Hubert H. Humphrey
Institute of Public Affairs
Capstone Project

Examining Issues of

Effective Communications and Sustainable Funding

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Executive Summary

Goals

The goals of this project between MN-CCD and Capstone students from the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs are twofold:

1. Assess internal communications practices to CCD member organizations and identify areas in need of improvement accompanied by methods with which to improve them.
2. Identify sustainable funding opportunities for CCD

CCD's main contact persons from twelve member organizations were interviewed to evaluate the usefulness of communications from CCD and knowledge of CCD's funding situation.

Major Findings

Email

- Generally, communications from CCD are of very high quality and are praised for their informative and educational content, and their timeliness.
- Respondents praised Anni Simons and attributed to her much of the improvement in CCD's services.
- Areas for improvement for emails include: length, format, and simplicity of writing

Website

- Most respondents indicated little use of the website, noting there is little information on the website not already available in CCD emails
- Website is lacking in design both in looks and in connecting CCD's various web tools

Funding

- General lack of knowledge regarding CCD's current funding sources, balance of funding between grant and member dues, and impact of end of grant funding
- Some lack of knowledge of CCD's use of funds and necessary funding level to ensure high level services

Major Recommendations

Email

- Format emails so they can easily be scanned for important information, with additional information available elsewhere
- Simplify language and increase clarity of directions to improve usability for all members
- Create supplementary advocacy materials for use by less knowledgeable members

Website

- Design website with a specific audience in mind (current members, potential members, public, media, etc.)
- Integrate with CCD's various web tools (Facebook, Twitter, blog) and increase visibility

Funding

- Increase communication regarding funding/budgeting with member organizations
- Focus on improving services to less able members to facilitate their participation, emphasize the value of CCD services to them, and increase their contributions.

Project Overview

This project was completed in fulfillment of the Master of Public Policy professional paper requirement. The project began in January 2010 when Anni Simons from CCD approached the "Managing Collaborations" course at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs with a project proposal. We then chose this project as the one we wished to participate in out of several available options. Once chosen, we met with Anni to determine the nature and scope of the project. The final products of the project consist of a formal final report and presentation to the client outlining our findings and recommendations.

Project Goals

1. Assess internal communications practices to CCD member organizations and identify areas in need of improvement accompanied by methods with which to improve them.
2. Identify sustainable funding opportunities for CCD

Background

Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (hereon abbreviated CCD) is a "broad-based coalition of more than 100 organizations of persons with disabilities, providers and advocates, dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities."[1] CCD member organizations represent a broad cross-section of the disability community. Members consist of organizations big and small from the public, private, and non-profits sectors, representing widely varying forms of disability, both physical and mental. In addition, under the umbrella of CCD's representation are member organizations of widely varying missions, from direct service providers, to advocacy organizations, to insurance company components and more.

In service to their broad constituency, CCD conducts a range of activities including, but not limited to, direct lobbying of the state legislature, grassroots and event organizing, as well as educational and information distribution services to members and the general public. CCD staff has a regular presence at the Capitol. CCD also organizes weekly grassroots advocacy days called Tuesdays at the Capitol, in which members of the disability community and/or their family members and caretakers advocate on their own behalves. Other events CCD organizes include townhall and candidate forums, in which members of the disability community come together to discuss issues with policy experts and state legislators. In addition, CCD has become a central information hub for the disability community, distributing information throughout its organizational network.

As large as the membership and as varied as their services are, CCD only has one full-time paid staff member. As a result, CCD is primarily staffed by its member organizations, who contribute the paid staff time of their employees involved with CCD. This is primarily accomplished through the subcommittee system at CCD, which splits the various disabilities issues into several substantive issue areas (e.g. long-term care, personal care assistants, transportation,

etc.). In total, there are nine subcommittees. Each subcommittee is staffed primarily by staff of member organizations, but also by member organizations' own volunteers and members. It is the responsibility of the subcommittees to develop agendas, positions, and policy recommendations on issues relevant to their subcommittee topic. These are then brought to the full membership of CCD, which determines the most urgent issues to then be pursued by CCD.

External Factors Affecting CCD

In order to better understand the current communications and funding situation within CCD, it is important to understand what factors are affecting CCD from the outside. Understanding these provides important insight into the overall and specific conditions currently being faced by CCD.

The most important of the factors affecting CCD is the economic recession that started in late 2008. As a result of the recession, the State of Minnesota faced a budget deficit of $4.8 billion for fiscal years 2010-11.[2] To compensate for the massive budget gap, the state government implemented deep and widespread cuts in funding across governmental functions. These funding cuts were especially hard-hitting for health and human services, which saw a budget cut of $236 million for FYs 2010-11.[3] With the state government being a significant funding source for CCD member organizations and their constituents, these events are of major consequence for CCD and its membership.

Similarly, as the recession began, the stock market plunged as the depth of the financial crisis became apparent. In just one year, the stock market declined almost 40% in value from a high mark of over 14,000 in October of 2007 to under 8,600 in October of 2008.[4] As a result, foundations saw the value of their endowments decrease sharply, were forced to cut back their funding activities, and have pulled back from funding the more abstract benefits of advocacy work in favor of funding more directly beneficial direct service providers.[5]

At the same time, and partly as a consequence of events occurring at the state government and in foundations, nonprofit organizations witnessed similar budget situations. Nonprofits have experienced decreased revenues and an increased demand for services when they were least able to serve that need.[6]

For CCD, the total effect of these trends (decreased government funding of services to disabled populations, decreased available funding from other sources, and similar budget crises in nonprofit organizations) was to produce an upsurge in interest in advocacy in the disability community. It became clear to many organizations that the best way to keep the situation facing their constituents and their organizations from deteriorating any further was to begin advocating for themselves. Thus, CCD's membership increased during this time period. It will be important to remember for later in this report that most of the new member organizations have only recently taken interest in advocacy.

However, at the same time, many organizations were experiencing budget distress of their own. Thus, despite the all-time high membership in CCD, it may come at a time when organizations are least able to contribute financially to CCD's mission. In addition, other funding sources are decreasingly available for the types of services CCD provides to the disability community. Thus, CCD finds itself in a difficult financial situation, with grant funding set to run out soon and an uphill battle for organizational contributions.

