

# State Domestic Violence Coalitions and The Violence Against Women Act

## GUIDING THE JOURNEY



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**National Network to End Domestic Violence**

The National Network to End Domestic Violence,  
a social change organization representing state domestic violence coalitions,  
is dedicated to creating a social, political and economic environment  
in which violence against women  
no longer exists.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*NNEDV would like to thank the many directors of state domestic violence coalitions who took the time to reflect on the history of their coalitions and a vision for the future. Those who worked to establish local shelter programs, state domestic violence coalitions, and the Violence Against Women Act share a special place in our national history. As always, we are grateful to the survivors who have shared their stories and who inspire our struggle to end oppression.*

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# HISTORY OF COALITIONS

## Introduction

At present, state domestic violence coalitions exist in every state, the District of Columbia, and several territories. State coalitions support local domestic violence shelters and sexual assault programs and provide state-wide coordination of efforts to combat domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Indian tribal nations have begun to develop tribal domestic violence coalitions with similar goals.

Every state domestic violence coalition has a unique history within its own state, and, collectively, the coalitions played a critical role in the enactment and implementation of the federal Violence Against Women Act. Coalitions learned a great deal about developing innovative programs and overcoming challenges from their sister state coalitions. The vision of early leaders from state domestic violence coalitions created options for survivors across the nation, and coalitions continue to guide communities in their quest to end violence against women.

### *Creation of the battered women's movement*

In the 1970s, communities across the country began to understand the prevalence of domestic violence and the need for survivors to have safe harbors and legal protection. It was a time when legislators, police officers, prosecutors, and judges did not treat domestic violence as a crime. It was a time when protection order statutes and civil laws protecting domestic violence victims did not exist. It was a time when federal laws did not address domestic violence and when state laws did not provide funding for domestic violence shelters.

The battered women's movement developed during this time as community members began to realize that domestic violence survivors needed food, shelter, support, and a peaceful place to recover and to sort out their options. The earliest shelters often began in someone's basement or garage when women gave safe havens to other women who were abused. Many of the early shelter groups arose out of consciousness raising groups that were a product of the women's movement.<sup>1</sup>

Historians view the battered women's movement in the United States as an outgrowth of the anti-rape movements and the women's liberation movements, which in turn were based on the civil rights and anti-war movements.<sup>2</sup> Leaders in the battered women's movement described domestic violence as a social problem and identified its cause as unequal power relations between the sexes, on a personal level and in a wider social and cultural context.<sup>3</sup> There was an analysis that cultural beliefs about male domination and female subordination created

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<sup>1</sup> R. EMERSON DOBASH AND RUSSELL P. DOBASH, *WOMEN, VIOLENCE, AND SOCIAL CHANGE* 25 (1992).

<sup>2</sup> DOBASH, *supra* note 1 at 26; SUSAN SCHECHTER, *WOMEN AND MALE VIOLENCE* 30 (1982).

<sup>3</sup> DOBASH, *supra* note 1 at 26.

social support for violence against women. Advocates saw a need for change in the criminal justice, social services, health, legal and economic systems.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the earliest shelters, such as Women's Advocates in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Transition House in Boston, Massachusetts, had their roots in the women's liberation movement. Women's Advocates began as a consciousness raising group whose founders wished to create a utopian community and evolved into a shelter for battered women.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, formerly battered women and other activists formed Transition House as a shelter for women with an underlying political goal of ending oppression against women.<sup>6</sup>

### *Evolution of state domestic violence coalitions*

The creation of state domestic violence coalitions varied by jurisdiction. In many states, women who ran local shelter programs joined together to talk about their common struggles. Activists from local shelters formed coalitions to reduce their isolation and to create broader changes within their states. In some cases, advocates created coalitions to tackle particular fiscal issues, such as a need for state funding to support local domestic violence shelters and services. The Rhode Island Coalition, founded in 1979, initially obtained state funding in the amount of \$5,000 through legislation.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the impetus to form coalitions in Kentucky in 1982 and in Iowa in 1985 was to secure consistent funding from the states.<sup>8</sup>

In other states, activists created coalitions when they came together to enact legislative changes. In several states, advocates formed coalitions in order to establish protection order laws. For instance, the Missouri Coalition came into being when advocates enacted a protection order law in partnership with legal aid attorneys, and volunteers ran the Coalition for eight years.<sup>9</sup>

In Pennsylvania, legislators, legal services attorneys, and shelter staff came together to lobby for an alternative to criminal proceedings for abuse survivors.<sup>10</sup> Staff from seven to nine programs met in Harrisburg and testified about the need for the Protection From Abuse Act. Afterwards, advocates continued to meet every six weeks, traveling to each other's programs and bringing their sleeping bags with them. The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence officially organized as a nonprofit in 1976.

The formation of some coalitions represented an attempt to guide state policy on domestic violence issues. In Michigan, for example, one of the first actions of the coalition was to pass enabling legislation for the Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board.<sup>11</sup> This was to ensure that the Governor and the state were accountable for funding and monitoring domestic violence services and that advocates could provide advice on policy issues.

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<sup>4</sup> DOBASH, *supra* note 1 at 26.

<sup>5</sup> SCHECHTER, *supra* note 2 at 34.

<sup>6</sup> SCHECHTER, *supra* note 2 at 34.

<sup>7</sup> Telephone conversation with Deb DiBare, Director of the Rhode Island Coalition.

<sup>8</sup> Telephone conversations with Sharon Currens, Executive Director, Kentucky Domestic Violence Association and Laurie Schipper, Executive Director of the Iowa Coalition.

<sup>9</sup> Telephone conversation with Colleen Coble, Executive Director of the Missouri Coalition.

<sup>10</sup> Telephone conversations with Susan Kelly-Dreiss, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) and Barbara Hart, Legal Director of the PCADV.

<sup>11</sup> Telephone conversation with Mary Keefe, Executive Director of the Michigan Coalition.

The earliest coalitions often began with meager budgets at a time when shelters were simply the homes of other women. In Texas, for instance, in 1978, five women sat on a floor, came up with a plan, and began to lobby for funding, education, and changes in public policy.<sup>12</sup> Advocates often formed coalitions so they could support each other in developing programs and policy.<sup>13</sup>

The earliest coalitions reflected the values of the battered women's movement. Many advocates viewed battering as a result of women's inferior position in society, economic inequality, and a history of discrimination against women in the social and legal systems.<sup>14</sup> The goals of the movement included assisting victims, challenging male violence, and changing the position of women in society.<sup>15</sup> Like any movement, participants had diverse ideologies, but all shared the desire to end abuse.

### *Birth of a national coalition*

The creation of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) illustrates the strength of an advocacy movement supported by the federal government. In July 1977, there was a White House meeting between federal agency personnel, battered women, and advocates to discuss how federal agencies could help end violence against women.<sup>16</sup> In 1978, the United States Commission on Civil Rights brought together hundreds of activists in the battered women's movement to inform the Commission, and the NCADV formed during this meeting.<sup>17</sup>

The NCADV's goals included the following:<sup>18</sup>

- To monitor and impact legislation relating to domestic violence and family policy
- To aid in the development of state and regional coalitions
- To develop a national network of shelters
- To educate the public to a non-acceptance of violence and to strive towards the complete elimination of violence in our society
- To support and initiate change in traditional sex-role expectations for women and men

While the NCADV had its roots in the earlier shelter programs and several state coalitions, its formation also led to the creation of additional state coalitions. Activists who worked with abused women saw the need to coordinate their activities, lobby for legislative changes, and involve state governments in the struggle to end violence.

