ALAS (National Latina alliance against sexual violence)

Participating Organizations

- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault, Austin, TX

Please note that all data below was derived from the collaboration's nomination for the Collaboration Prize. None of the submitted data were independently verified for accuracy.

Formation

Type of Collaboration:

- Administrative Consolidation to share, exchange, or provide back office services such as accounting, IT, human resources
- An alliance or similar collaborative structure through which members retain structural autonomy and have defined roles and responsibilities to achieve specific social goals or purposes

Geographic Scope: National
Collaboration Focus Area: Other
Population Served: Women and Girls
Year Collaboration was Established: 2004
Goals Sought Through Collaboration:

- Develop a stronger / more effective "voice"
- Improve the quality of services / programs
- Address unmet and/or escalating community need

Reasons Prompting Collaboration:

- Difficulty in meeting external standards / requirements imposed on our organization
- Advancement of a shared goal
- Response to a community need

Who Initiated Collaboration:

- Executive Director(s) / CEO(s) / President(s)
- Community leader(s) / organization(s)

Number of Participating Organizations: >10
Were Partners Added or Dropped?: Yes
The rich experience of communicating with many Latina victim advocates, learning of the marginalized working conditions that most of them faced, and identifying the Internet as a possible forum for support, technical assistance, and resource development, led to the development of ALAS.

The fact that this was a voluntary yet action-driven collaboration without any monetary commitment made significant difference in our ability to solidify a national voice of bilingual victim advocates. This endeavor was a response to the many e-mail inquiries that Arte Sana began to receive from primary and secondary victims of sexual violence regarding the availability of Spanish language victim services.

The partners were identified via online correspondence related to the development of an online directory of the different types of sexual assault victim services available in Spanish that were being offered by agencies across the U.S. in 2003, through our website, and requests for materials and support and through the identification of victim services.

The transition of partners has been driven by the working conditions of Latina victim advocates. Many who are the only bilingual victim advocate burn out and seek employment elsewhere after being overtaxed with multiple translation and interpreter duties. Those who leave victim services sometimes find it difficult to remain engaged. The collaboration offers ongoing engagement incentives including technical assistance, program models, RFPs, networking opportunities, and translations.

Management

Management Structure: One Executive Director / CEO / President

Members are encouraged to propose mini projects and the group utilized the listserv polling option to vote on major decisions or to collectively develop original materials.

Team leaders and ongoing moderation helps keep the group on task with reminders and deadlines. Consultant opportunities are offered when available and external groups /stakeholders and agencies are brought into the process of tasks like national position statements.

The online management style has yielded the drafting of four national position statements, the formation of an online creative group that contributed to the development of 11 original bilingual training and outreach products, and countless other materials that have been used by rape crisis centers across the nation. Just this year the group embarked on a non-funded review of rape crisis center website content to advocate on behalf of greater victim service information for survivors of sexual assault.

The commitment remains strong because the volunteer active engagement between 20 - 30 victim advocates was and is based on need.

Challenges

Challenges to Making the Collaboration Work:

● Addressing lack of staff or allocation of staff resources
● Retaining staff or staff departures
● Facing competitive factors in the operating environment

Overextension and demoralization at the work place have filtered onto the group and have impacted participation at times. In these cases we've addresses issues on a case-by-case have attempted to offer ongoing moral support to promote staff retention at our partner agencies.

We've address the challenges we've encountered by self-evaluations and open dialog of what it means to be an action-oriented group and team partner rather than a passive observer. We've also address the challenges by rewarding active engagement of partners via first call for workshop proposals and in-kind scholarships to Arte Sana national conferences, contracted consultant opportunities, grant collaborations and strict adherence to the membership criteria. The group members helped determine the membership criteria.

Impact
Internal Efficiencies and Effectiveness:

- Human resources - Shared and/or improved training and professional development
- Greater ability for each partner to focus on core competency - Greater ability to allocate resources to areas of need
- Improved marketing and communications, public relations and outreach - Improved marketing and communications, public relations and outreach

Community Impact:

- Increased collaboration with/among other community organizations (beyond the scope of the original collaboration)
- Collaboration has served as a model for others

Our national grant projects, with specific deliverables and timeframes have benefited greatly from the collaboration. Products that will be available for victim service agencies across the nation included the participation of the collaboration partners from product design, pilot testing, to the product demonstration stage. Our collective developments of national position statements have been endorsed by state and national organizations that address violence against women. Our networking with women color groups has helped solidify the voice of victim advocacy for marginalized communities.