Initial Issues for Investigation

Communication Usefulness

At the outset of the project, CCD wished to know if their communications met the needs of their member organizations. As one of CCD's primary functions is to be an information provider, they need to make sure their information services are useful. Specifically, CCD wanted information on how members felt regarding the quantity, timeliness, format, and content of the communications from CCD to members. Gathering information on this issue can provide CCD with direction in improving communications with its members.

In addition to the issue of communications quality generally, it became apparent that other issues CCD is facing may contribute to the usefulness of their communications. These include:

Information Gatekeepers

One of CCD's main activities is providing information. The goal is for this information to be used by member organizations and their members, clients, or population. However, the large majority of CCD's communications first go through CCD's main contact person at each organization. If these contact persons do not distribute these communications throughout their own organizations and membership, this would represent a major barrier to the effective use of communications from CCD. We identified two ways in which these contact persons could represent barriers to useful communication from CCD.

First, if the duties required of these persons as CCD's main contact, (i.e. making sense of and distributing relevant advocacy information throughout their own organizational networks) do not align with the day-to-day duties of these staff members in their own organizations, they are probably less likely to make use of CCD communications. Second, if CCD's organizational contacts occupy very low positions of power within their own organizations, it is less likely that they will be able to influence their organization to participate in CCD or take action on behalf of CCD. Both of these issues are important because they highlight potential barriers to useful communication that may not be dependent of the quality of CCD's communications.

Membership Growth

As outlined above, external forces have led to many new organizations seeking membership in CCD. While in most respects this can only be interpreted as good for CCD, it does present challenges of its own.

One challenge may be that the newest members of CCD have only recently taken an interest in advocacy because the poor economy forced them to. If this is true, these organizations may lack some of the knowledge, skills, and tools that the longer-standing members of CCD (traditionally focused on advocacy issues) may possess. Therefore, they may have additional needs to address in order for communications from CCD to be useful to them.

In summary, this project seeks to gather information on the usefulness of CCD's communications to its members and what can be done to improve upon the work already being done. In addition, the project seeks to analyze other potential barriers to useful communication from CCD. These potential barriers include the distribution of CCD communications throughout member organizations by the main contact persons (i.e. gatekeepers) and advocacy skills and knowledge of member organizations (especially new members).

Research Design

Data Collection Method

Interviews were used as the method of data collection. While surveys were the initial option for data collection, interviews were ultimately decided upon due to the fact that interviews typically yield richer information. Whereas a survey may simply point to if there is a problem and possibly what that problem is, interviews are much more likely to provide information on why the problem exists and what actions would be useful in remedying the problem.

Sample Selection

The desired sample size for the project was fifteen. A larger sample size would have been preferable to ensure representativeness of the sample. However, due to time constraints, fifteen organizations represented the maximum feasible sample size. Initial consideration of this issue led to focusing on two issues in particular: size of the organization and its level of involvement in CCD. These characteristics were chosen because they were thought to be important influences on the perceived usefulness of CCD communications.

Although explained in greater detail in the following section, the thought was that organizations of different sizes may have very different needs in order for communications to be useful to them, so a mix of organizational sizes must be included in the sample of organizations interviewed. Similarly, related to organizations' levels of involvement, it may be

that the usefulness of communication determines the level of involvement, that the level of involvement determines the usefulness of communication, or that both occur.

In any case, including organizations of differing levels of involvement will yield valuable information for improving CCD communications. Highly involved organizations will be very familiar with CCD's communication methods and thus be in a position to suggest improvements. However, less involved organizations may be less involved partly because communication from CCD represents a barrier to involvement for these organizations. Thus, these organizations will also possess important information to improve CCD communications. For these reasons, as well as because they are readily observable characteristics of CCD member organizations, the sample was composed of organizations representing differing levels of both characteristics.

Once the desired composition of the sample was determined, the CCD project supervisor selected the organizations to be included in the sample based on the criteria described above. Due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints, only twelve of the desired fifteen interviews were able to be completed. The final sample ultimately included organizations of varying sizes as well as levels of involvement in CCD activities.

Relationships between Organization Characteristics & Communication Usefulness

Again, as described above, particular characteristics of organizations were hypothesized to cause certain patterns in responses regarding the perceived usefulness of CCD communications. The interview guide was created in order to obtain information on these various characteristics in an effort to enable analysis of how these characteristics relate to perceived usefulness of CCD communication. Detailed explanation of the importance of these characteristics and their hypothesized effect on the perceived usefulness of CCD communications follows below.

Size

Size of the organization is likely to be related to usefulness of communications because larger organizations possess more resources (both human and financial) than smaller organizations. Therefore, larger organizations would be most likely, and most able, to devote resources to performing advocacy work. This situation contrasts to that of the smaller organizations. Unless advocacy is their mission, they are less likely to be able to divert any significant amount of time or money away from their stated mission towards advocacy work.

For CCD, this would create a situation where the larger organizations are more likely have the skills, knowledge, and tools to be able to make CCD communications useful for their needs. Smaller organizations, then, will more likely lack the skills, knowledge, and tools to be able to make CCD communications as useful. Therefore, smaller organizations will have different types of communication needs than larger organizations and their perceived usefulness of current CCD communications may be lower.

Length of Membership in CCD

The length of an organization's membership in CCD would affect the perceived usefulness of CCD in a couple different ways. First, as new members, it may simply take some time to learn how CCD functions and how work gets done. In this way, as in any organization, length of membership may matter.

However, length of membership may affect communication usefulness in another way with CCD. Older CCD members presumably joined CCD because they value advocacy work. Therefore, over time they are likely to have acquired the skills and knowledge necessary for advocacy. They can then apply these skills and knowledge to CCD's communications and make them useful. However, newer CCD members may have only recently taken an interest in advocacy, having joined CCD in an effort to minimize the harmful effects of the recession on themselves and their constituents. Therefore, newer members would have fewer advocacy skills and knowledge to apply to CCD's communications. This would result in lower perceived usefulness of communications from CCD.

Most likely, the longer the length of membership in CCD, the higher the perceived usefulness of communications from CCD will be.

