Analysis paper
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Working Together for a Better World:
An Analysis of Social Justice Organizations in Dallas

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Introduction

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the current lack of cooperation among social justice organizations in Dallas, Texas. The results of this inquiry will provide a starting point for subsequent discussion on potential information technology (IT) solutions to the problem at hand.

Organizations

This analysis considers the poor interaction among six community organizations whose efforts overlap in the area of social justice. These entities include the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the Greater Dallas Council of Churches, the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission, and the Green Party of Dallas County. Although numerous other area organizations have social justice functions, these agencies were selected as a result of some joint activities in recent years and the author’s own interaction with these groups.

Stakeholders and Environment

When IT applications are developed as a part of a larger community change effort, the initial stage of the process involves engaging important stakeholders (Schoech, 1999). Numerous stakeholders exist within each of these organizations and effect the overall direction of the change process. Their influence will be considered throughout this analysis. Such stakeholders include the executive directors, board members, funding sources, volunteers, and clients of the organizations.

Each of these organizations operates in the nonprofit environment and in the Dallas community as a whole. Dallas has historically been a conservative city, significantly shaped by business interests. As a result, one must consider how these economic and political forces influence the organizations’ activities as well.

Scope and Importance

Before any attempts can be made to apply IT to a problem, a change agent must assess the current needs and strengths of the situation (Schoech, 1999). To do so, this analysis will utilize systems theory to better understand the interaction among these organizations and to define the existing problem. A decision-making model will then be used to identify the decisions involved in
addressing the problem. Finally, the identified needs and capacities will be prioritized so the process may move to the intervention planning stage.

For human service organizations to play an integral role as catalysts of social change, they must adapt to the changing environment and utilize existing tools to increase their efficacy. Limited resources demand that organizations cooperate in order to avoid duplication of efforts and replication of successful initiatives. IT utilization can help community groups reach these goals (Athena, 2002). This analysis is salient to the extent that it can examine the lack of cooperation between these social justice organizations, identify current needs, and open the door for further discussion on how IT applications may address such needs.

**Definition of Problem**

**Problem and History**

Despite similar stated goals, the six organizations in this analysis have had limited interaction and cooperation in their social justice efforts. Except for a few notable exceptions like the James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Act of 2001, the organizations’ lack of cooperation has led to relatively ineffective and inefficient actions on this front. Because of the lack of information sharing, the agencies are often unaware that they are duplicating efforts and overlooking other concerns.

This lack of cooperation is not new. For instance, the American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee, and Anti-Defamation League have attempted to distinguish themselves from one another for years. Some leaders in these organizations fear that cooperation with the other agencies will confuse their identities and jeopardize funding sources. The Greater Dallas Council of Churches has not had these same concerns and was traditionally more connected to other organizations. However, funding cuts over the past several years have resulted in great reductions in staff and uncertainty within the organization. The organization appears to be more internally focused at the present time and is slow to respond to outreach efforts from other groups. Traditionally, the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission was reluctant to assume an advocacy role on social justice issues and also avoided overtures for joint ventures. Leaders at the organization attribute their past hesitance to historical pressures within their agency. Established in the late 1960s, the agency was formed with the support of business interests that desired a stable social environment that would benefit economic growth. As a result, the organization served more of a social control function than one of social change. However, that has steadily changed over the years, and the group delved into direct political advocacy for the first time with the recent campaign to pass a more comprehensive hate crimes law. Finally, the Green Party is a relative newcomer to Dallas and is only now establishing itself as an organization
focused on issues of social justice. All of these factors have contributed to the current lack of cooperation among the groups. The following section utilizes systems theory to map the current behavior of the organizations and offer more insight on the existing problem.

**Systems Analysis**

One benefit of systems theory is its flexibility of application. The theory can be applied to several different levels of inquiry, depending on which system is the focal point. In this way, each system can simultaneously exist as a distinct system or as a part of a larger system (Hearn, 1969). Here, each agency can be examined as its own system with its stakeholders constituting elements of that system or as a subsystem of a larger system referred to as the “social justice community.”

Schoech (1999) defines a system as a “group of related elements in interaction.” This definition can be used to describe the larger system of the social justice community. Here, the six organizations represent the elements of the focal system. These elements are related by their stated function of pursuing social justice. Although interaction is poor between the various elements, such interfacing does exist to some extent.

Notice that the common function of social justice does not mean that all of the organizations’ functions overlap. For example, the Green Party has political functions that may differ from other groups in the system. One must ask whether the additional functions and goals of each organization conflict with those of the other agencies. If so, such conflict may contribute to the lack of cooperation between the groups. For example, if the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission is diametrically opposed to some of the political stances of the Green Party, they may not want their name associated with the Green Party even on issues of social justice. Such contingencies, though often overlooked, play a major role in system interaction.

When a particular agency is the focal system, the various stakeholders constitute the elements of that system. In several of these organizations, the territoriality of agency directors, donors, and members directly contributes to the problem. This tendency to protect an agency’s sphere of influence or the director’s own power may lead a director to establish rigid boundaries between his organization and others. For example, the director of the Anti-Defamation League justified his refusal to cooperate with other agencies on recent projects by stating that he wanted to assure his donors “that they are getting their money’s worth from [him] and not some other organization.” Although human service organizations are by their very nature open systems (Schoech, 1999), clearly some of them have more permeable boundaries than others.
Systems theory focuses on the interdependence and relationship between various systems. To survive, each system must interact and exchange energy with other systems (Hearn, 1969). Linkages are necessary to span the boundaries between different systems. Currently, the six social justice organizations have few linkages. They rarely share information or cooperate on similar projects. Although multi-agency efforts are more complex and require more boundary-spanning activities (Schoech, 1999), cooperation is possible and often desirable, as this interaction opens the possibility for synergy.

