



Coalition Builds Capacity to Become the National Voice of the Physical Activity Movement

Developing leadership to promote physical activity among Americans

SUMMARY

From 2000 through 2006, the [National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity](#), an advocacy and member organization, built its capacity to serve as a national "voice" for the physical activity movement and its ability to sustain itself.

Key Results

- In 2002, the coalition completed a five-year "Plan for Physical Activity Leadership" that articulated a mission for the coalition and defined its leadership role in advocating for policies that support physical activity at the national, state and local levels. (See [Appendix 1](#) for details.)
- In 2002, the coalition relocated its corporate headquarters from Indianapolis, Ind., to Washington and hired professional staff in order to place itself as a national voice.
- The coalition's roster of dues-paying lead members increased to 19 in 2006 from eight in 2000 through the addition of 11 major organizations promoting physical activity. (See [Appendix 2](#) for a list of members.)
- The coalition has become self-sustaining by increasing annual contributions from members. By 2006, membership dues represented 98 percent of the total coalition budget.
- The coalition informed its members and other stakeholders about physical activity by initiating a variety of services, including newsletters, an informational [Web site](#), legislative reports on physical activity, issue forums for policy-makers and national conferences.

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provided \$758,060 in funding through a series of four grants from May 2000 through August 2006.

THE PROBLEM

In 1996, the landmark *Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health* drew national attention to the problem of physical inactivity and its health consequences for Americans—including diabetes, heart disease and obesity. The report pointed to research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showing that more than 60 percent of Americans are not regularly physically active, and 25 percent of adults are not active at all.

In response to recommendations in the report, three major health-promoting organizations—the American Heart Association, the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance—joined together to establish the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity in Indianapolis, Ind. The coalition's role was to provide national leadership in advocating for policies and environmental change to support greater levels of physical activity.

Originally a volunteer organization, the coalition drew support from dues-paying lead members while offering free membership to program affiliates. By 1999, the coalition had grown to include some 170 organizations representing public health, physical activity, medicine, science, business, recreation and other fields.

By 2000, the coalition needed additional resources to fulfill its potential as a strong national voice that could help Americans achieve the physical fitness and activity goals of *Healthy People 2010*—the national health objectives for the first decade of the 21st century. Specifically, the coalition needed to build its capacity through engaging in strategic planning, moving to a larger facility, recruiting professional staff and adding to its membership base.

CONTEXT

The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity sought to become *the* advocacy organization and voice for all issues related to physical activity. Because there were so many organizations that focused on disparate parts of physical activity—from school programs to community design—RWJF saw a need for an advocacy organization with this broader focus.

Within two years of starting to support the coalition, and beginning in 2002, RWJF launched a suite of national programs designed to work together to increase physical activity through community design, public policies and communications. The programs are:

- *Active Living by Design*. From 2002 through 2007, this program funded 25 community partnerships to develop and implement strategies to increase physical

activity by changing community design. These community partnerships were composed of a minimum of three organizations—at least one representative from health care, public health or the medical community and at least two organizations representing other disciplines, such as planning, transportation, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, real estate development, parks and recreation, housing, public safety, education and/or other related fields.

- *Leadership for Healthy Communities* (formerly called *Active Living Leadership*) works with government leaders to create policies that reduce childhood obesity by promoting active living, healthy eating and access to healthy foods. The program started in 2002 and will end in November 2010.
- *Active Living Network* promoted active, healthy environments by building a national coalition of leaders and advocates from the professions influencing community design, including land use, architecture and urban planning. RWJF supported the network from 2002 to 2007.
- *Active Living Research* supports research to examine how environments and policies influence active living for children and their families (for more information see [Program Results](#)). The program started in 2002 and will end in November 2012.
- *Active Living Resource Center* provides technical assistance to create active communities. RWJF program officers expected many communities to be interested in *Active Living by Design*, and, in fact, more than 1,000 communities applied for funding and were not chosen for participation in the program. The resource center, the subject of this report, was established to provide resources to them. See [Program Results](#) for more information.

THE PROJECT

With four RWJF grants running from May 2000 to August 2006, the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity built its capacity to carry out a leadership role in advocating for increased physical activity among Americans of all ages. The coalition's efforts focused on programs that encouraged greater levels of physical activity by individuals, as well as policies that promoted sustainable, activity-friendly environments.

