

## State-Level Associations: An Emerging Trend in Community Mediation

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*State-level mediation associations (SMAs) in more than twenty states may play an important role in the further development of community mediation by addressing many of the prevailing needs in the field regarding networking, access to resources, and quality control. This chapter is a qualitative exploration into the function and range of activities of SMAs and factors facilitating or challenging their development.*

In the field of community mediation, state-level mediation associations (SMAs) that support community-based dispute resolution programs (CDRPs) are an emerging phenomenon across the United States. Such associations are currently present in at least twenty-one states (“Statewide Organizations . . .,” 2000). In a report of the issues and practices of community mediation programs to the U.S. Department of Justice, McGillis (1997) described these associations as created for the purposes of encouraging development of new community mediation programs; assisting programs to gain funding; providing opportunities for technical assistance, networking, and training; and creating a state-level forum for discussion of issues relevant to the field.

The development of SMAs is quite timely in that they are well positioned to support further development of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) by addressing many prevailing issues currently faced by CDRPs, such as statewide strategies for information dissemination and resource attainment. Even though SMAs have been growing in number,

*NOTE: The authors would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank the key informants who generously contributed their time and insights to this study. We would also like to thank Loreleigh Keashly for her feedback on earlier drafts.*

to date nothing but the most basic descriptions are available about these organizations.

### The Role of CDRPs in the Development of ADR

The growth in ADR over the past decades (Goldberg, Sander, and Rogers, 1992) has been due, in part, to the pioneering work of community dispute resolution programs. CDRPs are predominantly nonprofit community organizations that help individuals and groups resolve conflicts through a variety of conflict resolution techniques, such as mediation, arbitration, facilitation, and conciliation (McGillis, 1997). In a study of community mediation programs in ten states, Wilkinson (2001) described CDRPs as serving “. . . as the backbone of mediation services of all kinds throughout the nation” (p. 2). Indeed, CDRPs, which first developed in the 1970s, have continuously played a significant role in development and expansion of ADR (Grover-Duffy, 1991; McGillis, 1997; Wilkinson, 2001). This role has included holding forums for training and mentoring new mediators, expanding the use of mediation and other ADR techniques into new sectors through innovative programming and collaboration, increasing community awareness of mediation through educational efforts, and ensuring ADR services are available to economically disadvantaged populations by providing low-cost or no-cost services (Wilkinson, 2001).

In parallel with the burgeoning development of mediation in general, the role of CDRPs has likewise expanded considerably. According to the current program list for the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM), community mediation programs exist in more than forty states throughout the United States (<http://www.nafcm.org/pg35.cfm>). McGillis (1997) has described the growth of CDRPs as characterized by increasing diversification and specialization. Whereas community mediation initially dealt predominantly with minor civil issues (neighbor to neighbor disputes, small claims court issues), CDRPs now offer mediation and other dispute resolution services in a variety of sectors: criminal and civil courts, education (special education and peer mediation), family law (divorce, child custody, and permanency planning mediation), public policy (environmental and land use disputes), and business (EEOC cases, consumer disputes, workplace grievances; Grover-Duffy, 1991; McGillis, 1997).

Writers in the field of community mediation have identified several issues faced by CDRPs that must be addressed if they are to continue to

thrive (Bradley and Smith, 2000; McGillis, 1997; Wilkinson, 2001). They include (1) statewide implementation strategies that would furnish funding, technical assistance, training, monitoring, and administration throughout the state; (2) development of a greater diversity of funding options, among them legislative funding mechanisms; (3) standards of quality control and evaluation across CDRPs; (4) development of effective working relationships with local, state, and national agencies, organizations, and foundations; and (5) increased public awareness and education regarding the process and benefits of mediation, as well the availability of specific programs and resources.

### State Mediation Associations

SMAAs are an important response to the changes happening within the mediation community. They create a mechanism through which CDRPs and other mediation practitioners can network, access funding, and improve skills (McGillis, 1997). SMAAs are well positioned at this time to play a valuable role, allowing increased collaboration and information sharing between the various sectors and interest groups.

