



Political Strategizing in a Constantly Changing Environment

What tactics did UHI campaigns employ to survive and thrive during political change? What do change agents need in order to be prepared for change? What are some of the risks in maneuvering in a political environment and how can those risks be minimized?

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About the Urban Health Initiative

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) established the Urban Health Initiative (UHI) in 1995 to determine whether a concerted, collaborative effort can bring about region-wide improvements in multiple measures of youth health and safety. Five campaigns comprise the UHI:

- Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
- Mayor's Time (Detroit)
- Safe Passages (Oakland)
- Philadelphia Safe and Sound
- Youth Matters (Richmond)

UHI campaigns work to implement proven strategies at such a large scale that citywide statistics will improve significantly. To do that, UHI campaigns must be change agents to secure systemic policy and fiscal changes necessary to get strategies to that scale. The UHI was designed to be non-prescriptive, allowing communities to craft implementation plans based on local conditions without assumptions, mandates or imperatives set forward by RWJF, which made a ten-year funding commitment.

The National Program Office (NPO) based in Seattle provides guidance, technical assistance and oversight to the local UHI campaigns in a number of areas including research, management, systems change and communications. The NPO also helps campaigns attract and develop the local leaders essential to bring about and sustain change in their cities. Former Seattle Mayor Charles Royer is national program director.

About the UHI's Lessons Learned Project

The UHI campaigns and NPO have learned many lessons with regard to developing change agent organizations, and securing and sustaining change in large cities. The NPO is working to catalogue these lessons so they can be put to use by the campaigns in the final years of the UHI, and so they can benefit future change agent organizations and their funders. Several topics have been covered. All papers can be found on the UHI's website, www.urbanhealth.org. More topics will be covered in the coming months.

All papers should be considered works in progress. The UHI is not yet complete, and many individuals who have been heavily involved with the UHI have yet to be interviewed. As new or different insights are gathered on a topic, the papers will be redrafted and reprinted.

Anyone who has comments, suggestions or questions about the UHI Lessons Learned Project or individual topics, can contact Jerry VanderWood, UHI Director of Communications, at 206-616-3692 or jerryvw@u.washington.edu.

Political Strategizing in a Constantly Changing Environment

By Jerry VanderWood¹

The Urban Health Initiative is a ten-year commitment by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. That this commitment is unusually long represents the Foundation's acknowledgement that it takes time to secure systemic change, and then more time for those changes to result in improved outcomes.

One of the reasons that change takes time, paradoxically, is that change occurs all the time. In just the first eight of the ten years of the UHI, the political landscape has changed considerably: The U.S. presidency changed hands and political parties. Each site has experienced turnover in the Governor's office, sometimes including a change in party. Each city has a different mayor than it had at the beginning of the UHI. Two cities went from a weak mayor to a strong mayor form of government. States have taken over school boards. Collectively the sites have had to work with no fewer than 20 (20!) different school superintendents. Security issues have become paramount at all levels of government. We went to war. And oh by the way, the economy and government budgets tanked.

Change agents know that if they are not skilled at anticipating and managing political change, those changes can set the effort back – momentum is stalled while new players are educated and motivated, and program strategies are re-framed in light of ever-changing political priorities. On the other hand, political change can mean tremendous opportunity, and many UHI sites have taken advantage of it. Below are some of the strategies that UHI sites have used not only to survive, but to thrive, during political change. In a nutshell, UHI sites understand they must be more than good advocates – they have to create value for their cities and political leaders.

Approaches to surviving and thriving during political change:

★ ADD VALUE FOR GOVERNMENTS

"Adding value" is one strategy that has been helpful to the sites in surviving changes in elected and appointed offices. The sites provide added value to both the city at large and individual candidates and incumbents.

For example, the data work – new data systems, data collaboratives, children's budgets, etc. – developed by many of the sites are considered important, ongoing services for the community at large. Data voids in these cities were barriers to the implementation of their strategies, so UHI sites filled them. The sites then shared these data products with the community at large, and many agencies have enhanced their own effectiveness by using them in the decision making process. Sites, in turn, are perceived as entities that produce the types of results valued by any government.

"If we get a change in administration, I still think Safe and Sound can sell its value and worth to whoever the next mayor is, as well as to some of the other non-profits, to be a hub where things happen."