The lack of linkages and the territoriality of various stakeholders have led some of the organizations to pursue their own goals to the detriment of the social justice community as a whole. Instead of cooperation, there is duplication of efforts and competition for recognition among the agencies. This has resulted in the unintended suboptimization of the larger system. A more viable alternative is to create a concerted suboptimization where the subsystems cooperate in a planned manner to achieve synergy in the overall system (Schoech, 1999).

The dearth of information sharing has also robbed the larger system of important feedback. Cybernetics holds that a system will behave erratically when feedback is lacking, making it less likely that its stated function will be achieved (Schoech, 1999). In the social justice community, none of the agencies are aware of each other’s activities or their successes and failures. Therefore, the subsystems are continuing to act without a feedback loop for the overall system. As noted before, the results include duplication, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness.

In short, application of systems theory to this social justice community has revealed the following behaviors:

- Possible conflict between organizations’ functions that do not overlap
- Territoriality of stakeholders
- Lack of linkages (information sharing and joint activities)
- Unintended suboptimization (as opposed to concerted suboptimization)
- Lack of feedback for overall system

Assumptions

This systems analysis assumes that the six organizations have common or complimentary definitions of social justice. The section also assumes that linkages and interaction can be structured in a mutually beneficial manner that will satisfy a sufficient number of stakeholders. The following section will provide some insight into the feasibility of this assumption.

Decisions Involved with the Problem

Having mapped current behavior with systems theory, this analysis will now construct a model of the decisions facing the organizations with regard to
the lack of multi-agency cooperation. Throughout this section, the following four influences on the decision-making process will be considered: the nature of the decisions, the persons involved, the information available, and the environment in which the decisions are to be made (Schoech, 1999).

**Decision 1: Recognition of Problem**

The agencies must first decide if the current situation is problematic. Although the board of directors of each organization should theoretically make the ultimate decision, the executive director of each agency has a great deal of control in this process. If the director does not believe the current lack of cooperation is a problem, she could avoid bringing the issue to the attention of board members altogether. Even if the issue is presented, the director may still influence the decision greatly by slanting the discussion to fit her personal views. In this way, the attitude of a particular stakeholder may greatly affect the decision.

The lack of feedback to the overall system deprives these decision-makers of information that would be helpful in making this decision. Because the organizations share little information about their activities or accomplishments, the agencies are unclear as to the level of progress being made towards the achievement of social justice. The information that is currently available is derived from newsletters sent by each organization. Unfortunately, this information is usually outdated. Although all of the organizations are online and have some type of website, these sites are often inadequate and neglected as well. Here, part of the existing situation exacerbates the larger problem by making the decision-making process more difficult.

Even if the organizations agree that the lack of cooperation and interaction among them is problematic, this determination will have little impact unless they progress to additional decisions in the model.

**Decision 2: Consideration of Joint Ventures**

If the organizations proceed, they must next decide if they are willing to consider joint ventures. These ventures could take numerous forms, which will be discussed in the subsequent solutions paper. Once again, each executive director and their board members would be the primary decision-makers. However, environmental influences also play a large role. For example, some of the organizations are regional offices of a national entity. They must abide by organizational policies set at the national level and may have to obtain approval from national leaders before partaking in any significant joint ventures. Therefore, external stakeholders must also be convinced that such activities are justified.
In considering this issue, decision-makers can examine the limited history of cooperation among the organizations. Last year, the groups worked together extensively to form a coalition supporting the hate crimes bill. As a part of a larger advocacy push for the legislation, these six organizations focused on state representatives and senators from the Dallas area. Over time, a concerted effort was successful in winning some unexpected support. A leader of the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission attributed this success to the joint efforts of the diverse agencies and said such gains were unlikely to have occurred without such cooperation. However, several smaller scale initiatives between the organizations have been unfruitful and often involved infighting. Perhaps issues selected for joint ventures must be clearly supported by each agency’s stakeholders, be identified as significant enough to draw a critical mass of support, and offer some degree of recognition if successful.

Although existing technology could provide additional information about possible joint ventures, the organizations do no take advantage of these opportunities. If used to interact at all, such technology is currently limited to occasional emails between individuals at different agencies. As previously mentioned, most of the organizations have put little effort into website development. Therefore, even if other agencies examine their sites, they would be unable to find information about current projects and concerns.

**Decision 3: Degree of Cooperation**

If at least some of the organizations recognize the lack of interaction as a problem and agree to pursue some joint activities, these groups must determine how much cooperation can occur without their own stakeholders becoming dissatisfied. If the stakeholders at issue are board members, this decision would fall to the executive director. However, if donors are the focus, the board members would also act as decision-makers.

The multi-agency nature of the proposed cooperation makes this decision more complex. The organizations have limited experience with these activities. This lack of familiarity makes it more difficult for decision-makers to understand the nuances of the issue and obscures their ability to accurately predict success.