The historical background of community mediation and the challenges brought on by new growth and expansion create a unique landscape, within which SMAAs are forming and growing (Bradley and Smith, 2000). The factors that have assisted SMAAs to successfully navigate this landscape and the challenges they have faced are largely unknown.

This study included a background investigation to identify the kinds of state associations supporting CDRPs. This was followed by a two-phase study examining the activities of SMAAs and the factors that have facilitated or challenged their development. Sources of information include analysis of organizational Websites, informal interviews with key informants in the field, and semistructured interviews with organizational leaders of exemplar associations.

### Background

Because of the dearth of information available describing SMAAs, a background investigation was conducted to gain a better understanding of the kinds of associations serving CDRPs. Unstructured interviews were conducted with four key informants in the field of ADR: two board members and one executive director of two SMAAs located in the Midwest, as well as

a representative from NAFCCM (the primary association supporting community mediation at the national level). Through these interviews it emerged that state-level CDRP support can take several forms. Based on interviews with key informants, a typology was created for subsequent sampling.

Consistent with McGillis (1997), there are two types of organizations that support CDRPs: (1) government agencies and (2) independent, non-profit associations. Because the function and developmental pathways for government agencies and not-for-profit state associations are quite different, and our interest was in examining bottom-up organizations emerging from the CDRP movement, we focused on the role of independent, not-for-profit associations.

Within the nonprofit sector of SMAs, further distinctions can be made based on the nature of the association's membership. Information from key informants revealed three types of SMAs: (1) CDRP associations, (2) professional ADR associations, and (3) hybrid associations. Associations of CDRPs are often founded by the executive directors of CDRPs, who join together to coordinate resources and support further development of community mediation in their state. Membership is predominantly at the organizational level and consists primarily of CDRPs.

Professional ADR associations are typically formed by individual ADR practitioners and may vary from representing only a specific sector of the mediation/ADR community (divorce mediators) to associations that represent the entire mediation/ADR community. Membership in these organizations is predominantly at the individual level, but they may also have organizational members. Many of these SMAs predate and have no direct ties to CDRPs. However, particularly in states that lack an association of CDRPs, individuals associated with CDRPs or the CDRP itself may be members.

Hybrid associations typically began as associations of CDRPs and expanded their membership to represent the entire mediation/ADR community. Membership in these organizations can be the most complex, involving members at the organizational or individual level, including private practitioners, volunteer mediators, CDRPs, and other ADR organizations.

### *Phase One*

Phase one of this study addressed the question, What types of activities are SMAs engaging in?

*Sample.* Twenty-one nonprofit SMAs were identified and examined on the basis of a list provided by the NAFCM program directory (“Statewide Organizations . . .,” 2000). The NAFCM directory is a national directory of SMAs that support CDRPs and includes listings of SMAs from all regions of the United States.

*Procedures and Analysis.* A content analysis of the types of services provided by SMAs was conducted using information contained in the NAFCM directory and on available organizational Websites identified using standard search engines (such as Google). Fourteen organizations were found to have both NAFCM directory information and Web-based information available for analysis. Services and activities for the remaining eight associations were based on the NAFCM directory information alone. Examination of each source for programs and activities resulted in identifying thirty activities across associations. Activities sharing a common theme were then grouped together into second-order categories.

*Results and Discussion.* Content analysis of SMA activities revealed seven primary areas of focus: (1) obtaining and/or administering state and private contracts, (2) developing mechanisms for quality control and enhanced credibility, (3) conducting professional training and development, (4) disseminating information resources, (5) offering insurance coverage and other benefits, (6) creating opportunities for networking and collaboration, and (7) making legislative representation and public education available. Each of these is described in more detail.

- *Obtaining and/or administering state and private contracts.* Some SMAs create funding opportunities for their constituents by securing state or private service contracts that are then administered to organizational or individual members. By nature of their position as state-level entities, SMAs are often strategically well placed to obtain and administer state contracts, private grants, and other for-fee services that may be too cumbersome to coordinate at an individual level. For example, state courts in need of mediation services may find it administratively burdensome to contract with multiple CDRPs or independent practitioners. Through an SMA, government agencies are able to consolidate multiple regional contracts into one state contract that can then be distributed by the association. Thus, SMAs are a link between the individual or regional mediation services and the state courts or legislative branches.