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<sup>12</sup> Telephone conversation with Sheryl Cates, Executive Director, Texas Council on Family Violence.

<sup>13</sup> For example, advocates created the Wisconsin Coalition Against Women Abuse in 1977 for this purpose.

Telephone conversation with Mary Lauby, Executive Director, Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

<sup>14</sup> DOBASH, *supra* note 1 at 131.

<sup>15</sup> DOBASH, *supra* note 1 at 28.

<sup>16</sup> SCHECHTER, *supra* note 2 at 136.

<sup>17</sup> SCHECHTER, *supra* note 2 at 136.

<sup>18</sup> DOBASH, *supra* note 1 at 36.

## State Domestic Violence Coalitions and the Violence Against Women Act

The creation of state domestic violence coalitions led to rapid legislative changes in many states. Despite the enactment of state civil protection order statutes and the strengthening of criminal statutes, criminal justice system personnel often continued to ignore or to mistreat domestic violence survivors. Advocates for battered women began to strategize with legislators about developing a federal law to change the nation's cultural tolerance for violence against women and to combat historical discrimination against women in the criminal justice system.

When an early draft of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was being considered, the Judiciary Committee conference report stated the following:

“Our country has an unfortunate blind spot when it comes to certain crimes against women. Historically, crimes against women have been perceived as anything but crime – as a “family” problem, as a “private” matter, as sexual “miscommunication.” . . . Until we name a problem, we cannot hope to see it for what it is. And until we name all violence against women as crime, it will be seen neither as violence nor as crime.”<sup>19</sup>

Advocates urged the federal government to respond to this national crisis, and between 1990-1994, legislators shaped and revised several versions of the VAWA in Congress.

State domestic violence coalitions were involved heavily in the passage of the VAWA. Coalition staff worked with local programs to provide witnesses, including victims, police officers, prosecutors, and advocates to testify in a series of hearings. Coalitions also mobilized advocates, survivors, and other community members to explain to Congressional representatives the need for the federal law. Coalition staff, such as Debby Tucker from Texas and Colleen Coble from Missouri, were involved in early discussions and drafting sessions for the VAWA. A group of state coalitions and some national organizations formed the Domestic Violence Coalition on Public Policy, later known as the National Network to End Domestic Violence, to help enact the legislation.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, the VAWA was enacted to prevent violent crimes against women, to hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes, and to improve systemic responses to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

Since the landmark VAWA was signed into law on September 13, 1994, the law has made a critical difference in the lives of survivors across the country. More than \$1.5 billion in grant funds have supported the work of prosecutors, law enforcement officers, victim advocates, judges, and social services professionals at the federal, state, local and tribal levels. Communities across the country used the VAWA funds to train criminal justice personnel and to support shelters and victim advocacy programs for survivors. Leaders established specialized domestic violence units in courts, prosecutors' offices, and police departments to improve the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence. While the VAWA funds supported critical programs and helped countless victims, the impact of the law went far beyond merely distributing money.

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<sup>19</sup> The Violence Against Women Act of 1991, CONF. REP. NO.102-197, at 37 (1991).

<sup>20</sup> ALBERT R. ROBERTS, HELPING BATTERED WOMEN: NEW PERSPECTIVES AND REMEDIES 21 (1996).

For the first time, the comprehensive law created a federal response to violence against women, with an emphasis on changing the culture's indifference to it. Under the VAWA and subsequent laws, certain crimes perpetrated primarily against women became federal offenses subject to federal prosecution.<sup>21</sup> The law also created the National Domestic Violence Hotline, ensuring that victims throughout the country could obtain access to critical resources.<sup>22</sup> The VAWA granted battered immigrants access to immigration relief without having to rely on their abusers.<sup>23</sup> And the law promoted partnerships between criminal justice entities and advocacy organizations by requiring applicants for funding to collaborate with nonprofit, nongovernmental programs working with domestic violence and sexual assault survivors.<sup>24</sup> These critical changes in federal law resulted from the daily work of local shelter programs and state domestic violence coalitions.

### *The implementation of the VAWA*

Across the country, state domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions played a critical role in implementing the VAWA. In many states, agencies administering the VAWA state formula block grants requested assistance from the coalitions in developing state plans for allocating funds. Coalitions helped shape how VAWA funds were spent in the states and advocated of behalf of member domestic violence programs.

In Wisconsin, for example, the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Sexual Assault Coalition Director met with state agency personnel and requested a thorough planning process for the use of the VAWA funds. As a result of input from these coalitions, the funds for victim services focused on underserved populations. Similarly, in Connecticut, the Coalition worked with the state agency to determine what to fund with the victim services allocation, and in Arkansas, the Coalition served as the peer review committee for the VAWA state funds. In Texas, staff from the Family Violence Council participated in the Governor's Commission to help decide how the state would implement the VAWA.

In addition to advising state agencies about the distribution of the VAWA funds, state coalitions often played a role in the enactment of state legislation related to the VAWA, such as state full faith and credit statutes. Coalitions also worked to bring their states into compliance with the VAWA conditions necessary to receive certain types of funding. Such criteria included ensuring that victims were not required to pay costs related to civil or criminal domestic violence cases or for sexual assault forensic exams. The Connecticut Coalition, for instance, helped pass a state law to eliminate restraining order fees. The VAWA helped coalitions to make progress on legislative goals such as eliminating the issuance of mutual protection orders and encouraging the arrest of domestic violence perpetrators.

In some states, advocates found that state statutes were easier to pass due to the federal money at risk. States enacted laws to comply with federal mandates and often improved other

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<sup>21</sup> These included interstate domestic violence, interstate violation of a protection order, interstate stalking, and possession of firearms by convicted domestic violence offenders or those subject to qualifying protection orders. See 18 U.S.C. §§ 2261, 2262, 2261A, 18 U.S.C. §§ 922(g)(9), 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(8).

<sup>22</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 10416.

<sup>23</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1154(a), 8 U.S.C. § 1254(a).

<sup>24</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 3796gg-1(c)(2).



domestic violence laws as part of this “federal package.” In other states, however, there was a backlash, and hostile groups emerged in response to the perceived power of the battered women’s movement. Some state legislatures enacted problematic custody statutes (for example, prohibiting the relocation of custodial parents or requiring joint custody), casting these laws as a “balance” to the domestic violence statutes.

In addition to fiscal and legislative advice, state coalitions also played an advisory role for many community agencies receiving the VAWA grants. In Michigan, for example, one million dollars in federal funds was spent on police, prosecution, and judicial initiatives.<sup>25</sup> The Michigan Coalition was on advisory groups for each of these projects.

In some states, coalitions were subject to overwhelming demands during the time period immediately after the enactment of the VAWA. State coalitions worked on police, prosecution, judicial, child protective services, and victim services efforts. Because some organizations that received funding had minimal domestic violence or sexual assault expertise, state coalitions scrambled to train people. Coalitions often were asked to serve on every state-wide project and felt a need to participate in emerging programs, but lacked resources. Over time, coalition staff began to be accepted as experts, and they developed collaborative relationships with criminal justice and governmental staff.

Coalitions also continued to work intensely with their member domestic violence programs. In some cases, coalition staff helped advocates repair their relationships with local criminal justice personnel and encouraged coordinated community response teams. In others, they reminded member programs of their missions to ensure that programs did not abandon their goals as a result of increased funding.