Up to this point, the analysis has examined funding sources as potential impediments to cooperation. However, donors may also encourage interaction among agencies. For example, the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission now receives significant funding from the United Way. This funding source has stated that collaborative efforts between organizations will be viewed positively when determining how to allocate funds.

To accurately make this determination, decision-makers should return to the earlier stages of the planning process. Stakeholders must be engaged at length to examine their willingness to support such changes and to clarify a
suitable direction for the change efforts (Schoech, 1999). If a change agent can identify the social justice concerns of important stakeholders, he could highlight these issues in the planning process.

**Results of Assessment**

The following needs and capacities have been identified in the previous sections and are ordered in terms of priority:

**Needs**

1. To improve communication among the agencies so each is aware of the others’ current activities, concerns, successes, and failures (increased linkages and feedback)

2. To create an environment of collaboration, instead of competition (concerted suboptimization)

3. To conceptualize opportunities for joint activities that can maximize their efforts and avoid duplication (concerted suboptimization)

**Capacities**

1. Concerned leaders and stakeholders - (Leaders and stakeholders from at least four of the six organizations are interested in greater cooperation)

2. Existing technological capacities - (All organizations are currently online, have an existing website, and have at least one tech-savvy employee)

3. Available information – (These organizations can find numerous examples of multi-agency collaborations in the field of social justice through internet research)

4. Available technological capacities – (There are many IT applications that could be useful for information management, improved communication, and identification of social justice concerns of stakeholders and the community)

**Conclusion**

The current lack of interaction and cooperation among the six social justice organizations has resulted in ineffective activities, duplication of efforts, and missed opportunities for addressing additional concerns. A systems approach identified problems with the existing behavior of the overall system. These areas of concern include territoriality, insufficient linkages, unintended suboptimization, and absence of feedback mechanisms. A decision-making
model then examined three primary decisions to be addressed and identified the influences most relevant to each. As a whole, the organizations need to improve communication and collaboration among them for the social justice community of Dallas to enjoy more success. With the support of some leaders and the availability of information and technological resources, such improvements are possible.

References


Solution Paper
A Common Bond: Uniting the Social Justice Organizations of Dallas

Developed for:
American Jewish Committee
American Jewish Congress
Anti-Defamation League
Greater Dallas Council of Churches
Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission
Green Party of Dallas County

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A Common Bond:  
Uniting the Social Justice Organizations of Dallas

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1
Introduction 2
Description of Problem 2
Summary of Analysis: Needs and Capacities 4
Description of Options 5
How to Proceed 9
Evaluation 11
Issues to Address 12
Conclusion 12
References 12
Appendices:
  Appendix A - American Jewish Congress website 14
  Appendix B - Green Party of Dallas County website 15
  Appendix C - Zoomerang website 17
  Appendix D - Pro-Tex website 19
  Appendix E - Barking Dogs website 20
  Appendix F - Power Point presentation 21
Executive Summary

This paper examines the current relationship among Dallas’ social justice organizations. A brief look at the historical background and a systems analysis of the organizations’ behaviors reveal several areas of concern. After the group’s needs and capacities are identified, the paper considers several solutions that are derived from these factors.

Organizations Considered:
American Jewish Committee    Greater Dallas Council of Churches
American Jewish Congress      Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission
Anti-Defamation League           Green Party of Dallas County

Problem:
These six organizations have historically had little interaction or cooperation. Their lack of communication has led to ineffective and inefficient activities, such as duplication of efforts. A system analysis reveals the following problem behaviors: (i) territoriality of stakeholders, (ii) lack of linkages, (iii) unintended suboptimization, and (iv) lack of feedback for overall system.

Needs (in order of priority):
4. To improve the efficacy of the agencies by getting them to act as a system
5. To improve communication among the agencies so each is aware of the others’ current activities, concerns, successes, and failures
6. To create an environment of collaboration, instead of competition
7. To conceptualize opportunities for joint activities that can maximize their efforts and avoid duplication

Capacities (in order of priority):
5. Concerned leaders and stakeholders
6. Existing technological capacities (existing website; tech-savvy employee)
7. Available technological capacities (existing IT applications)

Proposed Solutions (sequential):
1. Build upon current websites to improve communication
2. Use survey application to identify common concerns of volunteers/clients
3. Consider joint ventures to address these concerns

Implementation Strategies:
* Emphasize collaboration advantages (efficiency; attractiveness to donors)
* Reassure key stakeholders
* Limit number of joint ventures initially

Evaluation:
At bimonthly meetings, responsible tech employees will evaluate previous efforts and modify current goals as necessary.
**Introduction**

With the myriad of problems facing society today, human service organizations must continue to become more effective and efficient in their approach to these concerns. Despite years of hard work, social justice organizations in Dallas remain frustrated in many of their efforts. The purpose of this paper is to examine the current lack of cooperation among these organizations and consider possible solutions to the problem at hand. The paper primarily focuses on the use of information technology (IT) to build upon the current capacities of the organizations. While issues surrounding the implementation of these solutions will be discussed, detailed technical aspects of IT implementation are not addressed.

**Organizations Considered**

This analysis considers the poor interaction among six community organizations whose efforts overlap in the area of social justice. These entities include the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the Greater Dallas Council of Churches, the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission, and the Green Party of Dallas County. Although numerous other area organizations have social justice functions, these agencies were selected as a result of some joint activities in recent years and the author's own interaction with these groups.

