Colorado Secular Organizations

A Study of Selected Successful Local Groups and How They Do It

by

Tom Kellogg

February, 2017

This is a continuation of the series *The Roots of Building a Secular Community*

Part 3 – COCORE (Colorado Coalition of Reason)

Marvin Straus is one of the main Founders of COCORE (Colorado Coalition of Reason), started in 2002, and ran it for many years. COCORE is an umbrella organization where leaders of each member group can communicate directly with each other and share resources. Each group can use the COCORE logo. Marvin eventually handed COCORE over to me about 3 years ago, and soon after that he retired from the Colorado secular movement and moved to the Oregon Coast. At that time, COCORE was in decline. I have kept it alive while trying to get members to step up as volunteers, to be more active with it. There are now 47 members representing 25 Colorado secular groups. The main computer tool is a secure email Google Group with up to several leaders or representatives from each group. Emails sent to the group by a member of the group go to all other members, and no one else.

COCORE is a good resource for Colorado secular groups to network with each other. It has a completely different structure than other groups, or should I say "non-structure". In the first 10 years from 2002 to around 2012, COCORE was a major player in the Colorado secular movement, connecting and supporting its member groups. Periodically, a summit meeting is held at a centrally located place, where members meet to discuss ideas and network with each other.

Believe it or not, COCORE was actually the very first CoR group in the country, before UnitedCor (United Coalition of Reason), and became a model for it. There are now CoR groups all over the country under UnitedCor, each one run differently.

COCORE Summit Meeting April 25th, 2015 in Castle Rock, Colorado

The concept was to create a support tool owned by all of the member groups. COCORE purposely has no board of directors or leadership committee, with only a few administrative caretakers, currently just me. It is a conduit to allow direct communications and networking between the leaders or representatives of the member organizations, currently through a closed email Google Group. It began as a way for local secular groups to share resources and ideas. It is also a way for members to use the COCORE name and logo for promoting events and programs under the COCORE banner. The logo can be put on literature and handouts. COCORE does not actually host events itself, but has been instrumental over the years for helping to coordinate large multi-group events. It is OK for a group to say that COCORE is a *co-host* of an event, but cannot say it is a *sponsor* of an event. That is one of the very few rules.

COCORE tried to use various social media tools, but right now it is mainly a Google Group. Meetup.com was tried, and turned out not to be a good tool, because COCORE does not host events directly. There is a website and Facebook page that need some work. COCORE is a great resource, with great potential, but needs more people to be involved, since I am spread pretty thin.

COCORE almost self-destructed about 4 years ago while leaders of member groups argued about how to give it more structure and organization, not understanding how it works. Also, when the Denver Secular Hub started up, people thought it would replace COCORE. However, COCORE serves a different unique purpose, and was actually part of the inspiration for the Hub. After the COCORE organizational battle ended with no outcome, Marvin and I just kept running COCORE as before. Marvin was my mentor and taught me how the organization works, which was not easy to understand at first.

There may be some new energy brewing. Terry, a board member of the Denver Secular Hub is spearheading a "Think Tank" program, along with other Hub members and local groups, including the Boulder Atheists, Jefferson Humanists and the Denver chapter of FFRF (Freedom From Religion Foundation). There are several aspects of the Think Tank mission, such as getting the word out to the world about all the wonderful secular groups around, and that atheists and freethinkers are good and decent members of the community who care and contribute to it. Networking with other local groups is also a big part of the Think Tank, and COCORE could be a vehicle already in place to facilitate networking.

A new Jeffco Political Action Taskforce started up through the Jefferson Humanists, founded by JH member Ralph Hughes. It could use COCORE to network with other secular groups.   JPAT started up after the election, mainly as a vehicle to obstruct Trump and the Republicans from implementing their horrifying agenda. Efforts start at the local and state levels. Also, effective ways to contact and work with politicians will be a focus, and JPAT is expanding its horizons. The group is really taking off.