### *The need for reauthorization of the VAWA*

Between 1994 and 2000, coalitions conducted their daily work and also focused on reauthorizing and expanding the VAWA. Coalition staff knew that without federal funding, many of the newly developed units in prosecutors’ offices, police departments, and courts would disappear. Domestic violence survivors continued to need advocacy, shelter, and legal representation for survival, so the reauthorization of the VAWA was critical.

Many state coalitions worked with the NNEDV and the NCADV to educate members of Congress about the need for the law. For instance, the Connecticut Coalition contacted members of Congress and described the potential impact of the legislation, and the Michigan Coalition worked on the reauthorization of the VAWA for years. The Texas Council and its member programs prepared documents for the national domestic violence organizations and assisted with testimony, providing witnesses for Congressional hearings. Other coalitions, like the Wisconsin Coalition, worked to obtain desperately needed funds for coalitions.

Prior to the enactment of the VAWA 2000, few coalitions received STOP funds to perform technical assistance tasks. The legislative efforts of the NNEDV and member coalitions changed this. Among other improvements, the VAWA 2000 authorized the Grants to State Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Coalitions Program, recognizing the special role of coalitions in coordinating statewide efforts to end violence against women.

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<sup>25</sup> The rest of the funding goes to local domestic violence programs, and the Coalition provides technical assistance to the shelter programs.

## *The implementation of the VAWA 2000*

The VAWA 2000 was signed into law on October 28, 2000. It reauthorized critical grant programs created by the VAWA and subsequent legislation, established new grant programs, and strengthened federal law. The law reinforced the role of state domestic violence coalitions in coordinating advocacy and services for survivors.

After the enactment of the VAWA 2000, coalitions continued to inform state legislatures about compliance with the federal law. In Connecticut and Arkansas, for example, the coalitions helped pass legislation that honored out of state protection orders. Consistent with the VAWA 2000, these new laws overturned older statutes that required victims to register out of state or tribal orders prior to enforcement. In Wisconsin, the Coalition helped eliminate a service fee for protection orders.

In some parts of the country, state coalitions enjoyed a collaborative relationship with the state agency administering VAWA funds. In Connecticut, for example, the VAWA state administrator commissioned a study on dual arrest due to the coalition's concern about a high dual arrest rate (23% of domestic violence cases). As a result of the study, the state used law enforcement funds to place domestic violence victim advocates in three municipal police departments. These types of partnerships between state domestic violence coalitions and state funding agencies strengthened responses to survivors across the nation.

## *The state domestic violence coalition grant program*

In enacting the VAWA 2000, the Congress recognized that some states had collaborative partnerships with state coalitions while other states asked coalitions to perform critical roles without financial compensation. The Grants to State Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Coalitions Program, and its sister program, the Grants to Tribal Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Coalitions Programs, provided support directly to coalitions. The grants were “for the purposes of coordinating State victim services activities, and collaborating and coordinating with Federal, State, and local entities engaged in violence against women activities.”<sup>26</sup> The VAWA 2000 made clear that these grants to coalitions were intended to supplement – not to replace – STOP funds supporting coalitions for other purposes.

The Office on Violence Against Women's Fiscal Year 2003 solicitation for the coalition grant program describes the following activities for which grant funds may be used:

- ❑ Providing technical assistance to member agencies
- ❑ Expanding the technological capacity of coalitions and/or member programs
- ❑ Developing or enhancing appropriate standards of services for member programs, including culturally appropriate services to underserved populations
- ❑ Conducting statewide, regional and/or community-based meetings or workshops for victim advocates, survivors, legal service providers, and criminal justice representatives
- ❑ Bringing local programs together to identify gaps in services and to coordinate activities
- ❑ Encouraging the representation of underserved populations in coordination activities, including the provision of scholarship funding to underserved communities to participate in planning meetings, task forces, committees, etc.

<sup>26</sup> 42 U.S.C. 3796gg(c)(1).

- ❑ Engaging in activities that promote coalition building at the local and/or state level
- ❑ Coordinating federal, state and/or local law enforcement agencies to develop or enhance strategies to address identified problems
- ❑ Engaging in systems advocacy to effect policy and/or procedural change in order to improve institutional responses to domestic violence and sexual assault

State coalitions have used these grants for a variety of technical assistance activities. Many coalitions direct these funds towards statewide and local trainings. The Arkansas Coalition, for instance, uses this source of funding to educate and train staff from member programs, law enforcement, and other community organizations.

The Connecticut Coalition uses the new VAWA coalition grant for anti-poverty work, outreach to underserved populations, and conducting fatality reviews. In particular, an economic justice specialist will help advocates talk with survivors about their needs for housing, income, and employment. The Coalition also is consulting with Sujata Warriar, a national expert, to help domestic violence programs assess their own communities, determine which populations are not being reached, and improve advocacy for all survivors.

A number of coalitions use these grants to promote advocacy for all victims in the state, including survivors from diverse and traditionally underserved communities. The Wisconsin Coalition employs the funds to supplement training and to work with communities of color and older battered women. In Utah, the Council supports a Diversity Coordinator with these funds to ensure that all victims in the state can access services. In Texas, the grant facilitates community organizing and enhances work with underserved populations. The coalition grant program and other VAWA funds have helped coalitions and local programs improve advocacy for all survivors.

## PRESENT VISION OF STATE COALITIONS

### **Diverse Roles of State Domestic Violence Coalitions**

State domestic violence coalitions are as diverse as the communities they serve. From urban to rural communities, coalitions play a variety of roles in the struggle to end violence against women. Their sizes differ, from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, with a staff of 100, and the Texas Council, with more than 100 programs, to the New Mexico Coalition, with a staff of 3. Their philosophies differ, too, with many coalitions rooted in the feminist movement and others growing out of state governmental or social services programs. Despite these differences, state domestic violence coalitions share the common goal of eradicating violence against women and use a range of strategies to do so.

## *Advocacy*

Domestic violence coalitions advocate on behalf of survivors and member programs. Some coalitions work directly with survivors when help is unavailable on the local level. Other coalitions work through local member programs to ensure that survivors receive the legal services, law enforcement response, and advocacy they need.

Coalitions also advocate on behalf of survivors and member programs with power structures within the state. This may mean lobbying for steady funding for domestic violence programs or providing testimony about a legislative initiative that might harm battered women if enacted. In many states, due to budget cuts, coalitions advocate for continued funding simply to maintain core domestic violence services.

## *State-wide training*

Nearly every coalition serves as a resource on domestic violence for agencies throughout the state. Coalition employees train local domestic violence program staff on policy, legal, management and funding issues, among others. The Kentucky Domestic Violence Association, for instance, sponsored a certification program for all shelter staff statewide. The training program covered the philosophy and history of the movement as well as practical tips on handling crisis calls, documenting cases, and collecting statistics.

State domestic violence coalitions receive requests to train members of other disciplines as well. This may include educating police officers, prosecutors, judges, court personnel, probation officers, health professionals, teachers, social workers, public assistance caseworkers, employers, religious leaders, and lawyers. Such trainings may cover basic topics such as batterers' use of power and control or complex topics such as the impact of new child custody jurisdictional laws.

Staff from the Michigan Coalition trained more than 600 attorneys across the state on domestic violence, divorce, custody and jurisdictional laws, including tribal law matters. This program increased the pool of attorneys who are knowledgeable about domestic violence and improved legal representation for survivors in Michigan.
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In Rhode Island, through a Family Violence Option Advocacy Project, the Coalition trained welfare staff to understand domestic violence issues. The Coalition also participated on the statewide welfare implementation committee. Coalition staff worked to promote culture change within the DHS in collaboration with the Director.