-Ernie Jones, President/CEO, Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation
and board chair, Philadelphia Safe and Sound

★ **ADD VALUE FOR CANDIDATES AND INCUMBENTS**

This strategy of adding value applies not just to cities, but to individuals as well. Many sites have worked with candidates and elected officials to provide expertise with regard to children's policy issues. In many instances, sites have given politicians the policies to tout, as well as the words to use to do so. Politicians appreciate having good data and research-based strategies to add to their platforms, particularly strategies that come with the backing of influential individuals such as members of the sites' boards.

An example of this involves Detroit's Mayor's Time, previously known as The Youth Connection. The Youth Connection provided information on children's issues and after-school programming to the mayoral candidates in 2002, and with its partners hosted a "youth forum" for all candidates. (See Sidebar 1 beginning on page 9, "Making every candidate a right candidate: The Detroit mayoral race," for further information.) The conclusion is a new mayor who adopted The Youth Connection's strategies as his own and who joined forces with The Youth Connection to create the new entity, Mayor's Time.

"Several years of planning had given us the ability to provide the mayor with a foundation to immediately begin implementation of after-school programming for children of Detroit. We offered our RWJ funded program with its great administrative leadership and staff. Within one week, our executive director, Grenaé Dudley, was in the mayor's suite with an office developing Mayor's Time."

-Freddie Burton, Jr., Wayne County Probate Judge and board president, Mayor's Time

★ **HAVE EARLY WINS**

Many believe that the success that certain site strategies are having, both in terms of early outcome numbers and in terms of dollars being invested in them, would command the support of any new official. "Early wins" are important, as are the data systems to track outcomes and investments so that these wins are obvious.

★ **CREATE THE DEMAND**

In addition to appealing directly to an official in this way, many sites believe it is important to make it politically difficult for a new official to undo the implementation of sites' strategies. For example, given the demand for after-school programming, a new official would not want to undo or slow the momentum of after-school programming established in the previous administration.

"I think we need a two-tiered strategy. What we're trying to do with generating funding for these strategies and with data work, is build enough support and belief within the city leadership so if there's a new mayor, there's enough leadership still saying, 'Wow, those folks really do the work.' The other tier is that when administrations change and people look at things like the Children's Investment Strategy and say, 'That's the old mayor's initiative, I don't want it,' that's when you rely on your community mobilization for people to say, 'No, you're not taking my after-school program away.' You need to be working it at both levels."

-Jo Ann Lawer, Executive Director, Philadelphia Safe and Sound

Some have mentioned that, in siting programs, consideration be given first and foremost to areas of need – but that some consideration also be given to areas of political clout. For example, some after-school programs coming on-line could be placed in neighborhoods whose residents are more likely to launch a protest in the event that the programs are threatened with elimination, thus making it more likely that all after-school programs would survive.

“Added clout” is a major factor in the early decision to have regionalism be a core value of the UHI. Architects of the UHI believed that a regional approach would include the often more politically powerful suburban areas. Although most UHI sites did not build a regional approach or one as originally envisioned, many did seek to add clout to their efforts by considering the location of new programs within the city or by creating statewide coalitions.

★ **INSTITUTIONALIZE THE CHANGE**

“If what you’re trying to do is get institutions to work differently together, you’re really talking about who are the players you have to have at the table, and how do you ensure long-term commitment and eventual institutionalization of that commitment, so it is there independent of the top four or five people.”

-Dave Kears, Director, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency and Safe Passages board co-chair

The initial policy change is not enough. Indeed, it is the goal of all UHI sites to have their efforts institutionalized within systems. In a variety of ways they work with individuals up and down the ladder within bureaucracies, for example, not just with school board members and superintendents of schools, but also principals and teachers. In some cases sites have hired individuals who come from the middle layers of systems and who, therefore, can help the site navigate that system.

Many sites have staff assigned to work with middle and lower levels of systems to facilitate institutionalization. These staff often serve as diplomats between systems with different cultures that are now learning to work together, or as trouble shooters on technical issues. In general, they spend the time to analyze and break down the barriers to change at the micro level – time that those within the system don’t have because they are busy doing their regular jobs. (Note: Some consider these positions within site staff as temporary needs and used to start the institutionalization process; more people have suggested that they are needed for the long-term, as the institutionalization process takes much time and focused attention.)

