



THE RESPECT ABQ WOMEN CAMPAIGN:

Winning through Vision,
Strategy and Relationships



About the Author

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Acknowledgements

The author wants to thank the five interviewees especially Adriann Barboa who was key in connecting me to the other four: Steve Allen, Micaela Cadena, Julianna Koob, and Joan Lamunyon Sanford. Their generous and thoughtful reflections made it possible to piece together the story of how they worked together – and won – the Respect ABQ Women campaign. Tannia Esparza from Young Women United stepped in to carefully read and comment on the report; and Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, my co-director at the Building Movement Project, was a sharp and attentive editor. The report was funded by the Compton Foundation whose patient executive director, Ellen Friedman, offered invaluable insights during the process. Thanks also to Caroline McAndrews who was both a proofreader and designer for the report.



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About Building Movement Project

For over a decade, The Building Movement Project (BMP) has been working at the national level to support and advance the potential for nonprofit organizations to be sites for progressive social change. We develop research, tools, and training materials that bolster nonprofit organizations' ability to support the voice and power of the people they serve.

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Introduction

The Respect ABQ Women campaign sent shock waves through the reproductive rights community with its resounding defeat of a ballot initiative banning late-term abortion in Albuquerque. When anti-abortion groups filed their petitions in early July 2013, polls indicated that the ban would easily pass. Yet by the vote in November, a local Coalition – with national support – was able to change a slam-dunk for anti-abortion proponents into a win for those who believe women and families have the right to make their own reproductive decisions.

New Mexico has a long history of working to protect reproductive freedom, including access to family planning and abortion.¹ The success of fighting legislative attempts to ban late-term abortion may have been one reason for the introduction of the ballot initiative in Albuquerque. New Mexico is one of nine states that allows for abortion later in pregnancy. According to the people we interviewed, Bud and Tara Shaver moved to Albuquerque confident from anti-abortion wins in Kansas, and started Project Defending Life with the goal of ending late-term abortions in New Mexico. When their initial attempts to pass legislation failed, they turned their attention to a ballot initiative in Albuquerque.² They seemed confident of a victory in this “majority minority” city, where 47% of the population is Hispanic. In September 2013, two months before the vote, the Albuquerque Journal reported on a poll that showed 54% of all voters approved the ban and 39% opposed. The support for the ban was even higher among Hispanics, with 57% supporting the ban (33% opposed) including those who were registered Democrats.³ It is certainly impressive that the Respect ABQ Women campaign was able to turn these polling numbers around to defeat the ballot initiative. It is also noteworthy how the local leaders of the Campaign worked together and with national partners to not just win against the anti-abortion measure, but strengthen their coalition to take on future fights.

The win in New Mexico reverberated around the country. After so many defeats, it was a boost to those working on reproductive rights and justice, and many people wondered what made the Campaign such a resounding success. This paper tells one piece of the Respect ABQ Women story. It focuses on the elements that allowed a small group of five leaders – all part of the New Mexico Coalition for Choice – to stay together in an intense and challenging process in ways that resulted in a larger sense of community and possibility, and win an impressive victory.

There are many aspects of the achievements of Respect ABQ Women. Here we will focus on five elements:

- Creating relationships
- Developing a decision making process
- Defining the long-term vision and winnable goals
- Negotiating the local and the national
- Preparing for the fallout of campaigns



The discussion of these areas is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of what it takes to win. Rather it describes a process that can be instructive to other movement builders and policy advocates. The purpose here is to understand some of the elements that support or derail groups that are attempting to defend and promote the rights of all people whether it is in the area of reproductive freedom or other “controversial” issues.

One important component of the Campaign is to understand the background among the five people who took leadership – all from the Coalition for Choice – and how they were operating when the ballot initiative was filed. The paper will start with that relational history and then go on to explore the four other elements listed above. Except where noted, the information in this paper comes from the interviews with the five leaders from the Coalition’s steering committee.



