From Sand Boxes to Ballot Boxes

San Francisco's Landmark Campaign to fund Children's Services

By Margaret Brodkin and Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth

"No more prizes for predicting rain. Prizes only for building arks."

Louis V. Gerstner, Jr

This book is dedicated to the voters of San Francisco. Their recognition of our collective stake in children set an inspiring example for the country, and demonstrated that when the people lead, the leaders will follow.

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Acknowledgements

The Story of Proposition J is written from the perspective of Coleman Advocates for Youth and Children, and from my own point of view. By writing the story of our campaign to enact The Children's Amendment, I hoped to share our experiences and information with people and organizations interested in children's advocacy, and to inspire other cities and communities across the country to act on behalf of children.

An incredible number of people helped with the campaign, including parents and nonparents, activists and nonactivists, children's service professionals and people who just wanted to do the right thing for children. All of them have my deepest thanks.

Coleman spearheaded the Prop J campaign. Not surprisingly, the Coleman Board and staff turned out to be the most loyal and consistent volunteers. The Coleman Board of Directors proved to be an amazing team of daring, courageous players who voted to go forward with the campaign in the face of tremendous odds, and then contributed talent, skills, humanity and hundreds of hours. They gave up weekends, enlisted spouses and children, donated personal resources, took on difficult and ego-bruising tasks, and became completely emotionally invested in the cause and the campaign.

The Board divided up an incredible amount of work, from making presentations to community groups to standing on street corners with petitions, from planning fundraisers to preparing fact sheets, from recruiting volunteers to making campaign buttons. My special thanks to: Art Tapia, our Campaign Chair; Greg Day, our Board President; and Terry Strauss, producer and director of "I Wish I Were a Princess," the video made especially for the campaign. Thanks also to to our other Board members at the time of the campaign: Frank Lopez, Eva Maas, Lorraine Honig, Jean Jacobs, Shahnaz Taplin, Peter Bull, Carmela Rombawa-Bey, Vincent Chao, Betty Alberts, Irma Dillard, Alice Washington, Joe Bell, Cabot Brown, Jeanie Kortum-Stermer, Suzanne Giraudo, Patricia Lee, Sharen Hewitt, Dan MacAllair, and Sharon Meadows.

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Special gratitude to Jon R. Blyth, our Program Officer at the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, who believed that telling the story of Proposition J was important, and who gave us the latitude we needed to undertake this project.

Most of all, I acknowledge the voters of San Francisco, who had the wisdom to make children a priority and the courage to challenge the traditional political establishment.

Margaret Brodkin
Executive Director
Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth

Preface

"No politician in America believes that his political future rests on what he does for children."

George Miller
Member of the House of Representatives California District

Oil companies, defense contractors, and banking institutions have plenty of political clout. But little kids... kids who need immunizations, child care, and maybe even a welfare check... don't have any clout.

San Francisco is home to 116,000 children. On November 5, 1991, San Francisco became the first city in the country to guarantee funding for children, each year, in its budget. On that day, San Francisco voters passed Proposition J, an amendment to the City Charter which would set aside a portion of the property tax each year to increase children's services and prevent budget cuts in all children's services for a ten-year period.

Passage of The Children's Amendment, as Proposition J came to be known, was a landmark in children's advocacy in the United States. By approving the measure, San Franciscans mandated a change in public priorities and institutionalized the protection and expansion of expenditures for children. As a result, San Francisco will spend $160 million on programs for children between the years 1993 and 2003.

The political message of Proposition J was loud and clear: When given the opportunity to support improved care for children, voters say, "Yes!"

Proposition J was created and sponsored by Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, a small child advocacy organization which has been working on behalf of San

"On November 5, voters in San Francisco, where the percentage of children is lower than in any major city in the nation, will decide whether they want to amend the charter to guarantee funds for children....Bypassing lawmakers and making a case directly to the voters may be the wave of the future for the emerging children's movement, experts across the nation say."

"San Franciscans to Vote for the Sake of Children"
by Jane Gross
The New York Times
September 23, 1991

Francisco's children since 1975. Proposition J need not be an isolated event, however; it could set a precedent for many communities, and Coleman Advocates believes its experience in San Francisco reflects a potential for a real children's movement in the United States. At least a half-dozen cities across the country are already working on similar strategies, sparked primarily by San Francisco's success.

So, although most of the work of child advocates has been at the state and federal levels, there is enormous potential to organize constituencies and to reframe fiscal priorities at the local level. Increasingly public policy is being determined at the local level as federal and state governments shift responsibility to counties and cities. Imagine...if a dozen cities took actions similar to Coleman's, it would reverberate throughout the country and alter the national consciousness.

We hope that by sharing our experiences we can encourage others to try something new – perhaps a more daring and innovative advocacy strategy that works for children in their communities – and that cumulatively these efforts will help all children. Because every community is different, every community's plan of action will be unique; and while no one will completely replicate what was done in San Francisco, we hope child advocates will benefit from this successful experience.

Knowing that people learn most by hearing what others

have tried, it seemed important to be specific about what was done in San Francisco. Unfortunately there are few road maps in the field of child advocacy; only a few organizations have had the opportunity to chronicle their actions, their decisions, and their strategies. Yet this is precisely what will be helpful as those who care passionately about children collectively address where the child advocacy movement needs to go.

This is not a completely rosy story. If it were, it wouldn't be honest. Advocacy is tough, messy work, often fraught with conflict and relentlessly difficult judgement calls. Taking risks and surviving many failed attempts is integral to advocating for any cause. While Coleman had a singular success in the passage of Proposition J, its work also involved many mistakes and many less-than-perfect results. We believe that sharing these failures, obstacles, and difficult experiences will be as useful for readers as the stories of victories along the way.

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If this country is to improve the well-being of its children, it must create the political will to do so. This is perhaps the greatest challenge for each of us.

This book is about showing the politicians of America that they are wrong if they think their political future has nothing to do with their commitment, or lack thereof, to children. It is about turning political reality on its head, and demonstrating that there is indeed political mileage to be gained in caring about children.

Highlights: 1987-1991

Children's Budget Advocacy in San Francisco

1987

Building the foundation for budget advocacy

- City-wide conference for 300 children's service providers, policy makers, and volunteers is held to develop "An Agenda for the New Mayor."
- A comprehensive 10-point Children's Agenda to Board of Supervisors is adopted as official City policy.
- First-ever candidates night on children's issues for Mayoral candidates is held.

1988

Inventing a children's budget for San Francisco

- Speak-out on children's issues for Mayor attracts 600 attendees, one of the largest children's meetings in City history.
- Advocacy to prevent budget cuts to children's services prevents many cuts and becomes first comprehensive child budget advocacy for children.
- Conference to introduce Children's Budget concept and draft major planks of a budget proposal is attended by over 100 organizations and national experts on child advocacy.
- First Children's Budget, which includes a budget analysis, a profile of children's problems, and proposals for funding and potential revenue sources is drafted.

1989

Introducing the Children's Budget

- First Children's Budget (for $7 million)is presented to City officials.
- Campaign and media outreach on Children's Budget generates significant media coverage and endorsements from wide variety of children's, civic, political, and neighborhood organizations.
- Board of Supervisors passes resolution supporting the concept of a Children's Budget, and urges the Mayor to fund certain children's services.
- City officials add $5 million for new programs for children; Mayor cites children as priority in his budget.
- Mayor creates Office for Children, Youth, and Their Families, as recommended in the Children's Budget.
- Surveys, focus groups, a citywide conference, and other outreach garner input from over 120 organizations for second-year Children's Budget.
- Negotiations with City departments to incorporate children's proposals into budget requests are held.
- "Child quake" press conference on impact of earthquake on City's children begins public discussion of second-year Children's Budget.

1990

Crafting a children's budget campaign

- Second Children's Budget (for $18.6 million) is presented to City officials.
- Newspaper ads, bus shelter signs, poster campaign, and other broad-based outreach solicit public support for Children's Budget.
- Youth Speakout involves over 100 teenagers describing children's problems.
- Recommendations on modification of budget process to City officials, including increased community input and public exposure of budget process, are submitted.
- Board of Supervisors passes resolution calling on Mayor to annually develop a list of funding for children's services, thus institutionalizing a tracking system for expenditures on children.
- Demonstration is held against Mayor's budget for reflecting too few Children's Budget recommendations.
- $1.5 million local dollars are added to budget for children's services; some children's budget proposals are later incorporated into federally funded projects and ongoing agency budgets.
- Demonstration is held at City Hall with African-American community to demand city action about child victims of violence.
- Youth-run candidates' night on children's issues is held for members of the Board of Supervisors.
- Children's Budget Coalition is formed with 50 children's organizations setting Children's Budget priorities and drafting third-year Children's Budget.
- City-wide conference on children's issues, including discussion of possible ballot measures to support children is held.

1991

Mounting a charter amendment campaign

- Children's Budget Coalition presents third-year Budget (for $5 million) to City.
- Research explores options for a new permanent revenue stream for children's services.
- Coleman Board of Directors vote to undertake Charter Amendment campaign.
- Charter amendment is drafted.
- Three-month petition drive gathers 68,000 signatures to place amendment on ballot.
- Despite participation few proposals in Children's Budget are incorporated into City Budget; advocates focus on charter amendment as solution.
- Aggressive election campaign includes media, debates, dissemination of video, press conferences, mailings, signs, and rallies.
- Children's Amendment is endorsed by over 200 community organizations, most political clubs, and local politicians; opposed by major newspaper, Chamber of Commerce, and Republican Central Committee.
- Children's Amendment passes with a 55% vote.
- Groups throughout the country seek information from Coleman on mounting a ballot initiative to fund children's services.

"Tirelessly – some might say relentlessly – Coleman long has challenged The City to reallocate its resources to meet the needs of youth. Now, Coleman's Executive Director Margaret Brodkin has submitted what the organization calls a "children's budget" to City Hall. Coleman's argument is both moral and practical. Moral, because government has no duty more basic than to protect and provide for children. Practical, because failure to create preventive strategies that direct children toward healthy and productive lives costs society dearly in the long run."

"A Children's Budget,"
San Francisco Examiner
editorial, Feb. 16, 1989

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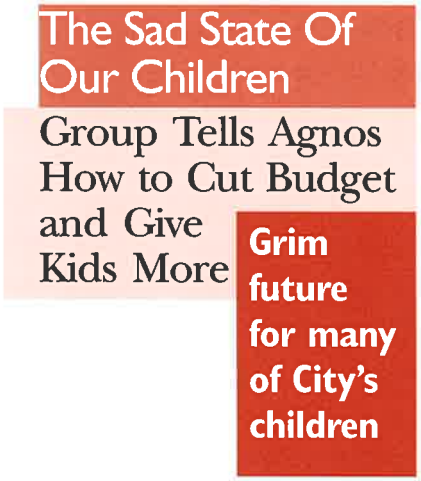
Confronting City Hall

Budget Battles, More Budget Battles, and Then, More Budget Battles!


The Sad State Of Our Children

Group Tells Agnos How to Cut Budget and Give Kids More

Grim future for many of City's children

Proposition J didn't come out of a vacuum. It was the culmination of four years of concerted, intense, and frequently difficult budget advocacy for the children of San Francisco. It grew out of reports about the plight of children. It grew out of three attempts to make the City of San Francisco adopt a Children's Budget. It followed the organization of coalitions established on behalf of children, community education campaigns, media endorsements, negotiations, hearings, press conferences, youth 'speak-outs,' and other seemingly endless events and strategies that constituted the Children's Budget advocacy spearheaded by Coleman Advocates for Children between 1987 and 1990.

Those years of budget battles created an information base, brought together key coalition partners, developed program agendas, and ensured that an informed public was ready for the debate that would follow – all essential for an effective campaign. The frustrations of those years were also the spark that ignited this campaign by causing people to realize that a new kind of strategy was needed. In San Francisco this meant going to the voters to amend the City Charter.

Because the budget battles really 'brought on' the amendment campaign, that story is a fundamental part of the story of Proposition J. The budgets were a process unto themselves as well as being a part of the larger process of approving the Children's Amendment. There were successes and failures throughout this phase, and many, many lessons can be learned from it. This chapter provides an overview of the budget years without which the campaign for Prop J might never have come about. Those especially interested in this part of the story will find more detail in the section entitled "The Budget Years," which follows the story of Prop J.

Kicking Off A Children's Budget Initiative

Laying the foundation. In 1987 Coleman successfully brought together 85 children's organizations from throughout San Francisco to develop a comprehensive children's agenda. The agenda would spell out policy directions to achieve affordable housing for families; sufficient child care resources; safe, enriching recreation programs; high-quality public schools; comprehensive social services; accessible health care; state-of-the-art libraries; effective vocational programs; a rehabilitative juvenile justice system; and ongoing comprehensive planning and funding to meet the needs of children in a changing society. The agenda was ultimately endorsed by diverse community groups, and adopted as official City policy by the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor late in the year.

It didn't take long to discover, however, that adoption of principles doesn't automatically translate to allocation of resources. Coleman began to realize that the *resource deficit for children* should be a key focus of the agency's attention. Without adequate resources, services would never meet the fast-growing needs of the City's children. Inspired by the leadership of the Children's Defense Fund and its annual Children's Defense Budget, Coleman joined what soon emerged as a national children's budget campaign. And for three consecutive years Coleman researched, developed, and advocated for a *San Francisco Children's Budget.*

To kick off the Children's Budget efforts, Coleman invited national experts in child budget advocacy to San Francisco, and convened a Children's Budget Conference at which 300 colleagues from all aspects of the children's field were introduced to the concept. Because there was an active network of children's organizations in San Francisco that had already worked together on other children's issues, Coleman realized that many of the building blocks of a budget strategy were already in place. Thus, it wasn't difficult to convene working groups to hammer out specific proposals in health, social services, child care, job training, recreation, and other key fields.

The San Francisco Children's Budget included six elements:

1. Themes, Principles, and Policies. Each year's budget had a theme consistent with a major concern of the city: for 1988 the focus was the drug crisis; in 1989, as a result of the Loma Prieta earthquake, the theme was repairing the social infrastructure; and in 1990 it was violence prevention. This was done to emphasize the point that investing in children directly addresses the most immediate concerns of all San Franciscans.

Each year's Budget articulated underlying principles such as prevention, cultural relevance in providing services, programs that emphasize outreach and accessibility, and improved collaboration among service providers. Further, each Children's Budget recommended targeting children whose needs are most severe; developing programs around which there was a strong community consensus; and leveraging state, federal, and private resources whenever possible.

Each year, the Budget proposed specific policy directions which then became the basis for the programs recommended in the Budget, e.g., that the health department "outstation" services in the schools and other community agencies rather than provide services only in traditional clinics; that City recreation centers assume greater responsibility for providing a continuum of services for high-risk youth, and take a leadership role in the development of latchkey services; that services for homeless families provide more than food and shelter, focusing on family and child support programs; and that the juvenile probation system expand community-based alternatives for youth currently housed in traditional juvenile justice facilities.

2. Profiles of the Problems. "Profiles on Children" or "State of the Child" reports have become the focus of much child advocacy occurring around the country in recent years. Coleman felt that data about the needs of children provided important documentation for the Children's Budget, and so prepared *"A Profile of San Francisco's Children,"* which contained 50 key facts on demographics, poverty, educational achievement, health, child care needs, hunger, homelessness, abuse, and crime. Wherever possible, trends were reported as well. But the agency was determined to put the focus on specific solutions, rather than continue to emphasize problems. So it was very important that the profile not be the centerpiece of the effort.

3. Analyses of Current City Expenditures on Children. While analyses of expenditures on children have been the focal points of many other Children's Budget efforts, Coleman used this kind of information as an appendix to its document each year. For the three years that City expenditures for children were documented in the Children's Budget, the information received almost no attention from either policy makers or the public. (Later, however, the data would provide some of the rationale for the Charter Amendment campaign.) At times it seemed important to use quantifiable information so that the City wouldn't be able to use its absence as a basis for rejecting the budget. But the data itself was generally glossed over by policy makers.

"Coleman has tilted the political balance. Everyone in this administration wants to do more for kids, but the only people we ever hear from are the ones who care about the mounted patrol or want more police cars or fire trucks. Coleman is pulling people together around a package of children's programs, and building a constituency for them."

Carol Wilkins
San Francisco Budget Director in 1989

"We had a meeting...around the library [closing] issue. I was jamming Margaret. 'Okay...you are now saying suddenly this marvelous afterschool resource is in danger, but tell me where you'd cut.' She said she'd be prepared to cut police. I said, 'Margaret, the day you stand up in the press and say that, then I'll listen to you. I don't want to hear you say that in the privacy of this room.'"

Sam Yockey
City Controller in 1989

First of all, no one really wanted to do the cumbersome work that went along with questioning whether current expenditures were indeed inadequate. Secondly, the numbers had little to do with whether there was sufficient political support to effect change.

Because we didn't want the collection of data to dominate our Children's Budget efforts, we relied entirely on information provided by City departments. Our primary strategy with regard to tracking children's funding was to get the process institutionalized. Ultimately, we succeeded in pushing the Board of Supervisors to pass legislation urging the Mayor to provide a comprehensive analysis of City expenditures for children. This proved effective, and two years into our budget advocacy, the Mayor's Office produced a 55-page analysis of children's spending, with significantly more detail than we ever could have gotten on our own.

4. Specific Program Proposals. Each year Coleman's Children's Budget contained between 7 and 30 program initiatives proposed for inclusion in the City Budget. They were generally categorized into the major areas of needs for children:

- *A supportive neighborhood:* recreation, child care, library, cultural, transportation, and grassroots self-help programs;
- *A stable home:* social services, shelter and housing support services, and residential treatment;
- *A healthy life:* health, mental health, substance and child abuse prevention programs, and alternatives to detention;
- *A productive future:* job training, youth employment, tutoring, and scholarship programs.

Each proposed program was described briefly, along with cost estimates. Therefore, the actual budget portion of the Children's Budget referred only to the costs of adding any of the proposed programs. [The overall costs of each year's budget varied from $5 million to $18.6 million, depending on fiscal and political realities. The total San Francisco budget is about $2 billion, half of which is local money, with about $50 million local dollars being spent on children.] Specific programs that Coleman proposed were based primarily on recommendations coming from a consensus of a large number of children's service providers. Backup documents containing more detailed proposals for many of the programs in the Budget were also submitted to the City's Budget Director.

5. Cost-Benefit Analyses. Each Children's Budget contained information about the cost benefits gained by investing in children and children's programs; comparisons between costs of prevention and costs of incarceration, hospitalization, and foster care; examples of current Budget items that could be replaced with useful children's services; and specific cost benefits of each program. While these arguments didn't sway policy-makers to support the Children's Budget, they did receive a great deal of press attention.

It was the first time we'd ever done anything like that...we had charts showing cost comparisons, like the cost of prenatal care compared to the cost of intensive care for a sick baby, or the cost of keeping a young person in Juvenile Hall compared to all the other services that could be provided that might prevent incarcerations, such as tutoring, employment, health... all the things we proposed in the Budget. One television station took that information and made much more beautiful charts out of it than we could ever have made. And the reporter even took it one step further, totaling the expenses because he realized that even if you added all these things together they didn't amount to more than the $28,000 per child we'd spend for a year of detention.... Well, just to hear the reporter say it, and to see something I'd sat figuring out on a yellow pad come to life like that on television was a powerful experience – I mean, my family was really impressed to see my midnight scribbles turned into beautiful graphics on the Channel 4 news. It was fabulous!

6. Proposals for Reallocation of Resources. Each year, in response to the perennial question of politicians, "But where do you want us to get the money?" Coleman took a calculated risk and responded with possible revenue-generating solutions:

- turning gardener positions into *recreation worker positions,*
- redeploying police officers to *youth-oriented programs,*
- extending a business tax to underwrite *youth employment training programs,*
- reallocating funds from the Mayor's office to *services for high-risk teens,*
- turning the County "ranch" (a juvenile detention center) into a *privately managed rehabilitation facility* capable of generating state and federal dollars for its operation,
- reallocating funds from the juvenile detention facility to *community alternatives,*
- cuts in the fire and public works departments to fund *children's services,*
- eliminating sports box seat perks for City officials in order to fund *after-school programs,*
- using surplus funds from the baseball/football park for *a sports camp for children,*
- putting a surcharge on golf fees at the municipal course for *recreation programs for disabled children,*
- eliminating cost-of-living-adjustments for top-paid City employees (with annual salaries over $100,000) to pay for *training for youth.*

These specific revenue-generating proposals and reallocation of resources were a radical departure from the more typical advocacy position of leave-the-nitty-gritty-to-the-policy-makers.

"This year's budget deficit would have been $180 million if cuts and new taxes hadn't been imposed. Next year's will be $72 million. So City Hall is only annoyed – not enlightened – by entreaties that offer no help on how to close it. That's why 'The Children's Budget Proposal' by Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth was generally well received last month. It did ask for 30 more programs for children that would cost $7.6 million more. But in a radical break with the usual interest-group pattern, Coleman suggested where to get it."

Bruce Petit
San Francisco Independent
March 1, 1989

Community Outreach

Coleman made active efforts to expand community outreach in order to garner community input. The agency built ad-hoc coalitions with key allies such as the African-American Community Agenda Coalition and the health-focused Coalition for the Proper Expenditure of Tobacco Tax Funds, and entered into negotiations with City departments. The Children's Budget Coalition – with more than 50 diverse and representative children's service organizations including the PTA, child care centers, community coalitions, youth service agencies, and San Francisco's welfare rights organization – was formalized in 1989, when Coleman began its third Children's Budget.

While Coleman spearheaded the San Francisco Children's Budgets, the documents reflected, in very genuine terms, the collective ownership of the concept and the widespread support the project had among the diverse leadership of the City's Children's Movement.