Some sites have made an interesting observation about the timing of engaging public officials. The basic steps are to invest in a small effort and then, if it proves successful, grow it to scale and have it institutionalized within the system. Institutionalization can be measured in a variety of ways. For example, an effort is institutionalized if it is no longer considered by those within the system as a special project or pilot that is funded out of discretionary funds, but as the normal way of doing business with long-term budget support.

Some believe that administrative leaders such as agency heads are in the best position to work together initially to develop and fund the small-scale effort. Then, elected officials who can move major dollars within city or state budgets become key to the cause. During the early development phase, administrative leaders feel they are “experimenting” and have the expertise and discretionary funds to do so. They may be uncomfortable having elected officials looking over their shoulders and, perhaps, applying political considerations onto the

initial effort. But on the other hand, once a pilot or small-scale effort is proven successful, the administrative leaders can then make the case to the elected officials that major investments are needed to bring it to scale.

A bit of irony is noted here: Change agents often find that an “intransigent bureaucracy” is a barrier to change. While UHI sites make this complaint, they also seek to institutionalize their efforts within bureaucracies so that, in part, when political change occurs, an “intransigent bureaucracy” will protect sites’ strategies.

Political skills, contacts and luck

UHI sites have survived and thrived during political change by being valuable to their cities as policy and process experts and implementers of good-government solutions. They have also learned some lessons about maneuvering in a political environment, including establishing relationships with politicians and government officials, yet remaining out of the political fray.

★ HAVE, OR GET, THE EXPERTISE

As is the case with both the data and communications issues, understanding and accepting the change agent role is key to making progress within a political environment. As change agents, UHI sites know they have to be non-partisan, because implementing change of this magnitude will take time, through multiple terms and tenures of officials. Sites need the expertise to scan the horizon, to anticipate how the political map may change over time, and to develop ways to manage that political change.

“A good political strategist on staff or in their constituency would be keeping tabs on who is likely to run, because that’s part of the political strategist’s job. So early on you could start figuring out who needed to be brought on or touched in some way. It’s back to having a campaign mentality where somebody is in charge of every one of these key pieces and is thinking strategically about his/her responsibilities in these areas.”

-Charles Royer, National Program Director

★ ONE DEGREE OF SEPARATION

Not surprisingly, all UHI sites acknowledge that relationships are key. They strive to have solid working relationships with incumbent officials as well as candidates and other “up and comers.” Quite often this relationship development pays huge dividends. The Detroit experience is notable in this regard – The Youth Connection worked to establish relationships with all mayoral candidates, including a young state senator. That young state senator, Kwame Kilpatrick, went on to become mayor, and The Youth Connection already had an “in” with him. Together they formed Mayor’s Time.

To some degree, the fact that The Youth Connection was able to develop such a close relationship with the new mayor was a matter of luck – it just so happens that The Youth Connection’s Board chair, Judge Freddie Burton, is a long-time friend of the Kilpatrick family. At the same time, though, it can be said that The Youth Connection created its own good luck. Like all UHI sites, The Youth Connection sought to have on its Board or among its UHI Fellows either key officials themselves, or individuals who have “one degree of separation” from as many current or future key officials as practical.

In addition to having well-connected Board members and Fellows, UHI sites have expanded their influence with policymakers and candidates by working through broad coalitions. The same principal as above applies here: the broader the coalition, the more likely that key policymakers or candidates will have a good relationship with one of its members.

★ **BE NEUTRAL**

Most UHI sites have spent time working with and educating candidates. As can be expected, they strive to be, and be perceived as, neutral during these forays into electoral politics. Certainly, if sites were partisan and sided with the losing candidates, it would be extremely difficult to then work with the new official to implement the sites' strategies.

Sites have worked to add value to all candidates' campaigns by educating them on youth issues and offering their strategies as non-partisan solutions with proven effectiveness. (*An example of a UHI site working in a campaign on a non-partisan basis can be seen in Sidebar 2, beginning on page 11, "Through Focus Five campaign, Philadelphia Safe and Sound and partners are getting commitments to kids from gubernatorial candidates."*)

★ **HOW CLOSE IS TOO CLOSE?**

Every UHI site has made friends in high places. They have "added value" for candidates who went on to win elections and/or have established relationships with incumbents. Everyone acknowledges that to implement a systems change plan, it is vital that a change agent should "have the ear" of mayors, superintendents, agency heads and other officials. However, all are concerned about being, or being perceived as being, too close to the incumbent. There is a danger that a new official would perceive a site's strategies as part of the former official's platform and, therefore, of less political value. Or, if an incumbent becomes politically weak for any reason, a site's "champion" could end up providing very little clout.