Level of Involvement

Higher levels of involvement will be associated with a higher level of perceived usefulness of communication. Highly involved organizations most likely do, and are able to, place a high value on advocacy activities and therefore are less likely to have barriers to effective communication such as lack of knowledge and skills or unwillingness to act. Similarly, higher perceived usefulness of CCD communications reflects higher quality communications from CCD, which would facilitate involvement. The opposite would be true regarding lower levels of involvement and lower levels of perceived usefulness of communication.

However, it is important to note that while an organization's level of involvement in CCD may reflect the value an organization places on advocacy activities, it also reflects the value an organization *is able to place* on advocacy activities. As mentioned previously, the size of an organization may place constraints on the resources an organization is able to devote to advocacy. Therefore, it is important to remember that an organization's level of involvement in CCD does not only reflect that organization's valuation of advocacy services. It also represents the ability to value advocacy given the resources they possess. Some organizations that are not involved in CCD's activities may not value advocacy work, but some simply may not be able to.

Interview Topics - General

Interview questions covered four general topics in line with the description above:

1. *Member organization contact person*
   - Information Sought:
     - Informational "gatekeeper" status of CCD main contacts
       - Level of Alignment of Main Contacts' Organizational Duties and CCD Contact Duties
       - Level of Influence of CCD Main Contacts

2. *Member Organization Relationship to CCD*
   - Information Sought:
     - Organizational Characteristics
       - Mission
       - Motivation for Joining CCD
       - Role of CCD for Their Organization
       - Length of Membership in CCD
       - Level of Involvement

3. *CCD Internal Communications Usefulness*
   - Information Sought:
     - Usefulness of Communications
       - Strengths / Weakness of Communications
       - Needs Met / Unmet
       - Potential Improvements

4. *Current funding situation*
   - Information Sought:
     - Level of Knowledge of CCD Funding Situation
     - Level of Alignment Between Dues Paid and Perceived Value of CCD Services

Analysis of Interviews

Once all interviews were completed and transcribed, the transcriptions were reviewed separately by both project group members to identify patterns in responses between interviewees. Once finished, results were compared to ensure that results were consistent regardless of who reviewed the transcripts. Once overall trends were identified, organizational characteristics were used to determine whether a consistent relationship exists between the organizations' characteristics and perceived usefulness of communications.

Interview Findings

General Perceptions of CCD

We felt that prior to specific questions on the usefulness of communication tools it was important to pose a handful of questions aimed at drawing out the general perceptions that the member organization and/or individual contact has of CCD. More specifically, perceptions of communication tools may not be necessarily congruent with the perception of CCD itself. Additionally, there could be a disconnect between the perceived objectives of CCD and the perceived role of communication tools in fulfilling those objectives.

Purpose of CCD

The responses related to these questions varied somewhat between member organizations (and those differences will be examined in more detail in a later section), but there did seem to be some general trends in these findings. Regarding the initial reasoning for joining CCD, many valued the access to a network of similar minded organizations, and how involvement with CCD helps members achieve their missions. Further, a large number of contacts mentioned the desire for a common voice and vision in the disability community. Similarly, many expanded on this notion by stating how strength in numbers is important for the ability to influence legislature and policy decisions. All contacts determined that the purpose of membership has stayed the same since joining, and nearly half stated that more value has been received than initially expected. Additionally, a number of contacts mentioned that the purpose of CCD itself has seemed to grow in the past couple of years as CCD has grown, resulting in a better organized and more visible organization in the disability and legislative communities.

As expected, these perceptions were consistent with the responses given on the type of work that CCD does. These responses include: community building and networking, legislative and grassroots advocacy, dissemination of information, and the organizing of events. The following quotes from contacts sum up the overall perception of purpose and quality of work:

> *"CCD provides a valuable and effective format for preparing and delivering a collective message from the disability community. They develop a shared vision and message and increase the numbers of people rallying around the issues that are important."*

> *"I've been very impressed with their work and I think it is very important. There would be a vast hole of needed services if CCD didn't exist…it is a great value in terms of the educational value and their ability to develop influence for the disability community."*

> *"They provide people that can testify at hearings and meet with legislators. They also organize rallies and legislative days for different groups to create visibility and get more people involved on these issues. They are becoming the go-to place when the media has questions about disability policy and effects."*

Impact on Workload of the Contact and Member Organization

All interviewees working within the day to day operations of the member organization reported that working with CCD creates a positive effect on individual workload and/or the overall duties of the organization. Further, for an organization directly addressing policy issues, being involved with CCD is often cited as a workload reliever for the following reasons: convenient and reliable source of resources, a strong network of similar organizations, source of issue education, and very capable of performing logistical issues that members would otherwise have to deal with themselves (such as organizing events).

As stated, no contacts mentioned a negative impact on workload, with the only added duties being related to the filtering of information from CCD and, for some, the editing of information to a format or language more easily understood by their intended audience. While some did request improvements related to the latter, these duties were generally accepted as necessary and appropriate to the overall objective of CCD and its members.

CCD Communications *– Responses*

In general, interviewees had a number of positive comments regarding communications tools and content. They found information to be very timely, informative, and consistent with the objectives of CCD. In particular, nearly every contact spoke very favorably of the work that Anni Simons has done since joining CCD. It did not matter how long the organization had been a member of CCD, or whether or not they were particularly active; all knew Anni and praised her efforts and quality of work. She seems to fulfill a very important role of being a consistent, knowledgeable, and capable representative of the consortium.

Many contacts remarked on how well CCD fills the role of distributing information for its members, with a willingness to educate on the activities of member organizations.

> *"They are a consortium that is really willing to be a distributor of information – if one organization has an event, Anni is willing to let everyone know, which is a nice way to facilitate among groups."*

While there seems to be an agreement that the information communicated is not superfluous in nature, there is still room for improvement regarding content length and presentation.

> *"There is just a lot of text, which makes it hard to read. I would say that in terms of showing members what they are doing, I think they are effective. But in terms of communicating strategically, they are still a little clunky."*

> *"I think that framing the communication in a way that the general public could understand could use some work. I don't think I can turn around and hand off these things…"*

As will be shown in a later section, this prevents some members from fully utilizing these tools, which may be preventing CCD from reaching its full potential related to advocacy impact.