**Stakeholders and Environment**

When IT applications are developed as a part of a larger community change effort, the initial stage of the process involves engaging important stakeholders (Schoech, 1999). Numerous stakeholders exist within each of these organizations and effect the overall direction of the change process. Their influence will be considered throughout the paper. Such stakeholders include the executive directors, board members, funding sources, volunteers, and clients of the organizations.

Each of these organizations operates in the nonprofit environment and in the Dallas community as a whole. Dallas has historically been a conservative city, significantly shaped by business interests. As a result, one must consider how these economic and political forces influence the organizations’ activities as well.

**Description of Problem**

**Historical Background**

Despite sharing a focus on social justice concerns, the six organizations here have had limited interaction and cooperation in the past. This lack of
cooperation has often resulted in ineffective and inefficient actions. For example, the lack of information sharing among the agencies has led to frequent duplication of efforts.

Several historical factors have contributed to the current situation. First, some leaders have resisted inter-agency cooperation because of territorial concerns, including maintenance of funding sources and volunteers (XXXXXXX, personal communication, February 2001; XXXXXXXX, personal communication, March 2001). Other organizations have felt pressure from their founders to avoid politically charged issues. XXXXXXXXX of the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission attributes her organization’s reluctance to assume an advocacy role on social justice issues to such historical pressures (personal communication, February 2001). Established in the late 1960s, the agency was formed with the support of business interests that desired a stable social environment that would benefit economic growth. As a result, the organization served more of a social control function than one of social change. This recently began to change with last year’s work on behalf of the hate crimes bill. Finally, economic contingencies may deter organizations that are otherwise amenable to cooperation from participating in joint activities. The Greater Dallas Council of Churches was traditionally more connected to other organizations. However, funding cuts over the past several years have resulted in great reductions in staff and uncertainty within the organization. The organization appears to be more internally focused at the present time and is slow to respond to outreach efforts from other groups.

Systems Analysis

Viewing these six organizations as one larger system offers several insights into the current problem and reveals needs that must be addressed in any proposed solution. The flexibility of systems theory permits this multi-level inquiry. Each system can simultaneously exist as a distinct system or as a part of a larger system (Hearn, 1969). Here, each organization can be examined as its own system with its stakeholders constituting elements of that system or as a subsystem of a larger system referred to as the “social justice community.”

Schoech (1999) defines a system as a “group of related elements in interaction.” This definition can be used to describe the larger system of the social justice community. Here, the six organizations represent the elements of the focal system. These elements are related by their stated function of pursuing social justice. Although interaction is poor between the various elements, such interfacing does exist to some extent.

Territorial concerns

When a particular agency is the focal system, the various stakeholders constitute the elements of that system. In several of these organizations, the
territoriality of agency directors, donors, and members directly contributes to the problem. This tendency to protect an agency’s sphere of influence or the director’s own power may lead a director to establish rigid boundaries between his organization and others. For example, the director of the Anti-Defamation League justified his refusal to cooperate with other agencies on recent projects by stating that he wanted to assure his donors “that they are getting their money’s worth from [him] and not some other organization” (XXXXXXXXXXX, personal communication, March 2001). Although human service organizations are by their very nature open systems (Schoech, 1999), clearly some of them have more permeable boundaries than others.

**Lack of linkages**

Systems theory focuses on the interdependence and relationship between various systems. To survive, each system must interact and exchange energy with other systems (Hearn, 1969). Linkages are necessary to span the boundaries between different systems. Currently, the six social justice organizations have few linkages. They rarely share information or cooperate on similar projects. Although multi-agency efforts are more complex and require more boundary-spanning activities (Schoech, 1999), cooperation is possible and often desirable, as this interaction opens the possibility for synergy.

**Suboptimization**

The lack of linkages and the territoriality of various stakeholders have led some of the organizations to pursue their own goals to the detriment of the social justice community as a whole. Instead of cooperation, there is duplication of efforts and competition for recognition among the agencies. This has resulted in the unintended suboptimization of the larger system. A more viable alternative is to create a concerted suboptimization where the subsystems cooperate in a planned manner to achieve synergy in the overall system (Schoech, 1999).

**Lack of feedback**

The dearth of information sharing has also robbed the larger system of important feedback. Cybernetics holds that a system will behave erratically when feedback is lacking, making it less likely that its stated function will be achieved (Schoech, 1999). In the social justice community, none of the agencies are aware of each other’s activities or their successes and failures. Therefore, the subsystems are continuing to act without a feedback loop for the overall system. As noted before, the results include duplication, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness.

