

Conference Summary Report

PROGRESSIVE
ROUNDTABLE™

Conference Rationale:

In today's information age, cultural values must be repeated, developed, and maintained in the public conversation, or they will disappear – first from people's lips, then from their minds. People can change the way they look at the world – become more progressive – but not without help. *Progressives must organize into a movement that promotes the benefits of progressive values, in order to create a sustainable progressive majority in this country.*

The Commonweal Institute's first Progressive Roundtable proved a successful model for organizing crucial players in this emerging movement.

Conference Summary:

In March 2006, the Commonweal Institute convened 58 prominent progressive non-profit leaders, funders, academics, and experts from across the country to address priority needs for building the marketing and communications components of the progressive movement's infrastructure. Long-term results were assessed with a follow-up one year after the event.

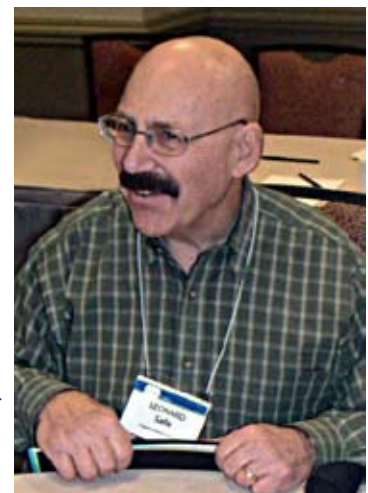
Major Results: Collaboration and Stronger Networks

New ongoing collaborations and networks that promise to **strengthen the progressive movement's infrastructure** are among the Progressive Roundtable's most significant results. The event not only introduced people to one another, but also gave them a unique opportunity to experience working together. We heard from a number of participants that the networking aspect was one of the most valuable outcomes of the convening; several recommended that future Progressive Roundtables allot more time for such networking opportunities.

Priority Areas Identified:

In order to help progressives communicate and market their ideas and values more effectively to the American public, the Progressive Roundtable identified **six urgent infrastructure needs:**

- A progressive media lab
- A research and coordination center
- A national strategic working group
- Investment in human capacity
- Progressive convener(s)
- Building connected capacity



*Leonard Salle,
Director/CoFounder of
Commonweal Institute*

Infrastructure Development Underway:

Both alone and in collaboration, Progressive Roundtable participants proposed 17 programs to address the above priorities for the progressive marketing and communications infrastructure. The Commonwealth Institute collected Letters of Interest for these projects and sent them to 18 funding entities that had expressed interest in receiving them. **The following eight projects are moving ahead.**

Progressive Communications Network Incubation Center (PCNIC)

Submitted by ProgressNow (www.progressnow.org), ProgressNowAction (www.progressnowaction.org), and Advancing Wisconsin

This program has expanded Colorado's ProgressNow model—a state-wide, multi-level communications and advocacy network for the state's entire progressive movement—into Ohio (www.progressohio.org), Wisconsin (www.onewisconsinnow.org), and California (www.couragecampaign.org), and similar organizations are currently forming in Minnesota, Michigan, and Washington.

Messaging for the Progressive Faith Community

Submitted by Faith Voices for the Common Good (www.faithvoices.org) and The New Press (www.thenewpress.com)

This proposal sought to create an echo chamber effect around new progressive ideas by developing a line of books on progressive religion, as well as developing new forms and uses of social software technologies to engage progressive audiences more deeply in values-related conversations. Portions of the project are being carried out to address some of the communication needs of the faith community, with at least four progressive religion books in progress and more in the pipeline;

www.faithvoices.org/programs/programs.html.

John Halpin (Center for American Progress) explains strategic considerations for promoting a progressive view of government's role; others at table include Mike Huttner (ProgressNow), Laurie Spivak (Commonwealth Institute), Dave Johnson (Commonwealth Institute), duVergne Gaines (Feminist Majority), and Darrin Bodner (Media Matters).



**Infrastructure
Development:**
(continued)

Netcentric Campaigns (www.netcentriccampaigns.org)

Submitted by Green Media Toolshed (www.greenmediatoolshed.org)

This proposal was to develop the Netcentric MEDIA Campaign Hub for coordinating distributed media campaign activities among many collaborating groups in any progressive issue area, and providing training and support services for users. A portion of the proposal, development of software to capture the distributed work of volunteers (e.g., hundreds of volunteers across the country collaborating to build and maintain a large database of media contacts), is reportedly going well and the developers are seeking major partners as potential licensees of the software.

(www.greenmediatoolshed.org/toolstour/MediaContactDatabase.html)

Public News Service Expansion

Submitted by Public News Service (www.publicnewsservice.org)
and *Media in the Public Interest*

PNS proposed expanding its network of 15 state-based progressive AP-style news services to add (1) local coverage for five additional key states; (2) increase the number of nonprofit sources and the range of issues that PNS reports on; (3) create a new Congressional Progressive Caucus beat to localize and “translate” national stories; and add new capabilities to its internet distribution, thus widening its audience. With funding from its existing sources, PNS has expanded the number of states in which it works to 21, plus five more in development, but has not been able to raise funds to add the CPC beat.