Email

This is certainly the most recognized form of communications tool used by CCD. Again, nearly every interviewee remarked very favorably on the timing of all emails. This includes the turnaround time for meeting summaries, useful timing of action alerts, and impressive response time of specific requests by organizations.

In general, the content is seen as very informative and appropriate in topic. However, there were some complaints regarding the length of emails like the News Updates. While many are happy with the content and like the new format of these emails, a number of organizations still find their effectiveness to be hampered by their length. These contacts would like to see the information more targeted to their organization's interests or at least in a format that is more easily scanned for this type of information (with keywords and/or bullet points). The degree to which an interviewee agreed with this sentiment does seem to be correlated somewhat with certain member characteristics (which will be addressed further in the analysis section) but there does seem to be at least some level of agreement that the amount of information could be reduced, with the more specific text and attachments moved elsewhere, such as the website.

Similarly, there is a general call for the format of Action Alerts to be improved slightly. Far from a total revamping of the format, there were a number of individuals who desired changes and supplementary tools that they thought would make them more useful and effective. These include making them more clear and direct about what the important information is and what action steps are desired from the member. For some, the content seems to be targeted towards individuals who are quite knowledgeable in both the workings of public policy as well as the specific disability-related issue, rather than being written in a manner more easily conveyed to those less knowledgeable and the general public. Again, member characteristics seemed to play a role on these opinions, and will be examined further in the analysis section.

Website

In general no one was overly critical of the website. But this may be more of a reflection of the overall low level of use by these organizations than it is a product of useful design. Some individuals mentioned it assisted with obtaining calendar information and minutes, but most found the information provided by emails to be at least as informative, if not more so, and quicker to access than the website. Subsequently, a large number of interviewees mentioned that they seldom utilize the website for anything.

The design of the website did not come off as particularly praiseworthy. Many individuals found it a bit boring and somewhat cumbersome for finding specific types of information. Similarly, many wondered why there were no links to other social media tools being utilized by CCD. Particularly for individuals not familiar with the twitter account or grassroots blog, they wondered how they were to find these tools through the website.

These points relate somewhat to the concern that many raised as to determining who the actual audience of the website is. For those that don't find it particularly useful for member organizations, they felt that the website would be much better served for a different audience: potential members, the general public, media outlets, and/or policy decision makers. Thus, these interviewees called for design and content changes that better convey the growing authority of CCD as the central go-to entity for issues related to disabilities.

Other

In the discussions of other forms of communications, there was a general agreement that postcards and fliers have been useful for increasing attendance to certain activities. Similarly, a few organizations mentioned the lasting usefulness of brochures on specific topics given out at events such as panel discussions. These have been repeatedly referenced since the event.

While we focused our research on internal communications, there were a few calls for increasing external communications through the use of more press releases and/or advertising of activities to increase visibility of CCD and the issues themselves.

Lastly, as meetings were vastly recognized as an important component for the efficacy of CCD, a number of individuals requested that technologies such as videoconferencing be looked into for those organizations unable to attend for some reason (including those in 'greater Minnesota area'). Many mentioned how beneficial these meetings were to making connections and gaining knowledge of issues within the disability community, and felt that more could be done to improve the accessibility of these meetings for member organizations.

CCD Communications *– Findings Related to Specific Member Characteristics*

In evaluating the current level of effectiveness with internal communications of CCD, we found a couple of factors that seemed to play a significant role regarding overall satisfaction. As mentioned in an earlier section of this report, we anticipated this being the case and had structured our interview process accordingly. What we determined was quite similar to our hypotheses, with a few subtle differences.

These factors are related to the characteristics of the member organization as well as the main contact. Obviously, CCD works with a variety of organizations, all with different levels of resources and abilities, and all addressing different aspects of the disability community in different ways. However, we did find this variability to have an effect on how an organization perceived both the overall work of CCD as well as the effectiveness of communications and activities related to CCD. While there are certainly interdependent relationships between all characteristics and the manner in which they impacted the satisfaction and effectiveness of communications from CCD was not fully determined or predictable, we did find the existence of general trends in three areas:

Size

While somewhat obvious, the difference in size between member organizations seems to play a role in how the type and format of information is perceived, as well as the needs and abilities of organizations to utilize this information. In general, larger members are better equipped to dedicate time, resources, and personnel to tasks of attending meetings and activities, as well as focusing on the advocacy actions desired by CCD. Thus, the analysis of this area seems somewhat correlated with the next area of *Focus*. Therefore, our findings will be placed in that section. However, it should be noted that these two areas are not necessarily connected, as a larger organization may not be completely focused on advocacy activities, but still have more of an ability than a smaller organization to carry them out.

Focus

This could denote a few different things, but unsurprisingly we found differences between member organizations consistent with whether they were a service provider or an advocacy-focused organization. Similarly, these findings were also applicable to the focus of the position of the main contact.

As one can imagine, there were differences between individuals that had much larger portions of responsibilities focused on advocacy or public policy issues, than those that were engaged in a wider variety of activities. Also, the type of relationship the contact had with CCD (e.g. whether they had previously worked with CCD elsewhere) also played a role in perceptions of CCD, as these individuals seemed more to have more positive perceptions of the benefits of advocacy work.

For member organizations and contacts better equipped and more familiar with these issues and activities, the communications tools seemed very appropriate and useful. They spoke of the high quality of information and the degree to which it can be effortlessly incorporated into their day to day duties.

> *"I think for our board members and volunteers interested in public policy, it is a tool for me so that I am not going to some of these things and writing up a summary. I feel like they are well written so I can just forward them the emails from CCD."*

> *"It is good for my credibility at the Capitol that when I go to talk to someone I have the most up-to-date information, and I owe that partly to CCD."*

Member organizations that either did not have an advocacy focus, or were too small to have an individual solely focused on policy issues, expressed a desire for emails to be formatted more directly towards their specific interests. These requests ranged from more basic changes to the current format that utilizes clearer bullet points and less description (with links to the website for further reading), to directly targeting the emails toward only those organizations specifically interested in the included topics.

"It is nice to have access to what is out there as a whole, but I am really only concerned about what is happening at my subcommittee."

"I often will look really quickly at what is in the email and if I don't see anything that applies to me or [my organization] I will just discard it."