Project Activities

Planning

With an initial planning grant, ID# 038264, project staff worked with consultant Denis Prager, Ph.D., to outline a vision, mission and role for the coalition. Prager conducted a series of 12 planning sessions from February 2000 to May 2000 that examined the national needs and opportunities for increasing physical activity and assessed the distinctive role that the coalition could play in meeting those needs.

Four task forces, composed of coalition members, focused on the following areas:

- Vision and Goals
- Strategic Blueprint
- Building Relationships and Partnerships
- Central Organization.

Enhancing the Infrastructure

Under the second grant, ID# 039659, the coalition used results of the planning process to produce a five-year strategic blueprint (*A Plan for Physical Activity Leadership*). It also relocated its corporate headquarters to Washington and hired additional staff.

Building the Membership Base

Throughout the six-year grant period, a key objective was to increase both the number of members and their financial contribution to sustaining the organization. By 2002, the coalition began to require members to pay dues, ranging from \$10,000 (lead members) to \$100 (local community organizations). The only exception is for government agencies and affiliated state coalitions, whose membership is complimentary.

Lead members form the backbone of the organization and are the focus of recruitment activities. They join by invitation only and are the sole voting members of the coalition.

The coalition Web site provides a detailed breakdown of [membership categories and benefits](#).

Defining a National Leadership Role in the Physical Activity Arena

With the two final grants, ID#s 046517 and 049477, the coalition focused on activities to establish and sustain its role as a national leader in the promotion of greater physical activity. Strategies included:

- Partnering with national organizations to improve nutrition and to increase physical activity in schools and work sites. The coalition served as a national partner for the [Action for Healthy Kids](#) organization, which addresses the epidemic of overweight and sedentary youth by focusing on changes in schools to improve nutrition and increase physical activity.
- Supporting state physical activity coalitions by hosting bimonthly conference calls as a forum for sharing successes and discussing common challenges and providing monthly state legislation reports on all state-level bills affecting physical activity.

- Advocating for legislative policies that increase funding for physical activity. Using membership dues, the coalition worked with a variety of Washington policy coalitions on specific legislation that provided support for:
 - [Safe Routes to School](#) program under the [Transportation Reauthorization Act](#).
 - Parks and recreation facilities under the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#).
 - Physical education in schools through the [Carol M. White Physical Education Program](#).
 - Physical activity in after-school programs under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Challenges

Recruiting and retaining professional staff to lead and manage the organization during its capacity-building period were challenging. Between 2001 and 2005, three executive directors were hired and subsequently resigned after tenures ranging from several months to several years. In 2005, Communications Director Sheila Franklin assumed the role of director of the coalition and project director for the RWJF grant.

Communications

Over the six years of the grant, the coalition built a communications infrastructure and strategies that enabled it to inform its members, policy-makers and other stakeholders about physical activity policies, emerging science, environmental assessments and intervention efforts at the local, state and national levels. Vehicles for disseminating information to these audiences included newsletters, reports, policy forums, the Web site and national conferences.

Coalition staff made a number of presentations on ways to increase physical activity at national meetings, including the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, the American College of Sports Medicine, the CDC International Congress on Physical Activity and Action for Healthy Kids Summit. Staff also presented testimony on physical activity at sessions of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

Please see [Results](#) for specific examples of communications products and the [Bibliography](#) for more detailed information.

Other Funding

From September 2002 through June 2003, the CDC provided a \$125,000 grant to the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity to provide technical assistance to the state coalitions working to promote physical activity. The coalition also used the grant to assist in promoting the CDC's Youth Media Campaign, which sought to increase physical activity among youth ages 9 to 13.

In August 2003, the CDC awarded the coalition a \$40,000 grant to support a June 2004 national conference on the current state of physical fitness policy and another \$10,000 grant to support a second national conference in May 2006.

RESULTS

Project staff described the following results in reports to the Foundation:

- **In 2002, the coalition's board of directors approved *A Plan for Physical Activity Leadership*, a five-year blueprint to guide the development of the organization.** The plan (available [online](#)) articulates the coalition's mission, leadership goals and strategic objectives and an action plan for achieving them.

See [Appendix 1](#) for more detail on the blueprint.