Increasingly, coalition staff are being asked to provide training at state-wide events such as police academies or in academic programs such as law schools and medical schools. For instance, the staff attorney from the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence trains a new generation of attorneys by teaching domestic violence law seminars at two law schools in Wisconsin. Similarly, the Pennsylvania Coalition will be working with the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts to conduct judicial training on domestic violence matters.

### *Funding agency for local programs*

A number of state coalitions serve as pass-through agencies and distribute funding to local domestic violence programs. In Kentucky, for example, the Association administers 5-6 million dollars of state funds for domestic violence programs. Generally, coalitions serve this function for state funds, but in some cases, they may administer federal funds as well, working closely with member programs to develop fair ways of allocating money. Coalitions that distribute funds to member programs can increase the consistency of advocacy and services for battered women and survivors throughout the state.

In other states, coalitions have declined to fulfill this type of function, perceiving it as a conflict with their primary role of providing a statewide voice for member programs. These coalitions do not want to perform such fiscal tasks, viewing the work as a distraction. The Washington State Coalition, for instance, attempts to do mission-based work and to hold on to a vision of social justice that is broader than just domestic violence. Both models provide certain advantages for member programs.

### *Systemic reform*

State domestic violence coalitions attempt to create social change and to reform systems that are not working well for survivors. Systemic reform occurs at many levels. Coalition staff often help draft policies for institutions seeking to change their ways of responding to domestic violence. They may assist police departments to revise their protocols, universities to establish sexual assault policies, or child protective services agencies to employ procedures that protect domestic violence victims. In Connecticut, for example, the Coalition works with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to ensure that its policies support survivors. As a result, domestic violence victim advocates from nonprofit programs will work within DCF offices.

In addition to helping agencies change their policies, coalitions historically have played a critical role in lobbying for legislative change. In many states, coalitions helped pass protection order statutes, criminal statutes, and laws providing funding for domestic violence programs. Coalition staff also fought to improve custody, public assistance, child protective services, jurisdictional, employment, insurance and confidentiality laws for survivors. Without the work of coalitions over the years, many of the legal protections that now exist for survivors would not have been enacted.

Funding streams and tax laws may limit the type and extent of lobbying activities that certain coalitions can perform. However, in response to requests from legislators, coalition staff may provide expert testimony about particular matters or recommend victims or others who may be available to testify. In Utah, for example, after domestic violence program staff urged police chiefs to become involved, the legislature passed a stalking injunction law.

In Connecticut, each member program of the Coalition designates a staff person who will be informed about legislative developments in the state that could affect battered women. These liaisons are available to provide information to legislators as needed or to identify victims willing to testify. In the past, the Coalition helped enact firearms legislation to protect survivors, including a law that requires batterers to turn in their weapons within forty-eight hours of protection order issuance.

### *Problem solving*

Coalitions assist communities when problems arise on a local level. For instance, if a local police department fails to respond to a survivor's calls or refuses to provide survivors with copies of police reports, coalition staff may be able to intervene. If advocacy with the local police chief fails, coalition staff may have relationships with other state-level personnel, such as the state Attorney General, who can help resolve the matter.

Coalition staff also help member programs solve problems. They may provide advice about a funding crisis or an employment issue. Coalitions also work with member programs to ensure that programs comply with civil rights laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act. This may mean making certain that shelters are accessible to victims with limited mobility or that interpreters are available for survivors who do not speak English. Coalitions often work with member programs to replace policies that penalize survivors with more inclusive policies.

In New Mexico, there is a grievance process permitting domestic violence programs to contact the Coalition for assistance. This helps prevent discrimination in shelters, and the Coalition maintains records regarding complaints. The Coalition also offers guidelines to assist programs in reviewing internal rules and evaluating whether or not they are necessary.

### *Public awareness campaigns*

State coalitions often conduct public awareness campaigns to highlight the prevalence of domestic violence in their communities. Such campaigns may take place during October, Domestic Violence Awareness Month, or April, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, or at other times of the year. Public awareness campaigns may include a Silent Witness Vigil at the State Capitol, illustrating the number of domestic violence victims killed during the past year. The Clothesline Project, designed to demonstrate the impact of abuse on victims and children, may be shown in a local area to increase public knowledge.

Education campaigns take a variety of forms. In many communities, local reporters write a series of articles on domestic violence issues in consultation with advocates. Coalitions may design public service announcements for television or for radio shows (including Spanish language or other shows). They may develop campaigns for high schools, doctors' offices, or centers utilized by religious or ethnic communities throughout the state, helping to raise awareness about domestic violence and the relief available.

The Rhode Island Coalition sponsored a national conference, "Media Matters," several years ago to encourage domestic violence programs and the media to work together. Presently, two Coalition staff members conduct media and public relations work, including developing campaigns for Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) in partnership with other New England states. The campaign will include identical billboards, television, bus, and print ads throughout several states, with support from corporate sponsors.

### *A voice for survivors*

At root, coalitions provide a state-level advocacy vehicle through which survivors' voices may be heard. Many coalitions require a certain number of board members to be formerly battered



women to ensure that the coalition's policies are grounded in the real lives of survivors. Others ask a battered women's caucus or task force to inform the coalition. Ultimately, the coalition's role is to deliver a message about how systems can be changed to empower survivors and to end intimate partner violence.

In Rhode Island, the Coalition has a grassroots community organizing project that brings survivors' voices into policy debates. The Survivors Overcoming Abusive Relationships (SOAR) task force creates vocal representatives for the media. The Coalition recruits community members and provides them with training, support, and leadership skills.

### *Accountability of coalitions*

Due to their diverse roles, state domestic violence coalitions have multiple constituents to whom they are accountable. First and foremost, coalitions seek to empower battered women and help them get what they need from other systems in the state. Coalitions also are accountable to member domestic violence programs. At a minimum, this responsibility includes making sure that programs have enough funding to keep their doors open and the support to provide quality services to survivors.

In addition to these guiding principles, coalitions also must answer to their boards of directors and to their funding agencies. An unsatisfied board may dilute the power of a coalition to make progress on a statewide level. Similarly, funding agencies (which may include local, state, and federal governmental sources, private foundations, and corporate sponsors) must view coalitions as fiscally and programmatically responsible to keep the funds flowing to support coalition programs.

Satisfying these four groups at the same time can be a challenge for state domestic violence coalition directors. Some coalition directors believe that increased funding has raised expectations and moved coalitions away from their principles, pushing them to become more like state agencies, particularly if they channel funding to local domestic violence programs. The Pennsylvania Coalition, for example, became the administrator of state funding (\$23 million dollars now) in 1980. The Coalition had to demonstrate to member programs and to state government that advocacy was a core value of its work and that services to battered women meant systemic reform – not just providing shelter beds and a hotline.

The Texas Council sets its priorities regularly by addressing what women and survivors say they need. The Council sponsored thirty-four focus groups of women and men throughout Texas to determine these needs. The groups included individuals from shelters and from urban, suburban, rural, and metropolitan communities. Focus groups also included women in prison, gay men, women with substance abuse issues, women of color, and women from religious communities, among others. The results of these discussions guide the Council's work.

A coalition's role with member programs can be particularly complex. Coalitions may serve dual roles as employees and as managers for member programs when they write grants for funding and then administer the funds. Similarly, they may need to nurture programs while evaluating the services that such programs provide.

Balancing the needs of diverse member programs when some are growing at a faster rate than others can be difficult. The Florida Coalition, for example, serves members ranging from feminist-based programs to Salvation Army programs, including large, urban programs and

smaller, rural programs. Some coalitions in larger states address these types of challenges by conducting regional meetings with members and providing more targeted technical assistance based on geographical needs. Other coalitions use their guiding principles to help them prioritize when they are pulled in different directions by funding agencies, boards, and member programs.