"Sometimes I don't read the long ones because they are so long. If there was some way to make them shorter or simpler, so that they are easier to sift through to find relevant information, that would be really useful."

As will be discussed in the funding section of this report, taking these steps toward a role as more of a service provider for these members may have a positive effect on the willingness to pay dues. However, it may have detrimental effect on the overall goal of CCD - to coordinate and consolidate the disability community as a whole. Yet, we believe that while many of these groups desiring more of a service provider role of CCD seem somewhat self-interested, it may be partially a reflection of their inability or inexperience in taking advocacy actions. To overcome these issues (mainly related to size and focus) many such members suggested adding supplementary materials to communications like Action Alerts that would assist them in taking the desired actions of CCD. These materials included: guides on unfamiliar policy and disability issues; form letters that the contact could simply fill out and pass on; and broader, understandable language on the issues so that it could be forwarded to the population of the member organization.

"I think that there is a level of assumed knowledge that is there for larger organizations with policy department so who do this work, but it is harder for smaller organizations to take the general information provided by CCD and turn it into action steps – as far as who to contact and how."

"I think they are harder for people with no policy background to know what to do…we usually add lots of background information (who and what to talk about) when we pass them on."

"It's useful, but it isn't in a form that we feel we can turn around and easily pass on to our members and their families. It's the issue of assumed knowledge. Simpler with main points would be helpful for us."

Membership

Differences surrounding membership are generally related to: how long an organization has been a member, how they became a member, and if they are part of a larger network or association that is also a member. We found these to play a role in the perceptions of CCD as well as the utilization of communication tools.

Similarly related to the level of advocacy focus and knowledge a member organization or main contact has, the newer the member was to CCD the less familiar they seemed to be with issues and advocacy actions. Thus, the main request was a call for improved clarity on aspects of not only advocacy and policy, but also on specific disabilities issues of which the organization may not have prior knowledge.

Additionally, those member organizations belonging to a larger network or association that is also a member of CCD seemed less apt to read and/or utilize the information provided by CCD.

> *"I get similar information from [our umbrella organization]. I only need it once, so I choose to read what is most beneficial to [my organization]. This will probably rarely be the CCD information, because it is more generalized for all member groups."*

Essentially, these types of members were more likely to take action queues from these larger organizations, rather than CCD. Subsequently, they may feel less obligated to be engaged either in participation or financially.

CCD Communications *– Recommendations*

While communications practices of CCD are largely seen as appropriate and effective, there are some areas related to specific characteristics of member organizations and main contacts that could warrant a deeper look into certain tools. To address these, we propose the following recommendations:

1. *Restructure the News Updates for Faster Reading*

There were a number of comments on how the News Updates have improved in appearance, content, and frequency in the last couple of years. However, in order to address the lack of time and resources that certain member organizations have to devote to these emails, incorporating a slightly different structure may help to alleviate these barriers and increase utilization overall. These changes could be as simple as presenting more direct topic headlines of each information piece that will more quickly tell the reader what is included in the paragraph. Another possibility is to trim down the content of each piece, leaving only the most important details supplemented with a link to the full content on the CCD website.

Although some interviewees mentioned that these, as well as Action Alerts, be more targeted to only the interests of the member organization, we are not sure that this is currently feasible for CCD, nor is it entirely consistent with its objectives of unifying the disability community. We believe that more subtle actions will help to convey the added value of CCD for the community without adversely affecting the pursuit of these objectives.

2. *Make Action Alerts more Direct and Understandable to a Broader Audience*

As mentioned, those member organizations not as familiar with policy procedures as well as disability issues outside their own may have a more difficult time determining what is being

asked of them in these alerts. Further, they are unsure of how to best convey this information to their populations. To overcome these issues, more approachable language could be used, accompanied by direct instructions of what CCD would like from each member organization. Doing so may increase the probability that these member organizations will not only take action, but pass on the information to their members and population to also take action. This may not be appropriate or necessary for all members, but exploring which members this may benefit seems worthwhile.

3. *Provide Supplementary Materials to Action Alerts (and elsewhere)*

In addition to making the content of Action Alerts more direct and easier to forward to others, we have already mentioned a similar call for supplementary materials meant to educate and ease dissemination of these alerts. These materials include guides on unfamiliar policy and disability issues, as well as form letters that the contact could simply fill out and pass on. Additionally, many of these materials could also be included elsewhere (such as the website) for these members to access easily.

4. *Orientation and 'Advocacy Training' for New Members*

Related to the previous two recommendations, some sort of orientation for new members on the workings of CCD as well as important policy language and issues could greatly benefit those members with no previous work in this area, but a desire to contribute. Similarly, 'best practice guides' for policy advocates in this area, and any additional training that may be useful for this type of work would also seem quite beneficial.

5. *Determine Audience of Website and Alter the Content and Design Accordingly*

As mentioned earlier, the website does not seem to be particularly useful for the member organizations interviewed. Further, it does not seem to be serving a purpose of increasing the visibility of CCD as a go-to entity with issues related to disabilities. Ultimately, a primary audience for the website should be chosen, with materials and design focused for the needs of that audience. We propose that the website be aimed towards groups external to CCD. This could include potential members, the general public, media outlets, and/or policy decision makers. The design and objectives of the website would be similar for all of these groups: increase visibility, promote the effectiveness of the consortium, and strengthen the credibility of CCD as the central entity for all disability related issues. Here are a few actions that may create improvements in these areas:

- Improve design and functionality.
    - Utilizing a more visually appealing design, as well as incorporating more pictures, stories, and testimonials would better present CCD as a more central and necessary member of the disability community.
    - Improvement in the navigation of the site would help individuals to more easily find pertinent information. Currently, the site entirely user friendly, especially for an external audience.

- Include 'successes' of CCD actions and activities
    - Presenting follow up information to Action Alerts and general activities and events would convey the overall effectiveness of CCD. This is important not only for the appreciation of an external audience, but also for current members to feel their inclusion and participation are contributing to the main objectives and goals.
- Provide links to 'social media' tools
    - Increasing the visibility of Twitter and Facebook accounts and pages, as well as the grassroots blog, are important to increasing awareness within and beyond the disability community. Many interviewees had absolutely no knowledge of most of these accounts. Provide explicit links to them on the website.
- Encourage member organizations to include a link to CCD's website on their websites
    - Being referenced on each of the member websites may seem only to be a superficial strengthening of the disability community network; however, this action has the potential to greatly improve the visibility and perceived authority CCD. An external audience will notice CCD more readily and the 'ranking' of the CCD's website will increase, positively affecting its position in search results.

