

**“Beyond the Snail: Accelerating the Pace
of Women’s Progress as Policy Leaders”**

***Daring to Forge a Bold Partnership:
MassGap and the 2002 Election for Governor***

Center for Women in Government & Civil Society
University at Albany
State University of New York
135 Western Avenue
Albany, NY 12222
518.442.3900
www.cwig.albany.edu

Judith R. Saidel, Ph.D., Executive Director
518.442.3896
Saidel@albany.edu

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MassGAP and the 2002 Election for Governor

“Here we are,” said Sarah Cardozo Duncan, the new President of the Alliance of Women’s Business and Professional Organizations in the Boston area. *“All these smart women organizational leaders in a coalition that has come a long way, but we now need a new initiative to sink our teeth into...what should we do, Liz?”* As Liz Levin, a founder and the first president of the Alliance, mulled over the question, it occurred to her that the coming gubernatorial election offered an opportunity to make significant change for women in Massachusetts. With the recently developed power and capacity of the Alliance, it seemed like the perfect time for the Alliance, a relatively apolitical group up until now, to take on a substantive, new challenge. Why not engage an issue that had plagued women for decades, but still seemed intractable—the number of women in positions of power in government.

“Let’s get parity in political representation” said Levin, *“It’s about time we had women leaders appointed in proportion to our numbers in the population. Let’s close the gap!”* Sarah responded with enthusiasm; it was a simple and compelling idea, and one that had the potential for real change for all women. They gathered a small group of women, mostly lawyers and business leaders, around Liz’s kitchen table, and MassGAP (Massachusetts Government Appointment Project) was born.

Initial Steps

The group knew the next step was to quickly expand the number of women and groups involved in the effort. Since the election was only five months away, they would need a lot of help to pull this off. In the first week of calls, they had twenty of the largest women’s groups in town on board; they knew they needed the most powerful movers and shakers to move forward. One of the Alliance participants was Roni Thaler of the Massachusetts Women’s Political Caucus (MWPC), who had wanted to do a similar project for years. After some negotiating of responsibilities, the MassGAP effort became a collaboration between the Alliance and MWPC, coupled with the open structure of a coalition so that any group could join.

Roni brought substantial knowledge to the coalition of how to proceed, as several years earlier she had attended a meeting of the National Women’s Political Caucus and had gathered information from California’s Women’s Political Caucus efforts on a similar project. The California women told Roni that they had made a mistake by not providing the names of potential appointees to the new administration in a timely way. Thus the Boston women knew that to be effective, they would need to have all the information ready for the incoming administration right after the election. The pressure was on.

The core leaders continued to add as many groups as possible to the list of endorsing organizations in the coalition, while they formed a steering committee with clear parameters to make the formal decisions for the coalition. Throughout the campaign, the small core group of activists continued to meet weekly around Liz’s kitchen table to shepherd the effort. The group decided to use a consensus, or *“Ladies Style”* decision-making process, as Sarah declared.

Seeking a Pledge from Both Gubernatorial Candidates

The Steering Committee set clear objectives for the candidates’ support of MassGAP’s goal:

- 1) get the candidates to sign on to the concept and to make a “best faith effort” to achieve 50% gender parity in appointments;
- 2) appoint a high ranking liaison to work with MassGAP after the election;
- 3) have as close to a 50/50 gender balance as possible in their transition team;
- 4) have a representative meet with MassGAP every 2-3 months after the appointment process to monitor progress.

Task forces with the charge of identifying candidates were formed along the lines of the major state agency sectors. The chairs of the task forces conducted intensive outreach to gather resumes and prescreened them for quality.

Another strategic decision made by the group was to be explicitly nonpartisan. This not only positioned MassGAP to work well with whoever was elected, but also put the focus of the effort on identifying candidates based on merit and not political patronage. Each task force was charged with gathering and screening resumes of women. Women involved in MassGAP could nominate themselves or others, but to maintain integrity in the process, anyone who was selected as a candidate would not be allowed to present resumes to the new administration.