### *Models for state coalition board and membership structure*

State domestic violence coalitions vary in terms of board and membership structure. Most coalitions originally were designed to reflect input solely from member domestic violence programs. Boards that retain this type of structure tend to be comprised of individuals from member programs, such as executive directors. Typically, each board member has a single vote. In Vermont, for instance, the sixteen executive directors from each of the member domestic violence programs sit on the coalition board, and each director has one vote. This structure provides an opportunity for member programs to come together.

Coalitions define member programs in different ways. In Missouri, the board is comprised of member programs, but such programs are defined broadly. Board members come from multi-service agencies, batterer intervention programs, and programs in police departments, in addition to non-profit victim advocacy programs.

The New Mexico Coalition has three categories of membership:

- 1) Voting board members, who represent member programs
- 2) Affiliate members (programs in their first year of membership)
- 3) Friends of the coalition (representatives do not attend meetings)

This structure helps acclimate new member programs to the philosophy of the coalition.

In other states, coalition boards mirror coordinated community response teams. While some board members come from domestic violence programs, others may be from the community at large, representing law enforcement, businesses, the health profession, and social services. In Arkansas, for example, 10 Coalition board members represent domestic violence programs, and 5 at large members come from law enforcement, legal services, the office of the courts, and the corporate or mental health communities. Using slightly different weighting, 4 board members from the Connecticut Coalition are from domestic violence member programs, and 10 are community members including lawyers, doctors, police chiefs, financial experts, and an individual from the Department of Children and Families. A diverse board structure may give a coalition greater weight throughout the state due to board members' connections to various professions and communities.

Many coalitions have revised their board structures in recent years. The Rhode Island Coalition, which revamped its board structure in the 1990s, has a coalition board where the majority of members (8 out of 15) are unaffiliated community volunteers. The Coalition finds that this brings in diverse candidates with high energy and skill levels. It also raises the objectivity of the board and keeps the focus on the needs of survivors statewide.

Where member programs make up only a portion of a coalition's board, coalitions generally require a certain minimum number of board slots to reflect such representation. Of the Utah Domestic Violence Advisory Council's 36 member board, at least one quarter of the members must come from domestic violence shelters. Other coalitions require board members to have



experience, such as the Missouri Coalition's rule requiring programs to be active in coalition work before staff are eligible to serve on the board.

Large coalitions may have several categories of board members. Texas, for example, has representatives from the following groups on the coalition board:

- ❑ member programs (who devote 1% of their funds to the Council)
- ❑ developing programs
- ❑ allied agencies (such as police, health, corporate organizations)
- ❑ individuals

Other large coalitions, such as the Pennsylvania Coalition, maintain a structure in which all domestic violence programs throughout the state (63 programs) retain one vote.

### *Creating diverse boards*

Coalitions use unique board structures to represent diverse communities in their states. Some coalitions divide the state into regions and require regional representation from domestic violence member programs. In Nebraska, for instance, 6 out of 9 of the representatives from member programs represent particular regions of the state. Other states form caucuses for certain disciplines or communities, and such caucuses have a certain number of votes. For instance, in Pennsylvania, three caucuses, the formerly battered women caucus, the lesbian caucus, and the women of color caucus, each have two votes. Iowa has a battered immigrant women caucus, an LGBT caucus, and a child advocacy caucus. Similarly, the Washington State Coalition provides votes to a women of color caucus, an LGBT caucus, a survivors' caucus, and a Jewish caucus.

Survivors' experiences guide many coalition boards. Some states, such as Utah, ask individual survivors to serve on the board. In other states, members of a battered women's task force advise the board. In Rhode Island, a representative from Survivors Overcoming Abusive Relationships (SOAR), a grassroots community organizing project, votes on the board.

The Wisconsin Coalition demonstrates its strong commitment to diverse communities through its board structure. The Coalition requires at least 50% of board members to be formerly battered women and at least 50% of board members to be people of color.

### *Parameters of board decision-making*

The role of coalition boards varies widely, in part based on board structure. Most boards play a role in fundraising for the coalition and in fiscal or budgetary oversight of coalition activities. This may include approving major expenditures or supervising the fiscal health of the organization. Coalition boards tend to be involved in personnel and employment decisions as well, at a minimum, hiring and supervising the coalition's executive director.

While many coalition boards address policy matters, an equal number do not. In cases where coalition boards do not govern policy, such decisions may revert back to member programs. A few coalition boards, such as the board for the Iowa Coalition, set the coalition's legislative agenda, but most coalitions use a different vehicle to determine the coalition's legislative goals.

Often coalition boards have additional duties, such as developing training programs, certifying advocate standards (Iowa), or determining membership (Pennsylvania). Other coalition boards focus on governance (Rhode Island, Texas), organizational development (Vermont), or program oversight (Connecticut). In Missouri, the board develops a five-year strategic plan for the Coalition. Due to extensive workloads, coalition boards usually rely on assistance from other entities.

### *Board committees*

Most coalitions form board committees for specific purposes. The Texas Council, for example, has public policy, executive, fund development, personnel, program and finance committees. Similarly, the Iowa Coalition has committees addressing membership, finance, certification, rural outreach, legislation, and the silent witnesses program. Board committees permit members to contribute in specific – and manageable – ways.

### *The critical role of member programs and volunteers*

Coalitions also depend heavily on member programs and on volunteers. When coalition boards do not include representatives from all member domestic violence programs in a state, coalitions generally obtain feedback from member programs in another way. In Connecticut, the Coalition director meets with the directors of all member programs every other month. In some larger states, coalition staff meet regularly with directors from member programs in particular regions of the state.

Coalitions tend to bring certain decisions back to all member programs. In a number of states, after funding agencies allocated money, member programs voted to change funding formulas to be more equitable to all domestic violence programs. In Nebraska, the Coalition asked member programs to develop a new state funding formula by supermajority vote. In Wisconsin, the Coalition and member programs work with the Governor's Council on a biennial budget process.

In some states, policy and legislative decisions go back to member programs for discussion and approval, particularly if the decisions will affect the operations of programs. For example, in Nebraska, member programs voted on the coalition's core values and on a confidentiality policy. In Arkansas, member programs provided feedback to a legislative committee.

While coalition boards and member programs fulfill critical roles, coalitions also work closely with others in the community. In Michigan, more than 200 volunteers and several active task forces (including a women of color task force and an LGBT task force) assist the Coalition. The structure of boards, task forces, and volunteer programs helps ensure that coalitions represent the diverse voices of communities throughout the states.

### *How boards make decisions*

Many of the earliest coalitions preferred a non-hierarchical structure for coalitions and boards, but some no longer use such utopian standards. The majority of coalition boards vote by simple majority rule. In addition, a few boards vote by supermajority rule (two-thirds or three-quarters majority).

There are coalitions, however, that continue to use a collective-based approach to decision-making. The boards of these coalitions often (but not always) consist of representatives from member domestic violence programs only. The Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, comprised of member domestic violence programs, uses consensus voting for board decisions, and “it works!” The Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee and West Virginia coalition boards also function on a consensus basis. In a few states, the consensus based decision-making process may be modified under certain circumstances.

### *Employment issues*

Coalitions also reflect the values of the battered women’s movement in their decision-making and employment structures. While the majority of coalitions have executive directors, a significant proportion of coalitions utilize consensus decision-making with staff. Team coordinators or co-directors may guide the work of coalitions committed to a non-hierarchical work structure.

