

# **Managing Social Movement Organizations: Lessons from NAFFE's "Structured Advocacy Network"**

## ***Draft of a discussion paper<sup>1</sup>***

### ***Summary***

#### ***Introduction***

Activists in many fields face a similar problem: how to bring together the fragments of an emerging social movement.

The problem of fragmentation was severe for the varied groups of activists concerned with contingent work that sprang up during the 1990s. These groups addressed different issues, ranging from job security provisions in union contracts to street corner hiring conditions for day laborers. Their constituencies ranged from unionized construction workers to high tech professionals to socially concerned religious activists. Some were local organizations, some national. Their organizational forms were diverse. Most had tight organizational planning processes that could not possibly be subordinated to a higher decision-making body. All had their own structures and agendas.

These groups felt that, despite their divergences, they had concerns in common and that they could be more effective if they could find some way to band together. They created an organization now known as the North American Alliance for Fair Employment (NAFFE). This paper is an account of how NAFFE has tried address the problem of bringing together the fragments by means of an organizational form known as a "structured network."

A structured network is very different from a conventional organization, but also from a "smart-mob"-style informal network. We hope NAFFE's experience will be helpful to people organizing around other issues who face a similar problem.

Advocates claim that networks provide a way that diverse and fragmented groups can cooperate across gaps in constituency, culture, tradition, and geography. They maintain that networks allow specific interests and "local knowledge" to be pooled into something

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by NAFFE staff members Tim Costello, Suren Moodliar, and Kim Folz and Jeremy Brecher, a regular consultant to NAFFE.

greater without losing its specificity. They portray networks as the way to establish cooperation over a large scale without succumbing to the centralization of power.

But skeptics doubt that networks can function effectively under real world conditions or that they can serve as vigorous agents of social change. They point to networks' typically vague structure, their lack of organizational control, their ambiguity of leadership, and their lack of conventional structures of accountability.

To understand networks and to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, it is necessary to examine how networks actually function and how they can be managed in ways that maximize their effectiveness. Often, networks become immobile or collapse because they graft structures and practices appropriate to stand-alone organizations onto networks. The result is that networks often become simply coalitions with huge paper memberships but a narrow focus on a few issues. This may be valuable in itself, but the alleged benefits of the network form, such as the possibility of real cross fertilization and deepened understanding of the issues at hand, is often lost.

To achieve the claims made for them, structured networks need to be more than simply loose arrays of organizations that communicate from time to time. They require at least as much thoughtful planning and management as a more conventional organization.

From its inception, NAFPE has explicitly set out to serve as a social laboratory in which to test experimentally the best ways to organize and manage itself as a structured network. In this paper we will examine the development of NAFPE's structure and management as an example of a structured network. We will try to see the ways in which network structure has and has not been fruitful. And we will try to draw lessons about what ways to structure and manage networks are likely to be most effective.

Many NAFPE member groups, such as trade unions and community organizations, deal with a wide range of issues besides contingent work. These organizations may be able to use the NAFPE model to develop similar networks in other spheres.

### ***Foundations and networks***

[The role that foundations play in shaping and sustaining social movement organizations in the US is unique. Like many organizations, NAFPE would not have been started, nor could it survive in its present form, without foundation support. The French American Charitable Trust provided funds to launch NAFPE and has been steadfast in its support ever since. Important grants from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations have been critical to NAFPE survival](#) and evolution.

Throughout the 1990s, many funders promoted the idea that organizations had to reach "scale and scope." But this proved to be a perplexing objective for many organizations.

For local groups and groups with narrow, well-defined missions, the demand for growth could disrupt their activities as well as expand them. With the current downturn in funding, this is a more critical issue than ever. Some foundations are now forced to pull back funding from the very groups they encouraged to expand, with serious organizational consequences.

Funders also encouraged groups to form coalitions with others rather than acting in isolation. Sometimes coalition was effective, and sometimes it helped groups reach scale and scope, But too often the result was a “mixed message” in which groups were simultaneously told to concentrate on their own growth and to devote resources to wider cooperation.

Networks provide an alternative road to “scale and scope” and to cooperation. NAFPE, for example, includes many groups that are local, focused on a specific, limited constituency, and/or devoted to one or a small number of issues. The structured network form has allowed a huge advance in the scale and scope of the effort to confront contingent work without having to draw member groups away from their own localities, concerns, and constituencies.

NAFPE decided not to become a fiscal intermediary between foundations and individual organizations, at least during its formative years. Serving as a pass-through organization could undermine the trust and solidarity needed to build a strong network.<sup>2</sup>

But networks like NAFPE can serve as intermediaries in other ways. NAFPE brings together a critical mass of organizations needed to shape and define issues and helps foundations identify promising strategies, tactics, and prospective grantees.

While foundations can benefit from networks’ knowledge, they need to have an arms-length relationship with emerging organizations. As John Doe of the McKnight Foundation put it foundations are in a good position to help launch networks but they should not “be like parents trying to film a teenagers birthday party.” (get exact quote and the guys real name).

Indeed one of the important functions networks play for members is to serve as “free space” for discussions of important questions such as funding. NAFPE members regularly compare notes about funding and funding strategies, especially as foundations have been cutting back on funding.