- **In 2002, the coalition established a new corporate headquarters in Washington.** The new headquarters provides coalition staff members with a location from which they can inform policy on physical activity. The coalition also recruited an executive director and staff with professional expertise in membership acquisition, public education, communications and marketing.
- **Between 2000 and 2006, the coalition increased its roster of dues-paying lead members to 19 from eight through the addition of 11 major organizations committed to promoting physical activity.**
 - Lead members contribute \$10,000 in dues annually.
 - Among the lead members recruited during the grant period were the YMCA of the USA, the United States Tennis Association, USA Track & Field and Nike.
- **The coalition also recruited eight new national strategic partner organizations.**
 - Strategic partners contribute \$1,000 per year.
 - Strategic partners recruited during the grant period included AARP, the American Geriatric Society, the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the American Councils on Exercise.

See [Appendix 2](#) for a list of lead members, lead members added during the project period and national strategic partners.

- **By 2006, lead and other members contributed nearly \$200,000 in annual membership dues.** Membership dues represented 98 percent of the total coalition budget, enabling the organization to be financially self-sustaining.
- **From 2002 to 2006, the coalition established itself as a national voice to focus attention on the problem of physical inactivity among Americans and to advocate for policy changes to promote a more activity-friendly environment.** Examples of key results follow:

- Launched two electronic newsletters in 2002, the *NCPA News* and the *Activity Advocate*. The first is a compilation of research, funding sources and examples of best practice; the second is a review of federal and state legislative progress related to physical activity. Some 1,800 subscribers receive these publications, which are available free (online subscription required). See the [Bibliography](#) for more information.
- Hosted two national conferences: *Physical Activity Policy in Action: Scanning the Landscape* (2004) and *Physical Activity Program Successes—Impacting Communities, Effecting Change* (2006). Some 175 stakeholders attended the two conferences.

For the 2004 conference, the coalition published a legislative reference manual, inventorying policies enacted at the state and federal levels from 1998 through 2003 in schools, work sites, parks/public spaces, transportation and health. In 2006, attendees received a binder of resources on physical activity programs to help them cultivate similar programs at home.

- Hosted four issue forums for policy-makers in Washington in 2002 and 2003. Forum topics covered physical activity in relation to the built environment, older Americans and transportation and public health.
- Co-hosted a micro-summit, *Healthy Lifestyles and Beautiful Parks—A Community Solution* with Americans for Our Heritage and Recreation. Some 50 individuals attended the event held in July 2003 in Asheville, N.C.
- Helped a committee of researchers and advocates produce the [Physical Activity for Youth Policy Initiative](#) report, which provides examples of model legislation and makes policy recommendations in four areas: after-school programs, community programs, community design and school programs. Some 30 organizations endorsed the document at the CDC's *2002 National Conference on Promoting Better Health for Young People through Physical Activity and Sports*.
- Redesigned the coalition's [Web site](#). The Web site, relaunched in October 2001, is a repository for all the resources, documents and information that the coalition collects and distributes. The Web site includes articles, statistics and reports from leading government and health organizations; a comprehensive calendar of national physical activity-related events; and information on how to get involved with the coalition at the national and state levels.
- Publishes a monthly report for members that compiles all state legislation affecting physical activity. The coalition has published this report, which is still sent electronically to some 120 members, since October 2003.

SIGNIFICANCE TO THE FIELD

According to former RWJF Program Officer Karen Gerlach, the coalition became one of the national voices for physical activity in the United States and an advocate for an active lifestyle.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Create a strategic plan that clearly outlines mission, goals and objectives to serve as a road map for building a sustainable membership organization.** The coalition's five-year strategic blueprint included a time line, work plan, evaluation tools and budget needed to achieve its goals. (Project Director/Franklin)
2. **In a broad field, find a specific niche to serve in order to attract and maintain members.** Through its programming efforts, state coalitions and information dissemination, the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity established a clear role as convener to inform, coalesce and mobilize communities to address physical inactivity. (Project Director/Franklin)
3. **Focus on relationship building and strategic partnerships to leverage advocacy efforts.** By working with diverse strategic partners, the coalition was able to achieve economies of scale, increase the visibility of the issue of physical activity and advance legislative policy. In addition, pursuing policy priorities in collaboration with other groups raised the coalition's visibility within the advocacy community and aligned it with a group of respected transportation, smart growth, child health, business, environmental and public health organizations. (Project Director/Franklin)
4. **Find an advocacy issue and own it.** While partnering with other organizations on advocacy efforts, the board of directors also was committed to making the coalition an advocacy leader. To stand out in this area, the coalition selected a specific legislative issue annually and took the lead on it, convening interested parties and coordinating all advocacy activities. (Project Director/Franklin)
5. **When building the capacity of a small organization, "grow" your staff as resources become available.** Recruiting new staff members first and then looking for the resources to retain them were problematic, contributing to early staffing turmoil. An organization with a small staff always wishes for more, but coalition leadership realized the importance of working within its means. (Project Director/Franklin)