**Summary of Analysis: Needs and Capacities**

The following needs have been identified in the previous sections and are ordered in terms of priority:
Needs

1. To improve the efficacy of the agencies by getting them to act as a system

2. To improve communication among the agencies so each is aware of the others’ current activities, concerns, successes, and failures (increased linkages and feedback)

3. To create an environment of collaboration, instead of competition (concerted suboptimization)

4. To conceptualize opportunities for joint activities that can maximize their efforts and avoid duplication (concerted suboptimization)

Although the needs may be difficult to address, the organizations have significant capacities upon which they can build:

Capacities

1. Concerned leaders and stakeholders - (Leaders from at least four of the six organizations are interested in greater cooperation; volunteers and clients are interested too since their concerns are often overlooked in the current system)

2. Existing technological capacities - (All organizations are currently online, have an existing website, and have at least one tech-savvy employee)

3. Available technological capacities – (There are many IT applications that could be useful for information management, improved communication, and identification of social justice concerns of stakeholders and the community)

Description of Options

For human service organizations to play an integral role as catalysts of social change, they must adapt to the changing environment and utilize existing tools to increase their efficacy. Limited resources demand that organizations cooperate in order to avoid duplication of efforts and replication of successful initiatives. IT utilization can help community groups reach these goals (Athena, 2002). This section examines both technological and non-technological solutions to address the previously identified needs. These options build upon the organizations’ capacities and also consider the current behavior of the system.
Improve Communication

One advantage that the Internet offers human service organizations is easier multi-agency networking (Schoech, 1999). Such networking can range from sophisticated, privacy-guarded applications to simple, informational websites. To begin addressing the needs identified above, these six organizations should (i) view the Internet as a tool to increase communication among them and (ii) build upon their current websites for this purpose.

Currently, the organizations learn of each other’s activities through newsletters that are already outdated by publishing time. By maintaining current websites with accurate information concerning ongoing projects, salient issues, and upcoming meetings, the organizations can more readily communicate this important information to their own constituents and the other organizations. In fact, an improved website of this type may direct an organization’s own volunteers to areas of interest that were previously overlooked, thereby increasing participation. Additional links to the other organizations could also reinforce the desired system relationship. These features will be further examined in the following website reviews.

As previously noted, each of these organizations currently has at least a minimal website. However, these sites vary greatly in terms of quality. For example, the American Jewish Congress website (Appendix A) is a one-page site that has not been updated for quite some time. The site provides little helpful information and most of the apparent links lead nowhere. Clearly, this organization is not reaping the full benefits of the Internet.

A better example to consider is the website of the Green Party of Dallas County (Appendix B). The opening page is attractive and friendly in appearance. Appropriate use of graphics entices the user to further explore areas of interests. By selecting the Community Action tab, one can quickly find upcoming events and meetings covering several topics. Of particular interest to the situation at hand, the website offers a Links section organized according to the Green Party’s “10 Key Values.” For each key value, the section offers links to other organizations with similar concerns. This function could prove greatly beneficial to all of the social justice organizations’ websites. As a whole, the Green Party website demonstrates the effective use of the Internet for communication purposes.

To implement this strategy, each agency would need to appoint one employee to be responsible for regular updates of their website. As noted in the capacity section, each organization has at least one employee that is somewhat proficient with technology, so this approach is feasible in that regard. Moreover, simple, useful websites can be maintained at a relatively low cost. The timely provision of information would also provide greatly needed feedback for the system as a whole. However, the website approach will only be successful if
each agency’s responsible employee is held accountable for the updates. One must also realize that placing information on the websites will not automatically integrate the organizations into a system (Schoech, 1999). Therefore, additional steps are necessary to ensure greater interaction among the organizations.

Identify Common Concerns

Volunteers at several of the organizations stated that they would like to know more about the ongoing activities of the other groups. If their own organization were not addressing an issue of concern to them, they would consider working with another agency that had a project in that area. The organizations can build upon this interest and emphasize a common goal of social justice by identifying some common concerns shared among the volunteers and clients of all of the groups. IT approaches, such as survey applications, can play a helpful role in this solution.

Zoomerang (Appendix C) is an online application that allows one to create professional surveys, gather the data, and analyze the results (Market Tools, Inc., 2002). A free version is available for small-scale use, but a subscription is needed for full benefits. The expanded version costs $599 per year for up to 10,000 survey responses. Since the organizations may be reluctant to spend funds for this purpose, the free version should be considered initially, despite its lack of certain customization tools.

Both versions of the application contain the following helpful features. First, the program provides survey templates specifically tailored to community issues. Included in this category are templates to identify community concerns and volunteers interests. Also, Zoomerang does not limit the user to simple survey results. Instead, you can cross-tabulate responses, comparing answers according to demographic information. This added level of complexity could be beneficial in planning services and examining community issues. In addition, the data analysis tools are impressive. The application can create spreadsheets and graphs with survey results (see Appendix C) and also perform statistical analysis on data collected. Finally, a thorough online Help feature is also included.

In the situation at hand, the surveys could be administered in two ways. Each organization could (i) email the survey to active volunteers and clients or (ii) include a survey feature on their website. Zoomerang is equipped to receive and tabulate answers from either source. One limitation on the email approach is the difficulty social justice organizations may face in identifying their clients. For example, if an agency’s stated goal is to fight racial prejudice, their client group would include a vast number of individuals. Perhaps, an organization could limit the scope of its client survey group to those clients with whom it has ongoing contact.
The survey approach offers improved feedback from stakeholders whose views may easily be overlooked, volunteers and clients. Moreover, if the organizations can identify common concerns among these constituencies, the agencies may find common ground for future joint ventures.

**Consider Joint Ventures**

Once the IT survey application has been used to locate common concerns among the volunteers and clients of the organizations, the agencies should view these issues as possible areas for joint ventures. Together, these two approaches would help create a collaborative environment, as discussed in the needs section of this paper. Moreover, this method would avoid duplication of efforts and improve each agency’s use of resources, thereby increasing the efficiency of the system as a whole. Joint ventures would also reaffirm the common bond among the agencies, their goal of social justice.