The Iowa Coalition pays staff based on years of experience, so some attorneys receive lower salaries than experienced advocates. The Coalition also uses nonhierarchical decision-making.
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State domestic violence coalitions designed their board structures, voting procedures, and employment policies thoughtfully over the years. They reflect the traditional values of the movement, such as collective decision-making, inclusive representation, and the need to listen to the voices of survivors. They also balance these philosophies with the pragmatic need to get a tremendous amount of work done in collaboration with other disciplines.

## PROFILES OF SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY EFFORTS BY STATE COALITIONS

### **Achievements**

State coalitions have made tremendous progress since the enactment of the VAWA. In many states, the VAWA funding alleviated some of the strain of competition between member programs and demonstrated that coalitions could help states obtain resources. Overall, this led to an increased sense of solidarity between programs and greater coordination of advocacy for survivors.

Some coalition directors view their greatest triumph as meeting the needs of member programs while moving public policy and systems advocacy forward. To maintain connections with member programs, the Rhode Island Coalition reorganized its staffing structure so that every staff member works with member programs in some capacity. In Nebraska, member programs view the Coalition as a viable resource due to its training programs. The Iowa Coalition prioritized community organizing efforts, including leadership development, in marginalized communities.

Some victories are easier to quantify than others. The Texas Council recently celebrated its one millionth call to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, supported by VAWA funds. This service permits survivors to call a toll-free number from anywhere in the nation and obtain information about local resources.

Coalitions offer domestic violence programs and activists a vision of another world. Because member programs provide direct services to survivors, coalition staff may focus on a broader view. Thanks to “incredible staff” and little turnover, coalitions have made progress in prevention and intervention efforts.

## Promising Practices

Since the enactment of the VAWA, state coalitions have continued to engage in creative and sustainable activities. Such activities include training and educating victim services, health care, housing, law enforcement, and judicial actors, conducting legislative initiatives and media campaigns, and organizing communities.<sup>27</sup> Many of these efforts are adaptable in other jurisdictions.

### *Prevention programs*

Most advocates believe that societal attitudes contribute to violence against women. As a result, coalitions support prevention programs in schools, workplaces, and other public settings. Such programs emphasize that there is a collective responsibility to prevent violence against women and to intervene in domestic violence cases.

The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence developed a prevention program with the Seattle Mariners, a professional baseball team. The team’s well-known slogan, “Refuse to Lose” was changed to “Refuse to Abuse” for the public awareness campaign. The Coalition created television, radio, and print advertisements and gained corporate sponsorship for the program. At baseball games, signs on the field broadcast this message, and staff distributed Seattle Mariners’ baseball shirts with the anti-violence slogan. Given the popularity of sports events, such programs have promise for raising awareness about domestic violence across American culture.

### *Management*

Like all organizations, coalitions need effective management strategies to fulfill their missions. The Washington State Coalition encourages staff retention through a feminist ethic in management and by compensating employees appropriately. To ease the burden on staff members, the Missouri Coalition hired an administrator to run the daily operations of the Coalition. Similarly, the Vermont Network sought outside assistance to reform its structure and asked a consultant to help figure out how to improve its bylaws, standards for member programs, and data collection systems. Such strategies may be useful for other coalitions.

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<sup>27</sup> ROBERTS, *supra* note 20, at 21 (1996).

## *Policy initiatives*

Across the board, coalitions conduct innovative policy initiatives that could be replicated in other states. For instance, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence works with communities of color on leadership development efforts. The Coalition finds that creating such networks is one way to foster inclusive leadership and to provide the movement with a diverse voice.

The Nebraska Coalition developed a unique collaborative project with substance abuse treatment providers and mental health providers. The Coalition helped providers understand the role of violence and sexual assault in women's lives so they could assist survivors to heal. The feminist based program may serve as a model for gender-competent programs in other states.

Post-VAWA, the Pennsylvania Coalition found that it was reacting to numerous policy initiatives instead of being proactive. The board and staff held three two-day meetings to determine their priorities. The Coalition's work now is guided by these priorities, and the Coalition maintains a policy listserve for member programs to promote participation and consistency.

## *Community organizing*

In many states, coalitions initiated community organizing efforts. In Texas, the Council conducted community audits throughout the state to determine what was needed. Communities across Texas shared their input and had a stake in the outcome of the Council's work.

In Florida, the Coalition spearheaded a rural development plan to encourage the creation of domestic violence programs in isolated, rural communities. More than one million dollars in funding supported the establishment of 17 rural programs, including task forces and outreach offices. These programs made an effort to empower and engage traditionally underserved communities, such as African-American women, older women, and religious women. Due to the success of the program in Florida, Alabama and Louisiana replicated the rural project.

Similarly, in Iowa, Coalition staff went to communities with underserved populations, helped recruit leaders, and assisted communities to create culturally specific domestic violence programming. In this way, advocates established a Latina women's organization and a deaf women's organization in the state. The Coalition now works with the Family Violence Prevention Fund to help other states conduct this type of work.

## *Legal advocacy*

State coalitions are aware of the desperate need for legal representation of domestic violence survivors and attempt to meet these needs in various ways. For example, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence employs two attorneys. One attorney is an immigration law expert and the other attorney provides technical assistance to attorneys and legal advocates across the state.

Recognizing the lack of legal assistance for domestic violence survivors, the Wisconsin Coalition administers a legal grant fund through which it distributes funds for direct representation. Domestic violence program staff must request funding on behalf of individual survivors, and they must identify the attorneys who will represent the survivors. A portion of the Coalition's grant funds supports appellate domestic violence cases. The Coalition requires grant funds to be distributed regionally and equitably throughout the state.

Similarly, the Florida Coalition developed a comprehensive plan to provide legal services to survivors through its Legal Assistance Development Plan. The Coalition created a clearinghouse of attorneys, and each shelter received funding to contract with domestic violence attorneys. This increased the quality of legal representation for survivors and helped reduce the isolation of attorneys, who met quarterly to discuss legal issues. An experienced attorney worked with the coalition to provide technical assistance to all of the attorneys, including training them on new laws. These legal assistance projects are useful models for improving legal representation of domestic violence victims.

## Challenges

While developing these promising practices, state domestic violence coalitions confronted numerous challenges in recent years. Coalitions with a political vision tried to focus on "mission based" work despite the pressures pushing them in other directions. The VAWA and the VAWA 2000 reflected a sea change in the nation's response to violence against women, but coalitions faced tremendous responsibilities as a result. Many coalitions now attempt to define their work internally, rather than simply reacting to the demands of criminal justice system players, state policymakers, or funding agencies.

State domestic violence coalitions also serve diverse member programs. The issues for domestic violence programs in small, rural, or conservative communities may be very different from those in urban areas. Domestic violence programs within states may be growing at different rates, requiring different types of technical assistance. In some states, coalition directors overcame a history of friction between member programs and the coalition or between certain member programs. In others, new directors rebuilt the coalition's reputation after years of dysfunction.

For coalition directors who came from a direct services perspective, leading a public policy organization is a challenge. For others, balancing the internal work of the coalition, including personnel and board issues, with the external work, such as community collaborations, has been a struggle. These skills became critical over the last decade, as many coalitions experienced a large increase in budgets and staffing after the VAWA's enactment. The Connecticut Coalition, for instance, went from 5 employees to 12 in the space of three years.

Other coalitions struggle to meet their workload demands with a small staff, such as the Utah Domestic Violence Advisory Council, serving 36 member programs with a staff of three.