Certainly, portions of the website can be devoted to serving the current member organizations (e.g. posting of calendar information, meeting minutes, issue guides, etc.), but much more could be done to convey a stronger presence in the policy and disability community. One fairly new member remarked that in the search for a collaborative entity such as CCD, it took much longer to find them then they had anticipated, or hoped. One can imagine that this experience is not unique to potential members but may include policy decision makers and potential funders as well.

CCD Funding *– Member Perceptions*

In general, interviewees displayed a lack of clarity regarding the funding situation CCD is currently facing. This included a variety of issues including funding sources, the relative balance of funding between member dues and grants, how the budget is spent, and the adequacy of the current level of funding.

Interviewees indicated a sense that CCD's funding sources consist of some mix of membership dues and grant funding. However, interviewees did not seem to have a good sense of how much of CCD's funding comes from dues and how much comes from grants. In addition, respondents very rarely mentioned the approaching end of Minneapolis Foundation grant funding and the resulting consequences for CCD's level of service.

On the flip side, some respondents indicated that they had little knowledge of what CCD's funds are used for in terms of paid staff time and activities. In addition, they indicated that they did not have a good sense for what level of funds would be needed to ensure adequate provision of

services. Finally, a couple interviewees cited ambiguousness in relation to CCD's legal status as an organization as a potential barrier to funding.

The quotes below exemplify the information gathered regarding the current funding situation at CCD:

> *"I think it's membership based, but I assume there is also some private funding. I really don't know though."*
>
> *"I know we pay dues, but I'm not entirely sure how dues are spent. I think we could use more communication as far as what the budget is spent on. We could also use more information as far as whether enough money is being invested in CCD or whether we are losing out on opportunities…"*
>
> *"They're probably living paycheck to paycheck. I think that they really need to decide if they are a consortium of a group of organizations or if CCD wants to be an organization of its own."*

However, given these sentiments, member organizations nearly unanimously stated that they feel that CCD's services represent a great value for the amount of dues they pay. Moreover, some mentioned having recently increased the amount of dues they pay, considering increasing the amount of dues paid in the coming year, or paying dues for the first time. However, interviewees also noted the significant amounts of staff time that their organizations contribute to CCD that does not show up in the amount of dues paid.

Another common sentiment expressed among members was that the value of CCD's services was much higher than anticipated upon joining and that the level of services has increased greatly over the past two years with the Minneapolis Foundation grant funding and the resulting hiring of a full-time paid CCD coordinator.

CCD Funding *– Interview Analysis*

The lack of knowledge regarding the current funding situation by CCD may represent a major barrier in being able to rely on member organizations to be the primary financial supporters of CCD's staff and activities as grant funds are set to expire in June. The lack of knowledge will affect CCD's fundraising ability among members in several ways.

Knowledge of Funding Levels and Sources

First, if members are not even aware that CCD is set to enter a period of significantly reduced funding in comparison to the previous two years, then it would be unlikely that they would be willing to increase their membership dues above current levels, or even retain current funding levels as they likely have financial hardships of their own.

Second, even if members are aware of the expiration of grant funding, it seems that some members are unaware of the considerable role grant funding plays in supporting CCD. If so, they will underestimate the impact that the loss of grant funding will have on CCD's services and again be less willing to consider increasing payment of membership dues.

Budgetary Accountability

Third, if member organizations feel that they do not know how CCD's funds (their membership dues) are being spent, this may decrease willingness to contribute by member organizations. With budgets being stretched to the limit for many members, they may want to be assured that their funds are being put to good use.

Finally, the ambiguous legal status of CCD may form another barrier, again decreasing willingness to increase their funding levels. Similar to the above concern, member organizations will desire to know to whom their money is given when they contribute to CCD. Not having legal status themselves, CCD lacks legal accountability for funds contributed by member organizations. As such, for some member organizations this may represent a barrier to maximizing the dues they are willing to contribute.

CCD Funding *– Recommendations*

To address the funding issues identified above, we propose four recommendations:

1. *Increase Communication Regarding Funding and Budget Information*

Providing this information to member organizations is important to inform them of the current funding situation of CCD. With the knowledge that CCD is entering a time of extreme financial hardship, members may be more willing to increase dues paying. Without this knowledge, there is no reason for them to increase dues beyond their current level.

In addition, by increasing communication regarding budget information, in particular how and where funds are used, member organizations can be assured that the money they contribute to CCD is being used in a productive manner. In doing so, organizations may become more willing to contribute funding to CCD.

2. *Formalize Legal Standing of CCD*

Formalizing the legal standing of CCD is another way for CCD to provide accountability to member organizations for funds which they have contributed to CCD. If implemented, this would remove questions of where money is actually kept when contributed to CCD, and where responsibility lies for its use. Again, the hope is that this will remove any remaining barriers for organizations hesitant to contribute to CCD's cause.

3. *Increase Awareness of Positive Outcomes*

Although CCD does a terrific job of making its member organizations aware of when action is needed, it could do a better job of making its member organizations aware of the results of

those actions. CCD should not be afraid to boast of the results it accomplishes, even if those results are simply to reduce the severity of budget cuts. These still represent improvement upon the status quo if CCD had not been involved in advocating. Raising awareness of such outcomes gives CCD a platform to demonstrate its value to its member organizations.

In addition, if possible, frame such communications in a way that communicates how CCD's work directly impacts the member organizations themselves. By communicating the positive impact of CCD's work on the member organizations, it emphasizes the value CCD provides. By increasing awareness of CCD's value to members, willingness to contribute to CCD financially may also increase.

4. *Increase Level of Quality of Services to Non-Advocacy Focused Members*

The member organizations that are least advocacy focused, whether because they choose not to or because they simply are not able to, represent the organizations to whom CCD can provide the highest value-added services. By providing high quality communications tools to these organizations, such as ready-to-use Action Alerts and form letters to send to legislators, CCD can provide a valuable service to these organizations at a much lower price than they could provide it for themselves. Providing high quality services to these organizations would demonstrate a real, direct value of CCD services to these members that could result in willingness to pay increased levels of dues.