In considering this approach, decision-makers (here, the executive directors and board members) can examine the limited history of cooperation among the organizations. Last year, the groups worked together extensively to form a coalition supporting the hate crimes bill. As a part of a larger advocacy push for the legislation, these six organizations focused on state representatives and senators from the Dallas area. Over time, a concerted effort was successful in winning some unexpected support. A leader of the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission attributed this success to the joint efforts of the diverse agencies and said such gains were unlikely to have occurred without such cooperation (XXXXXXX, personal communication, April 2001). However, several smaller scale initiatives between the organizations have been unfruitful and often involved infighting. Perhaps issues selected for joint ventures must be clearly supported by each agency’s stakeholders, be identified as significant enough to draw a critical mass of support, and offer some degree of recognition if successful.

To better understand how this approach could work, consider the following example. Several of the organizations currently state that homelessness and affordable housing are important issues to them. One group already works with the city of Dallas to renovate dilapidated homes that are about to be condemned. These improvements bring the house into compliance with city codes and allow the residents to continue living there. Perhaps, the other organizations interested in housing concerns could join this project. This joint venture would allow more homes to be refurbished and more clients to be served. In addition, the work could establish relationships among the volunteers of the agencies and create additional goodwill. This last effect may be important since the territorial concerns of the agencies at issue appear to be at the leadership level.
Further Possibilities

As discussed in the next section, territorial concerns of the executive directors may hinder the implementation of these proposed solutions. However, organizational services and operations can be changed by networking at the volunteer and client level as well (Schoech, 1999). By putting volunteers and clients from various agencies in contact with one another, joint ventures may encourage such changes. Another approach that could avoid territorial concerns would be a listserv linking together volunteers from each agency with similar interests. Communications would no longer be filtered through agency directors, and impromptu activities could be planned at the volunteer and client level without the need for board approval.

If the previous solutions are successful, the organizations may also consider operating a joint website at some point in the future. The site could serve as a clearinghouse for information on social justice issues in Dallas and would ideally allow the creation of a virtual community with this focus. An excellent example of this type of website is operated by ProTex: Network for a Progressive Texas (Appendix D). ProTex serves as an umbrella organization to unite progressive groups and grassroots efforts in Texas. The organization has identified four issues for “priority collaborations” (see Appendix D) at this time. Substantial information is provided on each issue, and website visitors are directed to action opportunities for areas that interest them. The site also links users to member organizations in the ProTex network that focus on these concerns. Discussion listservs have been established for a variety of issues to keep users informed on a regular basis. While the organizations examined in this paper are not currently prepared to create or maintain a website of this magnitude, the ProTex site offers many helpful ideas for their own sites and provides a potential opportunity for future growth.

On a smaller scale, the lower Greenville neighborhood of Dallas operates a virtual community website centered on an actual locale. The site, called BarkingDogs.org (Appendix E), is used to mobilize support and action on issues of importance to the neighborhood. Such issues include parking problems, community crime watches, and neighborhood maintenance.

How to Proceed

At this time, the organizations should consider utilizing the first three solutions in sequence, as each solution builds on the previous one. For example, once the websites have been updated and have become more useful, the sites can be used for survey administration. After Zoomerang has been utilized to identify common concerns, those concerns become the basis for joint ventures between the various entities. Although the volunteer listserv does not explicitly fit into this sequence, this communication tool would prove helpful from its inception, as it circumvents some of the territorial hindrances discussed earlier.
and may foster more open communication and sharing of ideas. However, the joint website approach would be unfeasible at this time and should be seen as a potential project for the future if earlier collaborations are successful.

Although the technology recommended in these solutions is relatively simple, implementation of these approaches may not be as easy. An IT change agent must know how to guide organizations through this process. In doing so, one should remember that convincing humans to change is often a more daunting task than the technological conversion itself (Schoech, 1999). To complicate matters further, multi-agency efforts are even more complex because of the great number of stakeholders involved. Here, each of the six organizations has an executive director, board of directors, funding sources, volunteers, and clients with diverse views. As seen in the earlier analysis, some of these stakeholders have territorial concerns that have led them to create rigid boundaries between the agencies.

Schoech, Cavalier, and Hoover (1993) discuss several potential obstacles to multi-agency networking. First, political obstacles within each agency must be successfully navigated. Such obstacles may include resistance from an executive director or board or disagreement with a parent organization. Another challenge is the lack of one central organization to create and maintain the network. While ProTex describes itself as a network of concerned organizations, it is also a distinct entity with its own funding sources. This structure makes it easier to manage its website and other activities and avoid some of these multi-agency problems. There is no equivalent entity in Dallas' social justice community at this time. Schoech et al. also point out that work patterns in each agency must also adapt in multi-agency efforts. To implement the website approach here, each agency must be willing to designate a responsible employee and allow that person to devote the necessary time to perform this task adequately.