There were many lessons for Coleman throughout these three years spent on the Children's Budget initiatives. Some seem obvious. Others were hard to learn because they went against instinct or – sometimes – stubborn faith and optimism. And still others couldn't have been imagined before they became relevant. (The details of these lessons appear in "The Budget Years," and any reader in a position to take on similar efforts to Coleman's, either in terms of annual budget battles or mounting an initiative campaign, is encouraged to read that section.)

Evaluating the Results: A Judgement Call

One dilemma that continually faces the child advocate – and is especially difficult in budget advocacy, where the results are fairly clear cut – is figuring out when you have gotten enough of what you want, when to declare victory, and when the results are sufficiently inadequate to continue to pound the table. This was always a complicated call for us at Coleman.

For four months during our first Children's Budget, we hammered away at the Mayor's Office. When he released his budget statement, he declared children a major priority, and embraced our drug prevention theme. But when we examined the budget, only a few of our proposals were included. The Mayor did announce the creation of the Mayor's Office for Children, Youth, and their Families (MOCYF), which we proposed in our budget. He created a teen unit in the social services department, also our recommendation, and accepted the concept of a children's budget. A victory? Absolutely!

As it turned out, we were among the only San Franciscans who publicly praised the Mayor's budget. This won us a certain amount of political 'points' with him, but they didn't turn out to be worth as much as we might have expected....

As the budget went to the Board of Supervisors that first year, we looked at a list of 25 programs we had proposed and not gotten. We picked two (job training and health services in the schools) to keep fighting for. We chose these because the youth employment program had the most widespread support in the youth community and the school health programs had been the most positively received among the Board of Supervisors in earlier hearings. Overnight we organized the Coalition to Support Youth Employment (30 members, stationery, press release, and a widely covered press conference), and with the

help of an ally on the Board got these inserted into the City Budget, along with several other youth programs supported by various Supervisors. Within several weeks, another $1.4 million in locally funded children's services had been added. All in all, we calculated over $5 million had been added to the City Budget for children.

As the 1990-91 budget was being prepared by the Mayor's Office, one of our sources informed us that none of our Children's Budget proposals was being given very serious consideration, and almost all of the Children's Budget proposals that City departments had inserted in their own budgets had been cut by the Mayor. We stepped up our advocacy efforts, and began making public our displeasure with the Mayor for never meeting with us to discuss the second Children's Budget. The Mayor's staff became outraged by what they perceived as publicly "turning" on the Mayor. In response, we issued a public position statement on the role of the advocate.

When the Mayor's budget was released, we had to make the most painful judgement call of the entire Children's Budget effort. The Mayor had once again declared children a priority and claimed to be funding additional children's services, yet when we scrutinized the Budget, we found that wasn't true. All of the hard-won victories at the City department level had been cut from the Budget (except $178,000 for respite care), and just a few of our proposals were included. The Mayor claimed to be funding new children's programs, but these were really just the continuation of funding from the previous years, plus some private foundation grants that had been received by City departments, the City's match of increased state funds for foster care, and court-mandated funds for Probation Officers. There had been cuts in recreation and library services, but not in health and social services. The results were clearly mixed.

We decided that the Mayor's Office had responded inadequately. So our entire Board of Directors, several young people, and our staff leadership stood outside the Mayor's Office as his budget was being released to the press. We tacked a report card on the wall that gave him a "D" for his commitment to children. The press covered our efforts, but the Mayor called the police and we were asked to leave! So much for our 'points' with the Mayor!

In the Coleman newsletter, we angrily announced that the only way to get money from the City was to wear a uniform (funds for police had gone up), sue the City (the Fire Department consent decree kept them from being cut as we had recommended), or have your cause written into the City Charter (as the city employees had done). Needless to say, this caused a great deal of adversity between us and the Mayor. This was painful for Coleman. In the end, the Board of Supervisors added funds for foster care and abused children amounting to another half a million dollars, but that didn't change our analysis: children had been shortchanged.

The charter amendment now became an inevitable strategy. The third-year Children's Budget became documentation of the need for a charter amendment, the basis for a community education campaign, and an effective organizing tool. The result of our third year efforts was that children's services didn't get cut in a budget crisis year. But virtually nothing new was added to the budget, and there were no realistic expectations that it would be. For three years in a row, some of our best revenue-generating proposals had been ignored.

"What stands out in my memory from those Children's Budget years is how exciting and exhilarating they were, and how creative we all felt. We were sure we were going to win. And then came the frustrations – the Mayor calling the police on us when we were peacefully demonstrating in front of his office...the City's refusal to put the thousands it paid for luxury box seats at 49er games towards children's services.... I remember thinking, 'We tried it your way and we still got trounced.'"

Kathy Baxter
Director, San Francisco Child Abuse Council
Member, Children's Budget Coalition

The political landscape for children changed significantly between 1987 and 1990. Before 1987, no one even thought about children as a constituency to consider in the Budget process. By 1990, what the City funds provided for children was a significant part of everyone's analysis (the press, political commentators, and public officials). Children's advocates now had a seat at the table and had established children as 'players.' Further, some new programs were initiated, and the budget process had become somewhat more accessible. City government had also agreed to document what was being done for children with City funds, creating a new level of accountability to the public.

Still, after four years we concluded that the level of effort we put into the budget process each year would be extremely difficult, and maybe even impossible, to sustain over time. We were spending 75% of staff time working on it. Without it, though, we felt sure that the progress we had made would disappear. The actual financial gains for children weren't very great, and each year it became more – not less – difficult to make our case. We didn't believe that children could be a strong enough constituency to prevail as the City's financial problems worsened.

Lessons Learned 1

From 1987-1990, Coleman Advocates fought exhaustive battles for Children's Budgets in San Francisco and won and won, but whether these annual victories were the best means to establish and protect the rights of children to have services available, and the obligation of San Francisco to provide them, was a question Coleman had to have the courage to ask and to answer.

- Without strong advocates, children don't fare well in the adult-dominated political arena.
- Children's advocates can become skilled City Hall "insiders" and can play the hardball game of budget politics, as well as anyone.
- Effective budget advocacy for children must rest on a clear, very specific agenda.
- Budget advocacy is a year-round process of coalition-building, proposal developing, budget analysis, and negotiation that takes months of preparation, and cannot be done effectively if limited to the budget season.
- Institutionalizing a method to track expenditures for children is a helpful policy advance that provides a good framework for followup advocacy, and is easier to get approved than new expenditures because it's less threatening.
- Children's advocates have a unique opportunity to persuade the public through the children themselves because children are so often their own best sales pitch.
- Because the second year of an innovative strategy no longer compels the press, advocates must become like advertisers, constantly planning different and entertaining strategies.
- Some programs for children will be easier to "sell" than others. Budget advocacy should focus on programs that can be linked to specific, compelling public concerns.
- Presenting plans for the reallocation of resources is always a risk; one group's reallocation ideas are another group's turf. Child advocates should tread carefully in proposing ways to find funds for children.
- Power creates change; reports don't. Politicians listen to power.
- The bulldog approach pays off.

"The projected $158 million deficit in next fiscal year's city budget will mean lean and hard times in San Francisco for people who depend on city services for basic needs. But the people who may be hit the hardest are those who don't vote and are powerless to do anything about the deficit: San Francisco's children."

"S.F. Deficit May Hit Kids"
by Angelo Figueroa
San Francisco Examiner
February 20, 1991

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Deciding on a New Strategy

Making budgets behind closed doors

Children's advocates are bypassing lawmakers

Invest in Kids or Pay Later, Group Warns

The Impasse

No matter how clever we were, how much more press than other causes we were able to garner, how many people we could get to hearings, it was hard to counter stone-cold political reality. We forced ourselves to be honest – to get beyond the flattery of political commentators and the ego gratification of media attention to realize that the several glamorous new programs initiated each year at our behest were minimal, and to acknowledge that the familiarity we had with City officials wasn't really helping. We came to believe that the realities for children would not change if we kept playing "politics-as-usual."

After analyzing overall expenditures for children across a five-year period Coleman discovered that not only had there been little positive change but that there had even been a decrease in the percent of the budget going to children. After watching legislative allies fight for children's services with ever-so-slightly less enthusiasm each year, and after watching eyes glaze over the second and third time through our Children's Budget proposals, it was clear that Coleman's "clout" with members of the Board of Supervisors was not increasing. As the City's budget crisis became more intense, those with more powerful constituencies would be likely to maintain their funding. There would be little or nothing left for children because, as in other budget crises, children's programs would be most vulnerable for cuts.

We began to get exasperated. It seemed we had out-advocated just about everyone in the City. We had more reports, more detailed proposals, more compelling cost-benefit arguments than anyone else. We never missed a budget meeting, and we were constantly coming up with more and more creative ways to make the point. It seemed like we were working harder and harder for fewer gains.

But no matter how hard we tried, we couldn't convince local politicians that helping kids would help their political future. We just weren't seen as a large (or wealthy) constituency. No one thought that voting on children's services would yield voter support.

Unlike business, unions, the gay community, or particular ethnic and neighborhood groups, no one saw children's advocates as a cohesive force, or a well-established constituency.

To some extent the politicians were right about disorganization among those supporting children. With the budget process being so complex, with such limited visibility, and the press having such a short attention span, what happened to specific children's services was very difficult to track. Many of the people who relied on these services *were* children, and they couldn't vote. Many of their parents tended to be poor; many were immigrants; and they were used to having very little power.

Mobilizing overburdened parents is difficult. Every politician knew how difficult it would be to organize this constituency into a group successful enough to create an effective political force. The process and the problem seemed insurmountable.

The number of people involved with Coleman, even combined with the employees of San Francisco's various children's agencies, was small compared to the citywide population. Together the groups could not make enough campaign donations, walk enough precincts, or sponsor enough fund-raisers to make a significant dent in a politician's career. Child advocates are also extremely ambivalent about becoming identified with specific candidates, and nonprofit child advocacy organizations are not legally permitted to endorse candidates. So using "political muscle" was an "empty threat."

The situation was exacerbated by the disturbing increase in the role of money in the political process – the high cost of running for office, the need to do endless fund-raising, the power of lobbyists of powerful special interests, etc. Even at the local level, serious candidates for an 11-member Board of Supervisors were spending up to $400,000 to run for office!

Children's agencies were co-opted to some extent by the City's funding games. Because nonprofit agencies in low-income neighborhoods got funding from the City, and were often protective of it, they couldn't be aggressive consumer advocates against those who made funding decisions.

Powerful constituencies had built in protections, making it difficult for Coleman to compete. Funding for many of those powerful interests was actually mandated in the budget; so even if policy makers were inclined to reallocate resources, their flexibility was limited. (This was true of the salary structure of many of the City employees, airport funding, and Fire and Police Department funding.)

The limits of traditional budget advocacy became apparent. Just as the agency came to realize that it might have reached the limits of what "insider lobbying" could accomplish, Coleman needed to do something that had a reasonable time frame and was possible within its limited resources – something that would have a much higher and longer-lasting return than year-by-year budget advocacy.

A Public Ahead of the Politicians

As child advocates, Coleman had one major 'ace in the hole.' People were increasingly aware of the problems of children partly because of the public information efforts of Coleman and other child advocates. Several pollsters had confirmed that people felt their children were worse off than they themselves were as children, that concern about children ranked high, and that citizens were more willing to spend public dollars on children than on many other issues.

So, while people were not *organized* around the issue of children, they did 'get it.' The number of people calling Coleman Advocates to ask what they could do to help children was increasing rapidly. Seniors, businessmen, and neighborhood activists were expressing more concern than previously about the plight of children. Even those who were not traditionally empathetic with vulnerable populations wanted to see the welfare of children improved.

There seemed to be a growing awareness that living with the consequences of neglecting the needs of children (crime, dependence, inadequate labor force) was unacceptable. The time seemed right to capture this public interest and concern about children.

Elements of a New Strategy

In December, 1990, Coleman concluded that a new strategy was needed. The idea was to create something that could:

- protect children so that the 'unwinnable' annual budget battles would not need to be waged.
- bypass the traditional political power structure, which failed to see either children or their parents as a politically powerful constituency.
- create a forum so that ordinary citizens could express their wish to make children a priority in the City's budget.

Prop J in a Nutshell

Over a two-month period, Coleman decided to move forward with what ultimately came to be known as Proposition J. By placing an initiative on the ballot, it created a forum for the public to mandate a re-ordering of City funding priorities that would not rely on politicians. By petitioning voters rather than requesting politicians to place the initiative on the ballot, Coleman emphasized the need to circumvent the entrenched political establishment.

Prop J would amend the City Charter to mandate that 2.5% of the property tax be set aside to expand children's services each year, eliminating annual budget battles and creating a kind of fiscal Bill of Rights for children.

"I was initially reluctant to support the idea of Prop J because I wasn't convinced it was the best possible strategy to pursue. Eventually I didn't see any other alternative available. We had reached the end of our ability to promote youth needs through the tactics we'd used for the past few years. We needed a fresh approach, something that could keep the attention of the public and the media... and have a direct impact upon the policies and services for children and youth."

Michael Reisch
Coleman Board Member

The Decision-Making Process

For nine months, Coleman debated whether a ballot measure was the best way to enhance funding for children. Reaching this decision was a serious, concerted undertaking that involved:

- soliciting advice from the City Attorney on tax and other revenue-raising options;
- analyzing the success or failure of other ballot measures for children across the country, and presenting this information at a citywide conference;
- reviewing San Francisco's child-related legislation and ballot measures during the previous five years;
- discussions with legal counsel regarding electoral activity permitted under the agency's tax-exempt status;
- presentations to Coleman's Board of Directors by legal, political, and legislative experts on the pros and cons of various revenue-raising options;
- discussions with political consultants about the feasibility of a small organization mounting a campaign;
- discussions with the Mayor's staff and most members of the Board of Supervisors or their staff;
- discussions with gay, African-American, Asian, and Hispanic leaders; union representatives; education advocates; large and small business owners; and other neighborhood leaders;
- a strategy meeting with service providers; and
- developing cost estimates, timelines, and work plans for an effective but inexpensive political campaign.

Important Considerations

The issues that received the most serious consideration before a final decision was made on which strategy to pursue are those that any community must consider, although the pros and cons will differ for each community.

Taxes vs. set-aside. The most difficult and contentious decision was whether to propose a new source of revenue (most likely a new tax) or a set-aside of a portion of the City's existing General Fund.

Questions were raised:

- What were the legal options for increasing revenues for children?
- Whose support and whose opposition would each option incur?
- Were there differences in the voting margin required by the various options?
- Which option presented the best opportunities for a campaign theme?

The pros and cons were weighed.

New revenue source (taxes):

Pro	Con
• Current City revenue base was already limited; having a new funding source would expand the total budget and prevent cuts to other services. • San Francisco's fairly progressive electorate is more likely to support a new tax for children than more conservative areas.	• Requires a 2/3 vote. • Public sentiment is generally strong against taxes. • Each tax option has problems and particular opposition (e.g., hotel tax would incur opposition from tourist industry; parcel tax is regressive; parking tax would exacerbate opposition from businesses; property transfer tax would be opposed by real estate, etc.).

Reserving funds for children (set-aside):

Pro	Con
• Avoids resistance to new taxes; child advocates would not have to bear burden of increasing City revenue base. • Requires only 50% vote. • Can use a "greater-efficiency-in-government" argument to create a "fair share" for children; both of which are popular themes.	• Possible backlash from organizations and groups who fear losing a share of the pie if children increase their share. • Considered "bad government" by politicians and policy experts, because it "ties the hands" of elected officials in the budgeting process.

In the end, the overriding factor in choosing a set-aside fund was that it only needed 50% of the vote vs. the 2/3 needed for a new revenue source. Coleman also felt this was the better way to go given the anti-tax sentiment of the public, and the potential argument that children (unlike any other segment of the population) needed adults to ensure them of their "fair share."

Ballot box vs. legislation. The politicians strongly recommended that instead of voters going to the ballot and amending the City Charter, they as politicians would develop legislation that would "assure" children a greater level of funding. In fact, some politicians offered to draft legislation that would be almost identical to the charter amendment Coleman was proposing.

It was tempting to trust the politicians and to let them develop legislation. Legislation, after all, was quick and easy compared to a grueling election campaign, and it wouldn't cost us a dime. There were many fewer risks involved. But, we were tempted only briefly. We knew quite well that any legislation passed by politicians could be just as easily withdrawn, and that as soon as the political pressures heated up, we would be in the same position as before.

Legislation had two disadvantages: It required passage by politicians, whose commitment to children was fickle at best; and it was easily modified, and therefore not a permanent solution. A ballot initiative, on the other hand, had two advantages: It provided a forum for the people, not the politicians, of San Francisco to make children a priority; and by amending the City Charter, it provided the opportunity for making children a more permanent priority.

"I supported Prop J from the very beginning. I'm a native San Franciscan, and growing up here, I knew it as a kid-friendly city. But that has not been true for a long time, especially for older adolescents. Maybe the color of those kids has changed. But making young people's issues a priority was important to me. San Francisco should be kid-friendly."

Irma Dillard
Coleman Board Member

Coleman's years of children's budget advocacy experience led it to select the ballot initiative.

Petition vs. politician-initiated ballot measure. In California, as in about half of the states in this country, there are two ways to put measures on the ballot: by *petition* of the voters or by having elected officials place them on the ballot. Coleman considered both options.

Petition: A petition drive is extremely difficult, very labor intensive, and usually expensive; a decision to mount a petition drive should not be made lightly. Nevertheless, collecting petitions has several overwhelming advantages: it provides a vehicle for public information, it offers a chance to begin organizing, and it creates public involvement and interest in a cause. It demonstrates that the cause is not politician-driven, but a grassroots effort. With current anti-politician sentiment, this can be a distinct advantage. It also keeps the issue from being seen as the "pet cause" of a particular politician, whom the voter may or may not like.

Politician-initiated: It's less expensive, less time consuming, and it allows your resources to be saved for the real election campaign. It also invests politicians in the issue, which can result in additional resources, support from their constituents, and greater visibility and/or credibility. On the other hand, there is the danger of the issue being seen as *belonging* to a particular party or a particular constituency.

In the end Coleman had no choice. No politician endorsed the proposal so there was no one to put it on the ballot – except the voters themselves!

Which Election?

When to put an item on the ballot requires a great deal of analysis, and probably the advice of political experts.

The major considerations are voter turnout, what else might be on the ballot, and the extent to which timing might affect the public's attitude toward the ballot proposition. In the case of a children's initiative, high voter turnout is usually desirable. As for other issues on the ballot, it's prudent to avoid appearing on the ballot with measures that might be seen as competitive. Coleman opted to run the campaign at the same time as the Mayoral election (November, 1991) because the agency thought that would provide maximum opportunity to force children's issues to become important policy issues for local leaders, and possibly even for the Mayor's race. The presidential election to be held one year later was avoided out of concern that the children's issue might get "lost," and the opportunity to educate the public would be minimized. As it turned out, placing this measure on the same ballot as the Mayor's race maximized public exposure for the issue, but decreased total vote count, since the turnout for the election was lower and more conservative than the presidential race that followed.

We wanted to do it. We had the psychological momentum, which was probably the overriding thing, truthfully. We'd been through enough 'strategizing' to know that if you wait, you often don't do it. There wasn't much signifiant happening at the state or federal level in that election, whereas if we had waited until the Presidential election we might have gotten lost in the shuffle. So it was a trade-off : when we were going to get the votes vs. when we were going to get the public's attention. Since one of the real goals of the campaign (remember, we didn't have any idea we were going to win when we started this!) was to use this as a forum to bring attention to the issue, I think we made the right choice.

There's no question in my mind that we would have gotten more votes had we waited, but in terms of what issues were on the table, ours was one of the big ones, which meant it attracted a lot more attention. We were also very interested in it being an issue in a Mayoral race. Whoever won would feel obligated to heed what the electorate had voted for, but more importantly, at every organization's candidate's night, the candidates would have to sit through the debate on the initiative before they got to speak!

Luck Is a Factor

Where would Coleman be if not for the state of Washington? Coleman would never have mounted a successful campaign were it not for the creativity and boldness of the Washington State Alliance for Children and its director, Jon LeVeque. A year earlier, the Alliance had mounted a statewide children's initiative campaign that had galvanized the state and brought children's issues to public attention in a new way. The major corporations of Washington mounted a last-minute campaign against the initiative and it lost with two-thirds of the voters opposing it. Nevertheless, the focus and visibility it brought to the children's movement in Washington inspired Coleman to move forward and to learn from this experience.

Tax rulings. Coleman's efforts would have been cut short were it not for a (then) month-old IRS decision that voter initiatives were not "grassroots lobbying." [Nonprofit organizations can spend up to 20% of their resources on regular lobbying, but only 5% on "grassroots lobbying."] Generally, grassroots lobbying means going directly to the public to urge them to take specific positions on pieces of legislation. It was decided, however, that in the case of voter initiatives, the electorate is acting as a legislative body, and that lobbying the public to vote for an initiative is not grassroots activity. This decision allowed Coleman to establish a separate campaign committee, and donate funds and staff resources to the work of that committee within the limits of the law.

Opinions of colleagues. *I discussed our charter amendment proposal with dozens of colleagues. Critics of public spending totally opposed the idea of a budget set-aside. No one in the business community encouraged us to move forward. Friends fighting for social justice causes were sympathetic to our cause, and some strongly encouraged us. In reality, it was the seasoned political activists in the City who were enthusiastic about seeing the children's cause take a bold stand.*

To my surprise, children's service providers (i.e., youth agency directors) were only mildly enthusiastic. I later realized that they are generally not used to being involved in political campaigns. As a group they were also quite discouraged, exhausted from funding cuts and attacks on social welfare programs. A few child advocates opposed the idea completely, fearing that a failure would hurt the cause of children. And a small group of local long-time community activists on children's issues strenuously opposed the idea, I think because they saw it as competition for their own agenda. A few members of our Board felt that this opposition would pose serious problems, and briefly recommended not moving forward. But this opposition never proved significant, and I suppose turf issues within any movement are inevitable.