The lessons we’ve learned include the need to value each partner agency’s individuality and allow all partners ownership to contribute to and benefit from the collaboration.

Model

This collaboration, which is heavily Internet based is extremely cost effective, saving thousands of dollars in travel expenses. It allows the ongoing active participation of diverse groups; our members have cultural roots in many Latin American countries, and ALAS membership has included victim advocates from the direct service level on the state and national coalition level. ALAS also serves as a model for multidisciplinary collaborations to address an issues in a more holistic approach. It promotes democratic participation and empowers each member with decision-making rights and obligations. Through collective product development and policy proposals, ALAS has shared countless materials for agencies without funding to produce them, and has contributed to the development of Latina victim advocacy during a time when it is needed most, without one cent of funding.

Efficiencies Achieved

The demand for trainings and technical assistance have steadily increased while the costs associated with said travel have also risen. This has created a budgeting shortfall that is best addressed through less expensive models of instruction. Web-based training, resources, and even networking has allowed us to effectively fill some of these gaps. Additionally, it has expanded the availability of training or technical assistance to those residing outside of communities where trainings are being delivered and has allowed professional networks to grow beyond the normal geographic service areas.

The collaboration has allowed organizations with greater staff size and other human resources to partner with smaller organizations with specialized skill-sets and specific expertise to develop and deliver programs and products that benefit the natural constituencies of all involved organizations.

The collaboration has saved thousands of dollars in travel expenses which would cost at a minimum $4,600 per meeting. (According to US General Services Administration (GSA) travel rates.) If we factor in the worth of the donated time; victim services grants allow up to $450 compensation for an eight-hour day, the potential cost for one full day of face-to-face victim advocacy consultant work could equal $9,100. This formula illustrates the incredible savings that the national collaboration offers those who are working to upgrade Latina victim advocacy in the domestic violence and sexual assault fields.

Evolution
For the past nine years we have witnessed the increasing gaps in victim services for Limited English Proficient residents as countless victims of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, including forced prostitution, and intimate partner rape have gone unserved. The collaboration was a mutually beneficial relationship between a budding national Latina-led agency founded in 2001, and a well-established state sexual assault coalition located in Texas, home to the second largest community of Hispanics in the nation. Through an initial Memorandum of Understanding for supporting each other’s training events and promoting outreach materials and efforts, the collaboration soon began to take on a national focus as the support of TAASA, one of the largest state sexual assault coalitions, of the various ALAS policy statements on behalf of eliminating victim assistance access barriers for Latinas, helped us draw attention to the needs.

It also modeled support by other state coalitions in other regions of the nation. In 2010, the collaboration yielded a position statement and a presentation module, on the potential effects of exclusive legislation on Latina victim advocacy, the review of victim assistance websites in the 16 states with half a million or more Hispanics for Spanish language content, and the development of a training agenda for a national conference. The position statement was shared nationally via the Arte Sana website and statewide, within TAASA training events.

The “bumps in the road” have and will continue to be financial, but through the effective use of the Internet we are able to create tangible results. The far-reaching impact of this collaboration cannot be underestimated, for we have centered around meeting the needs of communities/individuals who are frequently neglected in traditional service delivery models. By pooling our resources (in every sense of the word) and using the benefits of online networking, planning, and production we are accomplishing more than either could do alone and we are offering a viable model of victim advocacy that is making an impact on a national level.

The success of the collaboration can be measured through longevity. Arte Sana will soon celebrate its 10 anniversary and ALAS its 7th. The level of activism and productivity has continued throughout these years thanks to the solid collaboration with agencies and coalitions such as TAASA. The collaboration will come full circle in 2011, as a document originally created by Arte Sana with ALAS input to engage Latinas/os in Sexual Assault Awareness Month will now be updated and offered as a new collaboration tool that will also focus on prevention. This product will not only be distributed in Texas, but across the nation as well.

The findings of the last collaborative online review of web content in Spanish revealed that over 80% of rape crisis center and domestic violence shelter websites in the 16 states with half a million or more Hispanics (a combined total of 41 million) did not include one word of victim assistance information in Spanish. This revelation was not arrived at by an expensive long-term project, but rather an online collaboration. The results will be used in grant writing and policy development to enhance services. We believe this model of collaboration that utilizes online victim advocacy is one that could serve many causes and programs, for it promotes the sharing of talents and skills for the greater good and allows full engagement, participation, and leadership of communities and groups with limited resources and visibility.