Relationships: Looking at the Context

The Coalition for Choice has been successfully fighting for reproductive rights in New Mexico for over two decades. Over the past few years, the Coalition had gone through a series of changes in both membership and perspective. All five of the people interviewed were on the Coalition's steering committee that was formed in response to the ballot initiative and which became the core of the Respect ABQ Women campaign. And each talked about their experience in the Coalition, helping to piece together a description of the significant changes within the Coalition's operation and membership. By the time the anti-ballot initiative campaign started, the leadership groups on the steering committee had gone through a series of negotiations, learning what it takes to work together even when they disagreed.

Joan Lamunyon Sanford is the executive director of the New Mexico Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (NMRCRC). When she joined the Coalition for Choice fifteen years ago, Joan was just shy of 40 years old and the youngest member of the group. She described three experiences that affected her during that time. First, she attended anti-racism workshops sponsored by her parent organization, the national Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, which made her think about the role of women of color in the reproductive rights movement. Second, Joan and some of her volunteers became more aware of the obstacles facing low-income women in accessing abortions. Third, her participation in the planning of the 2004 March for Women's Lives made it clear to Joan that inclusion of younger women and women of color was key to the sustainability of the movement. As a result, Joan was actively looking for ways the Coalition for Choice could diversify its membership by race and age. More specifically, she had supported Young Women United in their bid to join as a member.

The first time Young Women United (YWU) tried to join the Coalition for Choice, it did not go well. Micaela Cadena, who was policy director at YWU during the Respect ABQ Women campaign, describes the 15-year-old YWU as, "a really powerful, strategic organization in New Mexico," that "hasn't lost our scrappy grassroots beginning." YWU focuses on reproductive justice with a staff and base comprised of and focused on young women of color recognizing their expertise, leadership skills, and new ideas. It was over five years ago, that a YWU organizer approached the Coalition for Choice about becoming a member and asked for their support of legislation that pushed for comprehensive sexual education in the schools. According to Micaela, the Coalition leadership was not interested either in YWU as a member or the bill. So YWU successfully advocated for it on their own, building relationships with the State's legislators and continuing to push their policy agenda. In 2011, YWU decided to try to join the Coalition again and almost succeeded. But when Micaela and YWU's executive director at the time, Adriann Barboa, raised questions about one of the Coalitions principles that gave legislative decision-making power to one or two lobbyists without consultation with other groups, the Coalition balked and YWU decided not to join.

Julianna Koob came to New Mexico after working as a lobbyist on reproductive rights issues in several other states. She joined the Coalition for Choice in 2008 as the lobbyist representing NARAL and the Southwest Women's Law Center, and later as the lobbyist for the ACLU and Planned Parenthood. Julianna noted that in New Mexico, "the women before me created good laws," but she also



observed a “culture of fear,” in the reproductive rights community. “There was a sense that people should not be too vocal.” By 2013, two long-term leaders from the Coalition left when they decided to no longer focus on reproductive health work, and Julianna had become the chair. She was interested in changing the culture of the Coalition, to address the problem of having an all-white and mostly aging membership in a state that was majority people of color and young. Julianna worked to create an environment that welcomed members, including YWU. There were still tensions, but this time they were able to make it work by looking at “where we agree and can move forward and not on where we disagree.” To their credit, YWU wanted to give it another try and decided to join the coalition, reaching an agreement not to entrust legislative decision-making power solely to lobbyists.

Steve Allen from the ACLU joined the Coalition for Choice in 2012, before Julianna became chair. He found it, “not in a great place,” but when the leadership changed, he noticed an evolution. Soon after he came into the Coalition, Adriann left YWU to head Strong Families New Mexico and joined as a Coalition member. Now there were two strong organizations – YWU and Strong Families – in the Coalition, both led by younger women of color. That year, a bill supporting pregnant and parenting students championed by YWU in collaboration with the ACLU of NM and Strong Families was signed into law. The women of color leaders at Young Women United and Strong Families worked hard to secure the Coalition’s support for this legislation, shifting the framework towards “reproductive justice” within the largely “reproductive rights” focused Coalition. Steve noted the impact of the changing of leadership. “Julianna Koob became the Chair and did a fantastic job of seeing that all voices were heard, and that we were diversifying the Coalition.” When Julianna stepped down as chair after the Respect ABQ Women campaign, Adriann took over. In Steve’s assessment, “both have a knack for coalition building; without that it can be a terrible experience.”