Other Funding Opportunities

Grant-making Organizations

Attached (as Appendix 1) is a list of grant-making organizations which represent feasible opportunities to attain additional funding. Organizations were chosen based on their level of interest in funding organizations working in the disability community as well as their level of interest in funding advocacy and advocacy training.

In discussions over the course of the project, CCD repeatedly expressed a desire to avoid competition for funding with member organizations. While this is admirable, upon searching for funding resources, its feasibility is questionable. Funders interested in funding disability issues through advocacy were few and far between. If that field is cut down even further by refusing to apply to funders who fund member organizations, there may be no funders left.

Remaining Questions

Mission Growth

When formed, CCD's primary mission was to unify the advocacy agenda of the disability community. However, the past few years of CCD activities have expanded from a focus on merely facilitating the actions of members' public policy staff to now including attempts towards 'drumming up' grassroots or non-member individuals for more effective advocacy actions. While this change may not necessarily counter the initial motivations of reciprocity and efficiency, they do take on slightly different forms and new motivations may take more prominence (if CCD were to spend more time and resources promoting specific issues or events, problems of asymmetry may arise based on who benefits most from those pursuits). This carries implications for not just the communications facet of CCD but also funding, as member organizations begin to determine the value of the collaboration in comparison with requested dues.

Understanding that CCD's members are organizations and that CCD seeks to complement and assist its members in their work rather than to replace them, is it feasible or appropriate for CCD to put more focus on grassroots advocacy and move from communicating solely with organizations to communicating to individuals? Doing so would more directly inspire action by and on behalf of the disability community as opposed to depending on member organizations who may or may not the place the same value on grassroots advocacy as CCD.

Conversely, if new members do not have the same advocacy focus as the traditional members of CCD, this may impact the types of issues that CCD is pressed to address. As opposed to the community-wide focus of the older members, perhaps newer members have joined to advocate on their own behalves. Because CCD's subcommittees are staffed by its member organizations' staff members, the composition of its membership determines CCD's priorities. It is possible then, that if these new organizations have different interests than the older CCD members and the skills and motivation to push their agenda, that CCD could see a change in the types of issues it seeks to address and how it seeks to address them.

Power Dynamics

While the implementation of the new dues schedule may be a proper method to consider the limitations of many organizations within CCD's diverse membership, it may also bring with it new power dynamics to address. Although CCD makes a conscious effort to focus on issues that are pertinent to the largest portion of the disability community, members that knowingly pay more in dues may have a stronger sense of 'ownership' in the consortium, and thus expect more of their interests to be addressed. Essentially, care may need to be taken to ensure that all member organizations, regardless of size, focus, or available resources, are taken into account and continue to feel an equal member of the MN-CCD.

Summary of Recommendations

Communications

1. *Restructure the News Updates for Faster Reading*

While these have improved from past years, they could be further streamlined for easier skimming by member organizations. Using bullet points or more explicit headlines would assist members in finding the materials that interest them most.

2. *Make Action Alerts more Direct and Understandable to a Broader Audience*

This will greatly assist member organizations not as familiar with policy procedures or other disability issues outside their own. Being more direct and clear may cause these member organizations to take action and pass on the information to their members and population.

3. *Provide Supplementary Materials to Action Alerts (and elsewhere)*

Aimed at increasing participation from the type of member organizations mentioned in the previous recommendation, these materials will help to educate and encourage dissemination of Action Alerts.

4. *Orientation and 'Advocacy Training' for New Members*

Related to the previous two recommendations, some sort of orientation for new members on the workings of CCD as well as important policy language and issues could greatly benefit those members with no previous work in this area, but a desire to contribute.

5. *Determine Audience of Website and Alter the Content and Design Accordingly*

We recommend implementing changes that better target an audience that is outside of CCD. The design and objectives of the website would be to: increase visibility, promote the effectiveness of the consortium, and strengthen the credibility of CCD as the central entity for all disability related issues. Suggested actions that may create improvements in these areas include:

- Improve design and functionality.
- Include 'successes' of CCD actions and activities
- Provide links to 'social media' tools
- Encourage member organizations to include a link to CCD's website on their websites

Summary of Recommendations

Funding

1. *Increase Communication Regarding Funding and Budget Information*

Providing this information that CCD is entering a time of extreme financial hardship, members may be more willing to increase dues paying. Additionally, information regarding how and where funds are used may increase willingness to contribute funding to CCD.

2. *Formalize Legal Standing of CCD*

Similar to the previous recommendation, this is another method for CCD to provide accountability to member organizations for funds which they have contributed to CCD.

3. *Increase Awareness of Positive Outcomes*

While also mentioned with the communications recommendations, benefits to this action go beyond groups or individuals outside of CCD. Internally raising awareness of such outcomes gives CCD a platform to demonstrate its value to its member organizations.

4. *Increase Level of Quality of Services to Non-Advocacy Focused Members*

By providing high quality communications tools to organizations less focused on advocacy actions, CCD can offer a valuable service at a much lower price than they could provide it for themselves, which could result in a willingness to pay increased levels of dues.

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[2] Wessel, Christina. Deficits: $426 million now, $4.8 billion soon and $4.6 billion later. Minnesota Budget Project. Retrieved May 5, 2010. Accessed at: http://minnesotabudgetbites.org /2008/12/04/deficits-426-million-now-48-billion-soon-and-46-billion-later/

[3] Pugmire, Tim. Local Governments, Human Services Take Brunt of Budget Cuts. Minnesota Public Radio NewsQ. Retrieved May 5, 2010. Accessed at: http://minnesota.publicradio.org/ display/web/2009/06/16/unallotments/

[4] Twin, Alexandra. Market Report – Oct. 9, 2008. Retrieved May 5, 2010. CNNMoney.com. Accessed at: http://money.cnn.com/2008/10/09/markets/markets_newyork/index.htm? postversion=2008100910

[5] Walz, Joanne. Personal Interview. Conducted April 14, 2010.