Sites have to calibrate this constantly. As described, they work with all candidates on a non-partisan basis. And they eagerly work with any incumbent, but strive to maintain that the strategies they promote can belong to any and all officials or to the city itself, and that the values they espouse are universal. For example, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign promotes *Baltimore's* after-school strategy. Philadelphia Safe and Sound calls itself "*the City's campaign for kids.*"

"Mayor Kilpatrick is committed to after-school programming and he coined 'Mayor's Time' because he feels that as mayor he should take responsibility to increase quality opportunities for kids, particularly during the often unstructured time between 3 and 8 p.m. We appreciate his vision and are pleased to have the opportunity to help make it a reality. At the same time we believe the vision can be applied beyond the city limits and beyond any one mayor's tenure. Our bylaws reflect that the areas include areas other than Detroit. We've had the mayor of Pontiac on the board. We also want to grow the concept of Mayor's time beyond these cities to around the state. The schools have the kids during the day; parents have them after they get off work. Who has the kids in between? The mayor. EVERY mayor has the responsibility, and that's one concept we have to sell.

-Freddie Burton, Jr., Wayne County Probate Judge and board president, Mayor's Time

★ **BE NIMBLE**

UHI sites have taken different approaches when working through political campaigns. Some have held public forums/debates for candidates; some have had private conversations with candidates or their key backers. Knowing how to approach candidates is not an exact science, and deciding which approach to take can be based on many factors, including the status of the sites' existing relationship with the candidates: sites with close connections to a candidate may get good mileage out of a private conversation; sites without close connections may have to "draw a crowd" in order to get the attention of candidates. In any event, having a political strategist is very helpful in determining which approach to take.

Sites have also learned to read the motivations of officials, and may revise their approach depending on whether, for example, a values-based approach is more likely to appeal to an official than a logical/data based approach. In other instances sites have determined who is influential with an official by, among other things, studying campaign finance reports, and then approached those individuals as gateways to the official.

School systems – a special case

Of all the systems UHI sites work with, school systems may be the most difficult for sites to access. School systems represent political change on steroids. Much of the reason for this may simply be timing – the UHI is taking place during an era of upheaval within the education arena, with the movement toward a results-based orientation exemplified by high-stakes testing, the federal No Child Left Behind Act and the growth of charter schools and other alternative approaches. School superintendents have turned over with extraordinary frequency: UHI sites have worked with no fewer than 20 different school superintendents. Three districts have been taken over by their states.

For UHI sites, dealing with the nearly constant change in school district leadership is one challenge. Another is getting and keeping the attention of the leaders and the system as a whole. School districts and their leaders are under tremendous pressure to reform the system and to produce results *now*. When UHI sites approach school districts with best practice strategies that could help the districts achieve their long-term goals, the school systems often can't provide enough focused attention to institutionalize the strategies. It seems in some – by no means all – cases that school districts consider sites' strategies, no matter how valuable and effective, as distractions from their most pressing concerns.

School systems also tend to be more hierarchical than other systems. Perhaps this is so because school districts are politically under the gun to fix themselves. Many districts are working hard to do so, with superintendents leading the charge. Therefore, any new strategy has to come via the superintendent and must jibe (politically and operationally) with the overall reform he/she is pursuing at that moment. This makes it difficult for external change agents to have an impact.

UHI sites use various strategies to deal with the challenges of accessing the school system. They cultivate the generally more stable lower levels of management, which in some cases have included individuals who went on to become interim, and sometimes permanent, superintendents. They learn how to approach the new superintendents (for example, with

a values-based or data driven approach, depending on the superintendent's style). Also, the UHI Fellows program has been helpful in this regard. Among the UHI Fellows are several members of elected or appointed school boards as well as a school superintendent.

Dealing with the "special case" of school systems perhaps merits its own lessons-learned paper.

The economy – a different kind of political change

The national economy went into a recession, resulting in severely constrained government budgets. That's no secret. The important lesson is this: It should be *assumed* that economic conditions will change considerably during a ten-year initiative. After all, the ebbs and flows of the business cycle are natural in the U.S. economy, even if each recession has its own cause-and-effect characteristics. In this case, the UHI did not prepare for the dramatic downturn and pervasive budget crises.