Adriann Barboa marvels at the fact that she is now the chair of the Coalition for Choice. She says if someone had told her five years ago that would be her role, she “would not have believed it.” Adriann credits many factors for the evolution of the Coalition including the support she received from her parent organization, Forward Together, to help with both processing and framing issues. When YWU and Strong Families came into the Coalition, they joined in a position of strength. They had pursued coalition membership because they recognized that the Coalition for Choice and its strong history had something to offer, and they were also committed to changing the Coalition from within by challenging the Coalition and its principles to be more inclusive. The integration of YWU and Strong Families turned out to be an important factor in the development of the Respect ABQ Women campaign.

The Respect ABQ Women campaign could not have won without strategy, media, organizing, mobilization, savvy staff, and an influx of resources. The background on the Coalition for Choice and the strengthened relationships among the leadership kept groups together under enormous pressure when they could have easily disbanded over any number of tensions and decision-points. Keeping and maintaining these ties was also a goal in itself. As one person noted, “We had existing relationships – we didn’t have to build on the fly – and we put a lot of work into those relationships.”



Decision-Making: Staying Strong

The filing of the petition for the ballot initiative banning late-term abortions in Albuquerque took place on July 3, 2013. The Coalition for Choice immediately convened a call. One of the leaders noted, “If this had happened three years earlier, [the leadership of the Coalition for Choice] would have gotten on the phone with the power brokers and made all the decisions. In the new Coalition, fourteen members were on a call to talk this through. It was chaotic and a great start.”

The Coalition members knew they faced a tough battle, made even more difficult because there were so many unknowns, including the date of the election. As one person put it, “We immediately put the Coalition for Choice into action. We formed a steering committee of seven organizations.”⁴ Steering Committee members started with a Memorandum of Understanding that clarified issues such as what each group was responsible for bringing to the table, how lists would be shared, who would have access to (potentially) new donors, and so on. All the Steering Committee members and the Coalition for Choice partners put in money and groups such as Strong Families and Young Women United also contributed significant staff resources.⁵ The Steering Committee also hired an experienced campaign manager. One of the interviewees commented, “We hired a campaign manager and we didn’t want to get in her way; we hired her for her expertise and the steering committee was overseen by her; she hired the field director and communications director. We had regular daily calls with all the partners.”

“People in the steering committee challenged each other on messaging, on anything, including challenging the big white-run structures... it led us to better results.”

Decision Process

Early on, the steering committee took on the role as the decision-making body for the Campaign. This appears to be a departure from fights in other states where national groups quickly mobilized to give support and expertise, and also made key campaign decisions. In the Respect ABQ Women campaign, the steering committee was determined to keep decision-making among local groups that they felt understood the needs of their community. Steering committee members also made the commitment to deal with differences in approaches and opinions among the different members. One person explained, “We knew that we already had a history and the practice within [the Coalition] of negotiating conflicts. Kind of like families or couples in long-term relationships; if you have an argument, the relationship isn’t over.” Taking the time to surface and argue through disagreements became part of the steering committee culture. “This is where culture shift was important,” noted an interviewee, “People in the steering committee challenged each other on messaging, on anything, including challenging the big white-run structures... it led us to better results.”