New ideas are hatched in these discussions. For instance, there is currently widespread criticism and concern among many social movement activists working on many issues that foundations are cutting back their grant making at the very moment when it is most needed. The funding of the 1990’s helped create an infrastructure that could make a difference in today’s economy, but which is unsustainable because of the lack of funding. One response has been to ask foundations to do counter-cyclical grant making. If cut

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<sup>2</sup> NAFPE has provided some funding to help other networks like the National Day Labor Organizing Network and the Coalition on Contingent Academic Labor.

[backs are needed they should be made during flush times, not during economic crisis when social movement organizations are most needed.](#)

## ***NAFFE and the theory of networks***

The era of globalization has generated a wave of social movement experimentation with new forms of organization and the beginnings of theoretical reflection on them. The trendy term for describing these new forms is “network.” NAFFE founders tried to bring the emerging theoretical perspectives on networks to bear on their own concrete challenges.<sup>3</sup>

Political scientists Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink in their book *Activists Beyond Borders* developed the concept of “advocacy networks.” They defined networks as “forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange.”<sup>4</sup> These networks could include NGOs, local social movements, foundations, the media, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, intellectuals, parts of regional and international inter-governmental organizations, and parts of the executive and/or parliamentary branches of governments.

Such networks, they argued, exchange information and support a dense nexus of communication among participants. They also develop a common language and frame issues for participants and the public.

Keck and Sikkink described “framing” as particularly central for advocacy networks. They defined framing as “conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, they portrayed networks as defined primarily by their frames. Individuals and groups generally participate in a network to the extent that they accept its central frame.

Advocacy networks perform two functions. They provide a structure through which members can communicate, exchanging information, learning from each others’ experiences, and informing each other of plans and intentions. But they also themselves

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<sup>3</sup>See Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, and Brendan Smith, *Globalization from Below: The Power of Solidarity*, Chapter 6. “Self-Organization from Below,” especially 83-4 and 86-90. Brecher and Costello *Common Sense for Hard Times* (Second Edition), (Boston/New York: South End Press/Two Continents Publishing Group, 1977). Brecher and Costello, *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Alliance of Labor and Community* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), especially pp. 332-334, “What Makes These Coalitions Different?” Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). Hilary Wainwright, *Arguments for a New Left: Answering the Free Market Right* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Diane Elson, “Market Socialism or Socializing the Market,” *New Left Review*, 172, pp. 3-44. Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Walter W. Powell, “Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization,” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 12 (1990).

<sup>4</sup> Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>Keck and Sikkink, p. 3.

serve as vehicles for action, as agents that initiate and conduct campaigns and other actions.

Advocacy networks functioned differently in campaigns than either conventional organizations or coalitions. There might be a lead organization and perhaps a formal coalition of supporters, but in practice most transnational campaigns emerged from planning within networks and were conducted by them, often across formal organizational lines.

Such campaigns were marked by what might be called cross-organizational team leadership. They reflected the comment of John Gardner that “In a tumultuous, swiftly changing environment, in a world of multiple, colliding systems, the hierarchical position of leaders within their own system is of limited value, because some of the most critically important tasks require lateral leadership – boundary-crossing leadership – involving groups over whom they have no control.”<sup>6</sup>

Network participants can be highly diverse and may disagree on many matters, as long as they accept the network’s defining frame of the issues that it addresses. Individuals can participate in them directly, whether or not they are formally affiliated through organizations. Segments of organizations can participate in them, and in the actions they launch, while other segments remain apart.

The network form allows a coordinated social movement composed of relatively autonomous groupings. It eschews a sharp distinction between organizers and the rank and file. It is difficult to monopolize the flow of communication within networks or to block its flow across organizational boundaries. Networks are resistant to leadership domination; their leaders are largely dependent on persuasion, rather than on control of scarce organizational resources or some form of muscle. When authority is delegated, it quickly expires, and is only renewed in the presence of active trust. Such a decentralized form also allows experimentation, which means that failures are less likely to be catastrophic for the movement as a whole.

[NAFFE’s organizational consultant](#), Paul Vandeventer of Community Partners, [a consultant retained by NAFPE during its planning phase](#), brought additional theoretical perspectives to the structuring and managing of networks. [These insights were based on work done with other emerging networks and a knowledge of organizational theory literature and were important in shaping NAFPE governance structure described below.](#) In particular, he was familiar with an emerging school of European scholarship on “policy networks” that link public sector institutions that need to cooperate but whose relationships are not shaped by strict hierarchical command.<sup>7</sup> This brought a different but

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<sup>6</sup> John Gardner, *On Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1990), p. 98.

<sup>7</sup> Much of the work of this school is gathered in Walter J.M. Kickert, Erik-Hans Klijn, and Joop F.M. Koppenjan, *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector* (London: Sage, 1997). Much of the material on the management of networks, such as issues of boundaries, perceptions, strategies, norms, and accountability are relevant to an advocacy as well as public sector networks.

complementary set of insights from the NGO and social movement-rooted analysis of most NAFFE participants.

Vandeventer emphasized the different approach to management a structured network requires. Rather than develop one strategy or set of tactics, networks promote a *strategic alignment* among network participants. An early NAFFE planning document provides the example of cooperation of temporary work organizations in Seattle, Boston, Silicon Valley, and New Jersey. They shared a set of goals about improvements they seek in working conditions for temporary workers, yet each had developed specific strategies, tactics, and campaigns to achieve those goals. As a network, NAFFE could “align these local efforts through a common frame and language and, perhaps but not necessarily, some joint actions. Actions growing out of local conditions can thereby put pressure on the temporary help industry as a whole.”

