strong advocacy leadership by these organizations will be required.

Advocacy on behalf of elders in the United States will need to consider the specific needs of diverse aging groups (i.e., ethnic/cultural, LGBT, socioeconomic, etc.). It will be critical for the statewide group to advocate and address the issues confronting the growing diverse population of elders.

Launch of the Los Angeles Aging Advocacy Coalition:

In response to challenges in the aging environment, community based organizations in Los Angeles have joined together to form regional coalition. Member organizations vary in size, staffing, scope, and age, but all provide a unified voice for increasing services to the low income elders, for offering economies of scale for shared ideas and resources, and for allowing community based organizations to partner on coordinated advocacy efforts on local and statewide issues on behalf of older adults. Collaborative efforts assist in enhancing the effectiveness of community.

The roots of the newly formed Los Angeles Aging Advocacy Coalition (LAAAC) germinated as a collective response to identified threats to the aging service system. It organically coalesced and filled a void at the local level of a unified entity organized to advocate on behalf of the aging community. LAAAC's mission is to preserve, protect and strengthen access to quality care for older persons, their families and caregivers in Los Angeles County by forging joint advocacy efforts to influence fiscal and public policy in the field of aging.

In March, LAAAC hosted the 2010 Aging Summit sponsored by The SCAN Foundation, the Archstone Foundation, and The California Wellness Foundation. At the 2010 Aging Summit, LAAAC not only launched a united alliance committed to a long-term sustainable coalition building strategy, but also set its policy and advocacy agenda, focusing on two main policy issues: 1) State Budget Cuts to Older Adult Programs, and 2) Preservation of the Los Angeles Department of Aging as an independent entity

The LAAAC has already had an immediate and positive impact on the aging service realignment, with the successful outcome securing the Los Angeles Department of Aging as an independent entity. This progress is largely attributed to the Coalition's education campaign targeting Los Angeles City Council members. LAAAC has also instituted weekly local and state level calls to keep leadership informed and engaged on state budget and legislative matters.

AGEnts for Change:

The relationship between The SCAN Foundation *AGEnts for Change* grantees and advocacy groups is reciprocal. Their role will be vital to building advocates associated with community-based agencies who can work with the larger advocacy community at both the local and state levels, linking regional perspectives and respective legislative districts to a broader conversation. As community members, grantees can help build public will to protect against misguided policies as well as help redefine aging policy. Being part of a larger informational exchange, they are able to provide input in strategy development as it relates to their own communities. It strengthens their role as a conduit to older persons, their families, extended service networks, local business, elected officials and the public at large.

In addition, grantees will be the point of entry that triggers the process of care, leading to trusted ongoing relationships with those most directly affected by impending threats. They have the ability to convene, mobilize, inform, educate and engage their Boards, consumers, caregivers, families, local businesses and the general public around the pertinent pressing issues affecting older persons in their communities. Community-based organizations can serve as educational outlets and mobilization hubs by creating an organizational culture of learning designed to sensitize the general public to policy implications.

In turn, local partners can be supported by the larger advocacy community through advocacy skill-building, informational and educational briefings, media training, conference calls, web-based support materials, referrals, and opportunities for networking. For example, in the case of the LAAAC, AARP supports their weekly state budget and legislative issue-related advocacy conference calls.

Grantees will have the opportunity to work with the larger advocacy community to launch policy and advocacy initiatives designed to promote effective statewide old-age safety-net programs and services related to policy and funding in California. An example may be that grantees use legislative or district data analysis to provide a politically compelling initiative. As well, grantees can engage in grassroots training and mobilization, and media advocacy, to focus attention on issues in all regions of the state.

Foundations' Role:

Beyond the grantee, Foundations can play a role

By the nature of their mission, foundations have an opportunity to create systemic and positive change. Regarding advocacy for aging services, foundations can play a key role through three interconnected activities — supporting nonprofit organizations, building constituent alliances, and engaging government.