The capacity to work through differences meant that the steering committee members were willing to engage in difficult and often transformational conversations. These discussions included an exploration of the complex feelings people held about the issues. One steering committee member pushed the others to, “be honest about our own discomfort about abortion later in pregnancy.” They invited the director of a clinic that provides late-term abortions to talk with the steering committee about why women came to them later in their pregnancy. “We had to talk about our own discomfort



if we were going to do the Campaign. We had to make sure we could say the right thing to do. I grew up Catholic, not religious, but this was hard.”

“The decision on the lead message is what won the Campaign and the people...because of our trusting relationships, even being pissed with each other, we made the right decisions.”

Decision-making among the steering committee tightened relationships, but there were challenges in keeping the full Coalition involved given the pace and intensity of the Campaign. Phone calls with the full coalition took place every other week and the steering committee sent weekly emails where they shared what would be going public. One interviewee expressed concern that outside of the steering committee, “it was a very top down structure,” and explained, “The coalition in ordinary times tries to achieve consensus, but that was not possible in a campaign... We largely handled it pretty well, but some were

uncomfortable ... we got as much input as possible.” Another steering committee member put it this way, “We did a pretty good job; looking back we might have identified a better path for communication.” A third interviewee noted, “We had to move fast, it was a tight campaign: we [the Coalition for Choice] are inclusive and we also understand that a short campaign is a different effort. Even in the steering committee there were active and less active groups.” In the end, the steering committee members both put in the time and struggled with the difficult decisions, creating a process where disagreement was permitted and worked out despite the pressures of moving forward with the Campaign.

Reflecting on the Campaign, one interviewee said, “When the petition was filed, we could come together, make the hard decisions, and run a successful campaign. [The ban supporters] made a lot of mistakes and we made a lot of good decisions. We stuck together even when we wanted to strangle each other.”

Decisions about Messaging

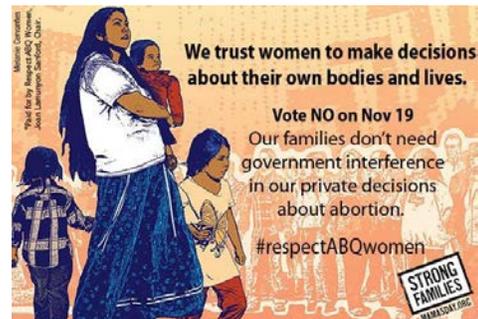
The Campaign’s name – Respect ABQ Women – reflected difficult discussions about messaging that occurred early in the process. Representatives of national groups that had run campaigns against abortion-banning ballot initiatives in other states assumed that the messaging would be in line with their parent organization’s ideas. Their message focused on using language about banning of abortions and preserving the right to choose. Young Women United and Strong Families, as the only women of color and Latinas in the room, immediately expressed their opposition to the steering committee about these initial suggestions for messaging. They pointed out the polling had shown that these framing were successful among older white women and that communities of color and others were not considered or included. Polling by the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health suggested a message based on families and their decisions. This data by the respected pollster Celinda Lake showed that the frame of “banning late-term abortion” and “choice” was less likely to appeal to people of color and low-income constituencies who already experience many barriers to access. Instead, one interviewee told us, “We started with the word, ‘respect’ from polling in New



Mexico; people wanted to be treated with respect.”

The interviewees talked about the “endless” hours spent on messaging. In arguing for a different message than the large national groups were pushing, the local groups – especially YWU and Strong Families – were clear about their values and the connection they had to Hispanic communities, “It was a long road to get to from the outside to the inside, and we had proven ourselves in those years. Our policy strategies, messaging and messengers, and insight into New Mexico’s political issues were extremely valuable to the Coalition. We were not just showing a brown face in the room; we showed the capacity to lead and guide.” Others on the Steering Committee agreed that YWU and Strong Families’ knowledge of the State and the Latino community were important elements in their ultimate success; “They educated us on the consequences [of different messages] in the Latino community and thank God they did that. We spent a lot of hours on the topline messaging we would allow, and deciding what we wanted our messaging to be.”