[6] CNN Newswire. Nonprofits Expect Permanent Damage from Recession. Retrieved May 5, 2010. Accessed at: http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/03/26/recession.nonprofits/index.html

Name of Organization	Reason for Inclusion	Contact Information	Application Procedures
Otto Bremer Foundation	The Bremer Foundation lists advocacy, civic engagement, and collaboration/partnerships as three of the four program areas it seeks to fund. Moreover, its fields of interest include civil rights for the disabled, public affairs, and citizen participation. People with disabilities are listed as a target population for the Bremer Foundation. Also, the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, a similarly focused advocacy coalition, received funding in the current year from Bremer.	Address: 445 Minnesota Street Suite 2250 St. Paul, MN 55101 Website: www.ottobremer.org Email: obf@ottobremer.org Phone: (651) 227-8036	Specific Requirements can be found at: http://www.ottobremer.org/download/OBF_ApplicationPacket.pdf Notes: - No deadlines - applications accepted year-round - Initial approach by letter - MN Common Grant Application Accepted
Margaret H and James E Kelley Foundation	The Kelley Foundation lists as their mission "giving primarily for human rights". With advocating for civil liberties listed in their fields of interest, CCD's lobbying and advocacy work is not a barrier. In addition, people with disabilities are listed as a target population of theirs.	Address: 408 Saint Peter St Saint Paul, MN 55102-1130 Website: (none) Email: (none) Phone: (651) 222-7463	Contact Foundation for specific application procedures Notes: - Deadline: October 1 - Initial Approach: letter - Accepts MN Common Grant Application

Nevin Huested Foundation for Handicapped Children	Giving guidelines only state that they give to organizations providing a 'variety of services' to the disabled	Address: 9100 W Bloomington Freeway Ste. 137 Bloomington, MN 55431-2251 Website: (none) Email: (none) Phone: (952) 884-7004	Contact Foundation for specific application procedures Notes: - Applications accepted year-round - Approach foundation with proposal
Kopp Family Foundation	Population groups the Kopp Foundation is interested in funding include people with disabilities. The past giving of this foundation indicated a heavy preference towards funding educational activities. If applying, emphasize the educational / training aspects of CCD's work.	Address: 7701 France Avenue South Suite 500 Edina, MN 55435-3201 Website: (none) Email: foundation@koppinvestments.com Phone: (952) 841-0438	Notes: - No deadlines – applications accepted year-round - Board meets every two months - Approach with letter of inquiry - Accept MN Common Grant Application
The Joyce Foundation	The Joyce Foundation is a regional grantmaker in the Great Lakes States, including Minnesota. The Foundation is 'committed to improving public policy through its grant program'. While CCD does not fit neatly into any of the Joyce Foundation's program areas, they are deeply committed to advocacy and public policy.	Address: 70 West Madison Street Chicago, IL 60602-4317 Website: www.joycefdn.org Email: info@joycefdn.org Phone: (312) 782-2465	Application procedures can be found at: http://www.joycefdn.org/content.cfm/application-process Notes: - Deadlines: Aug 18 and Dec. 7, 2010 - Send 2-3 page letter of inquiry 6-8 weeks prior to application deadline

The Needmor Fund	The Needmor Fund is a nationwide grantmaker whose vision is includes free exercise of rights regardless of, among other things, disability. They seek to support people who work together to change social, economic, and political conditions barring access to democratic participation. They definitely focus on grassroots organizing. These aspects of CCD's work should be emphasized if an application is submitted.	Address: 42 South Saint Clair Street Toledo, OH 43604-8736 Website: www.needmorfund.org/ Email: moreinfo@needmorfund.org Phone: (419) 255-5560	Application procedures can be found at: http://www.needmorfund.org/procedures.htm Notes: - Deadline: May 31, 2010 - Preapplication form (available at above website) due by deadline - Needmor will review preapplication forms and inform if submission of full application is necessary
The Proteus Fund	The Proteus Fund seeks to fund organizations committed to 'public interest advocacy' and those who 'increase civic participation by underrepresented constituencies'. This is another foundation where, if applied to, CCD's grassroots activities should be emphasized.	Address: 101 University Drive Suite A2 Amherst, MA 01002 Website: www.proteusfund.org Email: info@proteusfund.org Phone: 413-256-0349	No information given on application procedures.

Interview Guide

I. Relationship between Organizational contact person and CCD

1. How and when did you become involved with (your organization)?
2. What are your typical day-to-day duties for (your organization)?
3. CCD has you listed as their main contact at (your organization). How and when did this working relationship begin between you and CCD?
4. How does (being the main contact for CCD) impact your duties for (your organization)?
5. Before we get into specifics, could you describe for me your general impression of the type of work CCD does?

II. Relationship Between Organization and CCD

6. How long has your organization been a part of MN-CCD?
7. Do you know the initial reasoning behind (your organization's) membership in CCD, or what it hoped to gain?
8. Does CCD still serve the same purpose for your organization today as when you joined? For better or for worse?
9. Which committees or sub-committees are you or other members of (your organization) involved with in CCD?
10. Why these subcommittees? Could you describe your experience with working in these subcommittees?
11. CCD occasionally organizes events for members and for the disability community. How frequently does you organization participate in or attend these events?
12. Which ones would you say you attend most often? Are they actively promoted to your members by your organization?

III. CCD's Communications

13. Please describe your general impression of the effectiveness of communication from MN-CCD.

14. How often do you receive emails from CCD in a typical week? Is the frequency of emails appropriate? Format appropriate?

15. In what ways are emails most beneficial to (your organization)'s needs? In what ways could they be improved?

16. Is the information presented in the News Updates adequate for your needs? Why or why not?

17. What do you find most useful about News Updates?

18. How is the information provided in Action Alerts used by (your organization)?

19. Is the frequency and timing of the Action Alerts appropriate for CCD's function?

20. How are Action Alerts most beneficial to your organization's needs? How could they be improved?

21. Do you find CCD's website to be a useful tool for finding information about CCD's activities?

22. What features and/or information would you like to see added to make the website more useful to (your organization)?

23. How useful or necessary are other forms of communication such as postcards?

IV. Funding

24. Please describe your general impression of the funding and dues situation at CCD

25. Do you find the amount requested appropriate for the services currently provided by CCD?