### ***Constructing an interpretive frame***

Networks are ideal social venues for developing effective interpretive frames because they bring together a range of social actors from a variety of vantage points. Frames are ways that individuals and organizations define a problem, organize their assumptions about the causes of a problem, and develop ideas that inform action to deal (or not to deal) with a problem. Frames help build and sustain collective identities.

During the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US economy underwent major structural changes. These are reflected in such catchwords as globalization, deindustrialization, regional decentralization, and corporate restructuring. These changes affected many different groups, often in different ways.

In response, diverse agendas developed in both established and new organizations. The organizations drawn into the fight around contingent work issues cut across the divides of race, class gender, occupation, and geography. Most had a local, regional, statewide, industrial, or occupational focus.

The organizations that came to compose NAFFE started with varied interpretations of the meaning of contingent work and of the struggle to affect it. Through an on-going process of dialogue, these divergences were gradually integrated into a common frame. NAFFE developed an interpretive frame in an iterative process that occurred over the course of several years. The process included research into the history of contingent work, many face to face meeting as well as regular conference calls, e-mails, etc.

NAFFE needed a frame that would work on at least two different levels. First, it had to frame the issue of contingent work in a way that was effective for the public. The dominant business frame about contingent work is that it is good—it offers choice to workers and flexibility to employers. NAFFE developed a counter-frame that portrays contingent work as primarily a way for business to suppress wages and hire and fire workers quickly. But NAFFE also had to develop a deeper frame to unite organizations

and activists, such as unions and community groups, who approach the problem from differing perspectives.

The resulting interpretive frame is an essential part of the glue that holds NAFPE together.

Some NAFPE initiators saw the problem of contingent work as fundamentally one of discrimination. A group of workers (a high proportion of them women and minorities) were denied the basic workplace protections received by mainstream workers. Other NAFPE initiators saw the growth of contingent work as an aspect of corporate restructuring and the consequent reorganization of labor markets. These very different frames gradually accommodated to each other to produce a synthesis. That common frame was expressed in NAFPE's founding report, *Contingent Workers Fight for Fairness*:

“The ‘downsizing’ of standard employment and its replacement by contingent jobs are a core feature of the new economy. . . . Whether they are temps, contract workers, day laborers, or part-timers, most workers in nonstandard jobs face a lack of equity in pay, benefits, security, and basic labor rights. They may be treated differently from other workers even if they do the same work for the same company. This disparity violates the basic fairness principle of equal pay for equal work.”<sup>8</sup>

A similar process occurred around differences over whether contingent work should be framed as a problem for contingent workers, for other workers, and for society. NAFPE was fed by two streams. In one stream were established worker organizations – mostly unions – seeking to protect hard-won standards and attract new members, and in the other stream, scrappy community-based organizations and their allies seeking to organize contingent workers. Initially, there was often tension between labor organizations and community groups. But NAFPE developed a common frame based on a set of strategies designed to meet the objectives of both labor and community. That strategy can be summed up as: protect existing jobs by raising standards for everyone, thereby reducing cost cutting as an incentive for firms to shift to contingent staffing. The common frame was summarized in the statement of “Common Purpose” that opens NAFPE's Charter:

“Nearly one third of the U.S. workforce is engaged in nonstandard work, such as part-time, temporary and contract employment. Many of these workers fail to enjoy the pay, benefits, and legal protections associated with more traditional jobs. The existence of this growing nonstandard workforce is a social concern that affects all workers since regular workers now face the threat that their employers may lay them off and replace them with contingent workers. This threat lessens workers' bargaining power, contributing to the weakness of unions, the persistence of low wages, and the increasing polarization of society into haves and have-nots. The North American Alliance for Fair Employment (NAFPE) is a network of organizations across a wide range of constituencies affected by problems of nonstandard work. We stand for equal treatment with respect to pay, benefits, and protection under the law, regardless of employment status. Our work is part of the broader fight to ensure that working people have the right

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<sup>8</sup> The National Alliance for Fair Employment, *Contingent Workers Fight for Fairness*. p. 2.

and opportunity to provide for themselves, their families, and their communities in a humane and dignified fashion.”

NAFFE members may still differ on subjects outside the common frame. But these differences do not in general disturb its functioning as an effective network.

The process of constructing a shared frame helped build relationships among NAFFE members. It continues to do so as old frames are adapted and new issues are framed.

### ***Delineating organizational functions***

In the spring of 1999, NAFFE’s members began addressing the problem of creating an organizational structure that would best enable NAFFE to meet its goals. An 18-month planning process was funded by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. A consultant, Paul Vandeventer of Community Partners, helped develop the process.