By investing in advocacy efforts, foundations are improving the environment in which the nonprofits they support exist. Through policy advocacy activities, foundations can seek improved funding levels, more appropriate regulation, and streamlined program administration to protect the rights of older people. These efforts are necessary to ensure that the aging network and service providers keep pace as the population ages.

Grant making is a tool for leveraging change, but foundations can also perform valuable functions by facilitating collaboration and building alliances. Foundations can act as convener, relationship broker, policy promoter, knowledge circulator, and constituency builder. By bringing advocacy groups and direct-service agencies together, foundations facilitate a united voice that represents the needs of the aging community.

With connections to a wide range of legislators and an understanding of aging issues, some foundations are extremely well-positioned to engage government officials. Foundations can play an intermediary role between macro-policy decisions and micro-level needs by facilitating the conversation between communities and government. Foundations can also pursue a range of strategies to promote public policy supportive of aging issues, such as participating in official policy commissions, building relationships with key members of government, working with the media on public education campaigns, and funding the policy research and advocacy efforts of nonprofit organizations.

In summary, foundations can engage in a variety of policy advocacy efforts that can lead to systemic change for the aging community. Their efforts can strengthen the voice of underrepresented groups, can leverage the impact of available funds, and can inform policy makers of important issues, trends, and social changes. Foundations are in an ideal position to exercise leadership that will directly and positively impact the aging population over the coming decades.

Conclusion:

To protect and strengthen the service delivery system is an enormous challenge. For the aging community, it is a confluence of unmatched proportions. Advocacy in aging has been a quiet and narrow conversation. While there is action taken by larger consumer advocacy statewide organizations or issue-specific statewide groups, advocacy efforts can appear fragmented. Historically, episodic ventures lacking solution-driven agenda tended to fade away as issue fatigue crept in and/or funds were expended.

Obviously, fiscal challenges in the state have created the need to cut services, but the lack of champions in the legislature, coupled with well-off seniors not engaging on behalf of their less fortunate cohorts, and further compounded by voter apathy among low-income older adults who depend on these services, have enabled the old-age service safety net to be assaulted and gutted. In addition, there is no unified presence or voice in the form of a statewide coalition comprised of aging focused consumer groups, service organizations, research institutions and business groups to thwart the efforts that are dismantling aging services and programs.

Changes in fiscal and legislative policy are the only solutions to some of the thorniest problems in aging, such as healthcare, income support, housing for the low income older adults, and safety net funding, but little can be done without issue champions in key leadership positions.

Endnotes

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About the Authors

Center for Technology and Aging

The Center for Technology and Aging is devoted to helping California and the nation more rapidly implement technologies that improve home and community-based care for older adults. Through research, grants, public policy involvement, and development of practical implementation tools, the Center serves as a resource for all those seeking to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of long-term care services. The Center was established in 2009 with a generous grant from The SCAN Foundation (www.thescanfoundation.org) and is located at the Public Health Institute (www.phi.org) in Oakland, CA.

Public Health Institute

The Public Health Institute (PHI) is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting health, well-being and quality of life for people throughout California, across the nation and around the world. As one of the largest and most comprehensive public health organizations in the nation, PHI is at the forefront of research and innovations to improve the efficacy of public health statewide, nationally and internationally.

Gary D. Bass

Gary D. Bass is the Founder and Executive Director of OMB Watch, a nonprofit research and advocacy organization that promotes greater government accountability and transparency and increased citizen participation in public policy decisions. He is well known for assisting nonprofit organizations in better understanding federal rules affecting their groups and constituencies, and in 2003, he created NPAction as a one-stop website on building nonprofit advocacy. He is also a co-author of the 2007 book Seen but not Heard: Strengthening Nonprofit Advocacy, published by the Aspen Institute. Dr. Bass was selected as one of the NonProfit Times Power and Influence Top 50 for ten consecutive years, 1999-2008; in 2007, he was selected as one of the Federal 100 — the top executives from government, industry, and academia who had the greatest impact on the government information systems community — and in 2008, he received the Public Access To Government Information Award from the American Association of Law Libraries.