For all coalitions, obtaining steady funding for member programs and for coalitions continues to be a challenge. Some coalition directors raised concerns that erratic federal funding made it difficult for programs to sustain themselves. Some sources of federal funding, such as

STOP grants, generated competition over distribution. In other states, coalitions worked tirelessly to strengthen state funding sources.

## Allies

Despite these challenges, coalitions rally state and local actors to improve responses to domestic violence. Coalition allies are diverse, including some from unexpected corners. Coalition directors explained that support for their work has many sources – from those who share a similar political agenda, to those who wish to end violence in all forms, to hidden allies who experienced family violence in their homes and wish to end the cycle. Coalition directors described the following types of allies in their efforts:

### **ALLIES IN THE STRUGGLE TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

- State sexual assault coalitions
- Legal services organizations
- Homeless persons' rights agencies
- Anti-poverty organizations
- Social work agencies
- Disability rights organizations
- Children's rights organizations
- Victim services programs
- Healthcare organizations
- Prosecutors' offices
- Sheriffs' associations
- Statewide law enforcement training agencies
- State police
- Local law enforcement
- Legislatures
- Women's bar associations
- Family law bar
- Governors' offices on women or domestic violence
- Domestic violence fatality review teams
- State Attorney General's Offices
- Governors
- Secretaries of State (for address anonymity programs)
- State funding agencies
- State administering agencies for federal funding
- Departments of aging
- Mental health advocacy organizations
- Immigrant rights' agencies
- Child protective services
- Administrative offices of state courts
- State Supreme Courts
- Local courts
- State public assistance agencies
- Domestic violence research community



- ❑ Law schools and universities
- ❑ Survivors of homicide groups
- ❑ Departments of correction
- ❑ Business alliances
- ❑ Religious communities
- ❑ National Organization for Women chapters
- ❑ American Civil Liberties Union chapters
- ❑ Planned Parenthood
- ❑ United Way
- ❑ Mothers Against Drunk Driving

Without assistance from these allies, coalitions could not have increased domestic violence training throughout the states, changed laws, or raised public awareness.

## AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

### **The Importance of National Coalition Meetings in Decreasing Isolation**

State domestic violence coalition directors emphasized the importance of meeting with other coalition directors to share ideas. They viewed the work of national organizations serving coalitions, such as the NCADV and the NNEDV, as critical to the success of their own efforts within the states. Coalition leaders expressed gratitude to the NNEDV for its national leadership, legislative advocacy, and ongoing support for coalitions. They also appreciated the NNEDV's ability to provide a forum in which all coalition directors come together.

Coalition directors stated that national meetings helped them overcome a sense of isolation and reminded them that they are part of a broader movement. National meetings gave coalition directors practical solutions for specific problems as well as a sense of renewed vision. Coalition directors viewed the NNEDV meetings as beneficial in part because they gave them opportunity to talk with other coalition directors about management and policy issues, and they had no peers within their states with whom they could discuss these matters. The NNEDV coalition listserv helped maintain these connections over time.

### **Recommendations for New Directors of State Domestic Violence Coalitions**

The NNEDV asked coalition directors what they wished they knew when they began in their leadership roles. Coalition directors shared their experiences and provided suggestions for new coalition directors. Their recommendations included the need to train new directors on nonprofit management and federal issues.

Most coalition directors came from shelter programs and understood the obstacles that battered women confront. Directors expressed a wish for greater management training and



experience, particularly for feminist management skills, including the ability to be a leader and a visionary. At the same time, directors wished they knew how to build coalitions in a way that reflected the principles of participatory management.

Virtually all coalition directors recommended a mentoring program in which new coalition directors were matched with more experienced coalition directors. Others suggested that an introductory workshop would be extremely useful. It might include a brief description of national organizations and their differing roles, as well as information regarding major state players.

Coalition directors recommended strongly a crash course on federal agencies, including acronyms, funding sources, deadlines, and reporting requirements. Basic legal training on federal laws also would help many new directors.

A number of directors expressed a desire for training on how to manage the growth of coalitions. Changes in staffing patterns, budgets, and activities allowed coalitions to expand their work, but knowing how to handle these changes was a challenge for many directors. Basic training on fiscal management would have assisted many coalition directors in their early days. Others wished they knew what type of administrative infrastructure would support the coalition's growth, and at what point employment policies needed to change.

Coalition directors struggled to understand their roles versus the roles of their boards, and many wished they knew more about how to preserve this delicate balance. Some directors managed coalitions during a time in which the board was restructured. Knowing how to guide boards to conduct the work of the coalition, rather than simply having membership meetings, would have helped some new directors.

In addition, coalition directors wished they knew how to prioritize in terms of state-wide issues and attendance at national meetings. The competing demands on coalitions and the range of constituencies made an ability to prioritize critical. Advanced training, rather than learning on the job, would have helped directors.

**10 THINGS COALITION DIRECTORS WISHED THEY KNEW WHEN THEY STARTED**

- What fiscal management skills do I need?
- Who are the critical players in the state?
- What is the role of the board?
- How do I manage coalition growth?
- What are the critical policy issues in the state?
- What do I need to know about federal laws and grant programs?
- How do I maintain the coalition's vision?
- How do I incorporate the movement's values into a management style?
- How do I prioritize competing demands?
- Is there a mentor to whom I can ask questions?

## Representation of Survivors from All Communities

State domestic violence coalitions may identify gaps in services faced by victims from particular communities and work with criminal justice entities or shelters to correct these problems. For instance, immigrant battered women may hesitate to call the police due to fear of deportation or their previous experiences with law enforcement. Or, they may have been told incorrectly that they are not eligible to file for protection orders or for legal residency. Coalitions can work to promote education about immigration and domestic violence issues and to improve immigrants' access to police officers, victim advocates, attorneys, and prosecutors who speak their language (or to provide interpreters).

Similarly, coalitions often are at the forefront of efforts to end discrimination against victims from diverse communities. Coalition staff may be aware that women of color or LGBT survivors may hesitate to utilize the criminal justice system due to discrimination, or that shelters may be inaccessible to women with disabilities. They may work with religious communities to ensure that religious law and tradition no longer trap victims in abusive marriages. Coalitions also support training and legislative changes that expand legal relief to all victims, such as protection order laws that encompass victims of dating violence or same-sex violence.

The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence has created the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL), a national education and training program addressing elder abuse. Supported with funds under the VAWA, the Coalition provides information about the unique obstacles confronting older victims of domestic violence and how systems can better serve these survivors.

State domestic violence coalitions shaped the VAWA and the VAWA 2000 to respond to these gaps in advocacy and legal relief for survivors by extending protections for traditionally marginalized communities. For example, the law increased the set aside for Indian tribal governments from 4% to 5% under the Grants to Combat Violent Crimes Against Women and created a 5% set aside for tribes under several other grant programs.<sup>28</sup> The law created substantial relief for battered immigrants,<sup>29</sup> and ensured that victims of dating violence had access to services.<sup>30</sup> By expanding the definition of “underserved populations” to include geographic location, race and ethnicity, language barriers, disabilities, alienage status, age, and other underserved populations,<sup>31</sup> and by creating new grant programs to address elder abuse<sup>32</sup> and violence against women with disabilities,<sup>33</sup> the VAWA 2000 reached out to encompass survivors in the margins.

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<sup>28</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 3796gg-1(1); 42 U.S.C. § 13971(c)(3); 42 U.S.C. § 3796hh(e); 42 U.S.C. § 10420(f); 42 U.S.C. § 3796gg-6(f)(2)(A).