The NAFFE Steering Committee developed a step-by-step planning process. It began by having Vandeventer conduct in depth interviews of NAFFE members to identify what they would like NAFFE to do. What they found were not a fixed set of goals typical of organizational strategic plans, but rather key functions that would help members better achieve their goals and expand the goals they could consider:

1. To maintain the flow of useful information about contingent work issues to NAFFE members by:
  - producing properly packaged information tracking economic, political, and legal trends and events;
  - documenting new strategies and tactics;
  - serving as a nexus for the communication and exchange of information directly among members especially those working in similar sectors.
2. To help shape both a local and a national discourse on contingent work through media advocacy and framing strategies on an industrial, sectoral, local, and national level;
  - encouraging relevant research by scholars;
  - intervening in the political process when appropriate
  - sponsoring national and local conferences and events;
  - creating a widely shared public policy and action program on contingent work.
3. To link organizations working on contingent work issues across the divides of geography, structure, program, or constituency
  - For mutual support on existing campaigns and activities;
  - To launch new joint actions involving all or part of NAFFE’s membership;
  - To forge links with other social movements fighting for economic justice.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Excerpt”, “Surveying the membership”

## ***Acknowledging real-world barriers to effective organization***

During the planning process, NAFFE identified a number of issues that made it difficult to translate these objectives into an effective organizational form:

A diverse membership, encompassing a wide variety of organizations each with its own perspective, agenda, constituency, and decision making process;

A membership that participates solely on a voluntary basis;

A large geographic spread among members;

A complex issue – contingent work – that presents itself in many different forms to many different constituencies.

NAFFE saw these problems as characteristic of those faced by social movements in today's decentralized global economy. It defined the problem of organizational form as developing a structure that would allow it to perform the desired functions under these challenging conditions.

## ***Evaluating organizational alternatives***

NAFFE planners identified and evaluated four possible organizational models:

### **A unified national organization**

The typical characteristics of this structure were identified as a strong executive board, a centralized decision making structure located in a national office, and a clearly defined national program. Most such organizations have individual memberships. Local groups function as branches of the national organization with some autonomy to carry out local campaigns but with the expectation that they will devote considerable energy to the agreed upon national program.

This model was quickly rejected by NAFFE's planners. NAFFE had no individual memberships. It was an organization of organizations, none of which was likely to cede any significant decision-making power about campaigns or strategies to NAFFE's governing board.

### **A lobbying or "trade association" type organization**

These organizations generally produce useful information for members; hold annual conventions; deal with the press; and conduct lobbying on behalf of the groups' general interest. They are often based in Washington and tend to be public policy focused. While many of these functions are essential, NAFFE rejected this model because it is too centralized and does little to promote grassroots activity or contribute to the kind of movement building NAFFE members identified as important.

## **A coalition**

Coalitions generally bring representatives of organizations together to develop a joint program around a limited set of mutually agreed upon objectives. This structure was rejected because NAFFE members felt it was impossible to boil down a complex issue like contingent work to a few specific campaigns. Coalitions tend not to be inclusive since those organizations whose issues/strategies/tactics are not adopted quickly become inactive. Thus the kind of horizontal cross-fertilization and strategic flexibility needed to construct a vibrant social movement are usually missing. NAFFE members agreed that NAFFE should help form coalitions around specific issues, but NAFFE should not see itself as a coalition.

## **A structured network**

A structured network is a permanent organization of organizations based on “voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange.” Because networks are both structures and social actors, they perform the two sets of functions that NAFFE members identified as important. First, as structures they are a place for members to share ideas, get mutual support, and develop a common language and frame. Second, as social actors they engage in campaigns that involve all or part of the membership. The NAFFE network was envisioned as a seedbed for many forms of concerted action.

Ultimately, NAFFE opted for a network structure. As the NAFFE Charter puts it, “The network structure promotes broad member participation in decision making, coordinates the strategies and actions of member organizations in common projects, locates the resources necessary to sustain those projects, and attempts to shape public discourse through media advocacy, scholarly research, public events, and other suitable activities.”<sup>10</sup>

## ***Designing the governance structure***

At its loosest, a network may be nothing more than a communications node which anyone is free to connect with. But NAFFE’s idea of a “structured network” entailed far more than this.

The structure, embodied in the NAFFE Charter, established a Membership Meeting of representatives of NAFFE member organizations as the governing body. It normally meets regularly annually and develops basic organizational strategy, approves an annual budget, constitutes Action Groups, and elects a Coordinating Committee.

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<sup>10</sup> Note: The original consultant’s report argued against NAFFE becoming an IRS-recognized 501c(3) nonprofit organization, primarily because of the effect of legal requirements for a traditional board/officer authority structure. However, the decision was made to do so. What has been the effect?

As the organization structure was being established, there was concern that a network would be too loose a structure. Consideration was given to whether NAFPE should have a conventional Board of Directors with the ultimate authority to govern the organization. This was, after all, the usual way to establish accountability for the organization and its staff. But such an approach might also tend to centralize authority in the Board and tend to reduce involvement of member organizations.

After much discussion and some compromise, NAFPE decided on a Coordinating Committee rather than a conventional Board of Directors. The annual Membership Meetings elect the Coordinating Committee, which is required to reflect the geographic, racial, and gender diversity of NAFPE and to include at least one member from each Action Group. Emphasizing the difference from a conventional Board of Directors, the Charter states, “The Coordinating Committee does not act as a governing body, but assists with the political and administrative functions of the NAFPE network between Annual Meetings.” Its responsibilities are largely administrative, including drafting a budget, planning the Annual Convention, hiring and supervising of staff, conferring with Action Groups, authorizing designated members to sign checks and employment agreements, reaching out to other organizations, and coordinating NAFPE response on breaking issues.

Action Groups are the foundation of the NAFPE network. Each Action Group must be convened by at least two member organizations on the basis of a community of interest around a particular sector or issue. Action Groups are responsible for planning and implementing strategies in their sectors, consistent with the Charter. They create an annual action plan, report to the NAFPE membership as a whole, and confer with the Coordinating Committee and National Office about their activities. Any two NAFPE members can also convene an Ad Hoc Committee to pursue specific tasks.