Somewhat to the surprise of everyone, MassGAP secured letters of commitment from *both* campaigns to their goals and principles. This early win energized the group and strengthened their recruitment efforts. The outreach and organizing activities intensified, with everyone working at a furious pace over the summer and early fall.

After reviewing over a thousand resumes, MassGAP was ready after the election with 200 resumes of women judged by the Task Forces to have the experience and qualities needed for top positions. Thaler had contacted the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women in the early stages of the process and the Commission had shared its comprehensive list of over 1,000 individuals, thereby enabling speedy outreach to a broad array of women potentially interested in being considered for appointed leadership positions.

In a long meeting with the new Lt. Governor, Lynn Healey (who had been the point person on the Governor's transition team to work with MassGAP), panels of MassGAP women presented the top vetted resumes and engaged in a candid and confidential discussion with the Lt. Governor about the qualities of the candidates. Hard copies of the resumes were given to the administration, organized by the seven sections.

Lt. Governor Healey appreciated MassGAP's invaluable service of identifying women who were willing and able to serve the public in an appointed capacity, as finding and making contact with women in a six-week time frame, especially over the December holidays, is not an easy task. She viewed their non-confrontational "partnership" approach as particularly effective. In addition, MassGAP addressed a problem that Lieutenant Governor Healey sees as a huge hurdle to women: *"So many women take time out in their late 20's and 30's to have kids, while men are staying in the game. The intensive outreach that MassGAP did to find and recruit women not currently in the paid workforce was a critical element of its success in advancing women's leadership."*

Outcomes of the Effort

All this hard work did bear fruit. According to initial assessments by MassGAP, in partnership with the new administration, they increased the percentage of women in top leadership positions appointed by the governor from about 30% to 44% in the positions they were targeting. *"We did a 12-month project in four months"* noted Roni, *"The workload was immense."* Yet the intense drive and efforts by everyone involved was also very energizing to the women of MassGAP. *"It was a fabulous project because of the spirit we generated,"* said Liz.

Monitoring of progress continues, and MassGAP, while somewhat dormant now, remains committed to the goal of achieving 50% parity. Liz wryly observed the fact that headhunting firms get paid thousands for what the women of MassGAP did for free, a bitter pill to swallow when funds for such important efforts are almost impossible to find. Still, while the women of MassGAP know they have a way to go, the "wins" achieved in this effort taste very sweet indeed.

Strategic Choices of MassGAP

Directions:

Select the top 2 strategies in each of the strategy areas below that you think would be critical for your state to use if you were to undertake such an effort. Analyze barriers that might prevent the strategies from being successfully implemented and discuss ways of overcoming the barriers.

Describe other strategies with which you are familiar that have worked to increase the number of women in executive branch appointed leadership positions, as well as barriers that have prevented women's progress.

General/Organizing Principles & Tactics

- ◆ Be nonpartisan.
- ◆ Form a Steering Committee with clear parameters.
- ◆ Keep core group of activists meeting to guide effort.
- ◆ Partnership/high trust approach (low profile with the press/not use shame as a tactic).
- ◆ Loose organizational structure; flexible & focused on the big picture, not process.
- ◆ Decide to use consensus for decision-making.
- ◆ Minimize time spent on “turf” issues; create a loose, open organizing structure that focuses on the big picture.

Formulating & Framing the Goals

- ◆ Ask for “best faith effort” to reach 50% representation; not firm numbers.
- ◆ Ask for a 50/50 transition team of men and women.
- ◆ Get candidates to sign onto their goals early on.
- ◆ Ask for point person in new administration with the power to hire (gain access).
- ◆ Ask for person to meet with the group every 2-3 months to monitor progress.
- ◆ Focus on top positions, Cabinet & Boards.

Activities & Resources

- ◆ Concerted outreach to identify large number of resumes.
- ◆ Form Task Forces that parallel policy sectors (health, human service, transportation, etc.).
- ◆ Have staff to do the work of administration (copy resumes, collate notebooks, etc).
- ◆ Screen resumes for quality & identify willing candidates.
- ◆ Use a candid, confidential and ethical process for vetting resumes.