The economic downturn occurred at a particularly bad time for UHI sites. Just as the ramp-down of RWJF funds began, the economy turned. This made it more difficult for the sites to raise money for their own operations to replace diminishing RWJF funds. As a result, much time and attention was shifted from the sites' primary objectives of implementing systems change and toward their own fundraising efforts.

Government budget crises also made it more difficult for sites to generate or redirect public funding for their strategies. It is well understood that such crises, like other types of political change, can be opportunities.

"Any large-government budget director worth his salt likes to have boom and bust. You can make no change during the status quo. The changes come when you have manna from heaven – or LBJ – or when you get huge cutbacks that demand change to the things you're doing."

-Cindy Curreri, National Program Deputy Director

One of the few examples of UHI sites turning the economic and fiscal downturns into opportunities is occurring in Michigan. Staff of Mayor's Time are developing a statewide "blended funding" initiative where local money historically invested directly in local service delivery could be "donated" to local jurisdictions that would then pass the funds on to State agencies to match federal entitlement allowances. The money, through these circuitous routes, comes back to the local programs and their clients doubled or tripled, with no additional local or state investment.

For the most part, sites are "playing defense" with regard to existing funding for their strategies and are retooling their approaches given the new reality. The crises may yet become vehicles for the change sought by the sites. And, assuming that economic conditions will change means assuming that the current negative conditions will also change.

Again, the lesson is that both sponsors of change agents and the change agents themselves should anticipate economic shifts. Sponsors should, therefore, think about how they can help change agents through these periods. Change agents should think about adding contingencies and funds for dealing with economic change into their overall strategic plans.

Summary Points

1. Some approaches for change agents to survive and thrive during political change are:
 - a. Add value for the city by, for example, creating products such as data systems that have value for government. This makes it more likely that new administrations will recognize the value of, and want to continue to work with, that change agent.
 - b. Add value to candidates and incumbents by offering sound, research-based solutions that are politically advantageous for them to incorporate into their platforms.
 - c. Generate good preliminary results or other early wins, and have the data system needed to prove it.
 - d. Create public demand for the change; make it politically difficult for new political actors to reverse the change.
 - e. Work with multiple layers of a system to institutionalize the change.
2. Change agents need – on staff or within their constituency – the expertise to scan the horizon, to anticipate how the political map may change over time, and to develop ways to manage that political change.
3. Change agents should develop their boards and other internal groups with the goal of having connections with as many current and future policymakers as feasible.
4. Being involved in elective politics is a necessity for change agents, but they should be neutral and of value to all candidates when doing so.
5. Although change agents should strive to have close relationships with governors, mayors and other policymakers, they should recognize that a close association carries risks. These risks can be minimized by positioning the issue as, for example, the city's issue rather than the current mayor's issue.
6. Change agents should be savvy and capable enough to tailor their approach according to a policymaker's individual motivations and style.
7. School systems, particularly during this extraordinary period of education crisis and reform, are particularly difficult for external change agents to access.
8. Economic downturns and fiscal crises should be anticipated, and prepared for, by the sponsors of change agent organizations and by the change agents.

SIDEBAR I: MAKING EVERY CANDIDATE A RIGHT CANDIDATE: THE DETROIT MAYORAL RACE

(originally published May 2002)

Editor's note: Since original publication of this article, Mayor Kilpatrick and The Youth Connection have joined forces to create Mayor's Time.

Grenaé Dudley, executive director of The Youth Connection, knows an effective way to move after-school programming up the city of Detroit's priority list is not just to work with the mayor, but to work with future mayors.

With no incumbent running and a wide open race, The Youth Connection (TYC) and its partners worked to get children's issues in general, and after-school programming in particular, on the platforms of all the candidates. As a result, not only has new mayor Kwame Kilpatrick made after-school programming a key component of his administration's agenda, he has coined a term, "Mayor's Time," to refer to the often unsupervised hours from 3 to 8 p.m. Plus, through his relationship with the new administration, TYC Board of Directors co-chair Judge Freddie Burton worked to have Dudley "loaned" to the new administration to direct Mayor's Time. "It's a tremendous opportunity," she says. "We can now really push the agenda we've been working on for years."