NAFPE has a Central Office, but instead of an Executive Director directing the work of the organization it is essentially a secretariat with Network Coordinators and support staff. The main functions of the Central Office are to support the Action Groups, provide information, and help the Coordinating Committee with administration and fundraising.

Decision making in NAFPE is based on the principle of subsidiarity: decisions are made at a level as close as possible to those they affect. For instance, the Annual Meeting makes decisions that affect all of NAFPE; the Action Groups make decisions that affect their various sectors, consistent with NAFPE basic strategy and frame as agreed on by the Annual Meeting. The Coordinating Committee makes NAFPE-wide decisions between Membership Meetings. This helps decision making be both fast and democratic.<sup>11</sup>

Any organization that meets NAFPE’s standards for membership may join. To prevent a barrier to groups’ participation, no dues have been required, though voluntary payments have been encouraged. Guidelines for a voluntary dues structure are currently being developed.

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<sup>11</sup> Could address question of who decides, and how, at what level each decision will be made.

## ***Managing the network***

NAFFE's consultant, Paul Vandeventer, laid out in his initial report some of the considerations that have guided the management of the NAFFE network.<sup>12</sup>

Vandeventer contrasted the role of manager in "classical management approaches" versus in a structured network. In traditional organizations, the manager serves as the "system controller." The manager plans, designs, and leads the organization to achieve some pre-defined objective.

In contrast, the network manager serves as "a mediator, process manager and network builder." The manager facilitates the work of the members. The key management activities involve "selecting actors and resources, influencing network conditions and handling strategic complexity." It involves not so much "strategic planning" with clear goals and precise problem definitions as "strategic *alignment*" of the various plans, resources, and actors involved in the network.<sup>13</sup>

NAFFE's founders were initially concerned that, in the absence of a tight executive structure, the staff might just take over the organization. NAFFE has very self-consciously sought to ensure that the organizing initiative remains with the network's member organizations, not with its staff. The staff's role is not to run or represent the organization but to serve as a secretariat for the action groups. The staff has direct accountability to the action groups, who meet regularly and chart out their own plans. NAFFE staff has adopted a working style to promote member-to-member contact and joint projects. This is the way the issue of accountability without a central executive structure has been solved in practice.

The staff also plays a role in encouraging constructive discussion within the network. As a secretariat rather than an executive, the staff does not push a position, let alone seek to impose a position, on the organization. The staff role is instead to help structure good discussions in which all viewpoints within the organization's general frame can be expressed and a diversity of views be treated with respect.

[The staff does play some gatekeeping and fundraising roles that can shape the network, but strong member organizations that participate in NAFFE on a voluntary basis provide a mechanism to insure accountability. Also, because members can easily op in and out of both the network and particular projects, important checks are in place to prevent NAFFE from becoming a staff driven organization. The presence of action group representatives on the coordinating committee, which is charged with supervising staff, also reduces the chances that NAFFE will become staff driven.](#)

[A forthcoming members only section of the web site will house all financial and budgetary information to insure transparency. Minutes of all meeting and conference calls are also distributed to members and will be archived on the members only web site.](#)

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<sup>12</sup> "Structuring the NAFFE Network." See in particular "Recommended Approach," pp. 4-6,

<sup>13</sup> "Structuring the NAFFE Network" p. 5.

[NAFFE currently has three full-time staff members each of whom has experience in the labor movement, in community based organizations, and in national and international networks. They have been able to bring their experience to NAFFE, reducing the learning curve of how to staff a network.](#)

Both networks and their members are organizations with their own organizational interests. This creates a possibility for conflict and competition in areas such as the allocation of credit for successful activities and relations with funders. In general, NAFFE ~~features the activities of member groups~~~~tries to give as much credit as possible to member groups~~ in all its promotion, and to treat its own contribution as secondary. [For instance, when the central office gets press calls staff refers the caller to member organizations whenever possible.](#)

### ***Action groups in action***

By 2002, NAFFE had four Action Groups on Temp and Day Labor, Welfare/Workfare, Campus Organizing, and Public Policy. Each group meets in person once a year to develop an action plan. Updates and revisions are made throughout the year during monthly conference calls.

The Action Group structure allows those groups most intensely concerned with an issue or an action to manage their own operations while pooling their resources. It also allows a flexible division of labor that allows members to contribute based on their strengths.

In [a typical example](#), a Temp and Day Labor Action Group meeting called for the production of a basic worker rights flyer called “Temp Worker Rights.” Two groups volunteered to draft the flyer with the help of NAFFE staff. The flyer was drafted, circulated for comment within the network, laid out, and printed. Thousands were distributed. A Spanish version was translated by locals of two different unions in Texas and Washington, DC. The flyer—[in English and Spanish](#)-- was designed so that it can be customized by any NAFFE member organization and claimed as its own.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Flexibility and rapid response***

The [ability to respond rapidly](#) and flexibly is [essential to exploit strategic and tactical openings](#). [NAFFE’s structured network, with its action groups and ad hoc committees, work well](#) for this purpose. When something calling for a coordinated response occurs, NAFFE can get the word out rapidly to those who are likely to want to participate in a response. It can also quickly facilitate a discussion of what that response should be and what is necessary to initiate it.