AFTERWARD

The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity continues to attract new lead members and national strategic partners. In addition, the coalition continues to publish newsletters, host conferences, refine its Web site and provide other services for members, as well as advocate for funding to promote increased levels of physical activity among Americans.

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APPENDIX 1

National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity: Strategic Blueprint

The coalition's five-year strategic blueprint, "A Plan for Physical Activity Leadership," includes statements of the organization's mission, leadership goals and strategic objectives and an action plan for achieving them. The plan is available [online](#).

Mission of the Coalition

The mission of the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity is to unite the strengths of public, private and industry efforts into collaborative partnerships that inspire and empower all Americans to lead more physically active lifestyles.

Seven Leadership Goals of the Coalition

- Create a communications infrastructure and strategy that are accessible for individuals, organizations and communities to share information pertaining to policy changes, emerging science, environmental assessments and intervention efforts.
- Engage traditional and nontraditional partners, collaborators, and allies to participate in the coalition.
- Convene influential voices from all relevant sectors to build consensus and strategically link organizations for optimum impact.
- Articulate a common cause action plan or "Consensus Policy Platform."
- Provide information to local and state organizations on policy change approaches that emphasize the benefits and positive outcomes of policy change actions.
- Document and report the sustainable impact of policy changes that reverse unintended barriers to physical activity.
- Serve as a model for state and local coalitions dedicated to reversing unintended barriers to physical activity.

Four Strategic Objectives of the Coalition

- Champion public policies that reduce barriers to physical activity.
- Increase the adoption of activity-friendly community models.
- Promote incentives that result in greater adherence to recommended physical activity behaviors through community, school and work site environments.
- Influence policy and environmental changes for populations with low rates of physical activity.

APPENDIX 2

Member Organizations

Lead Organizations

Lead members (as of June 2000)

- American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
- American Cancer Society
- American College of Sports Medicine
- American Heart Association
- International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association
- National Association for Health & Fitness
- National Athletic Trainers' Association
- National Recreation and Park Association

Lead members recruited during the project period (2000–2006)

- Connor Sport Court
- McNeil Nutritionals
- NFL Youth Football Fund
- NIKE
- Outdoor Industry Association
- PE4life
- Pop Warner Little Scholars
- Shaping America's Health
- USA Swimming
- USA Track & Field
- YMCA of the USA

Strategic Partners

In addition to lead members, the coalition recruited the following national strategic partners/national nonprofit organizations during the project period:

- AARP
- American Geriatrics Society
- National Collegiate Athletic Association
- Researchers against Inactivity-related Disorders
- Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association
- Women's Sports Foundation
- American Council on Exercise
- SnowSports Industries America

See the coalition Web site for a [list of current members](#) and their membership categories (as of February 2008).

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2005 Physical Activity Legislation. Washington: National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, 2004 and 2005. This publication is a master list of all physical activity legislation, both state and federal levels. It is organized alphabetically (by state) as well as by category in major topic areas (recreation/sports, environment/trails, access/disparity issues/obesity prevention/wellness, school programming and transportation).

Newsletters

NCPPA News. Washington: National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity. The NCPPA News is an electronic newsletter published twice each month that contains links to news stories (from media outlets across the country) featuring physical activity and issues related to activities, new research and reports, funding opportunities and upcoming events. Published 68 issues in the grant period. Subscription list numbered 1,800 in January 2008. Current issue available on the [NCCPA Web site](#).

Activity Advocate. Washington: National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity. Activity Advocate is an electronic newsletter that covers the latest Capitol Hill actions, as well as what is happening in statehouses across the country on physical activity and related issues. Subscription list numbers 1,800 in 2008. Current issue available on the [NCCPA Web site](#).

World Wide Web Sites

www.ncppa.org. Provides information and resources related to physical activity policy, advocacy, research, best practices and the NCPPA organization. Washington: National Council for Promoting Physical Activity, October 2001.

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