Based on research done with Latinos, YWU and Strong Families stressed a more family-friendly approach, resulting in the Respect ABQ Women campaign. The Campaign’s winning message was that decisions about abortion should be made by women, families and their doctors without government interference. This message reflected the work by women of color in the reproductive justice movement both in New Mexico and across the country to shift the assumptions related to abortion. YWU and Strong Families urged the coalition to recognize the difficult decisions women and families faced about abortion. This allowed for more communities in New Mexico to weigh in on this issue without having to identify with what they experienced as a polarizing ideological debate between pro-life vs. pro-choice. One person told us, “The decision on the lead message is what won the Campaign and the people.” She added, “because of our trusting relationships, even being pissed with each other, we made the right decisions.”



Long-term Vision and Winnable Goals

One of the striking aspects of the Campaign was the belief by the leaders interviewed that – in the beginning – there was little hope they would actually defeat the ballot initiative. “We thought we would probably fight hard and probably lose,” said one of the leaders, “but over time the infrastructure we put together was putting us in a good position for success.” It may have been the sense that losing was a real possibility – and a push by Strong Families – that led steering committee members to focus on how people would move forward after the Campaign was over and the importance of keeping relationships intact, whether they won or lost. One person told us, “We had to say the right thing to do the right thing [for the people of New Mexico] whether we win or lose. Adriann told us it was not just about the short-term goals, it is about the long-term.” Another interviewee talked about it this way, “The biggest thing we did was to identify that we were working together on the short-term goal to win, but the long-term goal was to build the capacity of our organizations and for the Coalition for Choice to be stronger and more cohesive.”

The long-term vision was not only about the Coalition and relationships; it was also about expanding the base of supporters for reproductive rights, especially in the Latino community. One person explained that the biggest goal of the Campaign was to talk about reproductive rights in a way that “moved our community down the road to our side.” Rejecting a message on privacy or rights, Respect ABQ Women communicated, “enough information to voters to allow them to be the human beings they are, compassionate human beings. People are incredibly compassionate.”

“One of the doors I knocked was an older Latina woman. She said, ‘I have lived here 25 years and no one ever knocked on my door, so I am going to vote.’”

The long-term goals then boosted many of the short-term ones. For example, YWU and Strong Families insisted on a grassroots campaign in low-income communities that typically would not have been a priority for canvassing and calling. “Very early on we established how much we would have to push the field campaign to include communities of color.” They also looked for allies in the community to help with phone banking and canvassing, especially in Spanish. “We offered hot meals and child care; the space and environment for volunteers and campaign workers was a community space.” This message of inclusion paid off. One interviewee reported, “One of the doors I knocked was an older Latina woman. She said, ‘I have lived here 25 years and no one ever knocked on my door, so I am going to vote.’”

The decision to have a conversation about abortion in a community that had often been ignored by previous debates and campaigns on the issue left the two women of color especially vulnerable. One of them explained in her interview, “During the Campaign, there were times I was very fearful. I was at the first press conference and I was on the news. My family – I have a very large extended family – has been very proud of me when I have been on the news before this. I had talked to my mom and sister. I was crying because pretty soon everyone would see me talking about abortion. My mom was worried how the community would respond. It helped motivate us to constantly sit with what our



moms and cousins would think; it grounded our messaging... I would think, 'Okay, I am saying it in a way I believe in and in a way I would talk with my family.'"

Soon after the press conference, the interviewee was at a family Quinceañera where relatives said they had seen her on the news. She was relieved, "they were smiling." She went on to talk about one of her uncles who "is the epitome of New Mexican Latinos – a veteran who drives a Harley." He asked about the Campaign, "and I said, families have to make these decisions for themselves and he agreed and responded back to me with his own variation of our topline messages saying, 'that's right, out of state people can't make decisions for our families.'"



Defining the long-term values and goals helped the Campaign in several ways. It took success out of a win/lose paradigm, offering other ways of measuring results. It also reinforced the message that fragmentation and destructive discord had to be avoided; no matter the outcome, the Coalition members would be faced with other challenges where they would need to work together. The long-term focus was a way to guide and augment the Campaign by giving it a values base. As one person put it, "The Campaign helped us to find where those values are shared and the intersection of those values."



