How do you increase results fourfold without increasing your resources by the same? You do something very different! That's the thinking, and the purpose, behind the national Campaign for 100 Percent Access and Zero Health Disparities.

Currently, the programs assisted by the Health Resources and Services Administration only reach about one-quarter of the more than 40 million uninsured residents of the United States. Therefore, to meet the needs, something had to change.

Led nationally by the Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC), and on a state by state basis by primary care associations, the campaign is beginning to have an impact. In fact, enough of an impact that the Campaign recently was awarded the prestigious Business Solutions in the Public Interest award. In accepting the award, Dr. Marilyn Gaston, assistant surgeon general and director, BPHC, stated, “100 percent access to health care and better health for everyone is within our reach. Communities and organizations represented here in Washington today are proving that this is possible.”

At the state level, primary care associations, community health centers, and other Bureau grantees are seeking out partners for the campaign. However, these partners are not just the traditional safety net providers, they also are organizations and businesses traditionally not directly involved in health care.

For example, chambers of commerce, associations of counties and/or municipalities and major corporations.

In fact, at the awards ceremony, the President and CEO of the United Way of America joined with Dr. Gaston to announce a major new national partnership with the BPHC. The goal is to begin working with United Way organizations in as many as 50 communities over the next year. These will add to the more than 250 state and community initiatives already underway under the Campaign's banner.

To assist you with partnership building, inside this edition of Across The Board you'll find some practical advice from someone who has extensive experience in building community partnerships. The six “lessons learned” will provide some valuable guidance for anyone involved in the Campaign.

So what's happening in your state, or your community? Many states have already joined in the campaign, and many others are in the process. Ask your organization's leadership if your state or your organization has signed on, and join thousands of individuals and organizations nationwide working for 100 Percent Access and Zero Health Disparities.

Brochures outlining the national campaign are available from the National Clearinghouse for Primary Care information at 1-800-400-2742, or see the BPHC website at http://www.bphc.hrsa.gov/.
Editors Note: The following article is an abridged version of one written by Dr. Dent Davis outlining lessons the Tennessee Tomorrow Association had learned in developing local partnerships. However, this information should prove to be extremely valuable and practical as your organization strives to build partnerships and alliances to reach 100 Percent Access to Primary Health Care and Zero Health Disparities. For the complete text, please go to their website at www.tnacp.org.

HomeTown Connections is a framework and a process for effectively developing and strengthening local partnerships. The project began by talking with local community leaders involved in various partnership efforts. By simply asking what works in local partnership development, what hasn't worked and what they would do differently next time, valuable insights were identified.

Lesson 1:
For long-term success, involve lots of people.

Many local partnership groups are too narrowly focused. They either involve too few people in their process or fail to involve key stakeholder groups. Often a small local group, one organization or one agency, rushes to “plant the flag” and claim some project as its own. The group may want to “involve” others, but usually wants to maintain its “ownership” of the effort. But as in sports, most people find that playing the game is a lot more interesting than watching or giving advice. Few community leaders are willing to be involved without a stake in the process. Organizations that behave as if they “own” the partnership often find their behavior self-defeating. Lower levels of participation make a partnership difficult to sustain, especially over the long haul. In today’s world, no one organization can hope to sustain a partnership by itself. It is too costly, takes too much time and stakeholders who are not meaningfully involved will simply get involved somewhere else.

Involving a spectrum of community leaders builds a broader base of support. Community leaders come from different sectors and different organizations, such as business, education, government, health care, and community and economic development. As partnerships develop, it is easy to overlook key leaders in one or more of these sectors. The most successful partnerships continually add leadership and work hard to recruit the key leaders in the community.

Lesson 2:
A clear sense of purpose is the foundation for success.

It has been said that if a group doesn’t know where it is going, it will never know when it gets there. Many partnership attempts fail because of an inadequate sense of purpose. To sustain a partnership effort over the long haul, the purpose must be clear, engaging, practical and realistic. Purpose statements need to reflect real issues and not just concerns or ideas. Real issues not only reflect institutional needs; they also reflect the needs to speak to significant, personal needs of local people. It’s like the difference between a concern and an issue. As one local leader put it, “A concern is that the sewer system is outdated. An issue is when it overflows in my neighborhood.” The best partnerships engage the hearts and souls of people, as well as organization. Purpose statements need to be written. There often are differences of opinion of the purpose of the partnership as the group forms. A common purpose is foundational to a successful partnership and it is worth the time it takes for all stakeholders to clearly understand the partnerships’ purpose and enthusiastically support it.

Almost on board...
Lesson 3:
Local citizens will support the partnership when they understand its value for the community.

Another challenge for local partnerships occurs when the leadership of the partnership and those initially involved seek the involvement and commitment of the wider community. Unlike the movie, “Field of Dreams,” many local leadership groups have been disappointed in the interest, participation and commitment of the wider community. Developing strategies for involvement early on is important in ensuring community support. Listening to the community through surveys and other data-gathering techniques helps to ensure that the partnership addresses real issues. Providing opportunities for citizens to learn about the partnership and its activities is important. Many communities have developed various types of open houses, websites, demonstrations and fairs to help citizens learn and get involved.