- *Developing mechanisms for quality control and enhanced credibility.* Some SMAs provide services intended to serve as quality control mechanisms in order to bolster the credibility of their members, as well as the practice of mediation in general. For example, associations have created systems for peer review, oversight of CDRP programming, and standards of practice for mediators. For some states, efforts to standardize the quality and quantity of training and experience for mediators have resulted in SMAs developing mediator accreditation programs.

- *Conducting professional training and development.* Providing opportunities for professional training and development was a common activity for many SMAs. For example, SMAs have sponsored state or regional conferences that featured nationally known keynote speakers in the field of ADR.

- *Disseminating information resources.* State associations also serve as a hub for information dissemination throughout the state. Programming efforts in this area keep the membership informed of new developments and innovations in the field of ADR and notify members of upcoming association and community events. Examples of such information sharing mechanisms are publishing newsletters, hosting Websites, compiling resource libraries, and disseminating special reports alerting members to new innovations or emerging trends relevant to the field.

- *Offering insurance coverage and other benefits.* Several associations offer insurance programs available to their membership. For example, associations are offering benefits such as retirement programs, group health insurance, and liability insurance.

- *Creating opportunities for networking and collaboration.* Connecting diverse and geographically dispersed constituents, SMAs are a natural mechanism for networking opportunities. Association activities in this area may include offering a statewide membership directory, developing an Internet listserv, and creating a mediator or trainer resource directory connecting potential clients to mediators and training programs. Additionally, associations may sponsor gatherings such as annual meetings and conferences in order to bring members together.

- *Making legislative representation and public education available.* Whereas in the past legislative lobbying was done predominantly by special-issue groups, making large-scale mobilization difficult, SMAs now afford a mechanism through which legislative changes affecting the ADR community can be tracked and acted upon in a more coordinated fashion. Activities in this area include alerting constituents of pertinent legislative

changes, lobbying to expand use of mediation into new areas, and representing the association membership on important decisions affecting the ADR community. Furthermore, state associations are working to expand understanding of mediation by engaging in public awareness and education activities.

### *Phase Two*

In phase two of this study, the question was addressed, What organizational challenges and facilitating factors have had an impact on the development of exemplar SMAs?

*Sample.* Four exemplar SMAs were identified through a two-step method. First, key informants were asked to identify exemplar SMAs. With this method, three state-level organizations (one CDRP association and two hybrid associations) were identified that key informants judged to be associations from which others could learn. Because background investigations revealed that states lacking CDRP associations often use professional associations to represent them, one professional mediator association was also included in the study. This organization was identified on the basis of informal networking and was selected because it was a large, well-established organization with many CDRP members. It had been in existence for many years, had a large membership, and was engaged in diverse activities. Participant informants included past board presidents, board members, and individuals who had served as executive directors for the associations. Informants had been involved with their organizations for between seven and fifteen years.

*Procedure.* To explore the development of SMAs, qualitative data was collected through semistructured phone interviews. The interview consisted of open-ended questions regarding the structure and development of the association, sources of funding, organizational relationships, membership benefits, and general lessons learned.

*Analysis.* Interview data were content-analyzed using a cross-case approach in which ideas that emerged across interviews were identified and assigned a code. Codes sharing a common theme were then grouped together into metathemes and discussed between authors. Only those themes that were present in at least three of the four interviews were included in the final analysis.

*Data Authentication.* To authenticate the finding, the metathemes were shared with the participants. Feedback from participants indicated that the themes were accurate and representative of the information provided.

*Results and Discussion.* Key informants from exemplar associations described several factors that facilitated the growth and development of their organizations. Responses focused on strategic development of both internal leadership and external networks and support. Facilitating factors included (1) strategic selection of the board of directors, (2) development of connections to important social and professional networks, (3) strong state government support, and (4) strategic development of funding sources.

- *Strategic selection of the board of directors.* A common theme that emerged across interviews was the importance of having a strong, stable, capable, committed, and active board of directors to help guide the organization. As many SMAs are newly formed with few or no resources for full-time staff, a board that was willing to commit time and resources to the organization was identified as a key factor in the association's ability to thrive.