Local and National: Negotiating a Virtuous Cycle

There were many important decisions made by the Steering Committee that helped make the Respect ABQ Women campaign a success. However, all of the leaders interviewed were clear that they would not have won without an influx of money that came from outside of the state. As one interviewee told us, “it doesn’t matter what the messages are without the money.” Answering why they won, she continued, “It was the integration of message, leadership, and national resources.” Money was needed for everything ranging from paying campaign staff, to canvassing and phone banking, to communications such as radio ads, direct mail, and earned media.

The large national groups that had access to significant resources and had been through other attacks were ready to contribute financially. They also assumed that their expertise would be used to shape and execute the Campaign. But YWU and Strong Families pushed back, arguing that the national groups’ polling and messaging did not reflect the local community. One person explained that a campaign based on choice between abortion and non-abortion would not work, “We know the messages from national groups don’t resonate with our staff not to mention our families and community.” In addition, some of the local groups were frustrated by the assuredness of the larger national groups about their strategy proposals based on the experience of other campaigns; “We would hear how much they knew, but we would think, ‘if you are so successful why are there only four clinics left in the state that can do this [late term-abortion]. We have lost the war on women everywhere... it was hard to stomach; as if their expertise had been successful, but it hadn’t been.”

“Our local relationships were more important to us, and we had relationships and work that went beyond the election – to work together for reproductive freedom – so we wanted to honor the long-term goal.”

Steering committee members agreed that there were tensions with national groups, but their experiences varied. The ones connected to well-funded nationals felt in the end they received support despite some doubts about the Campaign’s direction. One person said, “Planned Parenthood and the ACLU, I couldn’t believe how great they were. I am on the rosy side because I have been in other states.” In this case it was, “a dance between the nationals and the Coalition.” The large better-funded national groups not only put in financial resources, they also devoted considerable staff time and expertise from people who had been through similar experiences.

A different viewpoint came from the local groups and those connected with smaller national organizations. They focused on the work it took to convince the national groups that the local Coalition knew their community and also had valuable expertise. An interviewee told us, “We needed national expertise for processing data, message testing, polling the best possible communications strategy.” From this vantage point, the local groups put up with a lot because it was clear that, “we couldn’t



have done it without the resources and people they sent; the ACLU and Planned Parenthood sent skilled field people managing hundreds of volunteers ... They stayed for three months."

The local groups took control from the beginning. The culture of the steering committee was to disagree and debate internally, but emerge with one voice. One decision among the steering committee that represented some of the tensions came later in the Campaign between a national vendor and local groups. The national vendor designed a mailer highlighting that the ballot initiative did not have an exception in the case of rape or incest. The mailer showed, "a woman in a shower, clearly not dressed, a black and white picture, with water coming down on her; it was very gruesome and exploitive." But it had tested "very, very well" among a focus group of Hispanic men and women. "The national experts said it was the best mail piece; it could put us over the top. My instincts were to go with it even though it disturbed me. We had to win the election." However, there was no data to back up the opinion that the graphic on the mail piece made a difference.

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YWU and Strong Families disagreed, finding the imagery too exploitive. And, "they would not let it go." They argued it painted women as victims. One explained, "I have a young daughter, I don't want her to see the image and bring it into the house." They were willing to compromise by agreeing to a mailer focused on rape and incest, something they had earlier opposed. The group finally agreed to go back to the national consultants and ask for a different image. One steering committee member on that call described it this way, "We were the crazy yokels from New Mexico. We made the argument that we cannot let the coalition be torn apart; we needed a different image that was not so disturbing. It was a very ugly and difficult call because all of these [national] folks know more than I do. We had to tell them it was not going to happen. But it was the right decision. Our local relationships were more important to us, and we had relationships and work that went beyond the election – to work together for reproductive freedom – so we wanted to honor the long-term goal. I might feel differently if we had lost!"