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<sup>14</sup> [NAFFE is engaged in wide range of programmatic activities that are beyond the scope of this paper. For a full description accounting of NAFFE programs contact the NAFFE office and ask for the current edition of “The Year In Review.”](#)

When the opportunity to sit ~~ee~~k-down with Manpower, Inc. unexpectedly presented itself, NAFFE was able to take advantage of the opportunity because of its past work and its capacity to quickly mobilize resources within the network. A committee of knowledgeable spokespeople was quickly elected. A fully worked out set of positions about standards in the temp industry had already been widely agreed upon within the network.

Similarly when NAFFE was approached by representatives of the International Labor Organization, an affiliate of the UN, to submit proposals for an ILO report on informal work in North America, NAFFE was able to quickly respond by drawing on expertise within the network. In addition, NAFFE was able to select a knowledgeable delegate to attend the ILO meeting in 2002 in Geneva to argue for out proposals.

The flexibility of networks in responding rapidly to emerging conditions is also illustrated by NAFFE's Campus Action Group.

Contingent work is transforming education throughout North America. A majority of full-time faculty are non non-tenure track employees. In 2002, organizing on college campuses by part-time faculty and other non-permanent staff soared. NAFFE's Campus Action Group – which includes national and local representatives of the three major higher-education unions, CWA, SEIU, independent union locals, all Canadian higher education unions, and local community-union coalitions – became the a national center for contingent faculty organizing.

### ***Rapid response***

#### ***Opting in and opting out***

If a group does not wish to participate in a particular campaign because it disagrees with the objective or simply does not have the capacity to participate, it can simply opt out without leaving the NAFFE network. This means that member groups can participate intensively in those activities that most concern them while not being required to contribute to those that don't. For example, in 2002, NAFFE conducted the first coordinated actions to highlight working conditions in the temp industry. Groups in six cities participated in a "Temp Worker Justice Week" timed to coincide with the temp industry's annual "Temp Employee Appreciation Week." In cities where interested groups were unable to directly participate in the week's activities because of prior commitments or other reasons, workers with interesting stories or experts in the field were made available for the press and other interested parties. The central office was thus able to show the national nature of on-going activities and the national nature of the problems temps face. Follow-up talks were held with public policy makers and industry representatives. "Temp Worker Justice Week" will become an annual event.

This activity was highly significant for the groups concerned with temp work, but much less so for others. In a conventional organization, the Temp Worker Justice Week might have been made part of the national program, and a great deal of effort might have been

spent trying (successfully or unsuccessfully) to get less interested local groups concerned with [different aspects of contingent work](#) to participate. The network structure allowed those concerned to organize themselves efficiently while allowing others simply to opt out of the effort.

### ***Dialogue and consensus***

Groups coming from different constituencies, experiences, and traditions often have very different initial takes on things. A network structure allows groups to cooperate where they see eye-to-eye without exacerbating conflict where they don't. Initial engagement may begin simply with the exchange of information. This may be followed by some mutual support on matters of common concern. Such exchange and cooperation create a positive atmosphere for dialogue, in which differences can be explored and often reframed in ways that emphasize common meanings and interests.

For example, many different kinds of groups are engaged with worker centers, hiring halls, and other forms of non-conventional organizing. More traditional organizations, notably trade unions, have at times been critical of these ventures. The NAFFE Temp and Day Labor Action Group has facilitated an on-going exchange of views among these groups, including scheduled monthly calls that include both labor and community-based representatives. This dialogue has reached sufficient consensus to permit the crafting and adoption of a set of standards for worker-friendly hiring halls.

Networks allow a safe place for discussion, a demilitarized zone where issues can be hashed out in a constructive manner. Groups representing the interests of high- and low-skilled immigrant workers often have different takes on immigrant labor regulation. They might easily find themselves on different sides of a question like H1B immigrant worker programs. However, NAFFE has been able to actively promote a constructive discussion of this subject. It has also been able to link representatives of high-skilled contingent workers here, such as Washtech, with people in supplier countries like India.

An on-going process of participatory framing and reframing makes a structured network fundamentally different from a "smart mob." While smart mobs may utilize cell phones, the Internet, and other high tech means of communication to organize and coordinate demonstrations, structured networks provide the basis for much more profound iterative dialogue through which different people can learn from each other and change accordingly.

### ***Utilizing network resources locally***

Increasingly, member organizations are considering NAFFE and its member groups [into their planning process, as part of their internal resources](#) that they can draw on for their own activities. [NAFFE](#) members know [they can tap into the knowledge and resources of the network](#). That has helped many [members](#) develop their own [local, state, and national strategies and public policies](#). The experience of other NAFFE members, made available through the network,

has helped make it possible for local groups to develop [state and municipal ordinances on day labor issues and create alternative hiring halls and worker centers.](#) ~~For example, a NAFPE member in Arizona chose to go slowly in an ongoing dialogue with a prominent national day labor company while the NAFPE Negotiations Team works out an agreement with Manpower, in the hope of leveraging NAFPE's national work at the local level.~~

### ***Extending the network***

Because local groups act on their own initiative, extending the organization [requires a significant but not adoes not require](#) a massive commitment energy and resources to organizing. Nor does it require major concern about the costs of servicing new members [on a day to day basis.](#) [No group that meets NAFPE's standard for membership is turned away but](#) NAFPE has grown to ~~65XX~~ member groups without a major recruitment effort. This includes an expansion of groups in Canada, where NAFPE has helped sponsor two meetings. Several Mexican organizations are exploring joining NAFPE as well.