The experience has shown the value of 1) partnerships, including non-traditional ones, 2) good data 3) good messages and 4) political neutrality. More on each of these later.

A key campaign-related event was the Youth Forum, an informal debate in which young people (TYC Youth Ambassadors) asked the candidates questions about issues - all focused on children and youth. The mayoral candidates took this forum seriously; fifteen candidates attended the forum including the leading candidates, Gil Hill and Kwame Kilpatrick.

Kilpatrick won the election, and because of his familiarity with TYC that grew during the course of the campaign, he tapped TYC to help with his transition. The new mayor asked Dudley to serve on his transition team regarding after-school opportunities.

Urban Health Initiative Fellows involved with TYC were key to the effort. "Our Fellows challenged us to think about how we could leverage our position and raise the profile of the after-school issue with the candidates," says Dudley. UHI Fellow Elizabeth Barton, Associate Director for the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies at Wayne State University, secured WSU as host for the forum and helped reach out to the other primary partner, the League of Women Voters. Another UHI Fellow, Think Detroit CEO Michael Tenbusch, was asked to chair Kilpatrick's recreation department transition team. Jack Kresnak, Detroit Free Press journalist and UHI Fellow, helped the Youth Ambassadors shape their questions for the candidates.

Getting an issue not merely on an elected official's "radar screen" but on his agenda of top priorities takes careful planning and an ability to seize opportunities as they present themselves.

The key aspects of this effort were:

- **Partnerships** - the League of Women Voters of Detroit and Wayne State University were invaluable partners, according to Dudley. Both organizations are well-known institutions that are not automatically associated with youth issues in the minds of candidates. Having them as partners added political weight to the effort and reinforced the message that interest in youth issues goes beyond the traditional youth advocacy groups.
- **Good data and concise messages** - The Youth Connection's efforts to generate and compile data on after-school opportunities (scope of the problem, costs, benefits of programming), as well as its marketing communications research to hone messages, paid off. Language and data that the major candidates began to use paralleled closely the language and data long used by the TYC. TYC made it easy for the candidates to incorporate messages and numbers about after-school opportunities into their campaigns.

- **Neutrality** - TYC did not campaign for a candidate, they campaigned for a cause. Their goal was that for whoever was ultimately elected, after-school opportunities would be a priority. They welcomed any and all candidates to the forum and freely gave their expertise throughout the campaign to any candidate who asked. Having a partner such as the League of Women Voters also helped assure neutrality. “The League helped us to remain impartial by, among other things, advising us to invite all candidates to the forum as opposed to trying to determine who the ‘top’ candidates are and inviting only them,” she says. League President Della Goodwin moderated the forum, which also helped TYC remain neutral.

SIDEBAR 2: THROUGH FOCUS FIVE CAMPAIGN, PHILADELPHIA SAFE AND SOUND AND PARTNERS ARE GETTING COMMITMENTS TO KIDS FROM GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES

(originally published October 2002)

Through a coalition unusual for its ubiquity on the campaign trail and unity among advocacy groups, Philadelphia Safe and Sound and its partners are working to ensure that Pennsylvania state government makes children a policy priority.

Focus Five for Kids: Pennsylvania’s Campaign for Children and Families was founded by Philadelphia Safe and Sound, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. Organizations and individuals from across the state have joined the non-partisan campaign, which seeks firm commitments to a comprehensive children’s agenda from the leading gubernatorial candidates. The effort is already showing signs of success in the public commitments of the candidates.

Focus Five concentrates on five key issues that, implemented together, ensure that children grow up healthy, safe, well-educated and prepared for tomorrow’s workplace.

1. Grow up healthy
2. Enter school ready to learn
3. Get a high-quality education
4. Have safe places to go and things to do after school
5. Live in stable and supportive families

“Focus Five recognizes the interdependence of all five issues, and the reality that none can be solved unless all are addressed,” says Naomi Post, Urban Health Initiative Fellow and former Safe and Sound president who led the organizational effort. “One of the most satisfying aspects of Focus Five is that it is such a united and focused effort. When we thought about how to make children a pivotal issue in the upcoming election, we knew that, as separate agencies, our individual messages would be lost in the noise and din of a political campaign. Our organizations may have different goals, but we have found common ground with these issues that, when addressed, will have the most positive, longest-lasting impact on the kids of Pennsylvania.”