Political consultants also had mixed reactions to our proposal. But one was very enthusiastic and believed that if the campaign were to be run correctly a children's initiative could win given San Francisco's positive voting history on school funding. We hired him! Others were much more wary. One of the most well known west coast political consultants feared strong opposition from powerful conservative politicians, and did not feel we could garner enough public interest in the campaign. We had gone to him to get pro bono services. He thought we didn't have a chance, and was further swayed by conservative politicians who told him ours was a losing cause. Concern about our lack of adequate funding, our failure to do polling, and our preference for an election with low voter turnout was also mentioned again and again.

After hearing that we would mount a petition drive, every elected official in San Francisco initially opposed the idea of the charter amendment on the same grounds: "bad government." It would tie their hands and put too many constraints on the City budget process. Many said they would actively oppose it; a few conceded that they might end up supporting it, but hoped it never got on the ballot. Mayor Agnos aggressively opposed the effort, leading some to express concern that our chances of winning were significantly weakened.

To Be, or Not To Be?

After all the meetings and all the advice and all the opinions, it was the agency's Board of Directors which had to make the decision. Ultimately they needed to believe:

- That the campaign itself – win or lose – would be a powerful organizing and public information effort;
- That the availability of $50,000 in the agency reserves (accrued over a 10-year period) would be better spent on a campaign than any other single item, including extending the life of the organization;
- That the public would 'get it' more quickly than the politicians had; and
- That making children a priority was the right and just cause to fight.

2 *Lessons Learned*

- If you wait for the perfect time it will never happen.

Coleman's Board took a powerful and significant step on February 11, 1991, when members voted unanimously to mount a grassroots effort to gather 40,715 signatures to put the concept of guaranteed funds for children on the ballot, and to work to enact this charter amendment for the children of San Francisco.

"Mr. [Jule M.] Sugarman, one of the founders of HeadStart, has long argued that an earmarked trust fund – financed in large part through a new tax source – is the only way to ensure a stable, sustainable funding source for children's programs."

"S.F. Ballot Measure Would Prohibit Cuts in Children's Services"
by Deborah L. Cohen
Education Week
October 23, 1991

3

Creating a Children's Amendment

'Grown-up' S.F. takes kids to heart with bold initiative

San Francisco Voters Test Children's Issues With 'Proposition J'

Politicians wary of 'kids initiative'

Drafting a Winning Proposition

Ideally, several months should be set aside to draft a ballot (or legislative) proposition. In our case, we did it all in just one month, and we might have avoided a few mistakes if we'd had more time. In any case, our own three guiding principles might be helpful:

- *Keep it simple because people vote "no" if they don't understand.*
- *No one signs petitions that are longer than one page.*
- *Be consistent with how your community's government already operates.*

Avoiding loopholes. By far, the greatest challenge in drafting the amendment was to figure out how to ensure that the "new" money for children would be used for new programs. Californians had lived through many variations on this theme, including lottery funds for schools which had actually resulted in reductions to the education budget, and tobacco tax funds being used to pay for existing health services rather than new anti-smoking efforts. Coleman was determined to avoid loopholes to the extent possible.

An attorney who is the Executive Director of a children's advocacy agency in San Diego presented Coleman with the concept of a 'baseline' Children's Budget. The idea was this: require the City Controller to calculate the City's expenditures on children for the two years preceding the implementation of the charter amendment. That amount (whichever year is higher) would serve as a baseline budget for children. The baseline would be

adjusted annually in accordance with the overall revenues of the City, guaranteeing that expenditures for children remained at a fixed percentage of the overall budget.

The concept of a baseline budget turned out to be one of the most creative and useful aspects of the proposition. It is, in fact, such a valuable addition to children's services that simply getting this concept put into law (even without any new money) would be significant for some communities and should be considered. It prevents cuts in children's services, and it forces the City to calculate and track the costs of children's services, which has many benefits.

"The San Francisco initiative is a wake-up call. It is being launched out of absolute frustration that we haven't been able to get support for what we believe is a top priority for the United States. This is a situation where the people may be way ahead of the politicians."

David Liederman
Executive Director, Child Welfare League of America

Defining the 'right' programs. As mentioned earlier, Coleman feared that the City would use the money in the Children's Fund for services that were not intended. The agency was first alerted to this when the Mayor compiled his list of city funds currently spent on children. The list included public transportation, police services, various Fire Department programs, and a wide range of court-related services. While not opposed to these services, Coleman did not intend to have the Children's Fund pay for them. Coleman's goal was to focus on prevention whenever possible, to avoid using the fund for huge 'black hole' City expenditures such as running the Zoo or purchasing property, and to assure funds were spent only on children and not on items that the City would normally fund.

These concerns were addressed by:

- Itemizing the specific services that could be funded.
- Setting percentage amounts to make sure that not all of the money went to one particular item or type of service.
- Prohibiting funding to "any service which benefits children incidentally or as members of a larger population including adults."
- Prohibiting use of the Fund for expenditures mandated by state and federal law.
- Prohibiting use of the Fund for various things the City might be tempted to spend the money on, but which were inconsistent with the types of programs the agency wanted to see expanded (e.g., the purchase of property, operation and maintenance of hospitals, recreation centers and libraries [already in the budget], operation of the Zoo [which was in financial trouble and could conceivably be seen as a children's service], and law enforcement and court-related services).

The development of the Children's Services Plan. Coleman felt it was important to incorporate the development of the Children's Services Plan into the regular city budget process so that services could be integrated into San Francisco's existing service delivery system without creating a new bureaucracy. The Mayor would have the power to develop the plan just as he or she has the power to develop the rest of the City Budget. Coleman built community input into the planning process by mandating Commission hearings prior to the development of the plan, and by requiring the Mayor to send the plan to the Board of Supervisors, which

could hold public hearings before finalizing the budget. Beyond these general parameters and simple mechanisms, Coleman chose not to be more specific. Needs would change over time; any new structures in the charter might add to the bureaucracy and create inflexibility.

Administering the fund. Coleman didn't detail how the Children's Fund should be administered, except to say that it would move (like all City functions) through the Mayor's Office. Mandating structures in the charter would have been inconsistent with other aspects of city government and unnecessarily constraining. Agnos had already created (administratively) an Office for Children, Youth and Their Families, and Coleman assumed, correctly, that the Fund would be operated through that office and through the various City departments that run children's services. Coleman also believed that creating a new bureaucracy would add to the expense of the amendment, and would be a political hindrance. It considered putting a cap on the amount of money that could be spent on administration, but decided against it. (If the cap was 10%, then no less would ever be spent. If it was 5%, many thought that would not have been enough under certain circumstances.) Coleman's lawyer, an expert in San Francisco's City Charter, suggested a mandate was not consistent with other aspects of the Charter, and should be dealt with as part of budget negotiations.

Phase-in and sunset. In an effort to respond to issues about "good government" and assure the public that this was a reasonable proposal, Coleman phased in the Children's Fund over a two-year period (establishing only half the fund the first year), and created a 10-year sunset on the Fund.

Proposition J Said:

- For ten years, San Francisco would be required to put 2.5% of property tax revenues into the San Francisco Children's Fund. The fund would provide expanded services for children under age 18.
- Money from the Children's Fund could only be used for child care; job readiness, training, and placement programs; health and social services (including pre-natal services); educational programs; recreation programs; delinquency prevention programs; and library services.
- There were prohibitions against specific distributions of funds. These included law enforcement services, the purchase of property, and any service that benefits children only incidentally or as members of a larger population including adults.
- For four years, a minimum of 25% of the funds would be mandated for child care; 25% for job readiness, training, and placement programs; and 25% for health and social services.
- In December of each year, the Mayor's Office would be required to submit a Children's Service Plan to the Board of Supervisors, outlining the goals and objectives of the fund and the services that would be funded for the following fiscal

"Proposition J was a watershed event in the children's movement because it mobilized so many people in support of a political issue which benefits children. It took budget work for children to a much highter level."

David Richart, Author, *Children's Champions: How Child Advocates Protect and Increase Budgets for Children*

year. Four relevant City commissions were required to hold public hearings on this plan.

- The City Controller would be required to calculate children's expenditures prior to the enactment of the charter amendment. For the next ten years, the City would be prohibited from reducing spending for children's services below this level. Money in the Fund could be used only to increase spending for children's services.
- The fund would "sunset" after 10 years.

If Only We Could Write It All Over Again...

It's important to learn from our mistakes, but it's still early to know what we would do differently. If we were starting again, we might:

- *Include parent support services in the list of services that could be funded (making them eligible for protection in the baseline budget);*
- *Limit the Mayor's administration of the Fund to 5%;*
- *Mandate that the Children's Services Plan describe how the services funded will be coordinated with other City children's services;*
- *Increase the time allowed for the development of the Plan;*
- *Create a Citizen Oversight Committee, jointly appointed by the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor, to approve and oversee the Plan; and*
- *Mandate an independent evaluation of the planning process and the programs funded, and list criteria for funding.*

When drafting any major policy change, it's impossible to predict every potential implementation problem, or to address every issue through the drafting process; sometimes things that need to be done conflict with each other. (It was impossible, for instance, to assure that funds would go only to children – generally thought to be under 18 years old – and at the same time provide transition employment programs for 18-21 year-olds. We had to make a choice.) The resolution of many conflicts must be left to the political process, frustrating as that may be.

Finally We Framed the Issue!

At the last minute, we realized that we should not simply set aside funds, but that we should also name those funds. Without a name, it would become that "set-aside amendment." With a name, the ballot handbook would refer to Prop J as "The Children's Fund". As with naming the Children's Amendment, the underlying strategy of the next phase – the campaign to collect signatures – was to frame the issue as being "for" kids. Those who supported our proposition loved children; those who opposed us did not. Our first action was almost intuitive. We made buttons with our own machine, saying "I♥Kids. I Support the Children's Amendment." Whoever would dare oppose such an amendment would have to make the "I♥Kids" button. The button was symbolic of the strategy.

Throughout the signature-gathering and the campaign, we ran against the political establishment. We purposely positioned the campaign as an attack on politics-as-usual. This was "kids vs. self-interested adults," a campaign of the people. We steered clear of politicians in seeking endorsements or any identification with the campaign. After all, we were putting the amendment on the ballot through a grassroots petition drive. We framed the "set-aside" of revenues as a "fair share for children" to emphasize that this was about children who don't get a fair share in the traditional political process.

3 *Lessons Learned*

After a month of intensive labor involving lots of colleagues, lots of feedback, and lots of drafts, the Children's Amendment was born!

- Drafting a ballot measure requires political, as well as legal, considerations. Make sure that children don't get lost in legal jargon, however, or it won't matter how legally sound the measure is.
- Use wording to frame the issue as a pro-child measure.
- Find an attorney very familiar with the City's legal codes (ours was a former City Attorney), as lots of mistakes can be made by an inexperienced lawyer.
- Don't involve too many people in the drafting process or it will never get done.
- Do have a small and diverse group of readers who can predict potential problems that might not be noticed initially. A significant aspect of drafting a proposition is trying to anticipate all of the ways the intent of the measure can be circumvented so you can build in protections to avoid them.

"Brodkin and her allies, frustrated and desperate, made one last, daring assault on the political establishment. The result is an unprecedented measure on the city ballot... that is likely to cause the men and women who control San Francisco's budget more trouble than they ever thought possible."

"Advocates for Youth Near Victory Against City Hall"
by Jay Mathews
The Washington Post
November 4, 1991

4

Making It to the Ballot

Guiding Principles, Basic Assumptions

Inherent to a grassroots petition drive is the sense of empowerment that comes from recognizing that people can do something positive. In this case, that energy would help children. People could put the measure on the ballot. People could make children a priority, even if politicians wouldn't. The campaign emphasized the positive and effective programs that would result from passage of the charter amendment, not the bleak and depressing problems of children. Both campaign pieces featured children in a voting booth, telling the voter that children couldn't vote, but adults could.

While it was important to alert constituents to the problems and needs of children, it was more important that voters realize there were solutions to these problems. This approach contrasted with many public education campaigns which only emphasized the terrible plight of children and left citizens feeling frustrated and powerless.

The assumptions were that a campaign based primarily on positive themes would bring support and that no constituency would oppose it; that representatives of other constituencies could not afford to be seen as opposing the interests of children, particularly if doing so smacked of self interest; and that politicians would not want to be seen as being against children. The only opposition that might be possible would come from the "good government" constituency, and this was not seen as a strong group that could put forth a particularly compelling argument.

Who Helped and Who Didn't

At the outset, we could not have anticipated who would help our cause and who wouldn't. There were many disappointments, but also some pleasant surprises. Children's service providers, who were expected to constitute the cadre of petition-gatherers and campaign volunteers, were either tremendously disappointing or terrifically supportive. One weekend, a coalition of 30 service agencies agreed to organize a Saturday petition mobilization and only one person showed up (the person who agreed on behalf of the coalition to do the organizing). A standing joke in the office was that service providers would only show up when it was all over, to stand in line to get the money, which turned out to be true to a point. There were notable exceptions to this generalization; the most dedicated campaign volunteers were, in fact, service providers. And about ten agencies made heroic efforts – walking precincts, standing on street corners, etc. Outreach was most effective in the service provider community among child care agencies. (This seemed natural because they had a built-in group of parents whose help they could enlist). We had hoped for help from teachers, and although their union had endorsed the amendment and the leadership was enthusiastic, the timing was bad and the activist teachers were totally preoccupied with issues stemming from state cuts in the school budget.

It's important to note that while service providers may not have been good campaigners, and were initially only lukewarm about the Amendment (many not really believing that it would ever happen), at least 50 children's agencies were strong endorsers very early on. To be sponsored by organizations concerned first and foremost about children was a very important element of the campaign.

Unanticipated allies also appeared. Campaign workers were particularly shocked one Saturday when representatives of the Teamsters Union appeared at their weekly signature gathering. It seemed that they were newspaper truck drivers who had been moved by the plight of the paper boys, and had decided to do something to help youngsters. Help came from groups in the City who were used to political action, as well as from a diverse assortment of interested friends and individuals who heard about the campaign. Consistently, volunteers came from the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission (which collected signatures in most parishes through-

out the city); the Unitarian Church (known for its activism and interest in children); the Green Party (which declared children the "first resource" and which was rooted in political activism); the city employees social workers union; one of the gay democratic clubs (having a street presence on a wide variety of political issues); Delancey Street Foundation (a substance-abuse recovery organization with a long history of activism); and a group of housing activists who collected signatures in the Housing Authority apartments.

Organizing the Petition Drive

Nothing is more difficult than motivating people to stand on a street corner to collect signatures. The sense of rejection one feels when people refuse (and many do) is overwhelming. To put the Children's Amendment on the ballot, Coleman had to gather more than 40,000 valid signatures of registered voters (with a 70% accuracy rate, that means collecting 40% more than is needed) in three months! This was in a city with only 407,150 registered voters.

A signature drive for children was not much different than any other. Coleman hired a part-time coordinator for the four months of the drive, and, ultimately, another part-time person to assist with phoning. Coleman's mailing list, which had evolved over many years, was used as the basis of its volunteer recruitment.

There were phone banks, computer lists, and all the accoutrements of a campaign. Coleman got off to a slow start with a poorly attended kick-off rally, moved on to weekend "mobilizations" (breakfasts at homes of Board members and friends, followed by signature gathering), urgent mailings begging people to work harder, fliers and notes in neighborhood papers announcing the need for volunteers, and a mid-campaign "panic party" complete with skits to inspire people onward. All in all, approximately 600 people volunteered to gather signatures.

About six weeks into the drive, Coleman realized that a purely volunteer effort was not going to be able to gather enough signatures, so, as mentioned earlier, in the end the agency paid people to gather over half of the signatures. Because the campaign had a large volunteer component, however, the fact that there were paid signature gatherers didn't affect the credibility of the effort. But it did emphasize the difficulty of organizing a children's constituency.

"I'd never been politically involved before. Knowing that we have to look out for children in order for there to be any meaningful change in the world brought me to Prop J. I was optimistic at the outset, but it's hard to approach strangers! I took my six-year old daughter with me to an animal rights rally at the Civic Center one weekend and asked everyone who went by to sign. A lot more people signed than didn't, and I got very little negative feedback. When I did, it was usually around taxes... some people just couldn't get that they weren't going to be paying any more taxes."

Barbara Mason
Volunteer
Signature Gatherer

Gathering the Signatures

The signature drive turned out to be just what the campaign needed. While getting volunteers was excruciating, getting signatures definitely wasn't. People who had gathered signatures on many other measures let us know that this was one of the easiest petitions they had ever circulated. Every signature gatherer developed a pitch that worked for him or her, but the gist was: "Please sign the Children's Amendment; children's services have suffered terrible budget cuts; this charter amendment will create a fund for child care, library services, pre-natal care, job training, recreation...."

Usually before the list of services ended, the person was ready to sign. Some people asked lots of questions and wanted long explanations. As time went on, more and more people knew about the charter amendment. And by the end, over 60,000 San Franciscans had heard directly about the needs of children!

Carol, Coleman's Assistant Director, and I would stand out in front of the markets at lunch time. One person, a lawyer, actually stood there and read the entire text of the amendment and grilled me about every detail. I don't think he had any idea he was talking to the person who had drafted it, though. I knew the answers to all of his questions, and he finally did sign it, but he was a half-hour case, at least!

We stood out there day after day. We had ironing boards set up so that we could spread out six or eight clipboards with signature sheets; that way, people didn't have to wait to sign – they couldn't say they were in too big a rush.

Some of us became very good predictors of who would sign and which locations were best for getting signatures. We concluded that African-American women were the most likely signers, and that women were more likely to sign than men. Immigrants (Asian and Latino) were least likely to be registered to vote. A community's political traditions seemed to have a great deal to do with whether they would sign the petition. The areas of the city known for their liberal activism were far easier sites for gathering signatures than the more conservative and less activist areas. Not surprisingly, the family neighborhoods were better places to gather signatures than the singles neighborhoods. And, a surprise to some, the gay community was also a fairly good place to get signatures.

Despite numerous press releases, a kick-off rally, and calls to friends in the press, virtually no one in the local media, except one TV station (KGO, the ABC affiliate), took the charter amendment seriously during the months of the petition drive. It simply was not covered. Friends in the media explained that it wasn't news; no one knew whether it would actually qualify for the ballot.

Taking Advantage of Surprises

Coleman was pretty surprised by the lack of response to what it believed to be a first-time effort in the City to mobilize politically on behalf of children. But in some ways, the lack of attention may have been a blessing. It gave the campaign the advantage of surprise when the signatures were submitted. Since people in the political establishment hadn't really taken the campaign too seriously for many months, those opposing the amendment had a long lag time to overcome.

By the time the opposition realized the charter amendment was serious and that it might pass, it was almost too late to mount a convincing campaign against it.

Most local elected officials ignored the petition campaign. Coleman did not aggressively enlist their support or assistance, and they did not want to be pressed to endorse what the campaign was doing. Coleman received a curt letter from the Mayor early on announcing that he opposed the measure because it was "not sound public policy." The Mayor's supporters (primarily liberal) were reluctant to differ with him, and conservatives were not inclined to support the measure in any case. During the petition drive only one member of the Board of Supervisors actually (quietly) endorsed the amendment, as did one candidate for Mayor. The night before signatures were turned in, the campaign invited every elected official to join. Most declined; one state legislator, a mayoral candidate, and two members of the Board of Supervisors agreed to participate.

Coleman was poised for the climax of its efforts!

Kids Take Over City Hall!

The highlight of the entire campaign was the day we turned in 68,000 signatures to the Registrar of Voters. We staged a magnificent event – the power of which took us all by surprise. We brought 100 children (from day care centers, and children of campaign volunteers) to City Hall, and put the stacks of petitions in four red wagons, each pulled by a group of adorable children. Several dozen adult supporters representing the 15 or so most active endorsing organizations joined the parade. We marched around the rotunda of City Hall. The adults made a few speeches explaining to the kids what was going on, and the three petition sponsors placed the petitions on the counter of the Registrar. People came out from their offices at City Hall and hung over the bannister looking down on the floor of the rotunda to see what was happening. The kids were singing ("The more we get together, the happier we'll be") and the room was filled with balloons. It was a glorious moment and, I believe, a unique political event!

This time the media came, and the visual power of children pulling those red wagons was irresistible! The story was covered by the Associated Press, *and appeared as a highlight in* USA Today. *Interestingly, the best coverage came from out-of-town press (San Jose and Sacramento), but local TV and radio stations did carry the event with enthusiasm.*

By the end of the day, about half the politicians in City Hall officially endorsed the Children's Amendment, and within weeks the Mayor decided not to oppose.

The campaign was underway!

4 Lessons Learned

On July 24, 1991, 100 children from San Francisco helped to turn in 68,000 signatures to place The Children's Amendment on the ballot. After months of signature collecting and many drafts, the campaign was finally underway.