[NAFPE could grow exponentially if it adopted an aggressive outreach strategy. But NAFPE has opted instead to grow in a more strategic way. At 65 members NAFPE is small enough to insure regular contact among members through meetings and conference calls. If it were grow to a few hundred organizations, NAFPE would have to re-tool its organizational structure, and resources would become more of a problem.](#)

### ***Facilitating new networks***

[NAFPE has tried to grow strategically by encouraging the growth of other networks and seeking to affiliate those networks where appropriate. NAFPE has supported with modest financial help and staff time the growth NDLO as well as the campus network, COCAL—both of which are affiliated with NAFPE.](#)

While conventional organizations often seek monopoly and are concerned with turf, boundaries, and competition, networks thrive on overlap and nesting. NAFPE has been active in bringing together groups that include both members and non-members.

For example, NAFPE does not see itself as becoming the coordinating body for worker center hiring halls around the country. But in April 2002 it brought together NAFPE members and others from around the country to develop a set of standards for worker-friendly hiring halls, and is now compiling the first directory of day labor hiring halls in the US.

### ***Aggregating power***

The aggregation of different kinds of organizations and constituencies has leveraged power in a way that would not be possible for a less diverse group. For example, organizing NAFPE's diverse membership into a coherent network has provided the "muscle" to negotiation with Manpower, Inc., the second largest temp industry

transnational. Manpower would have been unlikely to spend 18 months discussing standards in the temp industry either with a network of small community groups or with representatives of the labor movement. The network provides a balance of focused and diffuse power.

Networks allow for alliances that cross conventional class boundaries. High tech workers at Washtech and immigrant day laborers comfortably fit in the same organization. As long as the organization devotes sufficient attention to the needs of its various constituencies, their diversity is generally not in itself divisive.

## **Communications**

At the core of any network lie its channels of communication. Structured networks allow the sharing of information to be rapid and efficient. They provide both a broad dissemination of information of general interest. At the same time, ~~T~~through repeated experience the network can improve the targeting of information so that the right information can be gotten to the right people at the right time.

~~NAFFE has Ad Hoc Committees on Research and Communications~~ The great majority of staff work is essentially opening and maintaining the channels of communication among members and to the wider public. Direct horizontal communication between members also flourishes, and is constantly encouraged within the network by staff and members.

Channels of communication NAFFE has developed for the organization as a whole include:

a contingent-work newsletter distributed in hard copy and electronically

a website updated daily.

A list serve for member organizations.

A members only section of the website.

Monthly conference calls for each action group as well as regular calls for specific projects

Action Groups also have additional~~their own~~ means of communication. For example, the Campus Action Group established its own internal e-mail list serve with daily news bulletins and alerts.

Finally, there is an active program of communications with the outside world. For example, NAFFE has established a Press Center, with a database of journalists working on contingent-work issues and the capacity to provide press releases and lists of “experts” – workers and academics with relevant knowledge --to serve as sources for the press.

## ***Pooling local and expert knowledge***

One of the main advantages of the network form is its ability to cultivate the “local knowledge” of participants in concrete situations while also sharing it among those in different situations and integrating different local knowledges into a broader picture. In many cases, NAFPE gathers knowledge from member groups, organizes it, and makes the results available to the network. (This is often accomplished not by the Central Office but by Action Groups or selected member groups.)

For instance, NAFPE has recently compiled a directory of community based hiring halls throughout the US. It is the first complete directory of its kind. A large sample of these halls have been contacted by NAFPE researchers and a set of strategic questions has been developed about hiring hall strategies and tactics. These questions can help local groups make hiring halls more worker friendly and effective.

Knowledge pooling may take the form of publications and web data bases. For example, NAFPE’s Public Policy/Welfare-Workfare Action Group has produced a working paper on planning legislative campaigns and is compiling a directory of model legislation to develop a uniform set of model public policies on contingent work. It has already established a legislative tracking system for state-based contingent-work legislation—.

An important function of networks like NAFPE is to scrutinize and build broad backing for proposed legislation. This can help save groups from developing legislation that affects many people on the basis of a narrow constituency without adequately examining its broader consequences or drawing in other affected constituencies.

Knowledge sharing may also take the form of consultation to local groups by other groups or by staff. For example, NAFPE’s Public Policy/Welfare-Workfare Action Group helps local NAFPE groups prepare state-based and municipal public policy campaigns on issues from transportation costs for day laborers to unemployment compensation insurance reforms. And it has helped public employee unions draft model legislation to provide protection to existing public employees and to workers in publicly contracted jobs by requiring equal pay and benefits to all workers regardless of their employment status. NAFPE is also creating an on-line, interactive “Virtual Worker Center” to provide resources for workers, advocates, and organizers.

The network allows local groups to know what is happening nationally and even globally; conversely, it gives national organization a way to understand what is happening at the local level.

## ***How does a network negotiate?***

One of the challenges facing social movements that don’t take conventional organizational forms is how to negotiate with adversaries and other organizations where there is no Board and no Executive Director or union president authorized to speak on

behalf of the organization.<sup>15</sup> Over the course of 2002, NAFPE had to face this question as it engaged in on-going negotiations with Manpower.

Over the previous two years, laborious consultation among NAFPE groups and temp workers throughout the US and Canada had developed a “Code of Conduct for the Staffing Industry.” This code provided the basis of NAFPE’s discussion with Manpower over employment standards in the temp industry.