*Rita Nakashima
Brock (Faith Voices)
and Craig Aaron
(Free Press)
discuss priority
communication
needs.*

Progressive Clergy Mobilization

Submitted by FaithfulAmerica.org and Faith Voices for the Common Good.

This proposal sought support to create a joint information-delivery and technology infrastructure to reach mainstream religious people with progressive messaging through innovative social software. The joint infrastructure would provide clergy leadership training and a dynamic and a centralized interactive discourse service strengthening the moral public voice of the progressive movement. Interest in the online Synanim communication platform for the faith community, which is at the heart of this project, is gradually increasing.

**Infrastructure
Development:**
(continued)

Progressive Communicators Network Expansion

Submitted by Spirit in Action (www.spiritinaction.net)

The Progressive Communicators Network is continuing its proven approach of national and regional work on: (1) supporting networking between communicators; (2) building skills of communicators, with a focus on framing and messaging; and (3) fostering co-operation and collaboration and supporting the projects that spring from these collaborations. However, the rate of expansion of its work is less than would have been possible had funding been available for additional staff positions and program resources; (www.spiritinaction.net/pcn).

Blogtank/Blogpac

Submitted by a group of prominent progressive bloggers

The goals of this proposal -- to inject the values of speed, effectiveness, and accountability into the progressive movement by increasing the size, the legitimacy, and the reach of the progressive blogosphere -- are being carried out by two separate organizations. The Center for Independent Media (www.newjournalist.org), with affiliates in CO, IA, MI, and MN, provides investigative journalism skills training and mentoring to bloggers and online journalists, many of whose stories are subsequently picked up by television, radio, and newspapers. Blogpac (www.blogpac.org) supports the development of progressive infrastructure and builds the movement by giving grants to experienced internet activists and local bloggers at the state level.

Progressive Roundtable

Submitted by the Commonweal Institute (www.commonwealinstitute.org)

Based on the strongly positive reaction to the initial event in 2006, the Commonweal Institute is creating an ongoing series of results-oriented convenings. A local event in California is planned for late 2007 on the topic of infrastructure funding, and a larger event in the Midwest in 2008 on promoting progressive values through single-issue organizations and online interventions.

*Erik Sahlin
(Rockridge Institute),
Lorelei Kelly
(Stimson Center),
Martin Collier
(Glaser Progress
Foundation), and
others listen to
arguments for greater
investment in
leadership
development.*



Infrastructure Development: (continued)

Progressive Brand

An additional infrastructure need that was identified during the Progressive Roundtable, but did not make it into the “top six” priorities, was development and management of the “progressive brand” - a coherent identity for the progressive movement. The Center for American Progress (www.americanprogress.org) and the Glaser Progress Foundation (www.glaserfoundation.org) are currently working on a progressive brand project, which followed upon discussions that took place between senior staff of those two organizations during the Progressive Roundtable convening.

Participants' Comments

Hear what participants have to say, one year after the event:

*“I met folks in person whom I had only known by name and we still keep in touch. As well, we are **beginning to work collaboratively** with some.”*

*“I got a sizeable **consulting contract** through one of the contacts I made at the Progressive Roundtable.”*

“I refer to the Progressive Roundtable in conversation and look back at items on the Progressive Roundtable website for new ideas.”



*Rudolph Malveaux
(political consultant)*



*Meg Gage
(Proteus Fund)*

*“I appreciate what it accomplished in **getting such a diverse group to work together**; that’s one of the hardest things for progressives.”*

*“**It made a difference in my thinking** – helped change my ideas, because of meeting the many people there.*

I bump into a lot of people in DC now whom I met at the Progressive Roundtable.”

*“I was impressed by the wide variety of people who attended and the **great sense of community** I felt there.”*



*Ian Finseth
(Commonweal Institute)*

Recommendations:

This first-of-its-kind convening proved to be a rich learning ground regarding steps for the further development and maintenance of progressive marketing and communications infrastructure. Our analysis of the event and its outcomes, plus the feedback from participants (donors as well as others), reveals three ongoing needs:

- (1) **strong, clearly identified networks to drive the progressive movement;**
- (2) **proactive coordination of progressive messaging and strategic planning;** and
- (3) **donor education and closer cooperation between progressive funders and organizations working in the field.**

Conclusion:

By convening the Progressive Roundtable, the Commonweal Institute was **a catalyst for significant developments in progressives' marketing and communications infrastructure**. The results reported here indicate the beginnings of that infrastructure, while the remaining gaps present significant opportunities for important contributions to the progressive movement. The results also suggest an important lesson: progressive funders need to work more openly and collaboratively with each other and with progressive organizations and activists to build systems capable of winning hearts and changing minds in today's marketplace of ideas.

The full one-year conference report, with appendices, and an earlier, immediate post-event report, may be found at www.progressiveroundtable.org/conferencereport.

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