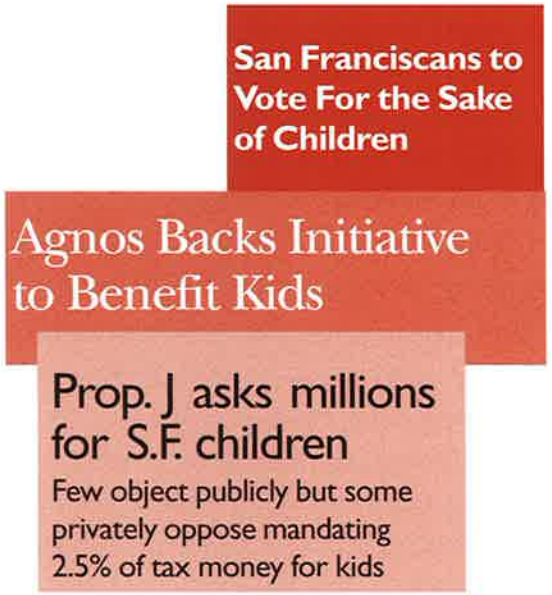
- It's time for child advocates to frame the issue and create the forums for policymaking. Leadership from the political establishment won't just happen.
- A grassroots petition drive creates political momentum and allows the people to take the lead in determining public policy. Elected officials will follow.
- A campaign not affiliated with politicians has many advantages. Advocates should not worry when their cause is not immediately embraced by elected officials or covered by the media.
- Organizing a petition drive is grueling. Many expected supporters let you down because collecting signatures is so hard, but unexpected friends appear. And there is simply no more effective way to organize grassroots support.
- Children's service providers are generally not very politically oriented, and cannot be counted on to be the core of a political campaign.
- Children are a winning issue when it comes to getting petition signatures.

"Why don't children's concerns reach the top of the government agenda? Kids don't vote. Why doesn't child care, child abuse, child health, child housing, get a priority bid for our tax dollars? Kids don't vote. Why doesn't the White House, the Statehouse, City Hall pay more attention to their needs? Kids don't vote. There is something sad about this generic, all-purpose answer, and something cynical as well....But this fall..the people of San Francisco have become part of an experiment... born of desperation...Now it's up to the grown-ups."

"A Ballot Experiment in Behalf of Kids"
Ellen Goodman,
San Francisco Chronicle
November 22, 1991

5

Mounting a Campaign for Children



The Battle Begins

As soon as the petition drive ended, the campaign work began. It was an intense and grueling three and a half months, with more steps than we imagined. But it was also the greatest opportunity to educate San Francisco about the needs of children.

The Ballot

Wording counts. The City Attorney and the Ballot Simplification Committee had phrased the measure for the ballot this way: "Shall the City be required to place a certain amount of property tax revenues annually for ten years in a Children's Fund to be used only for certain additional services for children..." This meant it was a full 21 words into the question before there was any mention of children.

Coleman argued, and finally the text was rewritten to read: "Shall the City be required to create a Children's Fund to be used only for certain additional services for children, by placing a certain amount of property tax revenues in that Fund annually for ten years?" Now "children" was the 9th word, and there was no mention of taxes until the 28th word.

"Political campaigns are both like and unlike other undertakings. They have something in common with advertising, marketing, organizing, and war. Although many elements are similar, the combination is unique.

The central fact about a campaign is that the principal opponent is time. The State will conduct an election on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, whether anyone is ready or not. The polls will open at 7 AM and close at 8 PM, period. This is not a collective decision into which the campaign has input. There are no extensions or postponements. A political campaign is dominated by time."

David Looman,
Campaign Consultant

The six-paragraph official ballot handbook "Analysis" contained an equal number of items requiring changes, and Coleman debated the Ballot Simplification Committee for each one. In the end, the measure was officially named "Children's Fund" in the ballot handbook and on the ballot. If the Fund had not been named in the actual amendment, it could have been called something such as "Property Tax Set-Aside," which would have framed the issue by its means instead of its ends. The results might have been extremely different.

Why "J"? *A primary concern was how the proposition would be portrayed to the voters in the official documents put out by the Registrar of Voters. To illustrate the level of minutia in which a campaign can become involved, we concerned ourselves with matters such as which letter the proposition would be given. This was, of course, something we had little control over – initiatives put on the ballot by elected officials were lettered first, and then the rest were done "randomly" – but that didn't stop us.*

We begged the Registrar of Voters for "K" (for Kids), because "C" (for Children) had already been assigned. And when the Registrar called us, delighted, we expected the best. But what did he say? "I couldn't get you 'K,' but I got as close as I could – You're 'J'!" He had obviously missed the point. But after all that, we didn't have the heart to be ungrateful.

Sending messages. At the outset of the campaign, Coleman established that – win or lose – one of its major goals was to use the campaign as a forum to educate the public about the needs of children. The agency developed several messages:

- *San Francisco's children face a serious crisis.* Eight key facts about the predicament of children were cited and repeated throughout the campaign. Included was information about the increase in child abuse, the number of homeless children, and the percent of babies born exposed to drugs.
- *Investing in children is cost-effective – an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.* In campaign literature we repeated points about the cost of preventive programs vs. hospitalization, incarceration, and welfare.
- *Children's services can make a difference.* A video was developed for the campaign which portrayed children who had been helped by existing children's services. Seven major children's services that could be funded with the Children's Fund were consistently described: library books, job training, child care, pre-natal care, tutoring, and AIDS prevention were repeatedly identified; and press events were all held at the sites of successful children's programs.
- *Children are vulnerable in the political process.* The campaign invested in a professional 'photo-shoot' of children engaged in 'adult' political activities (holding money to pay lobbyists, writing a campaign check, standing in a voting booth). The message "children can't vote; they can't compete with grown-up special interests" was repeated often.

• *"For these are all our children.... We will all profit by, or pay for, whatever they become."* This James Baldwin quote become one of the messages of the campaign. It was used in literature and speeches, and was underscored with an end-of-the campaign sign posted throughout town saying "SF♥Kids." In a very positive way, this said that children were a concern to the entire city of San Francisco.

All in all, by constantly linking the problem with the solution, and by saying repeatedly that the power lay in the voters' hands, the campaign maintained a very upbeat tone. Proposition J was positive and would help San Francisco.

A gift from the state: the ballot handbook. California prepares a ballot handbook for its voters containing official arguments for and against each proposition on the ballot, official rebuttals, and any paid arguments that are submitted by opponents and proponents. This service to the electorate is a boon to a grassroots campaign. As Coleman staff struggled over the official arguments to determine what points to emphasize, how aggressive a rebuttal should be, who should sign the argument, etc., some of the conclusions reached included emphasizing the benefit to *all* children; identifying specific services that would be received; referring to the Fund as a "minimum guarantee"; referencing other legal precedents in protecting children (child labor laws); and appealing to the voter's self interest.

One of the best things we did in the campaign was to take advantage of paid ballot arguments. While they had a per-word cost, the printing and mailing to every registered voter at the expense of the taxpayer made this the best free publicity we could ever get.

We submitted what turned out to be more than six pages in the ballot handbook – 25 arguments, signed by a total of 216 prominent San Franciscans. It was, by far, the largest section in the handbook. Our strategy was to cover as many constituencies as we possibly could, and impress voters with the outpouring, diversity, and unanimity of support for the measure. We worked to get ballot arguments submitted by all major elected officials, the School Board, the Police Officers Association, 50 children's services agencies, representatives of every ethnic group, leaders in the gay community, Catholics, women's groups, pediatricians, senior groups, unions, business leaders, and neighborhood activists.

The Realities of a Political Campaign

As child advocates, Coleman learned from this campaign how labor-intensive and emotionally stressful the experience is. As a campaign progresses, the desire to win intensifies, and each event in the campaign takes on greater and greater significance. Advocates for children are generally not accustomed to the electoral arena, nor to efforts that result in such a clear and public win or loss. In the Proposition J campaign, a number of events caused people working for the amendment a great deal of anguish because of the enormous stress and personal investment in the campaign.

Paid ballot arguments in favor of Proposition J

The best way to reduce crime is to prevent it. Taking care of our children is the smartest, most cost-effective way to keep our youth out of the criminal justice system....

SF Police Officers Association

It is both human and economical to pay now for health care, child care, and youth training, rather than pay later for welfare, psychiatric hospitals and prisons....

SF's Sheriff, District Attorney, and Public Defender

The most important obligation of each generation is to see that the next generation is prepared to carry on in its place....

Senior Action Network, Gray Panthers of SF, Grandparents Who Care

There was tension among various staff, and anger on the part of the agency staff directed towards the people hired specifically for the campaign (they weren't doing their share, weren't sufficiently knowledgeable about children's issues; should have made sure that this and that pitfall were avoided, etc.) Biased press coverage is absolutely inevitable, but it was very demoralizing for campaign workers because it affected motivation. A "mistake" on the ballot (a less-than-favorable quotation from the City Controller had been negotiated to be changed, but the changes never made it to the printer) caused angry letters and personal accusations. Unfair endorsement procedures enraged people.

Organizational structure. At the outset of the campaign, Coleman had elaborate plans for a formal steering committee of representatives from a wide range of organizations, a finance committee of people with money and influence, and a cadre of hundreds of volunteers. In the end, much of this did not materialize. The agency had spent very little time doing the groundwork for a political campaign. It was never able to interest the business community or the powerful elite of San Francisco in the importance of the campaign. It learned that it had to act quickly and that a large committee for making decisions would be cumbersome.

The campaign was managed by the Executive Director of Coleman (who took a part-time leave from her job to be able to manage the final months of the campaign full-time). Four key Board members made almost all of the decisions with the Director and agency staff, assisted by a professional campaign consultant, who was paid a $10,000 fee for a campaign plan, the production of campaign literature, and ongoing advice on every aspect of the campaign. The success of the campaign's organization rested on strong leadership, a solid administrative structure, a dedicated staff and Board, a very sound campaign strategy – and a good idea.

Endorsements

A significant part of any campaign is getting endorsements of individuals and groups that have influence with various segments of the voting population. In this respect, Coleman's campaign was like all others. But because of the momentum already created, and the way the campaign had framed and positioned the issue, the endorsement process – with few exceptions – went smoothly. The most influential conservative politician in San Francisco, State Senator Quentin Kopp, wrote the opposing ballot argument. He was the main spokesperson in the media for the opposition, wrote guest editorials in newspapers, and convinced other key opinion-makers to oppose.

We found that for many elected officials (or those wishing to be elected), being identified with our cause was more important to them than it was to us. This was certainly a pleasant change from the earlier days when we were running around City Hall begging for crumbs from the budget!

Facts vs. Fiction

Added to the stress of the campaign was the reality of politics – it's a dirty business. Coleman experienced tricks, name-calling, and lots of lies about Prop J. A key endorser sent slate cards to the printer with an "oppose" recommendation rather than the "support" on which the membership had voted. Anti mailings claimed that most of the money would go to Coleman. (Not a dime will.) Petition signatures were stolen. Coleman was accused of being a pro-abortion front. And so on.

Once in the political fray, it is probably impossible to avoid political games. Expect them as a part of the process, and prepare for them.

Quentin Kopp decided to lead the opposition to the amendment, despite our meeting with him and numerous tentative promises to at least remain neutral. Kopp has a strong following in San Francisco, and his supporters turned out to be the people who voted in greatest number in this particular election. It is highly likely that he was spurred on to oppose the Amendment when the Mayor, his arch-rival, decided to support it. I guess the lesson here is that you can never anticipate when your issues are going to be pawns in unrelated political games. When the local chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus decided to recommend opposition to its members, we were stunned. Fortunately, through last-minute appeals to the Executive Committee, we were able to convince them to remain neutral.

Organizational endorsements. Far more important than individual endorsements were the endorsements of the political "clubs" and organizations that took official positions and communicated them to their memberships. Organizations that mailed a significant number of "slate cards" or bought newspaper ads were the most important. Campaign staff made a list of 25 such groups, contacted them, and made sure to attend their endorsement meetings. Often a formal debate was scheduled.

During an intense six-week period, Coleman Board and staff and other volunteers made presentations almost nightly, and often more than one each night. Speakers were assigned depending on their previous alliances with various organizations. And although attendance at endorsement meetings was never huge – a dozen to 200 people – these meetings were useful forums to educate people about the needs of children. Those attending such meetings tended to be the opinion-leaders of a community or group; they were thoughtful, and didn't have knee-jerk reactions. Each group was a unique experience requiring numerous out-of-meeting calls and discussions, some more complex than others. Afterwards, participants in the groups called their friends, wielding as much influence as they could.

The campaign obtained endorsements from the Democratic Central Committee, all three gay political clubs, the Black Leadership Forum, the Latino Democratic Club, the Police Officers Association, the Coalition for SF Neighborhoods, various neighborhood Democratic clubs, the Chinese American Democratic Club, the Wallenberg Jewish Democratic Club, SF Tomorrow, and NOW.

There were some major disappointments and failures in the endorsement process. It was rumored that the Chamber of Commerce was about to oppose the measure. Although they had not been invited to do so, campaign staff were fairly aggressive in requesting the opportunity to make a presentation to change the Chamber's position. Staff also wrote letters to 25 business members of the Chamber requesting that they urge the Chamber to reconsider the position. One committee was convinced to remain neutral, but another one was not, and the full Executive Board of the Chamber ultimately decided to oppose the Amendment.

Although Coleman had tried to position the Children's Amendment as an initiative that was neither liberal nor conservative, with the opposition of the Chamber they could see

Changing Positions of Elected Officials

In March, Mayor Agnos officially and vigorously opposed the Amendment. The day the petition signatures were turned in, he decided to be neutral; three weeks later he declared that San Francisco's fiscal picture had changed sufficiently and he was endorsing the Amendment. Enlisting the support of elected officials was never a priority; by the time the campaign was in full gear, it was an established fact that this was a grassroots effort. Of the 35 elected San Francisco officials, 30 ultimately endorsed the campaign.

"Few would argue with the fact that funding for children's services should be an important ingredient when formulating the city budget. But Proposition J is a disastrous way to go about it....We fiscally responsible Republicans believe that earmarking a fixed percentage of the budget for any purpose is poor public policy."

Warren R. Merrill
Executive Director
SF Republican County Central Committee

"The issue is political poison. After all, who wants to be seen as anti-children? ...Voting against Prop J is not a vote against children, it's a vote against bad public policy."

Prop J No
SF Weekly
October 23, 1991

that they were beginning to fail. Despite staff's efforts, the Republican Central Committee also opposed the amendment, as did several other of the more conservative political clubs.

As it turned out, the public was apathetic about this election, and split about mayoral support. So, many groups didn't bother with their normal slate card. This worked to our great disadvantage because we relied on slate cards rather than on expensive campaign mailings to convey the support of the many groups endorsing the measure. The Mayor's endorsement of the Amendment became a signal to key conservatives to oppose. In fact, had the Mayor remained neutral, many of the City's conservatives might have done the same. Such is the game of politics, and the unpredictability of a campaign!

Courting the newspapers. The most difficult endorsement effort was with newspapers. The campaign staff's presentation to the editorial board of the *Chronicle,* complete with players for whom the board had great respect, was of no avail. As mentioned, the *San Francisco Chronicle* is San Francisco's major newspaper, with by far the widest circulation. The *San Francisco Examiner,* however, the second-largest paper, was undecided for months. The campaign staff tried hard to convince the head of their editorial board that Proposition J was indeed good government. They enlisted people he trusted to speak with him, sent lots of memos with every new argument the agency could come up with, and arranged the usual meeting in which they forcefully presented their position, all with good results: the *Examiner* not only endorsed, but featured their endorsement just prior to Election Day. The *San Francisco Bay Guardian* was with Coleman all the way. This was especially helpful because the paper is known for its influence with liberal voters.

All in all, the press was a mixed bag. A widely circulated neighborhood newspaper, influential with conservative voters, sat on the fence for weeks. The editor was somewhat ambivalent until the very end because of conflicting pressures from various constituencies. As the paper was going to press, we were still on the phone trying to convince the editor to change his mind, and soliciting various friends of his to continue to make calls. This kind of never-give-up attitude permeated the campaign, and resulted in some changed outcomes, but not in this particular case. We were also surprised by opposition from other smaller papers, but pleased with the strong endorsement of the major African-American newspaper.

Public Education

One of Coleman's major goals was to use the campaign itself as a forum for public education, so staff made particular efforts to maximize whatever opportunities they could.

Direct mail. The centerpiece of the campaign was a direct mail brochure; it was also the major education piece. It articulated the campaign's theme and was mailed and distributed to as many households as Coleman could afford. It targeted women voters (who voted recently) because Coleman had learned that they were the most supportive. The piece was purposely information-dense, especially for a campaign, but it was in keeping with the agency's desire to educate and to promote more concern for the problems of kids.

In retrospect, I have two regrets about our direct mail effort. We should have mailed to more people, and we should have developed written material specifically targeted towards seniors, whose support we lost in many areas.

Outreach. Coleman sought out every public forum it could to schedule presentations on the Amendment: radio shows, neighborhood meetings, meetings with organizations' boards of directors, senior citizen clubs, the Junior League, church groups, and city commissions. The Amendment gave the agency an occasion to talk about a wide range of children's issues to an extremely diverse audience.

Youth speak for themselves. Toward the end of the campaign, efforts to organize a youth arm of Coleman came to fruition. Young people appeared on radio shows, made presentations to their peers, and walked precincts.

"I Wish I Were A Princess." *The Washington Post* called Coleman's 12-minute campaign video, *"I Wish I Were a Princess"* electrifying. It premiered at the kickoff to the fall campaign. The event was not particularly well attended by the local press, but a reporter from the *New York Times* was there, and the video became the feature of her story. The video continued to attract media throughout the campaign, and many of the TV news stories about the campaign showed segments from it.

The video, which was made on a pro-bono basis by a member of the Coleman Board who is a professional producer, has won national awards, and remains one of Coleman's most treasured public education pieces.

We made 300 copies of the video, and hoped to have a series of campaign "house parties" where it would be shown by a campaign volunteer to friends and neighbors. (A good 1960s organizing strategy, with a 1990s VCR twist.) A dozen people came to a training on house parties, and several house parties were actually given, but this effort never really caught on.

Our attempts to have the video shown on the local media also didn't pan out, and our efforts to have it rented at video stores were turned down. Nevertheless, the video was shown – in a prestigious downtown law firm, in some neighborhood clubs, in some employee groups – and it did give a profound introduction to the needs of children throughout the campaign. As one of my colleagues says, the video even causes audiences of bankers and IRS agents – not usually thought of as bleeding hearts – to wipe tears away.

So while the video didn't affect the outcome of the election in the way we'd anticipated, with large numbers of San Franciscans seeing it and being moved to vote for Proposition J, it did seem to influence the media, impressing them with the importance of children's issues and – we hoped – the seriousness and professionalism of our campaign. This, in turn, affected their coverage to the public.

"Everyone had strong ideas about what we should be doing. And every time there was a mistake, feelings got pretty bruised. But a lot of it was fun. I remember my wife and kids making campaign buttons late at night. And it was nice to go to the political clubs and use past relationships for positive support for the issue. People would say, 'Don't worry Art, we're already with you.' On the other hand, because we have advocated for a lot of youth services, we tended to get into conflicts with some labor people. We thought we had mended all those fences... But part way through the campaign, we had to work really hard to get the Labor Council not to oppose us."

Art Tapia
Campaign Chair
Sergeant,
SF Police Department

Proposition J is bad government.
Compared to what? What we have now is bad government. It's bad government to leave children homeless, neglected, uneducated and unhealthy. A measure that reverses this is the heart of *good* government. It is why government exists.

Proposition J is special-interest politics.
Proposition J is the opposite of special-interest politics. Children are the future for everyone; they are not a special interest. They are short-changed because our budget process is so dominated by special interests. Without protections in the budget process, children's interests will never be able to compete with the true special interests of adults.

Proposition J ties the hands of city officials.
Exactly! If they had been responsive to the needs of children – if they had funded child care and prenatal care – then there would be no need to tie their hands. The evidence is in. Children are at the bottom of the heap in the budget battles. Tying the hands of elected officials is the only way children's needs will be met.

For a story that ran on National Public Radio, a reporter asked me about the argument that Prop J tied the hands of the politicians. I confessed my fantasy of walking into City Hall and seeing all the politicians tied up, begging me to free them; then I get to say, "If you had funded prenatal care, if you had funded children's health care, if you had funded afterschool programs..."

Proposition J will take money away from other needs.
Investing in a healthy, qualified, law-abiding younger generation saves money. Current extensive spending on incarceration, hospitalization, and welfare is taking money away from other needs. Proposition J will reverse this. Besides, the Children's Fund will comprise only one-half of one percent of the City Budget!

Funds for Proposition J can be generated by increasing efficiency in government, and it will serve as an incentive to do just that. Would you rather have your tax dollars pay for box seats at baseball games for City officials, or provide afterschool care for needy children?

Proposition J sets a bad precedent.
What if everyone does it?
Children are a special case. They are uniquely vulnerable in the budget process because they are the only constituency that cannot vote, and our collective stake in the welfare of our children is unparalleled. Or, depending on circumstances: It is standard procedure to 'set-aside' public funds for specific agreed-upon needs. We do it all the time. In San Francisco it is done for the arts, seniors, the disabled, city employees, and purchasing open space, to name a few. Opponents of a children's set-aside have supported many of these measures; they just oppose this one because they oppose children being a budget priority.

City officials privately oppose Proposition J.
And that merely illustrates why Prop J is so necessary. When allowed to operate privately behind closed doors, politicians will sell children down the river. That is why it is the people, not the politicians, who need to mandate protection for children.

Proposition J is ballot-box budgeting.
And that is exactly what children need. In those circumstances where official policy makers fail to act for the common good, democracy is well served when the public has the opportunity to have the last word. Isn't this why we live in a democracy?

As we anticipated, the major argument against Prop J was: "This is bad public policy." Initially we were somewhat timid about debating the issue. But as the campaign progressed, our confidence grew, and we discovered the most important lesson of the campaign: There really is no argument against investing in children.

When I went on Quentin Kopp's radio call-in program, I was supposed to debate a man from the Republican Central Committee. He backed out at the last minute, and Quentin thought I would then want to do the same. I said I was going on the air, so Kopp debated me! There were angry calls from people who were against Prop J, but I used it as a forum to educate and inform. I gave out accurate statistics in contrast to those they put forward; I articulated our position in a positive way over and over. Sure it was manipulation. I had to seize every opportunity to frame and reframe our issue.