The Temporary and Day Labor Action Group elected a bargaining team consisting of one NAFPE Network Coordinator, an advocate and an organizer from a temp organization, and an academic expert. The NAFPE staff member coordinated the team, prepared memos, and oversaw research. NAFPE member groups outside the team provided additional research. Each member of the team devoted significant time to the talks. Positions were arrived at by consensus. The network as a whole was regularly consulted for input.

The result is that the committee was fully prepared when it sat down to talk with Manpower and was able to respond quickly and in a professional manner, confident of network support for its positions. The groundwork and trust that exists within NAFPE meant that as the negotiations progressed, the NAFPE committee was able to adapt the code and develop innovative approaches to such questions as implementation and enforcement that often plague efforts to set standards where there is no enforceable collective bargaining agreement.

~~NAFPE also tries to do its fundraising jointly with its member groups, presenting itself as a vehicle for increasing their effectiveness. For example, NAFPE is trying to develop joint approaches to potential major donors with personalized funding requests that will maximize each donor’s giving, whether to the network, particular members, or both. Similarly NAFPE plans to hold joint fundraising events with local host committees in cooperation with member organizations. [elaborate?]~~

## **Netiquette**

Like other on-going human interactions, networks require norms of how people should and can be expected to act. While norms can be laid out as proscriptive rules, more frequently they emerge from the interaction process itself. They express a network’s sense of and learnings about what works and what is fair. They are often thought of as little more than “good etiquette” for network participation.

In networks, there is little formal authority that is able to impose legitimate sanctions for the violation of norms. But because it is so easy for members to opt out of particular activities without losing the benefits of participation in the network as a whole, the threat of boycott provides an easy and relatively low-cost sanction for unacceptable behavior.

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<sup>15</sup> For background on this question, see Jeremy Brecher, “Afterword: Lessons of the Tobacco Wars,” in Michael Pertschuk, *Smoke in Their Eyes: Lessons in Movement Leadership from the Tobacco Wars* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001).

Many of the norms evolved by NAFFE and other networks involve communication. A primary rule is: provide other people information that may affect them when they need it. At the same time, because people are faced with such an overwhelming flow of information, there is a complementary responsibility not to provide others so much information that it wastes their time and jams the channels of communication.

A second set of norms involve respect for each other's autonomy. This is imbedded in NAFFE's seeking strategic alignment of existing member activities rather than pressuring members to join entirely new collective projects.

A third set of norms involves limiting claims on scarce network resources. Each action group understands that staff time and resources are limited and acts accordingly.

A fourth set of norms involves reciprocity. If one member engages in activities that benefit another or others, some kind of balance can be expected in return. For instance, the central office has compiled a directory of hiring halls—the most complete listing of its kind. It shares this directory with NAFFE groups that in turn help to update it when they hear of new hiring halls being opened or existing ones closed. Similarly, members are willing to share strategy and tactics with other members.

A fifth set of norms concerns negotiation, dialogue, and conflict resolution. Where there are difficulties and conflicts, network participants are generally expected to engage in processes designed to address them, rather than either concealing them or acting to the detriment of other members. Whenever possible, NAFFE tries to develop its responses over time, so that conflicts can be worked out. For example, NAFFE's proposed codes of conduct, the public policies it promotes, and the organizing strategies it supports were developed through a year or more of dialogue, and continued to be revised through further dialogue.

There is one set of norms that is central to more conventional organizations but largely absent in a well-functioning network: a requirement for obedience to authority.

### **Emerging challenges**

Like all social movement organizations in the US today, NAFFE is facing serious challenges. These will test the network structure in a variety of ways.

Some of these challenges lie in the external environment. NAFFE and many of the groups that compose it were conceived during a long economic boom. Unemployment was low and labor markets were tight, making some strategies to improve wages and working conditions more viable. Today the economy is depressed and it shows little sign of recovery, especially for workers in low wage jobs.

The current political climate is hostile to government intervention and change designed to solve social problems. The crisis in public sector is being met by cutting services that poor contingent workers relied upon, including access to health care. A new round of

privatization and contingentization of public services is leading to more jobs becoming contingent. Immigrant workers face increase pressure from war on terror.

In this difficult environment, social movement organizations also face reductions in funding as foundations cut back.

Other challenges are internal to social movement organizations and may specifically impact structured networks.

NAFFE members face increased demands even while they are trying to cope in today's resource-short climate. This puts pressure on their ability to participate in wider networks like NAFFE. NAFFE has specifically, and so far successfully, tried to ensure that member groups continue to find involvement with the network worth their while.

In an era of resource contraction, groups must demonstrate concrete results to ensure the external resource flow on which they depend. It is often easier to show concrete, measurable results locally than through the more diffuse activities of a network. The result is a widespread tendency toward localism in organizational focus, even as broader arenas become more critical.

As NAFFE has matured, it has faced substantial turnover in the staff of people that are appointed to represent their organizations. Sometimes member groups' institutional memory regarding NAFFE gets lost. NAFFE has learned that it must pay particular attention to this problem and put in the effort to bring new people up to speed.

A particular problem with structured networks is that they are made up of organizations that are involved with many issues. Their internal planning processes may produce shifts in priorities which in turn lead them to more involved or less involved with an external network. Building trades unions, for example, were highly involved with NAFFE during the Labor Ready campaign, but became less involved afterwards, not because of any dissatisfaction with NAFFE, but simply because their own emphasis had shifted.