



# Leaning into the Headwind Requires Assertive Approach

*Alliance, UNCA tackle economic straits with strong vision*



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In his inaugural speech Jan. 20, President Barack Obama said, “Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land—a nagging fear that America’s decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights.”

He continued later in the speech, “The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history ...”

This reflection of the somberness and fear people feel today, while acknowledging the strong spirit that the citizens of this country have exhibited time and time again is a perfect reflection of the situation the nearly 525 members of the Alliance for Children and Families and United Neighborhood Centers of America (UNCA) are experiencing at this time.

While trying to continue to meet the needs of the children and families within the neighborhoods and communities you serve—including the increase in need due to the economy—you are concurrently witnessing the “cracks” within your own walls.

Unrelated to the Wisconsin winter, I have been frequently picturing in my mind a person leaning into a strong headwind, holding their hat on their head and their coat lapels to protect themselves from the cold wind, all while purposely moving forward. To add to this image, there is another person right next to that

person, walking by their side—this is your national membership association.

We are dedicating the first four months of 2009 to the most crucial issues our members are now facing. We are focusing all our skills, resources, partnerships, allegiances, and events to bring you even more cutting-edge knowledge, information, ideas, toolkits, and answers.

A very important part of that focused effort is being a player in the process to pass a national economic recovery package. This effort includes ensuring that there is strong representation within the recovery program for the federal programs that provide funding to nonprofit human services.

As so many of you are painfully aware, there exists a unique situation because a large number of members are fulfilling government contracts; and even before the economic crisis there were challenges related to rate of reimbursement and timely payment for services rendered. The Alliance and UNCA understand that you are also mission-based organizations and your role is to help when people need your help. Your instinct is to provide the service and assume that somehow, sooner or later, you will get reimbursed or you will somehow “make it.”

Indeed, nonprofit human service government contractors are not like the highway contractor who simply stops building the highway when funds dry up, or the defense contractor who stops work on the project. But the question cannot be left unanswered: How do we get fairly reimbursed for the services we are contracted to provide? Otherwise, sooner or later, we go out of the business of fulfilling on our mission.

As your national membership association, throughout this economic

stimulus package effort, and always, we will raise both moral and social issues on the one hand, but also pragmatic and economic ones of the other. With the help of our strong membership, we will make clear the social and moral consequences of failing to serve and protect America’s most needy and vulnerable.

It is very encouraging to note that the economic recovery legislation includes additional funding for the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage, summer youth employment, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start, and the Public Housing Capital Fund, among other areas.

Please know that our role for our members in this process is more significant than just getting the legislation passed. Our Washington, D.C., staff is working to ensure that Alliance and UNCA members are well positioned in our efforts so that any resulting legislation can be the right policy for you during these difficult times.

The Alliance and UNCA are not taking a wait-and-see attitude with this difficult economic situation. We are being aggressive and assertive, yet not reckless. I encourage you and your organization to take a similar approach. As the great John W. Gardner, founder of Common Cause, noted, challenges are simply “a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems.”

As we continue to face upcoming challenges with you, as well as help you identify and take advantage of the new opportunities that may present themselves in 2009, be assured that your national membership association is in a strong position to walk by your side into the headwind. ■