<sup>29</sup> *See, e.g.*, 8 U.S.C. § 1101 note.

<sup>30</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 3796gg(b)(1)(5); 42 U.S.C. § 3796hh(b)(2)(5); 42 U.S.C. § 13971(a)(1)(2); 20 U.S.C. § 1152(b)(2)(6)(7)(9) 42 U.S.C. § 3796gg(b)(1)(5); 42 U.S.C. § 3796hh(b)(2)(5); 42 U.S.C. § 13971(a)(1)(2); 20 U.S.C. § 1152(b)(2)(6)(7)(9).

<sup>31</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 3796gg-2(7).

<sup>32</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 14041a.

<sup>33</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 3796gg-7.

## Critical Current Issues

State domestic violence coalitions continue to address many of the same questions that battered women's advocates have struggled for decades to answer. Often these issues involve balancing the needs of battered women against the perceived needs of their children, or weighing the autonomy of survivors against the criminal justice system's goal of holding perpetrators accountable. Other policy initiatives present new questions, such as how to preserve victim safety in an increasingly mobile, accessible, and electronic world.

### *Funding*

A basic question for state domestic violence coalitions is how to ensure that advocacy and services will continue to be available to survivors. In an era of economic recession and state fiscal crises, many coalitions are struggling to maintain funding so that shelters can keep their doors open. Domestic violence programs that have relied on federal VAWA funding in the past are struggling to sustain their programs when such funding no longer is available.

### *Economic justice*

Most coalitions view economic justice matters as critical to domestic violence survivors. With reasonable domestic violence laws in place, it has become clear that battered women cannot utilize these forms of legal relief unless economic support enables them to survive apart from abusers. Like many coalitions, the Texas Council takes a broad view of economic empowerment and works on housing, welfare, job sources, transportation, childcare, and legal services for survivors.

The Pennsylvania Coalition understands that public assistance enables some domestic violence survivors to live free from abuse. The Coalition supported TANF advocates in every domestic violence program to provide survivors with access to information about benefits. The Coalition also trained 9000 employees from county offices to ensure that government workers understand domestic violence.

### *Housing*

Promoting access to long-term housing is another aspect of economic justice for battered women. In Utah, the Council is working to make sure that immigrant victims can obtain transitional housing. In Rhode Island, the Coalition is struggling to address a lack of affordable housing throughout the state. Similarly, other coalitions, such as the Washington State Coalition, support landlord-tenant bills that would protect battered women from eviction.

### *Battered women's children*

Coalitions tackle numerous issues regarding battered women's children. The Nebraska Coalition provides education about how a mandatory joint custody law could harm domestic violence victims. Similarly, in New Mexico, the Coalition has concerns that a proposed bill to increase penalties for offenders when children witness violence may be used against victims of domestic violence. On the custody front, the Michigan Coalition supports a proposal that would enact a rebuttable presumption against providing custody to abusers. These examples

are but a sampling of the issues coalitions address regarding the intersection of domestic violence and child maltreatment.

### *Legal representation*

Domestic violence survivors may have rights with respect to children and economic survival, but in many jurisdictions, they need well-trained attorneys to assert these rights. Throughout the country, coalitions attempt to help survivors find qualified attorneys to represent them in civil cases, including custody, divorce, housing, bankruptcy, insurance, and employment cases, among others. In Arkansas, for example, the Coalition is struggling to address a lack of legal services for battered women.

### *Confidentiality*

The rising popularity of both electronic communications and partnerships with other community agencies compel advocates for battered women to take a fresh look at how to keep information about survivors confidential. To address the confidentiality of communications between advocates and survivors, the Michigan Coalition developed a manual on confidentiality, available as a template for others. In other states, the Homeless Information Management System poses a problem, as shelters may be threatened with losing their HUD funds if they do not share the names of clients. Coalitions nationwide help member programs balance their relationships with community organizations and funding agencies while protecting battered women's privacy.

### *Reducing the unintended consequences of new laws or policies*

Coalitions often address the impact of proposed or existing laws on survivors. In Iowa, for example, the Coalition continues to educate others about the dangers that mediation and mandatory reporting pose for victims. Similarly, in Connecticut and Wisconsin, the coalitions are working to reduce dual arrest problems.

In Kentucky, when legislators introduce bills promoting the issuance of mutual protection orders, Association staff explain the harmful effects on survivors. To date, such bills have not been enacted.
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With the nation's increased attention to domestic violence issues, some community sectors have imposed punitive measures on victims. In Kentucky and Ohio, coalitions help courts understand why victims should not be placed in jail or held in contempt for "violating their own orders." Elsewhere, coalition staff educate prosecutors about why survivors should not be prosecuted for perjury or incarcerated for failing to testify against their abusers. These educational efforts are critical in an era in which legislators continue to enact domestic violence and related laws at a rapid pace.

## **Conclusion**

State domestic violence coalitions play an invaluable role in changing state laws, institutional protocols, and public attitudes about violence against women. In some states, the VAWA's

call for collaboration with nonprofit, nongovernmental victim advocacy organizations compelled criminal justice entities to listen to domestic violence coalitions and member programs. As a result, across the nation, policymakers, legislators, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, and media representatives now turn to state coalitions for information about how to help survivors and how to understand domestic violence.

According to one coalition director, the effects of federal legislation – raising public awareness and the legitimacy of the issue – have been more extensive than anyone ever imagined. A political shift has occurred. People, including the President of the United States, talk about violence against women. These continuing partnerships between state domestic violence coalitions and the federal government, and between coalitions and their local domestic violence member programs, can help ensure that domestic violence survivors obtain the help they need and that perpetrators are held accountable. Coalitions continue to plant the seeds of cultural change necessary to free domestic violence survivors.

## Appendix A

*In response to a survey by the NNEDV, coalition directors recommended the following resources to new coalition directors:*

Peter C. Brinckerhoff, *Mission-Based Management: Leading Your Non-Profit in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2000)

Phyllis Chesler, *Mothers on Trial* (1991)

Jill M. Davies, *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices* (1998)

R. Emerson Dobash and Russell P. Dobash, *Women, Violence, and Social Change* (1992)

Domestic Violence Intervention Project, *In Our Best Interest*, Duluth, MN

Domestic Violence Intervention Project, *Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Assault Cases*, Duluth, MN

Jeffrey L. Edleson, Claire M. Renzetti, and Raquel Kennedy Bergen, *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women* (2000)

Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991)

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*Coalition directors also recommended that new coalition directors read all of the following: state domestic violence laws, the minutes from every coalition board meeting since the organization's inception, and every newsletter written by the coalition.*

## Appendix B

### Updated OVW Coalition Solicitation Program Scope 2007

The Office on Violence Against Women's Fiscal Year 2007 solicitation for the coalition grant program describes the following activities for which grant funds may be used:

- ❑ Providing technical assistance to member agencies
- ❑ Expanding the technological capacity of coalitions and/or member programs
- ❑ Developing or enhancing appropriate standards of services for member programs, including culturally appropriate services to underserved populations
- ❑ Conducting statewide, regional and/or community-based meetings or workshops for victim advocates, survivors, legal service providers, and criminal justice representatives
- ❑ Bringing local programs together to identify gaps in services and to coordinate activities
- ❑ Encouraging the representation of underserved populations in coordination activities, including the provision of scholarship funding to underserved communities to participate in planning meetings, task forces, committees, etc.
- ❑ Engaging in activities that promote coalition building at the local and/or state level
- ❑ Coordinating federal, state and/or local law enforcement agencies to develop or enhance strategies to address identified problems

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