Some of the practical issues facing local groups came down to resources. The Coalition had been thrilled when Dolores Huerta – she and her father were heroes to many Latinos – volunteered to record a radio ad to oppose the ballot initiative. YWU worked with Dolores Huerta to produce the radio ads in English and Spanish, a decision some national groups opposed because they thought resources would be better spent on television. YWU argued radio was a more accessible medium for many communities of color who don't have access to televisions or the internet. YWU was able to find funding from national allies to help pay for the advertisements. Later, one of the larger national



groups contributed resources to buy more air time for additional radio ads developed by YWU.



The fact that groups were juggling accountability to their national organizations – with more or less ease – could easily obscure the enormous support Respect ABQ Women received from other local organizations that strongly endorsed the Campaign. One interviewee felt they could have brought in ally organizations sooner, “but in the beginning we had so much core

work.” Organizations ranging from the League of Women Voters to labor unions to the statewide LGBT group Equality New Mexico (EQNM) all played active parts in helping to fight the ban. As one person put it, “The local groups had existing constituencies, tens of thousands of members, funders, legislators, policy-makers, all of that infrastructure was already there...Countless organizations and individuals contributed.” Support also came in the form of volunteers who assisted paid staff in door knocking and phone banking.

This type of local mobilization showed the strength of the relationships between local organizations. The steering committee saw the importance of recognizing, accepting and nurturing these collegial relationships in ways that might have been overlooked by national groups coming into the state. For example, several of the steering committee members had been supportive of Equality New Mexico, the LGBT rights organization. When EQNM sent mailers to its membership to oppose the ballot initiative, steering committee members not only embraced their support but also understood the risk they were taking with members who might not see late-term abortion as “their” issue. Accepting EQNM’s support was also an important step for the Campaign that could have easily seen the issue of LGBT rights and marriage equality as a problematic alliance in a mostly Catholic city.



The Win

In a few short months, the Respect ABQ Women campaign changed expectations, even of its leadership, from losing with dignity to winning a significant victory. The actual win was decisive. Not only was there a 10 point margin (55% against and 45% for the ballot initiative), 15,000 more people voted on the ballot initiative in November 2013 than voted in the Mayoral election a month earlier.

The steering committee was elated. After talking every day, working through tough issues, fighting to keep local voices and perspectives front and center, they had won. More important, the steering committee members felt they had demonstrated to others around the country that local groups can make decisions, even ones that differ from the national experts, and succeed.

The aftermath of their success brought both joy and stress, with relationships among the steering committee members strengthened and tested. Though there were three spokespeople chosen to speak about Respect ABQ Women, there had not been a strategy with the national groups on how they would talk about why the Campaign was a success. One person told us, "When the Campaign was done, everyone was claiming it. All the national folks were on TV and none of us were in the center." Conflicts emerged among some of the steering committee members, what was described as Post-Campaign Stress Disorder. One person warned, "Be ready for the aftermath; pay attention to how to keep yourself healthy." The pace and intensity of the Campaign had created its own demands, but also gave those at the center a sense of purpose and community. "I was ready for a break," explained one member, "but who was going to be my interim community?"

“I feel positive not just about defeating the ballot initiative, but beyond reproductive health to other issues that we are working on together.”

Despite this aftermath, the overall sense was positive. "There were some tensions that came out of the Campaign," noted a steering committee member who continued, "but it has made us stronger as a coalition. We feel better equipped to react against negative proposals about abortion. More importantly, we are equipped to do proactive work, to get the culture shift we need in New Mexico and across the country to embrace access... It is a cliché, that what doesn't kill us makes us stronger. We come out the other side with success and relationships intact – both the short-term goals and our vision of what we want in New Mexico. I feel positive not just about defeating the ballot initiative, but beyond reproductive health to other issues that we are working on together."