In addition to being actively engaged, organizational informants stressed that the board was more effective when there was a strategic combination of people on it. Informants discussed the usefulness of including board members who possessed knowledge in areas such as finance, fundraising, or grant writing. Additionally, they stressed the importance of having a board that was well networked into relevant professional sectors, including politicians, law professionals, clergy, scholars, and individuals representing specific mediation sectors.

- *Development of connections to important social and professional networks.* Across interviews the growth and stabilization of SMAs was attributed in part to the social and professional networks that could be called upon to assist the association in gaining access to resources and developing new programming. These key relationships were described as instrumental in many ways. First, informants described the value of such relationships in gaining access to funding. Collaborative grant efforts with other organizations and state agencies were effective because they linked the association to agencies that had existing funds and stability in the eyes of granting organizations. Second, relationships provided access to donated resources, such as rent-free office space or meeting rooms, that would have been

financially unattainable to the developing SMA. Finally, informants suggested that building relationships with more established organizations aided the SMA in gaining credibility and influence in their state. Two commented:

Connections and relationships are everything—find a way to connect to the key people in your area somehow and get them on board.

Relationships with these organizations helped us to gain visibility, legitimacy, and funding through collaboration on grants. The collaborations attracted funding because they were innovative and they were linked to organizations and state agencies that have funding and stability.

- *Strong state government support.* Particularly for associations in states that provide legislative funding for CDRPs, gaining the support of the state government was identified as vital in developing the SMA. These relationships allowed the association to obtain state contracts that could then be channeled to its members. The state also created opportunities for new mediation and dispute resolution training contracts. For example, one association received a monthly report from the state that alerted them to available ADR service contracts.

Relationships with the state were described as being mutually advantageous to the association, the state, and the constituents of the association. Some state agencies found that working with individual practitioners or CDRPs was administratively awkward and cost-prohibitive. By channeling grants through an SMA, state contracts could be made available to a wider number of entities, without the state agency having the burden of individually administering them. Informants commented:

A state-level organization works better with the state department where it may be awkward to have individual centers lobbying. The representative model works.

Collaborative relationships with other ADR offices within the state government [allowed us to] find ways to combine services that overlap.

- *Strategic development of funding sources.* Funding is often problematic for any developing nonprofit organization. The issue of funding becomes even more complex if constituents of an association consist largely of

volunteer mediators and not-for-profit organizations with limited financial resources. Informants stated that diverse revenue streams were essential to stabilize the association, as well as to prevent the SMA from becoming dependent on one revenue source. Reliance on any one particular funding source was seen as problematic, because it left the association vulnerable to losing its independence by being overly obligated to any one funder.

Fees for membership into an association must also be considered carefully. If a large portion of the membership is made up of volunteers and not-for-profit CDRPs, membership fees must be kept at a reasonable level. However, informants warned that making the membership fees too low prevents the organization from being able to grow. One specific strategy that was offered by an informant for setting membership dues was to use a percentage of the previous year's expenditures. One commented:

You need to let your membership know right off the bat that this is an organization supported by its membership. Set the dues at a level to support at least 25–30 percent of the organization's budget. If you set it low in the beginning and then try and raise it when you need more money, it will anger the membership. Set that expectation from the beginning.

- *Challenges in the development of state mediation associations.* Several interesting themes emerged as informants described the challenges that their associations faced throughout their development. Issues concerned the associations' level of diversity, leadership, and funding. Specifically, informants discussed (1) tensions between organizational homogeneity and diversity, (2) conflicts of interest in the leadership, and (3) difficulties securing sustainable funding.

- *Tensions between organizational homogeneity and diversity.* A prominent challenge faced by these SMAs revolved around the issue of how inclusive and diverse the association should be, and how to effectively deal with the varied demands and interests that emerge as a result of diversity. Diversity, in this case, referred specifically to inclusion of various professional sectors of mediators. As a way to increase revenue from membership dues and increase the SMA's scope of influence, all four associations described a period in their development in which they considered expanding to include members from other sectors.

- *Challenges of homogeneity.* All of the associations started out as relatively homogeneous organizations, representing CDRPs or professionals.

