

Looking Forward from Thunderhead's Annual Board Meeting

October 31, 2007

Boo!

At the beginning of October, Thunderhead's board and staff gathered in Washington DC for our annual board meeting. It was a busy and exciting few days! The energy and ideas produced are carrying momentum as we develop our 2008 work plan, consider candidates for executive director and continue to have conversations with Thunderhead members, supporters and allies.

On the morning of day two, after we had spent the previous day attending to the nitty-gritty of organizational logistics, budgets, fundraising and other board responsibilities, Thunderhead's founding-chair, Randy Neufeld of the Chicagoland Bicycle Federation, had a simple question for board and staff. "In an ideal world, what is Thunderhead to you? What do you want out of Thunderhead?" he asked.

It is not often that Thunderhead board and staff are all together in one room, and, as anyone who's worked on organizing campaigns or other business with partners spread across ZIP codes and time zones knows, it is amazing how productive groups are when everyone is one room. "In an ideal world..." the conversation ensued.

The discussion, which has been going on for some time before the gathering in Washington, flushed out how Thunderhead can bolster itself to better serve the array of member organizations and more effectively campaign with partners...

Thunderhead is the chief capacity builder for bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organizations. And, because we facilitate information sharing and communication between members, Thunderhead is greater than the sum of its parts. The collective experience of our 130 member organizations, combined staff of 200, combined membership of over 97,000 and years of experience hold the answers to many questions and the solutions to many problems any of us face at work on a daily basis. What's amazing to me is that within our collective mind are answers that no one has come up with yet, and through Thunderhead's work to connect us and stimulate conversation and discussion, those answers emerge. Board and staff want to better connect all of you, facilitate information sharing and start conversations between existing members, future members and potential partners. *How can we connect you?*

Thunderhead board and staff want to provide all of our member organizations with the resources and tools you need to succeed. Whether your organization is 30-years old with a fulltime staff, its volunteer core is pulling together its second meeting at a local library or somewhere in between, we want to provide and help identify the resources and solutions that you need. *What can Thunderhead help your organization do that you can't do on your own? What kind of expert training and technical assistance can we work to provide? How can we help your organization think long term and plan strategically? Who can we bring together and help you connect with?*

Thunderhead occupies a strategic niche in the movement: we are a national organization made up of a coalition of local groups. This means that when it comes to ensuring that national-level policy and funding decisions bring the most benefit to on-the-ground initiatives, you are the experts! Part of Thunderhead's increasingly important job is to make sure that you have the most up-to-date information about events in our nation's capitol that effect your work at home. We also

want to make sure that you are able to effectively work with local cyclists, bicycle retailers and others to get connected to your representatives in Washington D.C. and partner with other influencers and opinion makers. Congressional leadership and key administration officials must hear our united voice, and we must build strong coalitions with new allies outside of the biking and walking world. With the current federal transportation funding law, SAFETEA-LU, set to expire on December 31, 2009, our voice will be more important than ever during the reauthorization debate, which has quietly started and will continue for (at least) the next two years.

Through better connecting the network of Thunderhead members and bringing an organized message to the political debates surrounding biking and walking, the board wants Thunderhead to become the “go to” leader on our issues. If someone from a public health, environmental, economic development, real estate, labor, aging, youth, immigrant or even transportation organization wants to know who they can work with in their state or community to advance biking and walking, we want them to call Thunderhead first to get connected and strategize.

To become the go to group, Thunderhead won't sit around waiting for the phone to ring. We're going to grow our relationships with new partners like the Institute for Transportation Engineers, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and The Disability Network and reach out and start new ones with leading transportation, health, environmental, social equity, disability rights, planning, development and business associations. And, of course, we'll continue to work in close partnership with longtime allies like the League of American Bicyclists, the National Center for Bicycling and Walking, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, America Bikes, Planet Bike, Bikes Belong, the National Bicycle Dealers Association and the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals. By supporting you and reaching out to build good relationships with other national coalitions, Thunderhead hopes to diversify and broaden our movement, professionalize it and further establish bicycle and pedestrian advocates as a force to be reckoned with. Maybe you want to lead that effort? If so, you can find details about Thunderhead's executive director job opportunity on-line at: http://thunderheadalliance.org/news.htm#Press_Releases

All of our organizations are working for better quality of life through biking and walking. Be it better access, healthier lives, a cleaner environment, a better economy or safer streets, together, we can all say that improved and increased biking and walking will contribute to these goals. The Thunderhead Alliance's mission is to create, strengthen and unite state and local bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organizations, so *in an ideal world, what do you want out of Thunderhead?*

Happy Halloween everyone!

Best,
Noah S. Budnick
Chair, Thunderhead Alliance, Board of Directors
Deputy Director, Transportation Alternatives