Lesson 4:
Dollars and sense, or the need for a written program and business plan.

Every community that has developed a local partnership has found it easier to begin the effort than maintain or strengthen it. In their eagerness to get started, partnerships sometimes try to shorten the planning process. All partnerships have a business dimension because they use resources to create things of value for people. All partnerships also have a business plan. Even my 18-year-old son has a business plan. If you asked him if he had a business plan, he would emphatically say no. But he does. His business plan is to maximize his revenues from his dad and increase his expenditures accordingly. The plan is not stated. It is assumed. Only by putting the plan in writing can it be evaluated and strengthened. The same is true for any partnership group.

Partnership business plans vary widely. The most successful groups have written plans outlining their goals, activities, funding and management. Successful partnerships also focus both on short-range and longer-range needs. Developing an adequate program and a business plan are probably the single most overlooked aspect of partnership building.

Lesson 5:
The small-step approach leads to successful local projects that build partnerships.

Many partnership efforts have lofty and inspiring goals. Most cannot be achieved in a short period of time. It is important to identify small, short-range projects that directly contribute to the partnership’s purpose, that are achievable and that can serve as catalysts for involving lots of people. Just as practice and playing games helps to improve the most athletic teams, successfully completing projects of value builds the partnership.

Lesson 6:
Partnership building is a process and takes time.

Patience and commitment assure the long-term success of any partnership effort. Partnerships are a process. It is relatively easy to facilitate a decision to begin working on an issue. It is much harder to accomplish results over time. Moreover, in every community, local issues, needs leadership and relationships are always changing. Successful partnerships have to be able to adapt and change over time.

Differences in organizational cultures and local interests lead to different assumptions that often lead to conflict and make broad-based effective partnership development difficult. Partnership building is a lot like learning a language. Some memory work is essential. There is foreign vocabulary, times when nothing seems to make sense and moments of real satisfaction when there is understanding and accomplishment. Like learning a language, partnership building is a never-ending process. Technology can strengthen the learning effort. Hard work can produce results. But the bottom line is people. Fundamentally, a partnership involves developing effective relationships between people over time.

The author, Dent Davis, is Executive Director of the Association for Community Partnerships, based in Nashville, Tennessee. He has more than 25 years experience in adult learning, partnerships building and group and organizational development. For more information, see the Association website at http://www.tnacp.org or e-mail the author at ddavis@usit.net.
Clifton L. Whetten doesn't know when to slow down. Though the 83-year-old retired from his construction business more than 20 years ago, he has yet to stop moving.

This bilingual (English and Spanish) octogenarian manages to be up at dawn to milk his six goats and run his 55-acre farm. He's back at 6 p.m. to milk the goats again. In between, he either tends his garden or fruit trees, visits any of the number of organizations for which he continues to volunteer or visits any of the seven children, 19 grandchildren or 21 great-grandchildren he shares with his wife, Claudia.

“I've been busy all my life and can't see stopping as long as I have health,” says Whetten. In his business, Whetten constructed many buildings in the United States and Mexico. So, as a founding member of the health center, he played a key role in the building of Chiricahua's $600,000 community health center. He served as site superintendent and was there every day to make sure the construction process ran smoothly.

Today, the center – a $1.7 million enterprise – serves more than 1,000 patients a month and is totally debt free.

“Some years back, the county raised the tax on cigarettes 40 cents a pack and designated the money for people who didn’t have health insurance,” Whetten says. “Over the years, it accumulated a lot of money, which helped to build this center.”

“We desperately needed this facility,” he says. “Our nearest hospital is 20 miles away.

Today, the center has a full-time family practice doctor, two part-time interns, a part-time OB/GYN and two full-time nurse practitioners. It serves the 6,225-square-mile Cochese County – which has only 11 people per square mile.

Innovation is key to growth at Community Health Services in Fremont, Ohio. But innovation comes only when a community health center has resources to develop new services.

That's why it is handy to have a banker on the board of directors.

“We are now in the process of organizing and opening a sick-child, day-care center,” says Robert Fuchs, assistant vice president of Old Fort Bank and chairman of the board of the center, which serves 9,000 users in a five-county area. “We are always looking for new ways to serve our population, and we realized that parents who work full-time often must miss work when their children are sick.

Fuchs joined Community Health Services in 1990 at the invitation of the clinic founder, Jean Seaburger.

“We met at the bank,” Fuchs said. “As we talked, she realized it would help to have some people with a financial background on the board of directors. When she learned I had served on other boards, such as the United Way and American Cancer Society, she invited me to a meeting. I went and soon realized I could make a positive contribution, so I joined.”

Fuchs quickly showed he could explain financial statements in layman's terms and could recommend what to do with reserve funds. So after a year, he was elected treasurer of the 11-member board.