Media Coverage

The short version of the story for Coleman is this: the national media was responsive; the local media was disappointing. If not for the national press, Prop J might not have been covered locally by mainstream media. Campaign staff felt that they were doing something unique, and from the outset said that this Amendment would make San Francisco the first city in the country to guarantee funding for children. Some of the initial press coverage picked up on this, with the *San Jose Mercury News,* for instance, calling Prop J a "landmark initiative" when the petitions were turned in. The campaign staff sent information and placed calls to the major national TV news stations, to *The Washington Post, The New York Times,* Associated Press and a number of other national media outlets. AP picked up the story early on, but it was not until September 23, well into the campaign, when *The New York Times* carried a long story with two pictures, that momentum with the national media picked up. Coleman continued 'working it,' figuring by then that national coverage was their best hope for local coverage. They sent the *Times* article to others, and eventually the story ran. Ellen Goodman did a column on it, and it was carried by the *Christian Science Monitor, USA Today,* the Canadian Broadcasting System, National Public Radio, and radio stations in many cities.

"Children's issues are new for the gay community. It's a new idea for people who don't have kids to think that this is their role, their responsibility. In a way, the gay community on this issue is a metaphor for everyone who doesn't have kids at home.... San Francisco has a long history of having the majority of its adult population without kids, but the whole country is getting like that now. We're all parents, whether we personally have kids or not, because the kids of today are the people we will soon be dealing with as adults."

Greg Day
Former President
Coleman Advocates
Board of Directors

The media was both the best friend and the worst enemy of the campaign. It caused us the most jubilation and the most grief. Local TV stations woke up to the story only when their national affiliates came out to cover it for the national evening news. One station didn't cover the proposition until "The Today Show" *asked for footage for their post-election analysis. San Francisco's* Chronicle *ran a story only after a campaign worker sent the clipping from* The New York Times. *The other major newspaper waited until October to write its lone news story, which was a semi-smear job, focusing almost exclusively on the so-called 'whisper campaign' against us in City Hall. The campaign's final press conference was attended by the national news teams, but only one local station.*

Why was the local press so bad? Did they have preconceptions that Coleman and our constituents couldn't do something of such major significance? Is the local media that much less sophisticated than the national media? Was this simply a carryover from their having 'maxed out' on children's budget issues from the past 4 years?

Or was it more insidious? The local media has a great deal of influence on local public opinion. It was certainly no threat to the political establishment in Washington D.C. to have The Washington Post *carry a story on the Amendment, as it did, but it was a different situation in San Francisco. Was the press purposely avoiding the story because the Amendment was a threat to the conservative establishment? Was it a case of the local press being more concerned than the national press about what "powerful" individuals think and being more inclined to tow the line?*

I truly don't know the answers to these questions.

Campaign press events. Although local coverage was mostly poor, there were some media successes at the local level. A rally in the Castro (a heavily gay district) was organized by Coleman's Board President, a gay man who had recruited a significant number of gay and lesbian leaders to speak on behalf of the campaign. He put forth the case that gays and lesbians have a stake in children too, and will no longer tolerate being excluded from addressing children's issues, especially since many are parents. The fact that many gay and lesbian young people needed services and would receive help through Proposition J was also emphasized.

An event specifically for the Asian press was held in Chinatown by youth-serving agencies, and it was well covered. Similarly, a press conference in the Mission District was held for the Spanish-language press. The final media event of the campaign was an enthusiastic rally at one of the City's recreation centers, with the Mayor and most of the City's elected officials, dozens of kids, and speakers from a number of the endorsing organizations – a parish priest, a representative of the Gray Panthers, a tenant organizer, the PTA, and a 49er. All supporters coalesced around this one event.

This final rally gave us a taste of what it is like to bring an entire community together on behalf of children. It was great! Everyone felt wonderful about what they were doing.

What Did It Cost?

Budgets vary enormously depending on in-kind support offered by various endorsing organizations. The total amount spent on this campaign, from the drafting of the amendment, through the petition drive, through election night, was $110,000. (See the Appendix for campaign budget expenditures.) Had more funds been available, they would have been used first to expand the direct mail effort because it was such a good way to reach people who were otherwise less accessible. (Interestingly, money might actually have been saved by paying signature gatherers earlier because the closer it is to the deadline, the more they tend to charge!) Coleman felt that the important, non-negotiable elements that had to be paid for included staff to recruit and motivate campaign volunteers, clerical support, petition gatherers, professional campaign consultation, office supplies, phones, and, most importantly, campaign literature and mailing. (Campaign signs are nice, but optional.)

One of the major disappointments of the entire campaign was the failure to raise a really significant amount of money. All in all, $24,000 was raised from individuals in contributions ranging from $5 to $3,000. This was the result of three house parties, several large campaign events, a tear-out for donations that appeared on all our literature, and personal requests to potential large donors. Some of the reasons for the failure to raise more funds probably include the fact that Coleman didn't have a lot of connections to people with money and fundraising skills. The strongest supporters of the cause had very little money; the grassroots campaign style and absence of strong opposition until late in the campaign led people to believe the campaign didn't need money; and business opposition dampened the enthusiasm of potential donors. In fact, efforts to organize a finance committee for the campaign never came to fruition. Very few of the people originally contacted were interested in being on such a committee.

Momentum and Results

After the Proposition J campaign turned in 68,000 signatures at the end of July, 1991, there was momentum, and Coleman learned an incredible political lesson. It had taken the initiative, ignored the political establishment, and won control of its issue. At that point, the political establishment came to the agency and asked to be involved. At the end of the summer the *Chronicle* conducted a poll of registered voters on four ballot propositions. It showed Proposition J ahead by the widest margin. This only added to the campaign's momentum. The perception of children as a popular cause dramatically shifted the political attitude not just toward Proposition J, but toward children's issues altogether.

"Earmarking a fixed percentage of the City budget for any purpose is terrible public policy. Meeting its requirements will inevitably cause cuts in other services like law enforcement and health care for the elderly. If this passes, effective governance by the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors will become even more excruciatingly difficult. That's why I'm voting against Proposition J, even if other elected public officials in San Francisco won't admit they'd like to tell you to do so also."

Quentin L. Kopp
State Senator

An example of the public popularity of the issue can be seen in the response of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. After opposing the measure, they eagerly discussed their views with *The New York Times.* After the story came out, however, they never again talked to the press – they simply refused and referred calls elsewhere. Coleman conjectures that once the Chamber saw their opposition within the context of a sympathetic article about the creation of the amendment as a solution to the plight of children, they realized immediately that their position was bad press. The campaign had shut down a significant opposing voice.

But it wasn't all smooth sailing. Contrary to everyone's expectations, the "good government" argument gained momentum, particularly as the campaign came to a close and Senator Kopp became more vigorous in his efforts and in my opinion, more mean-spirited in his accusations.

5 Lessons Learned

On November 5, 1991, San Francisco citizens voted on behalf of children.

- Creating a forum for people to express their support for children is a very powerful strategy.
- An election campaign has all of the ingredients to attract children's supporters: it's easy to participate, it sends a loud and effective message to the political establishment, and it provides an opportunity for the public to be educated about the needs of children.
- For children's advocates, an election is a particularly effective forum, with many built-in opportunities to get the message out. All of the resources that are normally spent finding the vehicle for the message are already there.
- A political campaign for children is in many ways like any other campaign. Priority should be given to organizational endorsements, direct mail, courting the press, and a strong and flexible defense.
- A political campaign for children is in many ways unlike any other campaign. The power and importance of the issue gets attention that other types of campaigns have to pay a great deal of money for. A compelling campaign for children can even attract the national press, and that coverage can assist with local press.
- A campaign for children should be based on positive themes, such as the potential of children to overcome adversity and lead productive lives, and the effectiveness of services for children. Too many negative messages about the plight of children are discouraging and ultimately a turn-off.
- No real arguments can be made against investing in children. Forcing the debate into the public is a way to capitalize on this.

"California voters are so worried about the fate of the state's children that they are ready to make it a top priority over other issues in this year's elections, according to a study released today. The report, "California's Children", appeared to put the political parties on notice that ... children's issues have wide-spread appeal... Sixty -five percent favored passing a law similar to an initiative approved by San Francisco voters in November..."

"Survey on the State of Children"
by Bill Workman
San Francisco Chronicle
January 8, 1992

6

Analyzing Voter Response

The Results: The Politics of Children

Proposition J won with 54.5% of the votes.

The results of the election, combined with the results of an early poll conducted by a major newspaper, gave a very clear picture of who voted for Proposition J and who didn't. The more liberal parts of town supported it, and the more conservative parts of town opposed it. In general, this meant that the older, richer, and whiter parts of the city were more heavily opposed. The younger, less affluent, and more heavily minority parts of the city strongly supported. The absentee ballots, which represented the more conservative electorate were 61% opposed. The neighborhoods identified as conservative were opposed by a similar percent. In contrast, the two African-American sections of town supported the measure by approximately 70%; as did the Latino and liberal activist neighborhoods. Only the wealthier neighborhoods voted against the proposition. And in some cases, this opposition was as much as 80%.

"I think the most helpful thing to us was hearing from Margaret that all of the so-called wise heads told her not to do it, and no one supported it, and they went after it anyway, and the public believed in it, and it was a people-leading-the-leaders situation. We're surrounded by the same kind of negative messages here in Colorado, and all of us share a gut feeling that the public cares more about kids than the leadership realizes. And that courage and enthusiasm for at least trying to do the right thing has been an inspiration for us."

Barbara O'Brien
Executive Director
Colorado Children's Campaign

On the other hand, there were many more neighborhoods in the city where support was just as high. These were generally in the low-income areas of the city, where the density of children was the greatest. However, the single family home areas, generally high-income, also supported the amendment, though not by such high margins.

It is very important to note that only 16% of San Francisco's population is under age 18, compared to 26% nationwide. San Francisco has the lowest percent of children of any city in the country, perhaps even the world. This is one reason why the success of Proposition J is so remarkable, and lends credence to the notion that people without children can understand why they must support other people's children. Since children are a declining portion of the population nationally, it is essential that many people without children support the children's cause if it is to be successful.

Try as we did to keep this from being a liberal/conservative issue, that was how it was seen by the voters – no question! It is possible that other communities need not assume this will be the case, since each political campaign is unique to its own community. In this case, the pivotal political event was the opposition by Senator Quentin Kopp. However, even if San Francisco's Mr. Conservative had not gotten involved, we believe the liberal/conservative split still would have been manifested.

While it might be wise for child advocates to continue courting conservatives, it is naive, I think, to see the cause of children as ideologically neutral. Our cause is clearly about public responsibility for the welfare of our country's children. We believe that laissez-faire, marketplace policies don't work when it comes to the well-being of children. We believe in aggressive government intervention to strengthen families and assure a minimum guarantee of health, education and welfare for children.

Let's face it: conservatives generally don't like this sort of thing. They can take it in small pieces – a legislator here and there who will support this piece or that – but as a general policy direction they have rejected it. This is no secret to anyone working in the field of children's issues. However, the premise of much of our work is that we are going to 'bring around' the conservative political establishment. Perhaps we should give that up, acknowledge the ideological premises of our commitments, and focus on motivating and organizing our potential allies to be a more powerful force.

In terms of big business, well, they generally tend to stay out of politics unless it directly affects them. And there certainly is not the perception on the part of most leaders of corporate America that political involvement in children's issues is important. So it may also be pointless to spend time trying to woo them. In the end, they oppose what they see as government intervention.'

What Did the Polling Numbers Mean?

Prop J won, but by less of a margin than Coleman hoped (though more than the agency feared), and less than the proposition initially polled. What did it mean? First of all, the high polling results came before anyone even knew what the initiative said and before any opposition had been publicly aired. So those numbers reflected the natural positive attitude about supporting children. Coleman knew that level of support was not a realistic expectation, and had seen children's initiatives fail in other communities even after the polls showed support.

Selecting an election with relatively low voter turnout, the campaign had indeed compromised votes for increased visibility and exposure. But perhaps more significantly, this was an atypical San Francisco election – it was, after all, the election where voters selected a police chief to be Mayor. The turnout was remarkably conservative, varying from 56% in the most conservative areas where Prop J lost by the highest margins, to only 38% in the communities where it won by the highest margins. Wealthier, older voters have higher turnout numbers. Many liberal voters were turned off by or not interested in this particular Mayor's race and didn't vote. The children's initiative wasn't compelling enough to actually bring people to the polling place. If it had been, the victory margin might have been much greater. Coleman learned that pro-child voters can, in fact, be difficult to "turn out."

One friendly interviewer jokingly accused us of "moral blackmail of the political establishment." And that is what it was. But a different reporter who accused us of using "pressure tactics" was wrong. After all, what kind of 'pressure' can child advocates exert? The blackmail, in this case, was nothing more than the threat of public exposure of lack of support for children. We kept that 'secret' in exchange for public support of kids. That was the political game we played. We're proud of the strategy and of the results.

Building a politically powerful children's constituency is similar to building any constituency. It requires experts who provide documentation and policy recommendations, advocates who negotiate and organize, and dynamic leaders who inspire the community to act. Most importantly, building a children's constituency means mobilizing at a grassroots level.

"If it weren't for Prop J, we would have been involved in years of budget advocacy. Instead we went straight for a major policy reform, and it took only a year. I think it is also important that we got very involved in the political process and kept our eyes on our goal. At first, county officials thought we were going to go away. Part of what allowed us to persist was the inspiration of San Francisco's Proposition J. We won and it was fun... Although I must confess that we are right now in the 'Implementation Blues'. In many ways it is a much more difficult phase than the campaign itself. But we're in it for the long run."

Michael Piraino
Executive Director
Westchester Children's Association

6 Lessons Learned

In an unusually conservative San Francisco election, with especially low voter turnout, Prop J may not have brought liberals to the polls, but it did win guaranteed funding for the City's children for the next ten years.

- Children's needs have the potential to be a compelling political issue. The majority of the public 'gets it.' They know children are in trouble and they want government to do more. When given the opportunity they make children a priority.

- There are few politicians who will aggressively oppose children's issues if they are going to be identified as being anti-child in the process. Together with the power of arguments in favor of children, this can be an incredible asset.

- Child advocates must be realistic about who their supporters and opponents are. Only 50.1% of the vote is needed to win. With majority support already in most communities, trying to win over the 'unwinnable' may not be the best use of scarce resources.

- Supporters of children are not likely to become typical political activists. It's probably not realistic to plan a strategy based on the expectations that people will march for children the same way they marched for civil rights.

- Because an election empowers people to make a difference, it fosters a sense of hope. This hope can then become the basis of further post-election involvement.

Highlights: 1992-1993

Post-Election Children's Advocacy

1992

Ensuring continuing accountability

- Coleman negotiates with City Hall officials to assure quality implementation of Prop J.
- Coleman organizes The Kids Network, a citizen action arm, which monitors Prop J and advocates on many children's issues.
- Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Their Families crafts the Children's Services plan for the implementation of Prop J. After some conflict, the plan is approved unanimously by the Board of Supervisors.
- Racial tensions result in a new Director of the Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Their Families.
- A Citizen Advisory Committee is established to assist with allocation of funds. They recommend the funding of 50 new programs, approved 10 months later by the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors. Services begin to get off the ground.
- Coleman conducts the first-ever Youth Vote in the public schools so that youth can have input on use of Prop J funds.
- Children's services are protected in the worst budget crisis in the City's history.
- Coleman issues formal report card for Board of Supervisors, and candidate's questionnaire to ensure that accountability continues.

1993

Overcoming new hurdles

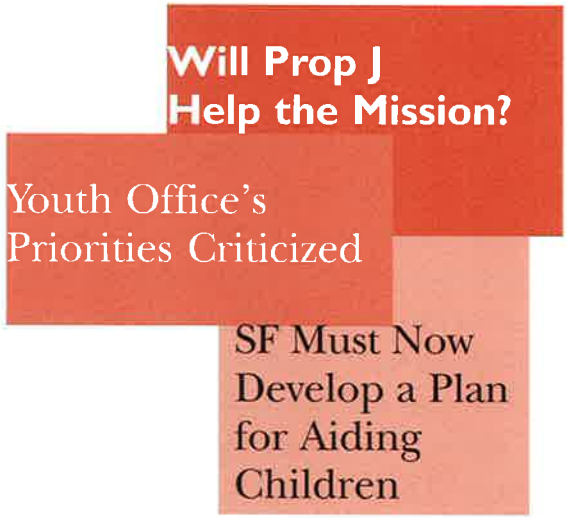
- All programs funded in the first Children's Services Plan following the passage of Prop J get underway. Coleman completes survey of all agencies, and documents that over 10,000 children (almost 10% of the child population) would be served in first of the programs.
- Coleman continues to fight hard for an independent evaluation of Prop J.
- The Citizen Advisory Committee is summarily dismissed, and a new committee is appointed and given a broad mandate to develop a comprehensive plan for all children's services.
- Communities across the United States consider action similar to Prop J.
- Children's services funding protected despite City budget crisis.
- Second year Children's Services Plan is developed and approved. 80 collaborative projects are selected for funding. Many programs funded get underway.
- Coleman publishes *Every Kid Counts: 31 Ways to Save Our Children,* a citizen handbook.
- The Kid's Network reaches 2500 members and takes successful actions on issues ranging from school bonds to gun advertisements.
- Coleman establishes *Children's Action Hotline,* develops a comprehensive citizen involvement directory, and expands youth involvement in their own advocacy.

"After a year-long gestation with some troublesome complications, a broad-based ad hoc committee proudly announced ...that it had produced the first draft spending plan under San Francisco's Children's Amendment.... It is now up to Mayor Frank Jordan to support the recommendations... and to see they are swiftly adopted. In promoting the Children's Amendment, the people led a movement demanding that the city put children first. Now it's up to the city's leaders to follow, support, and extend that commitment."

The San Francisco
Bay Guardian
editorial,
November 11, 1992

7

Continuing the Struggle



Political Momentum

Prop J was a political lesson for San Francisco. The children's constituency had flexed its political muscle and was clearly a force to be taken seriously. The very first children's issues that went to the City's Board of Supervisors subsequent to the victory – budget cuts that were not protected by Prop J – were quickly resolved in favor of children. This would never have happened before.

I think it really made people realize there were, in fact, political points to be made supporting kids. Three months after the victory, the frequently argumentative and competitive Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the first-year Children's Plan without even trying to insert each member's 'patronage needs' into the plan. To me, this reflected a serious effort to abide by the spirit of the Amendment. After the proposition passed, almost every elected official supported two school taxes on the ballot. There were increases in the sales tax, which were not initially popular and ran counter to the philosophy of many politicians. Nevertheless, San Francisco seemed to have established itself as a pro-child city. Even Frank Jordan, the man who was to become Mayor and who had opposed Prop J, denied ever having taken that position, and never again publicly expressed anything but strong support for the Amendment.

But the minute the election was over, two things became clear:

1. We had won only half the battle. Ensuring the effective implementation of the new Children's Amendment was going to be as hard as getting it passed. The political establishment, after all, had not changed.

2. We had educated and mobilized many San Franciscans to vote for Prop J; now we had to keep the momentum going. We needed to enlist the help of newly enlightened voters in monitoring the implementation of the Amendment and to begin participating in the fight for children on other fronts.

One of the first things we did after the election was announce that we were going to issue a formal "report card" on the Board of Supervisors – we wanted to make it really clear that the accountability would continue.

How Did City Government Respond?

Children are on the political map. Even before Proposition J won, Mayor Agnos had begun preparing for its passage. Once he determined that it was to be the law, he decided to make its implementation a model for the nation. A well-qualified Director was appointed to head the Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Their Families (MOCYF), and began meeting with dozens of groups throughout the City, soliciting input for the first-year Children's Plan. Twelve neighborhood hearings were scheduled throughout San Francisco to explain the Amendment and determine the public's priorities. Planning sessions among the City departments serving children were convened using Proposition J as a starting point for more comprehensive coordination. Negotiations with foundations and other private funders in the City began to lay the groundwork for the leveraging of Proposition J dollars, and the legislative wheels were greased in preparation for easy passage of the first Children's Plan. Because the Director had been involved in children's services for many years, knew most of the players, had studied all of the recent city, state, and national reports on the status of children, and was a seasoned City Hall operator, Coleman felt an enormous sense of relief. The Amendment was working. The City was taking the responsibility to involve the community in discussions about children; it developed a children's plan; and it was using Proposition J to facilitate improved coordination between city departments, and to develop innovative program proposals. Some things are too good to be true.

Art Agnos, who had initiated the early efforts to implement Prop J, was defeated by Frank Jordan in a run-off election one month after its passage. The new Mayor had not only opposed Prop J himself, but his major backers were from the business community and the conservative neighborhoods of the City – our primary opponents. He was also administratively inept. We should have known that nothing is easy.

Though we've been through many struggles, I think Prop J has been even more valuable to San Francisco during an administration that doesn't see children as an immediate priority. While the full potential of the Amendment has not been realized, the protections built in for children have become absolutely essential.

No More Smooth Sailing

Once Mayor Jordan was sworn into office, the struggle to maintain the integrity and purpose of Proposition J began. For several months after the election, Coleman used its clout to steer Proposition J in a positive direction, primarily through regular negotiations with City Hall officials over the endless administrative details that determine whether an amendment goes well or badly. For a while, it worked. Jordan retained the Director of the Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Their Families (MOCYF) who had been appointed by the former mayor, and community meetings were carried out as planned. The new mayor endorsed the well-crafted Children's Services Plan, and adopted many recommendations about the composition of a Citizen Advisory Committee.