States have had varying degrees of success in passing legislation and budgets supportive of children, says Bob Nelkin, director of policy initiatives at the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. “The critical difference in those states that have supportive policies is strong leadership from the governor,” he says. “That’s why Focus Five is so important.

“Efforts to get kids’ issues on candidates’ policy agendas in the past have relied, with limited success, on typical strategies such as questionnaires, forums and white papers,” says Nelkin. “We’re doing some of those things as well, but we’re also using paid and earned media, polling, taking candidates on tours of successful programs, and other strategies not typical of youth advocacy campaigns. Basically, we’re trying to get candidates to think about children at every turn. We’re creating a presence, a buzz, an expectation among the electorate that these issues must be addressed, and committed to, by the candidates.”

For example, college football fans inching along the traffic-snarled roads on the way to the Nebraska-Penn State game were exposed to billboards that highlighted the Focus Five policy areas. Both candidates were at the game to press the flesh, and the Focus Five campaign made sure they were greeted by scores of volunteers sporting buttons with the Focus Five slogan, “Hey, what about the kids?”

Focus Five has been running since April 2002, during both the primary and general election campaigns. Evidence of the campaigns impact can be seen in the public statements of the candidates. Some examples:

- Republican Mike Fisher says, "As governor, my administration will make the largest investment in early childhood education in Pennsylvania history." As governor, Fisher would push for critical additional investments in school readiness programs, including Head Start, early learning centers and community-based partnerships.
- Democrat Ed Rendell would institute all-day kindergarten in all public schools and dramatically increase state aid to education, and he supports smaller class sizes. He has promised more money for family support centers, which provide services ranging from drop-in day care to drug treatment to help struggling parents.

"Focus Five has really brought advocacy groups statewide together," says Nelkin. "I believe that, for years to come, we will have more unity, strength and influence."

The following individuals have been interviewed as part of the UHI's lessons learned project. Interviews with many other individuals involved with the UHI will be held over the following year. The author wishes to thank all interviewees for their time and insights.

Freddie G. Burton, Jr., Wayne County Probate Judge; Board Chair, Mayor's Time
Dennis Chaconas, former Superintendent, Oakland Unified School District; former Board Vice Chair, Safe Passages
Denise Clayton, Deputy Director, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Susan Crump, Vice President, United Way Services, Advisory Board Member, Youth Matters
Cindy Curreri, National Program Deputy Director, Urban Health Initiative
Grenaé Dudley, Executive Director, Mayor's Time
Jim Dunn, President and CEO, Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce (lead agency for Youth Matters)
Mike Evans, Director, Human Services, City of Richmond; Member, Advisory Board Executive Committee, Youth Matters
Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
Jeff Griffith, Communication's Director, Mayor's Time
Jeriel Heard, Associate Director, Mayor's Time
Linda Herzog, National Program Associate Director, Urban Health Initiative
Michael M. Howe, President, East Bay Community Foundation (lead agency for Safe Passages)
Martha Holleman, Director of Policy and Planning, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
Paul Jellinek, Principal, Isaacs/Jellinek; former Vice President, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Ernest Jones, President and CEO, Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation; Board Chair, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
David Kears, Director, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency; Board Chair, Safe Passages
Jon King, President and CEO, Exclusive Staffing Companies; Advisory Board Chair, Youth Matters
Jo Ann Lawer, President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Floyd Morris, Senior Program Officer, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
George Musgrove, former Oakland Assistant City Manager; former Board member, Safe Passages
Tony Nazzario, MIS/Data Manager, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Mae O'Brien, Director of Institutional Advancement, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Laura Pinkney, former Executive Director, Safe Passages
Naomi Post-Street, Consultant; UHI Fellow; former Executive Director, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Charles Royer, National Program Director, Urban Health Initiative
Rush Russell, President, Children's Futures; former Senior Program Officer, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Lisa Specter, Executive Director, Smart Smiles, Boys and Girls Club of Greater Richmond; former Deputy Director, Youth Matters
Veronica Templeton, former Executive Director, Youth Matters
Michael Tenbusch, CEO, Think Detroit; UHI Fellow
Phil Wells, Deputy Director, Mayor's Time
Robin Wood, Deputy Director, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
Marsha Zibalese-Crawford, Associate Professor, Temple University; Consultant, Philadelphia Safe and Sound

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