An expert on federal budgetary, program management, regulatory and information policy issues, Dr. Bass has published extensively, testified before Congress, appeared on national television and presented to groups across the country. A specific area of expertise is his understanding of the apparatus of government, particularly the executive branch of the federal government.

In addition to his role at OMB Watch, Dr. Bass is an affiliated professor at Georgetown University's Public Policy Institute and also teaches in the Nonprofit Management Executive Certificate program at Georgetown's Center for Public and Nonprofit Leadership.

Dr. Bass received a combined doctorate in psychology and education from The University of Michigan, along with the University's highest award for graduate student teaching and several awards for academic excellence.

Janet Seckel-Cerrotti, MSW

Janet Seckel-Cerrotti is founder and Executive Director of FriendshipWorks an Interfaith Volunteer Program. She has been a long-time promoter of caregiver programs and services for elders and is recognized at the national level as an expert in interfaith volunteer programming. Ms. Seckel-Cerrotti serves on numerous nonprofit boards and is active in the Boston faith community.

Lee Mason

Lee Mason is Director of Nonprofit Speech Rights at OMB Watch. Lee has worked in the nonprofit arena for nearly 20 years. Prior to joining OMB Watch, he served as the Director of Public Policy and Community Relations of the Center for Nonprofit Advancement. At the Center, he developed and maintained relationships with policy makers throughout the Metropolitan Washington area and served as a liaison between the policy makers and the nonprofit community.

Lee's nonprofit experience includes both academic and community-based initiatives in community economic empowerment, youth program development and advocacy, and educational administration. He has also supervised and coordinated all administrative and daily operations for an international youth leadership development organization with 20 sites in the United States and two in West Africa (Mali and Senegal).

Lee is a graduate of the University of the District of Columbia and New Hampshire College.

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Rigo has over 18 years of experience in the field of aging with an emphasis on public advocacy, diversity outreach, administration and direct service. He has served on numerous state and local boards, committees and taskforces focusing on advocacy, diversity and service issues related to aging. Currently, Rigo is the President & CEO of St. Barnabas Senior Services. As such, he is responsible for the organization's achievement of its mission and financial objectives. Rigo's other experience includes: Director of Diversity Outreach and Alliance for AARP National Office in Washington DC; State Deputy Director for AARP-California; Director of the University of Southern California's Los Angeles Caregiver Resource Center; Research Assistant for the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Aging; and Case manager for Alta Med Health Services Corporation, MSSP & SSI programs in Los Angeles. He has a B.S. from California State University, Los Angeles and an MS in Gerontology from the University of Southern California.

Women's Foundation of California

Lead Writers: UCSF Institute for Health and Aging Carroll Estes, PhD; Sheryl Goldberg, PhD; Eva Williams; Heather Wollin. The University of California, San Francisco, Institute for Health & Aging (IHA) mission is to optimize the health and aging of individuals, communities, and society through research, education and public service in the social and behavioral sciences. IHA is a key partner in the Women's Foundation of California Elder Women's Initiative.

Editor: Karla Rodriguez, MPH, Program Officer with the Women's Foundation of California. The Women's Foundation of California invests in women and girls to build a more just and equitable society for all. We envision a California that is increasingly healthy, safe and economically prosperous. We will achieve this vision by focusing on women and girls as agents of change because of their central role in families and communities. We simultaneously invest in the strategies of grantmaking, strengthening organizations, policy advocacy and movement building in order to accelerate systemic social change.

About The SCAN Foundation

The SCAN Foundation is an independent nonprofit foundation dedicated to advancing the development of a sustainable continuum of quality care for seniors that integrates medical treatment and human services in the settings most appropriate to their needs and with the greatest likelihood of a healthy, independent life. The SCAN Foundation supports programs that stimulate public engagement, develop realistic public policy and financing options, and disseminate promising care models and technologies.

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