The Children's Services Plan, which had to be drafted in less than three months (Coleman should have allowed more time in the Amendment) focused on prevention and collaboration. It required that new programs be culturally appropriate, minimize administrative costs, and, when possible, leverage other sources of funding. It contained 28 program categories to be funded, with 60% of the money going to community agencies and 40% to public agencies. Some programs were particularly innovative, including teen centers and a family resource center. The Department of Public Health would develop four satellite clinics in high-need neighborhoods; the Recreation and Parks Department would develop new latchkey sites and expand its youth employment program.

The Citizen Advisory Committee was chaired by a highly regarded member of the community. It included others with similarly high levels of expertise and credibility in the community. That committee assured that the first-year funding process was fair and that good programs would be funded.

But none of this was done without conflict, and that conflict laid the seeds of a far more problematic second round of funding. The potential of Proposition J to inspire improved planning and coordination was lessened in the shuffle.

Power Struggles and Racial Tensions

One of the most beneficial consequences of Proposition J, however, was that it forced city government to pay attention to children's needs in a new way. After all, the City was required to spend the money. That alone necessitated a pretty high level of attention. The new Mayor and the old-style politicos brought in to run the administration were not accustomed to paying attention to children's issues, so the first struggle was to make them realize that they now had an important new function. We sent a memo to the Mayor.

Excerpt of Memo sent to Mayor Jordan

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 16, 1992
To: Mayor Frank Jordan
Hadley Roff
Kent Sims
From: Margaret Brodkin
Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth

We love you, but...
YOUR LACK OF QUALITY ATTENTION TO PROP J IS NOT OKAY....

Coleman gets at least one media inquiry and ten calls from community members A DAY, asking about the implementation of Prop J. (Your office is getting up to 30 inquiries a day.) Almost 100 community people attended a Coleman-sponsored meeting this week seeking our direction on how to communicate with you about Prop J. We have been extremely optimistic and positive – telling EVERYONE so far that we believe your administration plans to make children a priority, will utilize the extensive community input solicited in the recent neighborhood meetings, and that the Prop J planning process is moving along smoothly.

WE AT COLEMAN ARE NO LONGER WILLING TO ASSURE EITHER THE MEDIA OR OUR COMMUNITY CONSTITUENCY OF OUR CONFIDENCE IN YOUR HANDLING OF PROP J until you resolve some key issues and communicate with us in some way about your plans....

On the day he received the memo, the Mayor's Chief of Staff scheduled a meeting for the following day, and the MOCYF Director met with the Mayor by the end of the week. But Coleman was frustrated by the type of negotiating stance it was forced to take very early on.

As soon as the planning process for the Children's Fund began, the power struggles over who would have influence in the process and who would be funded began. And although we knew that fights over money were inevitable, we didn't anticipate the ugliness that would characterize some of the struggle.

Underlying the tension were the constant references to race. Racial tensions are part and parcel of the urban political scene, and the implementation of Prop J reflected this. The Director of MOCYF had been attacked, early on, by some particularly vocal Directors and staff of youth agencies for her alleged "insensitivity" to minorities. (The Director was white.) The public hearing on the Children's Services Plan developed by the Director was attended by almost 250 individuals (brought out to a great extent by Coleman), and the testimony was overwhelming in support of the plan, which was ultimately passed. But the divisions that began in those weeks only got worse as the months wore on. To a large extent this is inevitable when the needs are so great and the resources are so thin. It's all so meager...everyone's fighting for crumbs.

Had the Mayor exerted strong leadership during this period, many of the future conflicts could have been avoided. But the Mayor became central to the problem. His conservative agenda did not include major investments in the City's minority communities. This led him to engage in two typical (and cynical) political games to deflect criticism: Respond to demands for token support; and make sure groups fight each other rather than you.

The Mayor refused to support the Director of MOCYF, and she resigned. After months, he found a Director he felt would respond to the demands of the former Director's critics.

The type of planning that is required by Proposition J takes a great deal of experience and skill. With a Mayor focused on the most immediate political possibilities of the Proposition, there was little concern about something as unpopular as "professional expertise." In fact, some community voices were very anti-professional, and demands for professional skill actually had political liabilities. As a result, the plans, requests for proposals, and other documents prepared by the Mayor's office tended to be general, with insufficient policy or program direction.

Jordan also responded personally to requests for Proposition J funding from political allies who felt their political support or power in the community was enough to warrant a grant. He allowed people to meet with him to discuss funding and then made oblique commitments to them. This was Coleman's worst nightmare – Proposition J could become a political patronage fund. One of the biggest arguments against public funding (for any cause) is that the money will be squandered for political uses rather than for providing needed services. Now San Francisco's Mayor, the proponent of such arguments, was making it a reality.

The Mayor's inclination to use the Fund in this way (and it is important to note that this was nothing new, in San Francisco or anyplace else) collided head-on with the views of his Citizen Advisory Committee. For months, the committee struggled with a process to select programs to fund; it did not want to be undermined by the Mayor or his staff. There were angry meetings, memos, letters, and calls; and in the end the Children's Fund went almost exclusively to the agencies that had been selected by the Citizen Advisory Committee in its objective process. Coleman felt this was a victory in that the programs were of high quality, reflected the intent of the Amendment, were targeted to high-risk children and youth throughout the City, and were committed to the goals of the Children's Services Plan.

But this did not happen easily, and at the end of the first funding cycle, the Advisory Committee was summarily dismissed by the Mayor and a new committee was appointed. The tables turned: the people who were previously 'in' were 'out,' and those previously 'out' were now 'in.'

No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

"I was appointed Chair of the Citizen's Committee to oversee allocation of the first-year funds by Mayor Jordan.... I felt the members of the committee really pitched in, read the proposals submitted, and scored them. I think the Committee members put aside their beliefs on certain turf issues and did a fairly good job of reading and scoring. But I, as the Chair, had constant battles with the staff of MOCYF since I felt they mistrusted citizen input and simply wanted to have the Citizen's Committee rubber-stamp the decisions that they made.... I'm not quite sure that a Citizen's Committee should always be butting heads with City staff; they should be working cooperatively."

Yori Wada
Community Leader
Chair of First Citizen's Committee for Allocation of Proposition J Funds

Coleman didn't go unscathed. In fact, we were pushing as hard as we could to keep the planning and funding process fair. We have a file full of letters to the Mayor, memos, recommendations about criteria for funding, principles for planning, and testimony provided at public hearings. But our perceived influence in the process was deeply resented by those initial opponents of the plan. The voices in this group weren't necessarily major ones in the community, but they were persistent, and had some credibility with the Mayor.

The fact that Coleman had a white director – me – became the subject of much of the attack. Coleman was labeled by some as a "white organization trying to decide what is best for minority children." All I can say is that this isn't true. Coleman's main goal has been to maximize public participation in the Prop J process.

It should be noted that this particular dynamic was not entirely new for Coleman. Despite its multi-racial board and staff, with an Anglo director, Coleman has intermittently been treated with suspicion by some. The perception that we had (or even wanted) control over the funds greatly escalated the tension. Certainly Coleman had been tremendously visible throughout the process. But it was never up to us to distribute funds, and we had no intention of applying for them. Still, the misperceptions were toxic. The risk of 'perceived power' is that it not only exaggerates the truth, it often distorts it.

When the tables were turned after the first year of funding, it almost seemed as if the Mayor's office was trying to purge us from institutional memory. There was no longer any public acknowledgement of Coleman's role in Proposition J; the agency's planning documents were dismissed by the Mayor's staff; previous Children's Budgets (relevant to the new planning process) were never consulted or mentioned. The first-year Children's Services Plan and the directory of agencies funded, both items which were associated with Coleman, were never mentioned by the group discussing the second-year plan!

I believe that one of the hardest lessons of all has been the almost inevitable backlash against the advocates. We had accomplished something remarkable. But remarkable change doesn't occur easily, and much of the pain of that change gets turned back on those who ushered it in. When the change is tied to money, the situation is even more volatile.

The tensions that are occuring in San Francisco are going on all the time in every city in America, yet they're almost never talked about openly in the policymaking arena. If all the turmoil and struggle in San Francisco ultimately enables us to talk openly about race and other fundamental issues related to true reform of children's services, we would certainly say it was worth all the pain.

Some say that San Francisco was not ready to make best use of such a dramatic policy change. But it may very well be the other way around – first the policy changes, then the system gets ready. In any case, Coleman's survey of agencies participating in the Prop J experiment indicates a high level of awareness of all of the implementation problems, but a continued high level of optimism about the future.

And indeed, progress, in small steps is occuring. Not just in new programs being funded and children's services being saved – but in a new commitment to collaboration and a unified vision.

Until the passage of Prop J, Coleman was an 'outside' advocacy group, doing the major planning for children's services in the City. The new law required the city to institutionalize this process. This has meant a loss of control for Coleman (we wanted to let go, but we still occasionally find the loss difficult), and it has meant that the new City-administered efforts will go through inevitable growing pains. Because there is now money available, many more people are paying attention to children's services. This has led to tension, but in time it may also be positive because there will be increased involvement in children's services.

We anticipate that tensions will diminish when San Francisco has stronger leadership, and the challenge of real tasks begins to overtake the rhetorical debate. We also expect positive results from the shift in national policies reflected in the 1992 Presidential election. In the end, we hope that having plans for children's services institutionalized within the city government of San Francisco will improve this city's capacity to serve its children; we're trying to keep perspective on the often faltering steps toward that end.

Too Much Bureaucracy?

A major criticism of Proposition J was that funds would be used merely to expand bureaucracy. Fairly early into the implementation process, a basic philosophic question arose: should the funds be channeled through the existing City departments, or should the newly empowered MOCYF administer the allocation and oversight process?

Coleman's Children's Budget process had always requested that new programs be administered through the appropriate City agency, and that the central office for children handle only planning and coordination. Nevertheless when the issue arose, even the Coleman Board of Directors was ambivalent on the subject:

- The anti-City department folks wanted a free-standing office for children that had complete control over the administration of the funds. They didn't trust the City departments to spend the funds as specified, nor did they think the departments would be accountable to the public.
- The other side argued that creating a new bureaucracy to monitor millions of dollars of programs wasn't necessary because City departments were already established for that purpose. Also, keeping the administration of the fund separate from the administration of other children's services would result in a lost opportunity to more fully integrate new children's services into the existing structure. In the long run Proposition J would have less impact on the overall children's services delivery system.

"When I came in as Director of the Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Their Families a year ago, this Office faced a tremendous challenge. A Children's Services Plan had already been set in place by the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors, but this office had no permanent staff to plan for the allocation of the first year's funds. Although this caused a delay of six months, the programs are now up and running. The Collaborative Planning Committee has laid the foundation for future planning for the Children's Fund. Its work has been timely, given the budget cuts at all levels. At a time when the City is facing the greatest deficit since the Depression, this planning body can help us re-tool and move forward with a renewed vision for our children."

Anthony Lincoln
MOCYF Director

Without strong advocacy to oppose it, the course of least resistance prevailed – MOCYF wanted total control over the money, and that meant establishing its own bureaucracy for administering it. One million of the $13 million Fund would go to staff MOCYF. It would have been considerably more had Coleman and others not raised objections. The Mayor's office maintained that less than 8% administrative costs was more than reasonable. Others disagreed, claiming much of it was money that could have been going to direct services.

Coleman Fights for an Independent Evaluation

The issue around which Coleman has been most publicly forceful and has continued to advocate is the need for an independent evaluation of Proposition J. Without an independent evaluation, the misperceptions continue and in-fighting among children's service providers and children's advocacy groups will persist. Coleman will continue to be seen as an agency with power over these funds – power it simply does not have. The agency convened a meeting of local foundations who were enthusiastic about funding an evaluation. Despite being approached on many occasions by foundations, the Mayor's office has resisted the idea. Coleman worked with a member of the Board of Supervisors to introduce legislation urging the Mayor to support an independent evaluation, which was passed unanimously, but initially ignored by the Mayor. Coleman remains hopeful that enough pressure can be generated to get the Mayor's office to come around.

A Foundation-Style Process

Rather than use Prop J as an opportunity to establish new public policy, it has become primarily a funding source, operating much like a foundation. This is not all bad; in the absence of leadership and specific planning, innovation has come from the applicants for the fund instead of its overseers. In fact, extraordinary creativity and coordination has emerged as a result of the Prop J process.

The Camp Fire Boys and Girls is serving four times more children than it initially planned as a result of its extensive outreach and collaboration with neighborhood groups in one of the city's most violent and underserved areas. The number of youths in Juvenile Hall was reduced shortly after an innovative collaboration between a citywide criminal justice alternative sentencing agency and a neighborhood community center. An entirely new girls' leadership development agency has been started, stimulated in part by the availability of Prop J funds.

The City has a new family resource center in a very high-risk area, and the program is well utilized and effective. Two new teen centers were established; a third was greatly enhanced. The Department of Public Health 'outstationed' maternal and child health clinics in the most underserved parts of the City. This represents only a portion of the new and expanded programs that resulted from the first year of funding.

In a survey of all agencies that had received Prop J dollars conducted six months after the funding cycle began, most reported very positive benefits to their programs. The agencies projected serving approximately 10,000 children during the first year, and had already reached about 50% of their targets.

Some were able to eliminate waiting lists, others reported improving the quality of programs, and others reported improvements in inter-agency cooperation. The agencies reported an additional $2 million that had been leveraged from the state and federal government and various private sources as a result of the new Prop J dollars. This represented a 40% increase in the funds available!

The planning for Prop J applications brought many organizations together for the first time, others for a renewed effort. Agencies serving homeless families only received a small grant, but their interagency planning process has been strengthened as a result of putting the grant together. A number of public/private partnerships were forged.

A Goal of Comprehensive Planning

Despite the tension and the power struggles, there is still great hope for realizing the potential of Proposition J. A new planning committee of approximately 35 members includes representatives from public agencies, mayoral appointees, and neighborhood agency representatives.

This group plans to collect data, prioritize needs, and develop program and policy recommendations for all children's services in the city. The Director of MOCYF also hopes to have the committee develop objective outcome measures for children's services. He believes that he has brought together a diverse group of key players (including Coleman) who have the potential to develop a new consensus on children's services. Knowing that there will be many ups and downs in this process, Coleman continues to hope that this is possible. (As of this writing, the committee has proceeded, but with difficulty. The political pressure applied behind closed doors about racial equity in funding isn't easily brought to an open discussion. And a group comprising many who seek funding from Proposition J tends to avoid establishing priorities, an essential aspect of good planning.)

Baseline Budget

One of the least talked about, but strongest results of Proposition J is the elimination of the annual battles to prevent budget cuts in children's services.

It's almost unbelievable what happened the first year the Children's Amendment went into effect. There were so few budget battles to fight. We were like the Maytag repairman. Here we were in the "worst budget crisis ever" and children's services were protected. Sometimes I think it was just dumb luck, sometimes brilliant planning. And then the next year – it was again the "worst budget crisis ever" and children's services were still protected. It was a miracle!

The City Controller conscientiously implemented the baseline children's budget mandated in the proposition. It took months of work, but finally each public agency analyzed its children's expenditures by line items. This means that the City has two budgets: its regular budget and its children's budget. Children's services are now easy to track.

"San Francisco created a baseline children's budget. That means we can't reduce expenditures. The children's baseline has its own separate section at the end of each department budget. This flags the fact that the department must meet mimimum guidelines. This is one of the only protected programs in the general fund budget. We [the Controller's office] were asked to figure it out, and we did. It worked out reasonably successfully, because no one has challenged our work. I believe we succeeded in carrying out the intent of the law."

John Madden
Deputy Controller of San Francisco

"Prior to Prop J, if we as a typical city service could provide the very basics, well, that was the ultimate goal. And the constant fight was just to remain whole enough to keep rec centers open so kids would have a place to go. Now we dare to think creatively and innovatively, to say, 'We're open and the kids are here, so what can we do to improve their lives?'"

Joel Robinson
San Francisco Superintendent of Recreation

There have been ongoing negotiations over what will undoubtedly be endless details and differences of opinion. To determine which services would not qualify for ten-year protection in the children's baseline budget, the Controller used as his litmus test the wording of the amendment: "services which benefit children incidentally, or as members of a larger population including adults."

That meant that funding for swimming pools was not part of the baseline children's budget in his judgement. Nor was funding for general City clinics, something we unsuccessfully protested. On the other hand, funds for children's librarians, most recreation center costs, pediatric clinics and wards, and pediatricians, all child welfare services, homeless family shelters, delinquency prevention, and much more, were included. All in all, we felt that the concept was implemented in a fair manner.

Of course, the Mayor is extremely frustrated by the children's baseline budget. The City has faced the two worst budget crises of its history in the two years since the proposition passed. In 1993 the strains were so great that the Department of Public Health attempted to "raid" the Proposition J fund to underwrite several children's programs they claimed were developed after the proposition passed. We knew efforts to circumvent the law were inevitable. But even in this case, the compromise reached was that there would be only a one-year use of Proposition J funds to underwrite long-promised HIV prevention and substance abuse services for youth. There is no doubt the programs are needed, but they had been planned (though not funded) prior to the passage of Proposition J, and fell into one of those inevitable loopholes.

City department personnel in children's services are ecstatic about the children's baseline budget and believe their programs would have been decimated without it.

There is an almost inevitable backlash to Prop J, particularly within City departments. It's hard for people in adult mental health, for instance, to see their programs cut dramatically while children's mental health programs go untouched. Some health workers in the children's field say it's time for a second "inoculation" for the public; they're asking that Coleman conduct a public information campaign reminding people about the plight of children and the need for children's services.

National Impact

Despite the somewhat rocky course in San Francisco, Proposition J has already had an impact on child advocacy around the country. Many communities have taken note, and at least a half dozen are considering a similar strategy. Coleman has received hundreds of inquiries for information from just about every state in the country. If a critical mass of communities in America finds a way to voice support and mandate protections for children, the impact will be felt at the national level. There is probably no more effective strategy Coleman could undertake than to enable other American cities to mount campaigns for children.

7 Lessons Learned

Ultimately the greatest challenge for Coleman since the passage of Prop J has been to not rest... to continue to advocate with innovation and energy for the rights of San Francisco's children... and to encourage and inspire other children's advocates across the country to continue to fight on behalf of all the children who haven't the power to fight for themselves.

- True reform requires ongoing advocacy to assure that the intent of reform legislation is carried out. Bureaucracies will always find a way to circumvent good intentions, even those related to the welfare of children. Advocates should watch out for power struggles that divert attention from providing services, elected officials satisfying political needs rather than providing quality leadership, and bureaucratic inertia that simply holds up needed action.

- The role of the advocacy organization in monitoring reform legislation involves balancing the roles of adviser, booster, and critic. There is probably no one right way to do this.

- The primary challenge to the leaders of the children's movement is to create new forums for the public to support children. The forums that must be created should utilize the power of children as an issue (i.e., that the majority of Americans care about children and that there is no argument that will be made in public against investing in children). But the forums must also understand the limitations of the children's constituency. The financially powerful are not part of the children's constituency, and the majority of strong children's supporters are not in a position to participate in traditional lobbying and politics.

- New organizing tools must capture the public's inherent support for children and allow children's constituents to voice their concerns within the realities of their day-to-day lives.

- Reformers rarely get "thank you's". Reform requires dramatic shifts in business-as-usual; it requires new players taking ownership of policies and tasks they had previously scorned. It is unsettling for all concerned, and the reformer often bears the brunt of people's frustrations.

"The stated goal of Coleman-sponsored Youth Making A Change (Y-MAC) is... to 'help teens get more active in making changes in their communities.' During the 1992 election, Y-MAC and Coleman organized a Youth Vote project that mobilized 8,000 high school students to vote, not only their presidential preferences, but also on priorities for spending Children's Fund money. Y-MAC members take an active political role, attending meetings of the Board of Supervisors and lobbying on issues related to youth."

"Teens in the Trenches"
By Sarah Skaggs
a Bay Guardian
education supplement,
August, 1993

8

Coleman's Dilemmas and Opportunities

Epilogue

New Pressures on Coleman

We never thought that our greatest victory also might cause our greatest anguish. Before the final vote tally was in, we began to realize that life for Coleman had changed. We had pulled off a significant political and policy maneuver. We were now perceived as powerful, and that meant that some people cozied up to us, others resented us, and still others wanted to do us in. We were a new kind of threat, not only to the political establishment, but also to the children's establishment. Were we going to try to control the money? Were we going to diminish other child advocates' clout in City Hall? It was clear that we would now be subject to a new kind of scrutiny, and greater opposition, as well as greater support.

For us, certain questions remain: How do we keep the momentum going? Shall we operate behind-the-scenes or as a loud public voice in monitoring Prop J? Will we be able to be honest advocates with such a heavy stake in Prop J? What should our relationship be to service providers (now applicants for money)? How much should we focus on Prop J in contrast to other issues? How shall we use our new power? How can we pass the power on to others? And, finally, what to do for an encore?

Comments from Recipients of First Year Prop J Funds:

"We've started an innovative process which helps schools find mental health agency partners."

"We've been able to add hundreds of kids to our youth employment program... from every neighborhood in the City."

"Our program has allowed mothers to go to work, since they can now be assured of free child care."

"The race politics around Prop J is poison."

"I'm just pleased that kids with disabilities have been included in the Prop J funding plan."

Coleman barely had time to celebrate before it was in the throes of sorting out these questions. At a special retreat for Board and Staff, the following policy decisions were agreed upon:

- Coleman's most important task was to build on the momentum created by Proposition J, and to develop a consistent, effective, citizen-dominated constituency that could be an ongoing advocacy voice in San Francisco. The agency's heightened visibility, the public's increased awareness and sense of empowerment, and a new cadre of activists for kids would provide the building blocks for such an effort. Coleman would focus its efforts particularly (but not exclusively) on bringing the voices of parents and youth into the child policy-making arena.
- Concomitant with the above goal, Coleman would distance itself from service providers, both because the agency's aim was to bring other voices into the children's arena, and because it didn't want to get in the middle of struggles over money.
- Coleman would aggressively monitor the implementation of Proposition J, and attempt to influence the policy decisions made by the Mayor's office to assure that the implementation was consistent with the intent of the Amendment.