This lack of organizational diversity was described as creating several challenges. First, homogeneous SMAs may find it difficult to gain access to influential networks that lay outside the scope of the membership. This can lead to lack of representation for the association and its membership at important decision-making forums. This limitation can have significant implications for the association's ability to expand programming and influence decision-making around areas affecting the membership. An informant commented:

It used to be the CDRP program was the only game in town. However, there started to be other programs and individuals that received contracts from the court. We felt it was necessary to include all these people and let them interact.

The board was not diverse enough to have the kind of networks it needed to expand.

The second challenge associated with a homogeneous membership was described as an inability to think outside the box. Diversity often brings with it a greater variety of perspectives and experiences that can increase creative thinking and problem solving. When members all come from the same background, groups have to actively challenge themselves to avoid making decisions with too narrow a focus. Two commented:

The original board was all CDRP. This didn't allow the board to think outside of their area. Created too narrow a focus. We needed to bring in some diversity.

Originally there [were] just [CDRPs] but there were concerns. . . . [It] created a sort of myopia from having similar backgrounds.

Finally, because SMAs are funded in part by membership dues, limiting membership means limiting the ability of the association to expand the amount of revenue that can be generated from member dues. With a limited membership, one SMA found that membership growth was not able to offset the growing financial needs of the developing organization.

- *Management of organizational diversity.* Paradoxically, the challenges associated with *lacking* organizational diversity were matched in significance by descriptions of challenges associated with *having* organizational diversity. Regardless of whether the association had chosen to diversify

membership or not, managing diversity within the organization was described as an ongoing effort. For associations with a relatively homogeneous membership, such as the association of CDRPs, management of diversity emerged as an issue in serving a group of CDRPs at different stages of organizational development. Key informants of associations that chose to expand their membership described additional challenges of managing the varied interests of a more diverse range of stakeholders: (1) internal competition for resources, (2) organizational strain from attempting to meet the diverse needs of the membership, (3) loss of organizational vision, and (4) differing political agendas.

For the SMAs that began as associations of CDRPs and expanded to include individual practitioners, tensions over where the association should channel its resources were described as a hindrance during the organization's development.

Different sectors represented in the association found themselves competing for resources. For example, one informant described tension between the original CDRP members of the association and the new private practitioner membership in reaction to a debate over who should be allowed to access state contracts administered by the association. Individual practitioners were anxious to have access to mediation contracts, but the CDRP membership did not favor increasing the number of entities among which funds could be distributed, since they feared this would lessen the amount of money they would be able to bring in to support their centers. Comments:

Centers were worried that if individuals could get contracts it would water down the amount of money they could get.

It used to be us against the Bar; now it's us against ourselves.

In addition to managing tensions over scarce resources, such as state mediation contracts, informants described a level of organizational strain that occurs in trying to meet the needs of a diverse membership. Supporting a diverse membership means increasing and diversifying services and benefits. This challenge was described not only in terms of having enough resources to adequately attend to the needs of both individual and organizational members but also in addressing and representing the variable needs of CDRPs who are in various stages of organizational development. This pressure to sustain such a diverse array of membership benefits was

described as a risk factor for growing associations to overextend themselves, engaging in too much at once and taxing limited organizational resources, as reflected in these informant comments:

It was difficult to accommodate the different needs of the members. To retain members, we needed to be able to offer services for individuals and centers.

Great things can be done, but you need to build it incrementally . . . the vision of the organization needs to be kept in check with the resources and risk must be balanced with forward thinking and practicality.

For the association that chose to maintain its status as exclusively CDRP-based, the key informant further spoke about a fear that diversifying the association too much would result in loss of the original purpose and vision of the association: “There were discussions of including other areas of interest on the board, but we decided not to. We felt that when you opened up your membership to private practitioners you lost your focus, which was to be a voice for CDRPs.”

Finally, because of their role as a state-level representative body, one informant described the dangers of becoming politically involved in issues that may differentially affect the diverse membership. An illustration of this was tension that emerged around creating an association-sponsored mediator certification program. These types of programs were described by one informant as a very “hot” issue because of the potential for accreditation being based on criteria that could advantage certain mediators over others (for example, creation of accreditation guidelines that favor mediators from law backgrounds over other mediators). One commented: “Inclusiveness was often incompatible with taking a stand around issues differently affecting membership.”

