

**NCHSD Spring Members Meeting  
April 21, 2008  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

The National Consortium for Health Systems Development held its annual Spring Members Meeting in conjunction with the CMS-sponsored MIG/DMIE Employment Summit. We met the afternoon of April 21, 2008, at the Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans.

NCHSD states know that developing messages about employment and communicating them to business and other stakeholders is often a critically important part of many grant initiatives—from enlisting employer support for infrastructure change to changing public preconceptions about working people with disabilities. Recognizing the complexity of today’s media environment, many MIGs are turning to business and communications professionals to achieve these goals.

In response, NCHSD designed the Spring Members Meeting to provide MIG staff with an opportunity to talk directly to policy leaders and professionals about developing and communicating messages about employment and disability to a wide array of stakeholders, especially employers. This session aimed to help participants learn about specific state strategies for crafting different messages for different audiences, effectively using skilled professionals and key partners, and understanding how the right messaging efforts can help make infrastructure change happen.

The keynote speaker was Neil Romano, businessman and recently-appointed Assistant Secretary, [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#), US Department of Labor. His presentation, *Effective Messages for Business in Your State*, was followed by a panel of business and media consultants:

- Merritt Carey, [GraffamSolutions](#), Maine: *Providing the Tools to Let Your Business Community Take the Lead*
- Chris Knopf, [Mintz & Hoke](#), Connecticut: *How Communications Can Serve the Cause*
- Anthony Morgali, [Morgali Films](#), Oregon: *Building a National Campaign to Get Your Message Out*

The notes below summarize each speaker’s presentation, as well as the lively discussion that followed.

An exciting outcome of the discussion was the decision by states to collaborate on a marketing campaign about employment and disability. Joe Razes of CMS encouraged states to devote MIG funds to this kind of marketing, and said that supplemental funding might be available to help support their efforts. NCHSD is convening a working team to move this agenda forward.

**Neil Romano’s Message:**

- Advocates need to remember that they have a “product that they are selling” and shouldn’t be intimidated by trying to make a sale.
- It’s important for MIGs to be enthusiastic in their marketing of employment for people with disabilities.
- He believes using business cases to strengthen the argument for employers to hire people with disabilities is the most effective way to sell the concept. ODEP is setting up a section

of business cases on their website that states can use to market their employees to businesses.

- Here are the top 3 most critical business issues identified by a survey of consumers:
  - Does the business provide health care?
  - Are they concerned about environmental issues?
  - Do they hire individuals with disabilities?
- This is how important employing individuals with disabilities is to businesses' customers!
- These statistics emphasize his point as well:
  - The definition of disability is changing—now 4 of 10 households identify that they include an individual with a disability.
  - 92% of people would rather give their business to a company who employs individuals with disabilities. People believe employing people with disabilities shows that the business cares about people, which in turn shows that they care about their customers and helps customers see more value in their product.
- "Diversity creates innovation" and employees with disabilities create diversity.
- Chris recommends trying to find another word for "accommodations"—reframe this as just another cost of doing business.

#### **Merritt Carey's Message:**

- As you think about advocating for employees with disabilities, remember your target audience—businesses.
- It's important to start closing the gap between non-profits and the business community.
- We need to start translating and formulating our messages so that they better resonate with business. Work on the language we use with the business community—speak to them in terms that they can relate to, in other words, use business-friendly language.
- There are several "hooks" you can use to encourage businesses to hire more individuals with disabilities:
  - Aging population—baby boomers are going to be retiring and one solution is to diversify your workforce.
  - Social responsibility—it expands consumer good will.
  - Employment of returning war veterans.
- When you're communicating with employers, pull them in quickly and keep your message succinct.
- Become comfortable with your role as a "sales person"—use consultants and experts when it's appropriate.
- Use the feedback you get from your work with employers and use this to start connecting businesses together.
- Merritt also recommends avoiding the word "accommodation" when talking to employers—instead, just explain that *every* employee requires some sort of accommodation or adjustment.
- Once you've developed your message, package it with sophistication and make it business friendly. Pay for a designer. Don't make it look like it was produced by the government or

a social service agency. Make it appealing and give your products – website, print materials, videos – a shared look.

### **Chris Knopf's Message:**

- Make sure your communications partner believes in what you're doing and thinks like you do about disability and employment. Be careful not to accept pro bono help from someone whose primary objective is only to enhance their own reputation.
- The more authentic your approach, the better.
- Use reality – build on real-life success stories and testimonials. Demonstration is a powerful tool – SHOW THEM.
- Your goal is to make the business feel like it is commonplace to have a disabled employee, so that they don't notice any difference.
- Get people to use the resources you develop, such as your website. This is a way to have ongoing engagement with employers.
- Continue to build the content of your resources, continue to build the relationships with your contacts and maintain your engagement with them. Keep them hooked in!
- Tool kits are a good way to do this – they give people the information they need to make it happen.

### **Anthony Morgali's Message:**

- Marketing theory involves three things: your content, its context and the marriage between the two. (These were illustrated with visual examples.)
- Producing in bulk is cheaper than producing a single spot—make 4 spots at once rather than just one.
- The work he did in Oregon was relatively cheap—with a little help from your partners, you can get a lot for your money.
- Making a media buy can be local or regional versus national. There are a lot of factors to consider, so get an expert to help you through this process.
- January and February 2009 are going to be good months to buy more inexpensive air time.

### **Outcomes and Next Steps**

Following the presentations, and a question-and-answer session with the panelists, participants discussed the idea of collaborating across state lines to develop and broadcast a marketing campaign centered on disability and employment. Many states were interested and excited about the possibility of pooling their resources to make a major media impact, while recognizing the challenges inherent in this sort of collaboration among a diverse set of states.

Joe Razes of CMS encouraged states to use MIG funds in this way. He noted that several states were not drawing down the maximum MIG funding their Medicaid Buy-In expenditures could justify—these states could propose to spend additional MIG funds on a collaborative marketing campaign. Joe also said he would consider proposals to bring federal partners into the collaboration.