Monitoring Proposition J

Coleman didn't anticipate the intensity and all-consuming nature of monitoring the implementation of Proposition J, partly because of the agency's enormous investment in seeing that Prop J went well, but also because the Amendment posed such new problems for the City and for the agency as advocates.

Guiding principles. Shortly after the election, Coleman recommended principles based on input received during the campaign to guide the implementation of the Children's Fund:

- Focus on prevention and early intervention.
- Distribute resources equitably to children in need throughout the City, providing services to the largest number of children possible.
- Target new services to children at risk of failing to acquire the skills necessary to become productive adults.
- Provide services in the most accessible, culturally relevant, and neighborhood-based manner.
- Improve parity in the service delivery system so that programs for girls receive equitable funding.
- Maximize community input into the planning process.
- Maintain rigorous quality standards for agencies and programs receiving funds.
- Use existing administrative systems to minimize additional administrative costs.
- Use funds as a way to restructure City departments to maximize efficiency and improve public service.

• Use Prop J funds as a means to improve the community of San Francisco, and not to focus exclusively on the needs of particular neighborhoods and the service providers who operate in those neighborhoods.

Many of the principles were ultimately adopted.

Early opportunities for input. Initially, Coleman had the opportunity for enormous input into the Prop J process.

We were conflicted about how much input and involvement we should have. Some Board members pushed to see us involved almost daily, even recommending people for staff and advisory positions in the Mayor's office; others thought we should limit input to a few carefully worded policy recommendations and purposely remain distant. Then came the questions: Should Coleman Board members serve on the new citizen advisory committee to implement Proposition J? How could they be both objective monitors and participants? Would they get co-opted? Did they want to lose an opportunity for input?

Coleman decided to have Board, but not staff members on the advisory committee. These Board members would function as individuals, not as Coleman representatives.

Then came the much harder issues for an advocacy agency, particularly as the process progressed. Coleman had to figure out whether the glass was half-empty or half-full, and to what extent the agency ought to critique the shortcomings of the Prop J implementation process. More important was the choice about making criticisms public, or negotiating behind closed doors with the Mayor's Office to make improvements. If the agency went public with its concerns, there were matters of degree: how public it would go, and with what level of concern. Criticisms could be shared with colleagues in the field, or through the agency's growing mailing list, or via the press. Coleman could voice concerns directly, or attempt to organize large protests. Both Board and staff were extremely ambivalent and often conflicted as the agency attempted to address these questions.

There were a lot of liabilities for children in having the proponents of Proposition J act as the major critics of the Amendment. Having the public view Prop J as problematic as soon as it started was a double-edged sword. It might have created pressure on the Mayor; but it might also create a backlash against Proposition J. Coleman was acutely aware that once criticisms get aired in the public arena, subtleties and shades of gray are entirely lost. In the eyes of the press, and therefore the general public, Proposition J would either be going well or going badly – nothing in between.

This dilemma caused months of conflict on the Coleman Board, and sometimes conflict between staff and Board. Finally, after the strongest proponent of a don't-go-public-with-criticisms strategy left the Board, the conflict subsided. But the judgement call about Coleman's role is still an uneasy one.

In the two years following the passage of the Amendment, we adopted a middle-ground strategy. We had a number of meetings with the Mayor's staff to express concerns about implementation. We escalated to behind-the-scenes threats, having written private memos to the Mayor's staff, and even a confidential first-year report with 13 recommendations for the second year.

More Comments following First Year Prop J Funding:

"Prop J has really gotten the providers of services to homeless children to work together like never before."

"We need to focus funds on programs that serve kids, not ones that flex political muscle."

"I never thought I 'd say this, but being forced to work with two other agencies has made our program better."

"Neighborhoods that have clamored to have recreation services will now have them."

"Our success has been the collaboration's ability to pull providers together who otherwise never would have worked together. Non-traditional leadership has been fostered."

Coleman has also been somewhat ambiguous at many public hearings, expressing "concerns" about various documents prepared by the Mayor's Office, and offering constructive "recommendations" aloud, while never expressing forceful opposition or attempting to mobilize large groups of people to protest.

At the end of the first year of Proposition J, Coleman wrote an open letter to the public in some San Francisco neighborhood newspapers. The letter described the programs that had been funded, and the positive results of having prevented budget cuts. Coleman promised to continue its monitoring efforts and warned of potential problems, but the message remained positive.

Outcome takes time to measure. *Conclusions about the success or failure of a reform measure become clear only after time. It will probably be a full four years after the passage of Prop J before we feel comfortable asserting a forceful judgement, and, if necessary, engaging in public organizing to effect change. This is partly because it takes that long to determine whether something is working. But it is also because the judgement must be translated to the public, and the only translation that makes sense is the ultimate impact on the children of San Francisco. People don't rally around the need for professional planners or independent evaluations, or problems with RFPs. But they do rally around money going to a program that kids don't attend, or all the services being in one part of town, or children not receiving adequate supervision.*

Coleman is trying to monitor every program that is funded through Prop J. We've enlisted the help of graduate students and are conducting structured interviews with representatives of each program. The responses are coded for computer, and we'll be preparing regular reports for the public on the data collected.

Since the Campaign

The real focus of Coleman's work following the passage of Proposition J has been to build on the momentum created in the campaign, and to organize a political constituency comprised of ordinary citizens. The agency postulated that many people in San Francisco were now better informed about children's issues, and that a certain segment of the people who enthusiastically supported Proposition J could be involved in ongoing advocacy. While the election had been a dramatic event in establishing a new strategy, Coleman had to find a way to sustain this new strategy beyond the election. Often a ballot measure is the culmination of grassroots mobilizing. In this case, the agency wanted to use it to spearhead a new level of involvement.

Some of the efforts subsequent to the election include:

Creating the Kids Network. Twenty-five hundred people are now members of the Network. They receive a monthly newsletter with an advocacy action enclosed: a postcard to be sent, flier to be posted, or petition to circulate. A wide variety of issues have been dealt with through the Network. People have circulated petitions to maintain library services (they were maintained); sent postcards to prevent cuts in school crossing guards (there were no cuts); protested to the local paper about gun ads (the paper launched a series of articles and opinion columns on the issue, but retained the ads); and wrote the City's major corporations protesting their support for an anti-welfare initiative (one of the corporations discontinued support).

When San Francisco's most effective youth program was about to be cut, 500 members of the Kids Network protested. Despite this effort – the largest of its kind to occur in San Francisco in long a time – only 50% of the program's funding was restored. In a mailing, the Network identified local businesses that tried to have the City's school tax declared illegal. There were so many calls to these businesses to protest their action that the businesses mounted a counter-campaign in the City's major neighborhood newspaper. The newspaper carried two strong anti-Coleman editorials, and a barrage of letters and phone calls followed. Coleman realized that this was an inevitable result of having increased its power within the City. They were now an agency with, as the editorial put it, a "political agenda."

Through the Kids Network, Coleman has established a Children's Action Hotline, which consists of a tape recording, updated weekly, that identifies actions needed on behalf of children at the local, state, and federal levels in language that is simple and accessible to the average San Franciscan. The agency continues to refine its candidates' questionnaires on children's issues and its report cards on how City officials 'performed' on children's issues. In a postcard survey, members of the Network identified this report card as their most valuable publication.

Coleman has also sponsored a number of events for Kids Network members, including an annual dinner meeting, a press conference-demonstration in City Hall, and special perks at a concert in the park; created bumper stickers, refrigerator magnets, buttons and other items which help give people a sense of identity with the Network; and made available a variety of educational materials, including a parent guide to children's services, an information card with the phone numbers of relevant public officials, a video, and information reports on the needs of children.

Developing a comprehensive First Steps Project. As a new strategy to increase involvement in children's services, one hundred and fifty children's agencies are participating in the First Steps Directory. The Directory lists places to volunteer and donate, inspirational and educational material to stimulate citizen involvement, and realistic advocacy suggestions for the average citizen. Coleman will conduct a public education campaign to motivate people to order the Directory. The agency's thesis is that any type of involvement, whether donating a refrigerator to a group home or volunteering in the office of an agency or tutoring a child, will not only improve services for children, but will create more activists.

Writing a citizen guide on how to help children. Coleman leapt at the invitation by Harper, a San Francisco publishing company, to create this important tool for citizens. In writing the book, Coleman realized that most of its thinking had been about what children's policies were needed and what child advocates should do. The agency had spent very little time thinking about what most Americans should do. The book gave Coleman an opportunity to expand its thinking in precisely the direction it needed to go.

Expanding youth involvement. Coleman has come to believe that young people themselves must be a central part of an effective children's constituency, and has worked hard to strengthen the youth arm of its own agency. Youth Making A Change (Y-MAC) consists of 15 high school students from throughout San Francisco whose projects have focused on empowering a new youth constituency:

• **Youth Vote.** In November of 1992, Coleman conducted a youth vote in San Francisco's public high schools. In collaboration with the school district and civic organizations (League of Women Voters and the Junior League), Coleman worked for six months to develop a curriculum, resource material, and a mock ballot handbook for an election to determine what programs young people wanted to see funded by Proposition J dollars. The election was held prior to the official election, with the same type of voting machines used in the city's election. Six thousand youths ranked teen centers, services for the homeless, sex and AIDS education. At Coleman's initiative, the Board of Supervisors urged the Mayor to use these priorities in the development of the second-year plan, and that has happened.

• **Youth speak-out.** In collaboration with several other youth groups, Coleman organized a full day of youth presentations on a wide range of issues, from race discrimination to school curriculum to AIDS. The speak-out received considerable media attention, and was attended by some of the city's school board members, supervisors, and staff from the Mayor's Office. It resulted in a proposal by Y-MAC for an official youth forum within city government.

• **Other youth projects.** Y-MAC sponsored a citywide conference for youth interested in advocacy. Its members monitor the media's portrayal of young people, appear on radio and TV shows, are interviewed by newspapers, give testimony at hearings, and attend civic events to learn about advocacy strategies or represent their points of view of youth.

8 *Future Directions*

Coleman Advocates for Children sees great hope for the youth of San Francisco. Citizens have made clear their support for future generations.

Hopes for San Francisco

San Francisco has embarked on an exciting ten-year adventure to improve the plight of its children. Proposition J has ensured that some resources to make this possible are available, and that some of the impetus to make improvements will go beyond the legislation itself.

The goals of Proposition J – to protect existing funding for children and to increase the level of services for children – will very likely be met. Most of the services funded will address many unmet needs of all the City's children and youth. Thousands of children will benefit. New, creative programs will be developed.

Whether Proposition J will realize its full potential depends on:

- The leadership of the Mayor's Office;
- Healing the divisive politics surrounding any funding initiative;
- Developing a collective vision among all stakeholders about a children's service system, and developing the skills to make that vision a reality;
- Building a strong parent-and-youth-based constituency.

Appendix

1. Creating a Children's Budget

A "Children's Budget" has come to mean a document that child advocates submit to policy makers to promote either the reallocation and/or expansion of public resources for children. For some, such as the Los Angeles Roundtable for Children, it has meant an analysis of how money is currently spent on children. For others, such as the Association for the Children of New Jersey, the budget itemized recommended allocations for children's programs, and served as an alternative to the official budgets.

The Children's Budgets developed by Coleman Advocates went beyond documenting what was spent on children in San Francisco, and beyond identifying programs that should be retained or expanded. The agency proposed specific, new policy directions; a comprehensive rationale for these policies; and a coherent set of (often new) programs to implement these policies. Coleman also proposed funding sources for the entire budget package. (It should be noted that Coleman's Children's Budget efforts never included education beause in California, education is primarily funded by the State, and is not controlled at the City level.) In this way, an innovative Children's Budget model with the potential to be an effective tool for advocacy and planning was born.

Community Outreach

As the development of the Children's Budget evolved, Coleman was able to expand ways to solicit community input. Efforts to expand thinking, get new ideas, ensure support, and, simultaneously, to 'spread the word' included questionnaires; focus groups; presentations in high school classrooms to gather youth input; attendance at political clubs and neighborhood meetings to solicit ideas; interviews with key personnel in City departments; and holding open, well advertised strategy meetings. Hundreds of diverse organizations and community leaders participated, including the Junior League, gay and lesbian political clubs, business organizations, neighborhood clubs, and church groups.

In preparing the initial San Francisco Children's Budget in 1988, Coleman relied on a dozen officially and unofficially produced reports on the problems of San Francisco's children. It also used longstanding recommendations of many neighborhood coalitions to supplement the input from conference attendees and follow-up caucus groups. Drafts of the budget were circulated to community leaders and opinion-makers throughout San Francisco's network of neighborhoods. Contrary to what might have been anticipated, results showed very little controversy about the programs to be proposed in the budget. Even later, when budget requests had to be pared down, as long as there were proposals in each of the major service areas, there was surprising consensus among diverse groups.

Refining the Children's Budget Process

Community outreach had an increasing effect on the Children's Budget. As Coleman searched for community groups to involve in the effort, the agency discovered a growing number of parent-initiated grassroots efforts organized out of people's homes, primarily addressing the drug crisis and community violence among youth. After identifying almost a dozen such groups, Coleman convened several meetings among the groups themselves, and developed a proposal for grants to "neighborhood-based peer and parent support programs." These groups all felt they needed small amounts of money to sustain their efforts so that supplies and other expenses wouldn't continue to come from their members' own pockets. This proposal became a centerpiece of Coleman's subsequent Children's Budget. While not immediately funded by the City, it became the basis of San Francisco's federally funded drug prevention program, and within six months of the idea's inception, a $500,000 grants program for these groups had been established! That program is still in place, and has spawned many neighborhood empowerment groups.

Five hundred copies of the first Children's Budget were mailed to City leaders, leaders in the children's field, and key children's service providers. Hundreds more were disseminated upon request. It became a significant planning tool for many non-profit organizations (one of the secondary benefits of a Children's Budget).

Building ad-hoc coalitions with key allies. San Francisco's child population is probably the most diverse and multi-cultural in the country. African-American children (approximately 15% of the child population in San Francisco) are, by most standard measurements, at a high risk for infant mortality, needing foster care or special education, ending up in the juvenile justice system, etc. Coleman worked in conjunction with the African-American Community Agenda Coalition, an organization of grassroots activists concerned about youth violence in their neighborhoods, to incorporate into

their work a specific budget for African American children. The agency pointed out how elements of the overall Children's Budget could benefit African-American children, and identified several programs, such as residential drug treatment, that could specifically focus on African-American youth. As a result, two African-American Supervisors on the Board at that time became more interested in the Children's Budget, and pushed hard for the programs affecting their communities.

Coleman organized a broad-based health coalition to urge the Mayor to spend a significant amount of the City's share of tobacco tax dollars – The Coalition for the Proper Expenditure of Tobacco Tax Funds – on new programs for children. The agency knew it would be more effective in pushing for this funding source if it did so as part of a more comprehensive health agenda that included AIDS programs, services for refugees, the homeless, and other low-income groups. Health proposals were worked out in collaboration with the broad committee that was formed in order to make sure that all concerned could back each other's proposals. The Children's Budget proposals, health outreach teams, and drug treatment for mothers with children, were, of course, key parts of the package. As a result of the coalition, Coleman received more publicity and political support for its proposals.

Working with City departments. As time passed, Coleman added an important element to its process: negotiations with City departments. This served a double purpose: 1) it was an opportunity to test the Children's Budget proposals and, if need be, to modify them to be more compatible with other plans of the department; and 2) it provided an additional forum to try to get some new children's services inserted into the City's own budget.

An exciting moment came when we received a call telling us that the City's Social Services Budget was to be heard at the Social Services Commission the following day. (It had not been advertised, so even though we tried to follow every budget hearing, we had been in the dark about this one.) We began making calls, and within several hours we had mobilized a very articulate and persistent group of about eight grandmothers caring for young children to come to the meeting. The grandmothers' testimony about their need for respite care took everyone by surprise. Immediately the Commission insisted that respite care be added to the department's budget. Department staff were ordered to come up with a detailed proposal, and insert it into the budget. That year it was one of the few new services for children that was funded. This just illustrates how flukey budget advocacy can be.

Formalizing the Children's Budget Coalition. By 1990, when Coleman began a third Children's Budget, the agency felt it was important to formalize a coalition of children's organizations that would submit specific proposals. Fifty diverse and representative children's service organizations joined the coalition that ultimately sponsored the Budget, including the PTA, Grandmothers Who Care, child care centers, community coalitions, youth-serving agencies, and the local welfare rights organization.

A Difficult Balancing Act for the Lead Agency

While the San Francisco Children's Budget was Coleman-driven, the need for strong leadership and flexibility was balanced with the need for collective ownership of the concept and genuine widespread support for the project. The efforts to gather input, convene groups to develop specific proposals, and have organizations review the drafts led to numerous endorsements. People seemed quite satisfied with having a say, but letting the project be Coleman-initiated.

Seeing the work through. Within Coleman, the Children's Budget was definitely seen as a Coleman project. Understandably, other children's service providers in the coalition were preoccupied with the work of their own agencies and their particular budget needs. That they were invested at all in the examination of a Children's Budget was a positive reflection on them and on the importance of coalition-building.

It's a delicate balance – Assuming a leadership role and being able to control the advocacy process, and also having it be truly based on a genuine consensus of the major players and stakeholders. I think it always depends a great deal on the personalities involved. But in our case, for a number of years we were able to keep a very high level of trust among a critical mass of people who supported this, and then, of course, if we'd have a success, that made it easier. But for the budget process, we went to extraordinary lengths to have a community consensus-building process and we gathered enormous amounts of input from everybody who would have a stake in it. After the big citywide conference that introduced the idea of a Children's Budget, we broke up into many small groups and asked, "What do you think should be in it?" We held follow-up meetings, and then sent out questionnaires, and had focus groups, and then sent out drafts and asked for input, often sitting down with the draft itself...so that even though we did the writing, it was based on a careful response to what we heard others say the priorities were. We didn't think we could get the support and win the kinds of things we were going after unless it really did reflect consensus. But if we had waited for a formal consensus process – well, I have seen lots of advocacy efforts die because the process is just interminable...paralyzing, really. If we had waited for the group to write it collectively, or to vote on every single sentence, it simply would never have happened. I think people bought into it because we were really careful to make sure that each round reflected what they wanted it to say.

Once we submitted it to the City, we felt that we were the advocacy experts, and could really develop a strong advocacy strategy and not have to take a vote on whether to go to the media or to provide testimony or to discuss what the focus of the press conference should be – I mean we had meetings and got input, but ultimately we made those kinds of decisions. And if we hadn't done a good job, I think we would have lost our credibility immediately.

But we were able to be much more aggressive than I think many children's advocates have been – at least in San Francisco – because we weren't being funded by the City or through the policies we were asking to see changed. So we had a lot of latitude. We were also able to use the advocacy skills we'd developed over the years.

Advocates fight for a cause – in this case, kids, and in this case, we were fighting against the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to

get them to change the budget process. The advocates' only tools and skills are issuing reports, researching data, making policy proposals, using the media, negotiating with public officials, holding public hearings, testifying before public bodies, drafting legislation, and mobilizing the community. Coleman was equipped to be independent and to fight aggressively because we didn't have any conflicts of interest issues to contend with.

Without the flexibility to call the shots, it would have been impossible to be as effective as we were. In many instances, the effectiveness of Coleman's advocacy depended on one person (often myself because I'm the Director of the organization) knowing everything about what was happening. Allowing that person to make quick judgement calls was absolutely necessary.

The balance seemed to work well for us. We were free to advocate as we saw fit, yet there was sufficient buy-in so that many groups felt the budget reflected their priorities. Thus, supporters could often be quickly mobilized when needed. It is important for child advocates to realize that while there are many enthusiastic endorsers of the cause initially (powerful individuals, labor, business, other public interest groups), allies will not necessarily put their clout on the line to have children's services funded when those services need to be pitted against other items. Allies often fade from the scene when you move to budgetary allocations.

Advocacy tactics. Tracking the budget process, negotiating with decisionmakers, presenting testimony, organizing letter-writing campaigns – these are all skills child advocates can master well. Some of the advocacy tactics Coleman engaged in were fairly typical:

- **Sending notices** to the agency's mailing list requesting supporters to call and write to the Mayor, department heads, and supervisors – the Children's Budget package included prewritten postcards to the Mayor and the Board;
- **Orchestrating hearings** at key points in the budget process, making sure that a large enough group of people appeared when important decisions were to be made, and even more people when Coleman's items were the only ones on the agenda;
- **Meeting regularly** with legislators, their staffs, and high-level administrators in the Mayor's Office, and making sure carefully organized representatives of the constituency of that particular politician were present;
- **Submitting editorials** to major newspapers, neighborhood papers, and even one to the business paper (recommending a "pro-business tax" to support youth employment programs), as well as opinion messages that were aired on TV and radio;
- **Seeking official endorsements** of a children's budget from one of the two major local newspapers, two of the four local TV stations, and the predominant local news radio station;
- **Keeping information** and meetings going at a steady pace during the several critical months while budget policy was being made.

It may not be necessary to undergo everything Coleman went through to gain inspiration to mount a Children's Amendment-type campaign – I certainly hope not!

One reason for preparing this document is to allow others to learn from Coleman's experiences without necessarily going through the same steps. There are, however, some elements of budget advocacy which must be undertaken before an organization attempts a charter amendment-type strategy.

