THE ROLE OF COALITIONS IN INFLUENCING DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES
In 2005, 19% of US residents lived with some level of disability.

In 2010, labor force participation for people with disabilities was less than a third of that for people without a disability (21.8% vs. 70.1%).

People with disabilities are 3 times as likely to live in poverty than any other group.

Even when employed, average income (including benefits) for a person with a disability is $19,100, almost half the $33,800 for a person without a disability.
CCD Background

- The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is a coalition of over 100 national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C.
  - Founded in 1973: oldest and largest cross-disability coalition

- CCD works at multiple steps in the legislative process to influence public policy
  - Critical role in shaping the Americans with Disability Act, Developmental Disabilities Act and Workforce Investment Act
Methodology

- 32 semi-structured interviews were conducted with CCD co-chairs and members, Congressional aides, members of other DC-based disability coalitions and other experts.

- Additional information from:
  - Attendance at CCD meetings
  - Written documents gathered from CCD member organizations, conferences
  - National Disability Rights Network annual conference
  - Senate and House hearings on disability and employment issues
CCD’s Main Activities and Strategies

- Made up of 20 task forces covering a broad range of issues
  - e.g. Education, Employment and Training, Veterans, Social Security, Health, Rights
  - Each fairly autonomous, but with some cross-task force collaboration when needed

- Mostly works through Congress to influence the legislative/regulatory process
  - Involved in multiple steps of this process
CCD’s Advantages

**Broad-Based Membership**

- Perspectives and information from all key players in the disability community: CCD’s support a “gold standard”
- Allows individual groups to have their voices heard on the Hill that otherwise wouldn’t because of lack of capacity/political capital, “silo-ing”
- Reduces redundancies, inefficiencies

**Political Legacy**

- Oldest and largest D.C.-based disability coalition in operation today in the US
- Moral/expert authority as “the voice of the disability community”

**Organizational Structure**

- Financial flexibility, minimal overhead costs
- Division of labor into task forces for maximal efficiency
CCD’s Limitations: Internal

Key challenge: unifying conflicting interests and aims among factions of the coalition

- Numerous differences in priorities and values between:
  - Groups representing different disabilities
  - Organization type (e.g. advocacy vs. provider organizations)
- Every CCD member is allegiant first and foremost to his/her home organization
- CCD operates only when it can achieve consensus, so it can’t take action on important but controversial issues

Internal hierarchy leads some members to feel marginalization

- Emergence of new disability coalitions gives alternatives to CCD
Internal Limitations: The Case of 14 (c)

- 14(c) certificates allows employers to pay people with disabilities below minimum wage, at a commensurate wage based on productivity.

- 14(c) is a huge source of controversy in CCD.

  - Some CCD members are provider organizations that use 14(c) to hire employees.
  - Many advocacy organizations would like to see 14(c) repealed.
    - But can’t agree on timeline for repeal, alternatives.
  - Deadlock on any issue concerning 14(c).
CCD Limitations: External

- Volatility of political climate
  - CCD works largely in a reactionary capacity
  - When no disability legislation is being addressed on the Hill, CCD has little to work with
  - Implication of a broad range of factors: economic climate, the prevailing ideological contexts and the priorities of the President and Hill leadership

- Emergence of other disability coalitions
  - Claim to represent “the authentic voice of the disability community”
  - Waning influence of CCD due to information competition
  - Dissatisfied members can work outside of CCD
Broader Policy Implications

What are the key factors that influence the functioning and success of coalitions?

- Membership composition
- Internal hierarchy
- Defining goals
1) Membership Composition

Who can be considered a legitimate member of a coalition?

- Creation of splinter groups identifying themselves as “the authentic voice of people with disabilities”
- Tensions between advocacy and provider groups

Broad-based vs. restricted membership

- Broad-based: legitimacy through inclusion of diverse actors in decision making process
  - More extensive perspectives, but may hinder consensus building
- Restricted: legitimacy through inclusion of “right” actors
  - Less extensive perspectives, but likely greater ease at consensus building
2) Internal Hierarchy

- In CCD, certain organizations are more influential at shaping CCD’s agenda than others
  - Dissatisfaction among some of the newer, less powerful members

- Hierarchy vs egalitarianism
  - Hierarchy: can provide leadership direction, but erosion of equality can diminish legitimacy
  - Egalitarianism: may provide maximum legitimacy, but, especially with large coalitions, may hamper effectiveness
3) Defining Goals

- To what degree can values and priorities be compromised in order to create policy recommendations that can actually be adopted?
  - In CCD, this trade-off is epitomized by debates over 14(c), as some groups see anything less than its immediate repeal to be promoting discrimination and marginalization.

- Incremental change vs. stringent adherence to principles
  - Incremental change: “small improvements better than nothing”
  - Stringent adherence to principles: compromise may lead to complacency
Alternative Roles for Coalitions

- One of the main challenges for CCD (and other coalitions) is the unpredictability of the political climate in Washington
  - Budgetary allocations are always in flux
  - In current climate, attempts to reduce the deficit are leading to widespread spending cuts
  - Cuts impeding ability of agencies to carry out mandates

- Privatization of some roles of public agencies by CCD member organizations
  - CCD member NDRN serving as regulatory body for 14(c) to ease burden from Department of Labor
  - Similar privatization of public services, at least temporarily, may help avoid key service disruptions during volatile climates