With these challenges in mind, the social justice organizations must carefully select their political approach to implementing the proposed solutions. Although each agency’s obstacles will be unique, several guidelines are applicable to the group as a whole. To begin with, supporters of such changes should emphasize the attractiveness of these solutions to donors. By avoiding duplication of efforts, the organizations are using their resources more efficiently. Moreover, collaborative efforts are attractive to many funding sources. For example, one of the stated missions of United Ways of Texas is to create encourage strategic relationships between human service organizations throughout the state (United Ways, 2002). Also, some local United Way entities ask for collaborative approaches in each request for funds. Next, the organizations should reassure key stakeholders that there is no intention of merging any of the agencies or causing them to lose their distinct identities. Instead, the efficiency of the systems approach should again be emphasized. Finally, the number of joint ventures should be limited at first, so reluctant
stakeholders are not scared into entrenchment. By considering strategic approaches to each of these political obstacles, IT change agents will increase the chances of successful implementation.

**Evaluation**

The earlier systems analysis pointed out problems that the absence of system feedback can cause. Such feedback is also necessary to determine if the solutions are successfully implemented. Measures of positive system outputs should be built into the solutions from the beginning (Schoech, 1999).

The following are a list of goals for the organizations over the first year:

- **Month 1**: Identify employees responsible for website updates
- **Month 3**: Post monthly news and activities on websites by first day of each month
- **Month 6**: Develop agreed upon survey and identify target sample
- **Month 7**: Administer survey to volunteer and client sample
- **Month 8**: Identify common concerns from survey results
- **Month 9**: Each agency proposes one potential joint venture
- **Month 12**: Establish at least one ongoing joint venture

Although these goals provide a good measure of progress for the first year, modification of plans may be necessary or desirable once the process has begun. To allow for this, a bimonthly meeting of the responsible employees from each agency will provide opportunity for evaluation of previous efforts and review of future goals. If changes appear necessary, these representatives may develop proposed modifications to the plans at these meetings and submit them to their respective agencies. However, measures should not be changed too frequently or they may become meaningless (Schoech, 1999).

Having these employees serve as the representatives has several advantages. First, these individuals are responsible for website maintenance and will be more aware of any concerns or technical issues. Also, this method would avoid adding another meeting for executive directors to attend. In addition, the tech employees can exchange ideas and conceptualize future opportunities among themselves without first filtering the ideas through their organizational leaders. This may allow for greater incubation of ideas than would otherwise be possible. Once the ideas have been developed in a comprehensive manner, the proposals stand a better chance of gaining support from agency
decision-makers. Finally, the bimonthly meetings would also hold the tech employees accountable for website updates since they would regularly face their counterparts and discuss their websites at these meetings.

**Issues to Address**

The following issues were identified in the previous discussion of the implementation and evaluation processes:

- Importance of emphasizing benefits of collaborative efforts to stakeholders (more efficient and more attractive to funding sources)
- Importance of reassuring stakeholders (organizational identities will be preserved)
- Advantage of proceeding cautiously with joint ventures (to avoid alarming reluctant stakeholders)
- Importance of evaluation and monitoring procedures

**Conclusion**

The current lack of interaction and cooperation among the six social justice organizations has resulted in ineffective activities, duplication of efforts, and missed opportunities for addressing additional concerns. A systems approach identified problems with the existing behavior of the overall system. These areas of concern include territoriality, insufficient linkages, unintended suboptimization, and absence of feedback mechanisms. As a whole, the organizations need to improve communication and collaboration among themselves for the social justice community of Dallas to enjoy more success. To do this, the organizations should begin by building upon their current websites. An IT survey application may also be used to identify common concerns of their volunteers and clients. Joint ventures can then be undertaken to address these concerns. As always, both technological and political contingencies will affect the implementation of such plans and must be considered for a successful resolution. Through communication and cooperation, social justice can be advanced in Dallas.

**References**


Appendix A

American Jewish Congress website

Southwest Region
This site is under construction.
Welcome! You may browse public areas of our site. [PARTICIPATE]

Stronger Gun Control Legislation Petition

Our mission statement
American Jewish Congress is a national membership organization founded in 1918, which works to advance social justice and human rights for all Americans. The organization has an emphasis on defending the First Amendment, particularly as it relates to the separation of church and state.

[click here to access our National website]

Opening (and only) page of website – Has been “under construction” for several years
Appendix B

Green Party of Dallas County website

Opening page of website

Activities

Many progressive non-profit groups in the Dallas area sponsor ongoing activities and regularly scheduled meetings.

**Dallas Green Party Meeting**

The first Saturday of every month, join us at Paperbacks Plus as we work on building a coalition of progressive activism in the Dallas community.

We meet at Paperbacks Plus on Lawrence and Skillman, just a couple of miles east of Downtown Dallas.

You can get directions here.

**North Texas Coalition For A Just Peace**

The North Texas Coalition For A Just Peace meets the first and third Monday of every month at the Maryknoll Peace Center at the intersection of Rek and Brinn.

Events related to September 11th and the state of freedom and liberty here and abroad are discussed and actions are planned.

You can call the Peace Center at (214) 630-7993 for more information.

If you would like your group’s activities and meetings listed here contact webmaster@dallsgreens.org.

"Community Action – Activities" page
Introduction to Links section – tied to Party’s 10 key values

Links

These links provide a way to see what progressive groups are doing in Dallas County. By providing these links we hope to inspire you to join, volunteer, donate and appreciate all the work going on for positive change right here where we live.

The links are organized around the Green Party’s 10 key values.

If you are a progressive, non-profit organization in Dallas County, please let us know so we can list you here and spread your message. Would you consider adding our link to your website? If so let us know. Contact webmaster@dallasgreens.org.

RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

Organizations who honor cultural, ethnic, racial, sexual, religious and spiritual diversity within the context of individual responsibility to all beings.

Diversity

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Organizations working for social justice, social responsibility and personal growth. Groups taking responsibility for reclaiming their neighborhoods.

Social Justice

GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY

Introduction to Links section – tied to Party’s 10 key values

Ecological Wisdom

Organizations spreading awareness that we must live within the ecological and resource limits of the planet, applying our technological knowledge to the challenge of an energy efficient economy. Groups responding biocentric wisdom in all spheres of life.

If you are a progressive, non-profit organization in Dallas County and would like us to add your link to this page please contact webmaster@dallasgreens.org

Sustainable Dallas

The Sustainability Committee of the Environmental Center of Dallas (ECO Dallas) goals is for a sustainable Dallas future. Its mission is to educate citizens and business for responsible stewardship of our environment and natural resources through education and collaboration. It hosts the annual Sustainable Dallas conference.

Environmental Center of Dallas

ECO Dallas is creating a physical and virtual space for building the sustainable city in North Texas. We envision a Dallas indeed, a whole region with clean air and water, where abundant open space shelters native wildlife and all citizens have the chance to experience nature, business, government, and citizens will all participate in and benefit from a way of life that makes the city and the planet healthier, now and for future generations.

Dallas Sierra Club

Dallas Sierra Club is about everyday people listening to their inner voice saying, “I wish I could do something about our environment” and then working with others to make a positive contribution to our Earth.

Save the Trinity!

A coalition of civic and environmental organizations working for
Appendix C

Zoomerang website

Opening page of website

Partial list of available community templates for survey creation
**View Results**

**ANALYZE RESPONSES**

Here are the fruits of your labor. Answers to survey questions are calculated in real-time and presented in clear graphic charts and tables. You can begin checking survey responses hours (or even minutes) after deploying your survey.

Zoomerang offers an Advanced Features Package that provides access to even more powerful survey tools. Take a look at these hot, new subscription features.

### Sample results page

**Survey Results**

**Satisfaction Survey**

1. How satisfied are you with Zoomerang and its service?
   - Very Unhappy: 1.0%
   - Unhappy: 2.0%
   - Somewhat Satisfied: 3.0%
   - Satisfied: 4.0%
   - Very Satisfied: 5.0%
   - Extremely Satisfied: 6.0%
   - Total: 100%

General questions or comments? Click here to contact us.

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Sample results page
Appendix D

Pro-Tex website

In the Progressive Spotlight

Real Budget for Texas
In a continuing effort to bring about tax fairness in Texas, many individuals, labor unions, and public interest groups have begun a project called the "Real Budget" Project. Over the coming months, they hope to do what no governor, lieutenant governor, or legislature has ever done in Texas history. They want to create a real Texas budget that would detail Texans' needs for adequate healthcare, child care, and criminal justice reform, among others. For more information or to talk about our Real Budget survey, click here.

Get Up, Stand Up!
Organized by the Texas Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, "Get Up, Stand Up - Organizing Against Police Abuse," will be held Saturday, May 4th, at the Claudia Black Center in San Antonio. The statewide conference will bring together civil rights activists, students, families and others from around the state to educate, train and strategize on key police reform issues such as racial profiling and police brutality. For more information, please visit the TOJC Web site.

Current priority collaborations

Pro-Tex wants to support the work you do by linking you with other advocates who have similar concerns. We provide staff support and other resources to help people initiate collaborative action and build coalitions and collaborations that are part of the Pro-Tex network. The Pro-Tex Board of Directors chose four priority issues to focus on over the next several years. They are:

- Health Care
- Criminal Justice Reform
- Fair Employment
- Tax Fairness

Visit the links above to see how you can get involved with one of these efforts.

Pro-Tex provides an infrastructure for the people around the state - both grassroots activists and policy advocates - who know the issues and are already working on them in some fashion. We believe that there are already many dedicated activists around the state who are actively engaged in working on these issues. We are not the principal actors or advocates on this issue, although we may serve in an advisory capacity or as a facilitator within the coalitions, planning committees, and steering committees we work with.

Click to read more about Pro-Tex's support for coalitions.
Appendix E

Barking Dogs website

Community Watch summary now online

The latest DPD Police Summaries for Lower Greenville and vicinity are now online. This page is a summary of criminal activity reports as provided to local Community Watch coordinators by the Dallas Police Department.

The report now includes all incidents documented on the DPD's Crime Summary for Block Watch reports provided to BD and others in the area. Our previous summaries (October 2001 - March 2002) reported only those incidents within a two-block radius of Lower Greenville between Ross and Belmont Avenue.

Opening page of website

Qualifying for ROP

There is a specific process and set of forms required for starting the ROP process. Here are the general requirements.

Sixty percent (60%) of the residents on either side of any block (or 60% of all residents on both sides) must sign an application/petition for RESIDENT ONLY PARKING. Residents who rent DO NOT NEED landlord approval.

Submit a list of vehicles owned by people living on the street on the application. Specify (days or hours) when you want the parking restrictions to be in force.

A $50 application fee must be paid when the petition is
Appendix F

Power Point presentation

The Power Point presentation entitled “A Common Bond” is attached as a Power Point file of the same name.