- Document the problems of your community's children, the general level of expenditures for children, and the types of new services that are needed.
- Develop a moderate level of consensus among those involved in children's issues about services needed.
- Document the failure of local government to respond adequately to needs of children (which doesn't mean that they must have failed to respond to a Children's Budget or to as aggressive an effort as Coleman conducted).
- Develop credibility on children's issues with policy makers, the press, and the service provider community.

The Budget Process and Accountability

Creating a budget is a complex, difficult process, often requiring a high level of expertise. Public comment is often perceived by policy-makers as a necessary annoyance. And in some instances, public scrutiny minimizes political courage in making difficult choices. But the lack of public scrutiny means that a child advocate's greatest weapon – the threat of public exposure – is difficult to wield. The press, and even the most persistent advocates, often miss those few public moments when the priorities are really set. The true budget priorities of any politician (what they really bargained away and what they really fought to preserve) rarely come to light.

Because the budget process is usually part of the reason that the budget status quo is maintained, it can become a legitimate, and even important, focus for children's advocates. Demands for greater public access can be an integral part of a Children's Budget campaign. As a result of Coleman editorials and protest letters to City departments about access, four City departments modified their budget-making process and increased community input. The Mayor conducted several community meetings prior to developing a budget, and established a special community advisory committee on the budget (with child advocates as members).

Lessons Learned

Coleman learned many lessons – the painful way – throughout the budget process. As stated in "Confronting City Hall," some of these seem obvious enough, but they were made relevant to the agency in significant ways over the course of the three years spent fighting for a Children's Budget. Perhaps some brief discussion here will save other children's advocates time, energy, money, and even heartache.

• Children's advocates can play hardball, too.

Budget politics is hardball. For children's advocates that means no longer being 'nice guys,' but rather being comfortable playing tough, even with friends. I suppose no one's angry at you until you challenge the status quo. In many ways it was painful to lose my innocence about this, but it also helped me become a better-equipped, more 'grown-up' advocate.

This proved to be a painful lesson for us at Coleman. Because our cause is perceived as just, we were used to having people admire our commitment. The 'good' people in City Hall liked to see themselves as our friends, and certain legislators liked to be seen as being in the forefront of children's issues. But as our campaign for real reform and meaningful reallocation of resources wore on, our so-called 'friends' realized they couldn't deliver without major disruptions of the status quo. There was a real personal toll – relationships suffered, and it was, for me, deeply painful.

When we attacked the Mayor for ignoring our second Children's Budget, his Budget Director (a friend and social worker) became enraged. He was convinced that I was considering a run for Mayor and was, out to undermine the future candidacy of the current Mayor. When we insisted that the Board of Supervisors had not acted adequately on our proposals and instead went to the press, we were chastised and ridiculed publicly. When we sent out a newsletter criticizing the General Manager of the Department of Social Services and the President of the Social Services Commission for holding their annual budget hearing with virtually no public outreach beyond the legal requirement, these two friends were angered and surprised that we – who were well informed about their budget – dared to criticize them on behalf of others. Each of these tactics in fact resulted in some level of success for our cause, but there's no question there was personal pain involved.

• Kids are their own best sales pitch.

Children's advocates have potential opportunities to make their case that those representing more entrenched and traditional causes do not. After all, children are very compelling. Almost everyone can understand the urgent needs of children when confronted directly by the children themselves. Coleman never missed an opportunity to make images of children visible. Pictures of children appeared on huge bus shelter signs; day care centers were frequent sites for press events; every event at City Hall was crawling with kids, no pun intended. In short, kids were featured prominently in the 'campaign' for a children's budget, and as it progressed, more and more children were brought into the arena. Often these were children from community agencies, or the children of Coleman Board members. This included, as mentioned earlier, organizing a youth speak-out; youth attending meetings with

policy-makers; parents bringing their kids to hearings; even a children's version of the Budget, complete with the concepts in children's words accompanied by children's drawings.

The children and young people we included in our activities were extremely articulate, often moving in their efforts to convince policy-makers to fund services for them. In fact, one legislator begged us to stop bringing the youth to public hearings because it was so difficult to say "no" to them. Of course that plea only pushed us harder to make children visible. But Coleman also learned not to limit all strategies to traditional lobbying techniques. When the City's Budget Analyst prepared a report the agency didn't like, we prepared an alternative report, replicating exactly the format and style, and simply changing the content. When pictures of earthquake-shattered homes featured prominently in all papers, Coleman took pictures of pre-earthquake shattered homes of the poorest children, and maintained they looked just as bad. When we wanted to underline our message about the unmet needs of San Francisco's children, we brought Santa Claus and a group of children to put their wish-list at the foot of the Mayor's Christmas tree and sing carols to the Mayor in four different languages.

• The media forced Coleman to up the ante.

The media is accustomed to covering social problems, and is generally willing to cover children's issues long before politicians are willing to make them a priority. The media can also get the message to the public, which is the basis of any advocate's influence in the political process. Using the media is often the only way to push moral arguments, which have little impact when held behind closed doors at private meetings. One story in the paper about support for a particular program was sometimes equal to dozens of meetings, letters, phone calls, and public testimony.

The media can be an ally, but it is also fickle. It tires of issues previously covered or no longer 'hot.' This poses problems since budget battles are never short; they are long and tedious, and rarely consistently press worthy. Often, just when a cause most needs the punch that the press can offer, they are finished with the issue and on to another one.

When the first Children's Budget was released, Coleman got press coverage simply by tacking up all of the proposals on butcher paper in the Rotunda of City Hall and having young people hand-deliver copies to the Mayor and President of the Board of Supervisors in black envelopes. The means of delivery and the power of the document itself garnered lots of public attention. By the second year, the issue of a Children's Budget

wasn't new and catchy enough for the press, so Coleman did its own ad campaign (part paid and part pro-bono) in order to get public attention.

Coleman staff posted devastating quotes from kids in trouble asking people to support a Children's Budget on telephone polls. Coleman also staged events, sponsored a speak-out in which young people gave dramatic testimonials about their problems, and staged guerilla theater in City Hall about children being an endangered species in San Francisco.

Do you know the story of Martin Luther? He was taking on the whole Catholic Church, mostly for its rampant corruption, and he posted his theses right on the church doors. I have to admit, he crossed my mind when we were taping up our proposals in the Rotunda of City Hall!

By the end of the three years of presenting children's budgets we had run out of ideas for getting public attention. Advocates must constantly find new angles to sustain a certain level of attention. This is extremely difficult. It continually taxes our ingenuity, and sometimes affects the substantive policy proposals we make. To get press attention, often you have to position your issue in the most controversy-laden way. It's as simple as that. You almost learn to say things in an inflammatory way because that's what the press will cover. It's terrible, but true.

Issues are only sexy in the media for a certain amount of time, which is usually a far briefer a period than their actual relevance. I think it's really unfortunate in many ways that news has become entertainment, and you have to provide good entertainment if you're going to get news coverage. Now you can either reject that and say, "I won't do it – I will be pure." Or say, "That's what it is and we've got to become part of it." I chose the latter.

• Advertising and advocacy have similarities.

Budget battles are most successful when they are targeted toward just a few symbolic issues that are immediately and politically 'sellable' to the public. This runs contrary to good policy-planning concepts because policy analysts believe in developing a comprehensive, interrelated agenda, with programs based on the most urgent needs of the highest-risk populations. But when such analysts find themselves in the throes of a political budget battle, the struggle to identify the few issues and programs that have the most 'sex appeal' with the public becomes the priority.

Budget advocacy must also resonate with the other major events or problems that are occurring in the community and are foremost on people's minds. Using these problems as themes – whether it be a drug crisis, a natural disaster, or concern about violence – can be a powerful tool.

• Drama and conflict get attention.

One of the most memorable events of the entire budget advocacy process was the press conference jointly sponsored by Coleman and the African-American Agenda Coalition to protest the City's inaction in preventing drug violence. Several dozen individuals stood together, all holding coffins representing youth who had been killed in drug violence in San Francisco the prior year. The group called on the Mayor to declare a state of emergency and to immediately implement a number of the key recommendations in the Children's Budget.

The two things that people probably remember most about the Children's Budget campaigns were the proposals to replace gardeners (from the Recreation and Parks Department) with recreation workers who would supervise at-risk kids; and to use the funds normally spent on box seats for City officials at sports events in order to generate funds for a sports program for children and youth. These ideas got strong press coverage and embodied the major conflict of the Children's Budget: children vs. business-as-usual.

Editorials were written on this. It was one of the few things the person on the street knew about the Children's Budget. Conservative columnists and political analysts began to take the effort seriously because Coleman was willing to talk in realistic terms about the City's overall funding picture and where funds for children's services might come from. The agency received a great deal of credit from the local political commentators and probably received a majority of the editorial endorsements because of this strategy.

• Newspaper ads.

One strategy recommended to Coleman was placing a full-page ad about the Children's Budget in the *San Francisco Chronicle,* the City's major newspaper. The ad contained arguments for the Budget, and coupons to be cut out and sent to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors to support the Budget. It cost approximately $15,000, and did not turn out to be cost-effective. The timing of the budget process is complex, and it's nearly impossible to time a single ad so that it can have a strong enough impact. An ad is also an extremely high-risk undertaking because where the ad actually appears within the paper is unpredictable, as are other national and local events occurring on the day the ad is scheduled to run. The greatest value of an ad is to convince politicians that the issue and its advocates are serious and capable of being aggressive.

• Some ideas carry a high price.

It's important to note that presenting concrete ideas about where to get funding is a fairly unusual strategy on the local level. (To our knowledge, no other advocates in San Francisco had done this.) The general response of advocates to the politician's question, "Where can we get the money?" is "You're the policy makers; that's your problem." We decided that we lived in a time when that was no longer a responsible answer, and that we needed to suggest higher and lower priorities. We did it partly to be responsible advocates, and partly because we knew that this would grab public attention, and give us credibility.

Despite all the problems, Coleman doesn't regret the strategy of identifying funds that should be reallocated to children, and would probably adopt it again under certain circumstances. It was considered very daring to break the taboo you learn in Advocacy 101, which is that when the policy makers ask where they're supposed to get the funding, you're not supposed to answer the question.

In the end, almost none of the ideas that we recommended were adopted. And most of the policy-makers didn't want to deal with those issues, but it did force them to pay attention to us, and it did make a statement about the seriousness of our efforts. But no organization should adopt this strategy without knowing and weighing all the pros and cons.

While ideas about reallocating resources can be the basis for a great deal of public attention, they carry a high price. Every "resource" that is to be reallocated is a piece of turf being protected by some special interest group that potentially becomes an opponent.

Coleman learned this lesson the day it released the first Children's Budget and received an angry call from the head of the gardeners' union. Despite meetings and negotiations between Coleman and the union, when the amendment measure was on the ballot – four and-a-half years later – the leadership of the union blocked the endorsement of the San Francisco Labor Council. Coleman also entered into an angry letter exchange with the Chief of the Fire Department. Some commissioners will never forgive the agency for attacking their box seat perks; some probation officers saw Coleman as the enemy; and some in the business community saw the agency as just one more group trying to drive business out of the City. Many of these perceptions continue to this day.

This is a dilemma for an advocacy organization! Some of the most powerful entities in the municipal arena are the City employee unions, and all too often child advocates find themselves at odds with these unions. The advocates see the disparity between what goes into police and fire departments compared to services for children, and the detrimental impact on chil-

dren when institutional services are retained instead of funding innovative community-based alternatives. Advocates know that some department budgets are extravagant in light of budget constraints and overwhelming social needs. And yet, they don't want to oppose fair benefits for workers, or make enemies.

Coleman purposely refrained from taking on personnel issues at the police department in our reallocation proposals, and the benefit was that the Police Officers Association became strong supporters of our Charter Amendment. On the other hand, advocates don't want to buy into myths about the overriding power of these unions, and really have no idea whether the passage of our charter amendment had any relation to the endorsement of the police.

Despite constantly recurring questions about where to get money for proposed programs, elected officials paid little heed to our suggestions. It may have been naive, but I really thought they would do some of it. They made some of the cuts, but they didn't reallocate those funds to children's services. In the end, politicians listen primarily to political power, and actually grew quite uncomfortable with our suggestions about how they could reallocate resources. Our ideas challenged them to make tough choices and to take on sacred cows. We realized that success had little to do with our ingenuity in finding funding, and almost everything to do with whether we were seen as a powerful constituency.

• Meetings with politicians may not be helpful.

One thing Coleman learned was that face-to-face negotiations with politicians are often unnecessary, and not particularly significant. That's because political decisions have little to do with reason or an exchange of ideas, and much more to do with perceived power. Real 'negotiations with politicians' occur in the press and in community forums. Despite the fact that the Mayor of San Francisco continually refused to meet directly with the children's budget advocates, "negotiations" went on for months, in some instances with favorable results.

While not having a real meeting distressed us a great deal personally, it actually gave us good ammunition for our campaign. On the other hand, meetings with our political allies often had negative results in that these meetings became opportunities for our "allies" to attempt to co-opt us (e.g., "explain" the budget dilemma). My observation is that advocates tend to put too much stock in a personal meeting with policymakers, and too little into the 'public negotiating' process.

• Reports don't create change – power does.

Coleman spent a great deal of time producing detailed documents on the needs of the City's children, on public expenditures on children, and on program models. Initially the sheer impressiveness of all the work that had gone into the Children's Budget gave it credibility.

However, one should consider doing a cost-benefit analysis of time put into advocacy vs. time put into documentation. The documents are impressive and satisfying (they are concrete, and funders love them), but they don't necessarily lead to real change. In Coleman's case, some of the documentation work went unnoticed and seemed to play only a minimal role in the outcome.

• Inside-the-system allies are important to find.
Close allies inside government can make budget advocacy for children more effective. These allies provided critical specific information on the budget process. They let you know when budget cuts are planned even though they don't become public for months; they tell you who is on your side and who isn't; they inform you about whether your proposals are being considered. Sometimes these allies are not public about their support. Middle- or lower-level people within City bureaucracies often called Coleman with very useful suggestions based on their inside information. These were often people who were so frustrated inside the bureaucracy that they welcomed the opportunity to help a critic of the system. Coleman always worked closely with these people, and their confidentiality was always protected.

• Legislators are more responsive than the executive branch of government.
The legislative branch of government was generally more responsive to advocates on budget issues than the executive branch. This is partly because the legislative branch makes an effort to operate in public, as opposed to the executive branch which usually develops its budget proposals exclusively behind closed doors. The legislative branch has public hearings, and open votes on specific issues in the Budget, its discussions are covered by the press, and there is simply more accountability to the public. Legislators could 'adopt' various children and youth programs to fight for, and felt they could get political mileage out of being identified with a homeless program or recreation program or youth employment program.

• Budget advocacy is a year-round process.
Budget advocacy is a year-round process of building coalitions, developing proposals, and analyzing and negotiating budgets. Budget advocacy is extremely time-consuming, takes lots of preparation, and cannot be done effectively if it is limited to the 'budget season.'

• The bull dog approach pays off!

Coleman became known as "that group that will never go away." Coleman was consistently informed, always there, and rarely missed a hearing or an opportunity to comment on the budget process. When there was no public testimony permitted, Coleman was in the back of the room with signs. When the press didn't call for comments, Coleman called the press, or issued a newsletter. This persistence made children's issues difficult to ignore.

I hope not every children's advocacy group will have to go through what Coleman did for three years. Annual budget battles are a drain on resources in almost every way – financially, professionally, and emotionally. In many ways my thinking now is, "Go straight for the ballot." Of course, this is an overstatement, as annual budget battles have to be part of every child advocate's work. But an election is compelling. Let people in your community understand that they have the power to be advocates in the voting booth, and that children – who have no voice of their own in matters of policy – need adults to exercise that power on their behalf.

Appendix

2. Sample Campaign Budget

Line items are roughly ordered as the expense was incurred.

Campaign Manager	$10,000	
Signature Drive (staff/materials)	50,000	
Filing Fee	200	
Legal Fees	1,500	
Telephone	2,000	
Printing and copying	27,000	*Includes petitions and two campaign brochures (one during signature drive, one after)*
Meetings and rallies	1,500	
Political Slate Cards	2,000	
Postage and mailing expenses	10,500	*One large targeted mailing after initiative was on ballot – $8,000*
Ballot arguments	4,000	
Supplies	800	
Miscellaneous	500	
Total	$110,000	

Appendix

3. Text of Initiative Charter Amendment Proposition J

San Francisco's Charter Section 6.415

6.415 Children's Fund

(a) There is hereby established a fund to expand children's services, which shall be called the San Francisco Children's Fund and shall be maintained separate and apart from all other city and county funds and appropriated by annual or supplemental appropriation pursuant to sections 6.205 and 6.306 of this charter. Monies therein shall be expended or used solely to provide expanded services for children as provided in this section.

(b) There is hereby set aside for the San Francisco Children's Fund, from the revenues of the tax levy pursuant to Section 6.208 of this charter, revenues in an amount equivalent to an annual tax of one-and-one-quarter cents ($0.0125) for each one hundred dollars ($100.00) of assessed valuation for the first fiscal year which begins ninety days or more after the election which approves this section, and revenues equivalent to an annual tax of two-and-one-half cents ($0.025) for each one hundred dollars ($100.00) of assessed valuation for each of the following nine fiscal years. The treasurer shall set aside and maintain said amount, together with any interest earned thereon, in said fund, and any amounts unspent or uncommitted at the end of any fiscal year shall be carried

forward to the next fiscal year and, subject to the budgetary and fiscal limitations of the charter, shall be appropriated then or thereafter for the purposes specified in this section.

(c) Monies in the fund shall be used exclusively to provide services to children less than eighteen years old, above and beyond services funded prior to adoption of this section. To this end, monies from the fund shall not be appropriated or expended to fund services provided during fiscal year 1991-1992, whether or not the cost of such services increases, or appropriated or expended for services which substitute for or replace services provided during fiscal year 1990-1991 or 1991-1992, except and solely to the extent of services for which the City ceases to receive federal, state, or private agency funds which the funding agency required to be spent only on services in question.

(d) Services for children eligible for fund assistance shall include only child care; job readiness, training and placement programs; health and social services (including pre-natal services to pregnant adult women); educational programs; recreation; delinquency prevention; and library services, in each case for children. Services for children paid for by the fund shall not include:

(1) for example and not for purposes of limitation, services provided by the police department or other law enforcement agencies; by courts, the district attorney, public defender, or city attorney; by the fire department; detention or probation services mandated by state or federal law; or public transportation;

(2) any service which benefits children incidentally or as members of a larger population including adults;

(3) any service for which a fixed or minimum level of expenditure is mandated by state or federal law, to the extent of the fixed or minimum level of expenditure;

(4) acquisition of any capital item not for primary and direct use by children;

(5) acquisition (other than by lease for a term of ten years or less) of any real property; or

(6) maintenance, utilities or any similar operating cost of any facility not used primarily and directly by children, or of any recreation or park facility (including a zoo), library facility or hospital.

(e) During each fiscal year, a minimum of twenty-five percent (25%) of said fund shall be used for child care, a minimum of twenty-five percent (25%) for job readiness, training and placement, and a minimum of twenty-five percent (25%) for health and social services for children (including pre-natal services for pregnant adult women). Beginning with the fifth fiscal year during which funds are set aside under this section, the Board of Supervisors may modify or eliminate these minimum requirements.

(f) Not later than three months after the election which approves this section and not later than December of each calendar year which begins after said election, the Mayor shall prepare and present to the Board of Supervisors a Children's Services Plan. The plan shall propose goals and objectives for the fund for the fiscal year beginning the following July 1,

propose expenditures of monies from the fund for the fiscal year beginning the following July 1, and designate the city departments which would administer the funded programs. In connection with preparation of the Children's Services Plan, and (except in connection with the first Children's Services Plan) prior to the date required for presentation to the Board, the Health Commission, Juvenile Probation Commission, Social Services Commission, Recreation and Parks Commission and Public Library Commission shall each hold at least one public hearing on the Plan. Joint hearings may be held to satisfy this requirement. Any or all of the commissions may also hold additional hearings before or after presentation of the Plan.

(g) The fund shall be used exclusively to increase the aggregate City appropriations and expenditures for those services for children which are eligible to be paid from the fund (exclusive of expenditures mandated by state or federal law). To this end, the City shall not reduce the amount of such City appropriations for eligible services (not including appropriations from the San Francisco Children's Fund and exclusive of expenditures mandated by state or federal law) in any of the ten years during which funds are required to be set aside under this section below the higher of the amount so appropriated for the fiscal year 1990-1991 or the amount so appropriated for the fiscal year 1991-1992, in either case as adjusted. Not later than three months after the election which approves this section, the Controller shall calculate and publish the applicable base amount, specifying by department and program each amount included in the base amount. Said base amount shall be adjusted for each year after the base year, based on calculations consistent from year to year, by the percentage increase or decrease in aggregate City appropriations from the base year, as estimated by the Controller. Errors in the Controller's estimate of appropriations for a fiscal year shall be corrected by an adjustment in the next year's estimate. For purposes of this subsection, aggregate City appropriations shall not include funds granted to the City by private agencies or appropriated by other public agencies and received by the City. Within ninety days following the end of each fiscal year through 2001-2002, the Controller shall calculate and publish the actual amount of City appropriations for services for children which are eligible to be paid from the fund (exclusive of expenditures mandated by state or federal law).

(h) If any provision of this section, or its application to any person or circumstance, shall be held invalid or unenforceable, the remainder of this section and its applications shall not be affected; every provision of this section is intended to be severable.

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Thomas G. Keane
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Stephen G. Bloom
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Bill Workman
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The New Mission News
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"Youth Office's Priorities Criticized"
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Marsha Ginsberg
The San Francisco Examiner
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from "Voters Approve Measure That Is a First in the Nation"
Elaine Herscher
The San Francisco Chronicle
November 7, 1991

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