- *Conflicts of interest for the leadership.* Interestingly, the nature of SMAs sometimes creates a tension between what is in the best interests of the association and the private interests of the individual leaders. This was a particularly relevant theme described by informants from associations that had CDRPs as organizational members. For example, informants described tensions that arose among association leadership over how much they should charge to administer grants and for-fee service contracts. In one instance, because the board consisted largely of CDRP directors, there was pressure to keep contract administration fees very low, so as to

maximize the amount of money available to the CDRPs. Although it was to the CDRP's benefit to have low administration costs associated with the contracts, such a strategy was not in the financial best interests of the SMA, which depended on those fees to operate.

This challenge of conflicting interests was also described in internal disagreements within the leadership over how much oversight the association should have over its membership, in terms of peer review of CDRP programs or mediator accreditation programs. Some members believed such actions were too intrusive, arguing that individual interests for autonomy should overpower interests in favor of state-level standardization. These are natural tensions that can arise when the leaders of the SMA are also the leaders of the individual organizations that make up the membership of that association, as these informants indicate:

The board was all executive directors of CDRPs. They wanted all the money to go to the centers and charge only a very minimal administration fee to the organization for administering the grants. This worked against the financial best interest of the organization.

Internally, the individual interests of the centers often need to be reconciled with the larger state network agenda.

- *Program funding.* Most nonprofit organizations struggle with how to obtain sustainable funding. State associations are no exception. However, the nature of state associations creates unique challenges in securing financial solvency. In addition to managing financial conflict of interest with the association's membership, informants identified challenges with use of grant funding and the financially complex nature of administering contracts as significant challenges in establishing organizational stability.

Although several of the associations represented in this study use grant funding as a way to diversify their revenue beyond membership dues, informants warned that grant money for SMAs has several limitations. First, grant money is rarely available to pay for overhead and operating costs. Further, informants described grant money's alluring tendency to be perceived as stable when in reality it is an unsustainable resource. Finally, grant money was described as far more readily available for creation of new programs than it is to sustain existing ones. The combination of these factors creates a propensity to overextend the association's resources by

creating new programs in order to receive funding that then must be maintained without grant support. Some comments:

People don't want to pay for overhead. You can get grants for projects, but not for overhead.

Grant money is often problematic. It creates dependence that is not sustainable. You need staff in order to administer grants.

Further, for organizations that serve as administrators to state contracts and private funding that is channeled to CDRPs or practitioners, managing the flow of money in and out of the organization can become complex. If not managed appropriately, confusion can cause both funders and members to lose confidence in the association. This risk is amplified by the fact that most associations are limited in human resource capacity, having only a few staff who play many roles. Informants commented:

Money became hard to track because contracts were delayed. There was inadequate bookkeeping and the centers weren't getting paid. This caused centers to lose confidence and withdraw their membership.

Think big but be cautious, realistic, and measured in your approach.

## Conclusion

Writers in the field have made several recommendations to support continued development of community mediation (McGillis, 1997; Bradley and Smith, 2000; Wilkinson, 2001): (1) statewide implementation strategies that would provide funding, technical assistance, training, monitoring, and administration throughout the state; (2) increased diversity of funding options, including legislative funding mechanisms; (3) standards of quality control and evaluation across CDRPs; (4) development of effective working relationships with local, state, and national agencies, organizations, and foundations; and (5) increased public awareness and education regarding the process and benefits of mediation.

SMA activities offer a promising response to these pertinent issues. Association-sponsored conferences and professional development workshops for mediators are responding to statewide needs for training and technical assistance. The need for increased diversity of funding is being

answered by efforts to gain more state and private contracts. Calls for quality control and evaluation are met with associations developing statewide standards of practice and mediator accreditation programs. Informants have argued that the state-level nature of associations is an effective mechanism for developing relationships with government agencies and large foundations. Further, legislative lobbying for expansion of ADR services promotes advocacy for greater public awareness and use of mediation and other ADR services.