It was clear that the steering committee had held to their commitment to move beyond "egos and building our own organizations." As one person concluded, "We made it work for us and the constituencies we are trying to serve. If we are not of service to those people, then why are we doing this?"



Lessons Learned

This paper offers one perspective on the results of the Respect ABQ Women campaign and how it defeated a late-term abortion ban campaign. It focuses on a local decision-making group and how they were able to work and act together. The victory in this campaign was never viewed by the people we interviewed as a blueprint for success, and they understood that a stronger opposition could have turned the tables. However, certain themes emerged from the interviews that the participants felt kept them working together productively and significantly contributed to their win. Listed below, these suggestions are aimed at local groups. A similar list from the perspective of larger national groups would also be instructive.

1. Be Prepared

All of the steering committee members interviewed talked about what had taken place before the anti-abortion campaign was even introduced that prepared them to work together. These included:

- **Having the skills to work through differences:** It is important to have a process to deal with the difficult conversations that are inevitable.
- **Addressing issues of age, race, and class:** Ignoring tensions on these issues, especially in white-led groups, creates divisions which are exacerbated during campaigns. The results are schisms that can lead to a fractured rather than cohesive community fighting for rights and justice. Doing the internal work of addressing issues such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia and ageism helps groups learn to deal with and work through conflicts when they arise.
- **Understanding (when to) comprise:** There is no way to run a campaign without give and take; however, there are some things that are the 'bottom line' that need to be agreed on and clear.

2. Decide on Process

How decisions are made during the campaign is key since there is enormous pressure to act quickly. But ignoring process can be costly in the long run. Defining a good decision-making process can balance speed, analysis and an examination of unintended consequences.

- **Define Expertise:** Decisions are not just about process, it is also about the information needed to make a good decision. Hearing different views will help prepare the campaign as long as the process for deciding is clear.
- **Take (on) Power:** Decision-making is about power and it requires being clear about who has power (and why). How power is distributed needs to be addressed early on.



3. Set long-term goals

Everyone wants a short-term win, but being clear on the long-term goals helps to prevent the tensions that are inevitable when operating in the tense environment of a campaign. It also can help shape the decision-making process.

- **Prioritize relationships:** Examining how the campaign can strengthen relationships over the long-term gives the process more of a chance of creating a cycle that keeps the groups working together rather than splitting apart.
- **Educate others:** Bringing others into the long-term goals can help build and strengthen the coalition and campaign and help them to understand decisions.
- **Act afterwards:** Create a plan for the aftermath both for decompressing and analyzing the results but also to remind members of the campaign of the long-term goals.

4. Define national and local roles

Larger national groups often have the necessary resources to fight the campaign as well as important relevant experience and information. Local actors have expertise about the community and new ways to look at and frame issues that resonate with the local context. The combination of local and national knowledge is very powerful but it is something that requires practice to balance.

- **Create process:** Communications, decision-making, and goals all need to be defined early on so that there is some agreement between the national and local groups.
- **Bring in an array of national actors:** There are large well-known national groups who have financial resources and there are small national groups that may have a good ear to the ground. Having all these groups work together can help support local decision-makers.
- **Decide on credit:** It is not easy when everyone is working so hard to remember that credit – for a win or a loss – is shared. Remembering to work out the claiming of credit as part of the process can model how we can all work together.



Endnotes

¹ http://newmexicomercury.com/blog/comments/the_fight_for_reproductive_rights_in_new_mexico; <http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/government-and-you/state-governments/state-profiles/new-mexico.html>

² <http://www.operationrescue.org/?s=Bud>

³ <http://www.abqjournal.com/259923/news/more-voters-support-abortion-ban.html>

⁴ These groups included the National Organization for Women, NM ACLU, NM Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Planned Parenthood (NM), Southwest Women's Law Center, Strong Families NM, and Young Women United.

⁵ All of the Coalition for Choice partners contributed a significant amount of their resources.



Building Movement Project

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2015