Since then, the center has added a modern addition onto its old turn-of-the-century building. The addition doubled the facility's floor space. It then purchased two lots on either side of the building and paved over the lots to provide parking for its patients and personnel.

Fuchs, who is married with one daughter, has used the center since his family doctor retired eight years ago. “I enjoy going there as a patient,” he says. “It gives me another perspective on the center and helps me to appreciate the services we provide.”
THE CASE OF THE MEDDLING BOARD CHAIR

“He’s struck again, Stan,” said Helen Troyer into the mouth-piece of her office telephone. On the other end of the line was Stanley Garcia, a good friend and mentor over the years.

“Refresh my memory,” Helen. Is he still chair of your board?”

“Yes, still chair and still up to his old tricks. For three years I’ve put up with his weekly visits to all of our sites, acting like the inspector general. I’ve put up with weekly lunches where he grills me about every detail. I’ve even put up with his requests for weekly financial figures.”

“I’ve put up with those things because he’s a well-meaning board member and a strong supporter of our organization. His business contacts have helped us obtain several six-figure gifts. His energy is boundless.

“But today was the last straw. He called me this morning and said that he has found the perfect candidate for our director of finance position. And he said he wants to be with me when I interview all final candidates. I feel more like an executive assistant than an executive director.”

Helen Troyer paused to catch her breath.

“What do other board members think about the situation?” Stanley Garcia asked.

“I don’t know; I haven’t talked with many of them about it. I don’t think most of them realize what’s going on.”

“Sounds to me, Helen, like you have a problem.”

“I know I do, Stan. That’s why I called you. What should I do?”

What should Stan tell Helen?

Member 1

The trick will be to channel Mr. Winston’s energy so that his support continues, but he gets out of day-to-day management. I would suggest that Ms. Troyer heap great praise on Mr. Winston for that portion of his support that has been helpful and appropriate, without mentioning the meddling. This praise should be given in the presence of the rest of the board and should be followed (not too closely – it shouldn’t look like a set up) by the suggestion of some long-term tasks for which Mr. Winston is the perfect candidate.

One example of such a task would be chairing a very busy committee -- hopefully a committee so busy that Mr. Winston won’t have time to meddle elsewhere. Care must be taken and advance inquiries made to ensure that Mr. Winston is indeed interested in the assignment, will accept it and will contribute positively to the organization. In other words, a mere set up won’t work.

Member 2

The issue needs to be resolved on two fronts: First, Helen Troyer must inform the chairperson that she considers the request to interview staff inappropriate and that she intends to move forward without his involvement. Second, she must involve other board members to ensure that appropriate policies and safeguards are in place to prevent this behavior in the future.

Helen should immediately contact a board member, preferably the chair of the personnel committee, and reaffirm the agency’s policies that govern the hiring of staff below the level of chief executive. She should inform this person of the chairperson’s request to participate in interviewing job candidates and ask that he be reminded that his is inappropriate. To correct this matter, Helen needs the support of other board members who understand the difference between administration and policy-making.

Member 3

Stan should tell Helen that only when board terms are established – with additional limits on the consecutive number of years a board member may serve as an officer – will this problem become manageable.

In the meantime, Helen must look at her job description, assuming she has one, and determine whether she has the authority over the hiring and firing of staff. If she does (most executive directors do), Helen must point this out very diplomatically to Mr. Winston while at the same time expressing her deep appreciation of his interest and offer of help. She might also offer to enlist his and the board’s assistance if she finds herself unable to make the final decision.

It is fortunate that Helen has kept her counsel and not shared her problems with other board members, since board members tend to stick up for one another no matter how good a job the executive director is doing or how bad a job the board is doing. Helen must direct her efforts to board training as the next step in the maturation of the organization. Hopefully, such training will result in amended bylaws and clearly defined board and staff responsibilities. Until this happens, her life as an executive assistant will continue.

Editor’s note: Each Issue of Across The Board features a case study that portrays a commonly encountered situation. Although similar to many true-life situations, these cases do not describe any particular organization. This issue’s case study is adapted from Board Member, the membership periodical of the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 2000 L Street, NW, Suite 510, Washington DC, 20036. 202-452-6262. Used with permission. All rights reserved.
Title: The New Community Collaboration Manual  
Author: National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations  
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Master the nuts and bolts of building effective collaborations whether you are a new or experienced collaborator. Also included, how to work with the media and use information technology.  
Available from: The National Assembly  
203-347-2080  
www.nasassembly.org

Title: Nonprofit Mergers  
Author: David La Piana  
Pages: 26  
Cost: $12.00  
Mergers are a way of life in the for-profit world. Although less common with nonprofits, if your nonprofit is struggling to survive or you are looking for ways to strengthen your organization, you might consider a merger. This concise booklet makes a strong case for mergers and discusses common characteristics; how a merger should proceed; potential problems; and the board's role in a merger.  
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