Although there is great potential for SMAs to become leaders in the field, the effectiveness and sustainability of the individual association will be related to its ability to navigate the challenges inherent in running an SMA. In doing so, the association must identify and build upon the assets that help it gain legitimacy, stability, and solvency. The present study suggests several issues that must be strategically managed regarding the inclusiveness of the association, development of its leadership, and the nature of the relationships the association develops and maintains.

First, SMAs must attend to how inclusive their membership will be. This decision is likely guided by two considerations: economic feasibility and the vision of the association. Is the vision of the SMA to support growth and development of one specific sector of the mediation community (CDRPs), or is the vision to support networks and resource sharing among all sectors throughout the state? As evidenced by the presence of successful homogeneous and heterogeneous SMAs in this study, there is no one best model.

Just as the membership structure influences the overall character and vision of the SMA, so too does the type of funding received by the association. Resource dependency theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) suggests that outside resources obtained by an organization create dependencies, thereby making the organization subject to greater influence by external forces. Consistent with this, our findings suggest that the kind of funding sought and accepted by the association can have a strong influence on the type of association it becomes. SMAs are encouraged to carefully evaluate each new funding opportunity for its consistency with their vision and mission. This allows the association to maintain clarity of vision and purpose throughout its development (Schein, 1992).

Developing strong leadership was a common theme that emerged as being necessary if an SMA is to accomplish its goals, as well as an area for potential conflict. Effective leadership was identified by several characteristics. As with any organization, effective leadership was distinguished by

a high degree of commitment and involvement with the association. However, our results additionally suggested the need for existing leaders to continuously recognize both the important sectors requiring representation and the specific skills needed to move the association forward so as to strategically foster new leadership in these areas. This is consistent with Schein's argument (1992) that if organizations are to have a managed evolution, senior leaders must constantly seek insight into what is missing in their organizations, so the gaps can be filled and the organizations can continue to grow. Last, the SMA must recognize the inherent conflict of interest often present when leadership comprises organizational leaders who hold membership in the association.

Finally, the present study suggests that associations are built on the connections and relationships they are able to foster within their state. Indeed, the power and effectiveness of an SMA lies in its ability to adequately represent the collective interests of its members and harness resources to support those interests. Networks are an important element in helping organizations to identify and access new resources (Kelly, Ryan, Altman, and Stelzner, 2000). Actively working to develop good relationships with state agencies, nonprofit service organizations, and grant foundations can open doors for grant opportunities, new program development, collaborative ventures, and state and private contracts. Thus associations are challenged to seek out new networks and associations for growth and expansion, while never neglecting to value and nurture existing relationships outside and within the organization.

There are several limitations of this study that should be noted. First, our descriptions of SMA activities are based on representation of the organizations from the NAFCM directory and available Web pages. Such organizational information sources may overrepresent or underrepresent the activities of a given association. Further, the current study does not attempt to assess how effective the association is in accomplishing the intended outcomes of its activities. Therefore, it is appropriate to interpret these results as a preliminary understanding of the overall function of SMAs as demonstrated by the range of activities pursued across associations. An analysis of the overall outcomes achieved by such activities would be an interesting area for future research. Second, the present study uses a case study design intended to permit an in-depth look at a small sample of exemplar associations supporting CDRPs so as to identify potentially generalizable themes that can help to guide our thinking about the development of SMAs. Caution should be exercised when generalizing

findings across state-level associations, to government-supported organizations, or to other associations not affiliated with community mediation.

Future research could examine the usefulness of these associations from the perspective of CDRPs, and which services would allow them to have greater utility. Additionally, the present study suggests the overall composition of the membership and board of the organization strongly influences many areas of organizational functioning and decision making. The impact of other aspects of organizational makeup such as demographic diversity (race and ethnicity, age, gender) within the association may also be an interesting area of inquiry.

It is appropriate (if not ironic, given the nature of work in the field of mediation) that the greatest challenge to and facilitator of an SMA's survival appears to rest in the relationships it weaves among its membership, with its leadership, and with the myriad stakeholders throughout the state. Interestingly, lessons learned from representatives of key SMAs in this study were not characterized by a description of any best model of how to sculpt these relationships. Rather, insights lie in recognizing the challenges and benefits to the many approaches to running state associations so that decisions can be made strategically and with a plan that is consistent with the vision of the organization.

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