



# A Great Idea

## *Baking for the Budget: Building a Coalition Around Raising State Revenue*

### *Community Mobilizing*

#### **Summary**

Kentucky Youth Advocates, along with Kentuckians Allied for Revenue Reform, held a “bake sale” on February 18, 2003 to call attention to Kentucky’s \$400 million budget deficit. Kentuckians Allied for Revenue Reform (KARR) is a coalition of 45 progressive organizations dedicated to enacting comprehensive tax reform and eliminating the state budget deficit without harmful cuts to human services programs. They put their message in front of legislators and the media by proclaiming “We are baking for the budget. We’re doing our part to reduce Kentucky’s budget deficit and maintain needed services.”

#### **Background**

When it became evident that the state of Kentucky, like so many states, would realize a huge budget shortfall last year, Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA) knew they had to do something that would capture the attention of the state legislature and the media. They knew they would have more power as part of a coalition.

KARR hosted a press conference with the usual fare of budget charts and personal stories of the effects of the budget cuts. They realized, however, that they needed to do more. Remembering the old slogan that said it would be a “great day for this country when our schools get all the money they need and the Air Force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber,” it hit them. They decided to hold a bake sale – a bake sale for the budget!

By selling Medicaid Muffins and Chocolate SCHIP cookies, KYA and their coalition raised \$500 which was ceremoniously donated to the state treasurer. Obviously this donation was a drop in the bucket (they calculated for the press that they would have to host 999,999 bake sales in order to cover the deficit), but the bake sale was invaluable in fostering relationships among coalition members, raising awareness of the deficit, and building visibility for the coalition itself.

#### **Key Elements**

- ◆ In January of 2003 a coalition called the “Progressive Caucus” gathered to discuss their focus for the upcoming session. The informal coalition, which met weekly during the Kentucky legislative session to discuss common issues and how they could help one another, decided to focus on comprehensive tax reform and the state budget deficit.
- ◆ They then decided to formalize their coalition and change their name to “Kentuckians Allied for Revenue Reform” (KARR).
- ◆ KARR’s first action was to hold a press conference titled “Our Solution to the State Budget Crisis.” The conference, which took place in early February, allowed regular citizens to talk about how the state budget cuts were going to impact their lives. Stickers saying “For Kentucky’s Sake, Do Your Job” were distributed.
- ◆ At KARR’s next formal meeting, they brainstormed ideas for what to do next. As a joke, somebody said, “Remember that old poster that said ‘it would be a great day for this country when our schools get all the money they need and the Air Force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber...’ we should hold a bake sale.” After some discussion it was decided – they would hold a bake sale for the budget!
- ◆ KARR distributed a press release to state media to gain attention for the upcoming bake sale.
- ◆ KARR coalition members volunteered to make baked goods. Others coordinated who would bring items, create staffing schedules, and secure a permit for a space in the Capitol.
- ◆ On February 18 they held the bake sale for the budget from 9 AM until 1 PM next to the cafeteria in the basement of the Capitol building. Each baked good came with a sticker that said, “Baking for the budget. We’re doing our part to reduce Kentucky’s budget deficit and maintain needed services.”

- ◆ KARR held a press conference afterwards. They presented the jar of \$500 to the State Treasurer before two reporters.
- ◆ After the bake sale, KARR coalition members wrote an op-ed:

“Kentucky’s finances are in sorry shape, and if the General Assembly doesn’t do something impressive quick, ordinary, working Kentuckians are going to be hurt worse. The General Assembly doesn’t have a serious attitude about revenue to take care of people. We say to the General Assembly, stop changing the subject. The subject isn’t whether average working people should be forced to pay more taxes. The subject is how government provides services for the people. We believe in taking care of children, seniors, and the disabled. We know we need education, law enforcement, health care and increased security in these scary times. We know that these services don’t fall down like manna from heaven, and patriotic people believe in shared sacrifice for the common good.”

### *Staff Time*

- ◆ Several KARR members, including KYA staff volunteered to bake goodies.
- ◆ One KYA/KARR member spent an hour coordinating the bakers.
- ◆ Another KARR member spent an hour securing a permit for a space in the Capitol building.
- ◆ One KARR member spent a half hour with the State Treasurer to secure his agreement to receive the proceeds to the State Treasury in a media event.
- ◆ Other KARR members spent approximately 13 hours organizing the press conference and the op-eds, and creating posters and stickers during the weekly coalition meetings.
- ◆ Total staff time was approximately 15 hours.

### *Things to Think About*

- ◆ The diversity and membership base of the KARR coalition helped legitimize the message. KARR is composed of 45 labor, religious, human service, and advocacy organizations, including AARP, AFL/CIO, and the National Council of Churches.
- ◆ By keeping the message simple rather than getting into specific details of tax reform, KYA was able to get the entire coalition to buy in to the message.

- ◆ The coalition knew that it was important for them to clearly communicate their message to the public and the media. To ensure this, they clarified the specific message and the purpose of the bake sale at weekly planning meetings. KYA staff attended the meetings to provide expertise in strategy and communications. All members of KARR pitched in to help design and create stickers, posters, press releases, media messages, and cookies.
- ◆ Some legislators were not amused by the bake sale stunt.

### *Costs*

- ◆ All baking ingredients were paid out-of-pocket by KARR members.
- ◆ Total cost to organizations was \$0!

### *Outcomes*

- ◆ People throughout the Capitol building buzzed about the group holding the bake sale for the budget. Many legislators purchased items, or chuckled and promised to return. A few looked slightly upset. Regardless of the reaction, the bake sale got people talking about the budget deficit and gained KARR significant recognition from legislators.
- ◆ The bake sale also gained KARR attention from the media. The pre-bake sale press conference was attended by two television stations, two radio stations, and several state newspapers. The post-bake sale press conference was attended by one television reporter and four state newspapers. The Courier Journal, Lexington Herald, the News Enterprise, and The State Journal ran articles about the bake sale.
- ◆ In addition, the bake sale fostered relationships among the coalition members by providing an opportunity to digest the events of the previous legislative session and develop new contacts while they worked together on a single issue. Furthermore, they released jointly written op-eds and press releases. While the coalition has not come together to endorse one specific tax reform package, the joint actions in the 2003 session were a good first step to building that support and cohesion.
- ◆ Finally, the bake sale raised \$500 toward the budget deficit, which KYA and their partners handed directly to the State Treasurer. And, they did not have to take out administrative expenses!

### *Contact Information*

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