**UCP’s Focused Strategic Direction – A Summary Addendum**

**Background and Need**

Two years ago UCP published a white paper entitled "Jumping the Curve," which laid out a series of challenges to the national network and the need for UCP to make a major shift in direction and reassess its organizational model for long term stability. Many of UCP’s affiliates have been struggling with state budget cuts, increased regulations and reduced public support for disability issues, while dealing with challenges around staffing, client choice, and redirection of services under Medicaid waivers. These bottom-up challenges have rippled across the network, and reverberated at the national level.

The demands on the national network changed with more decentralized federal policy and funding decisions, national disengagement of volunteer leadership, and the interconnected, co-dependent relationship between UCP affiliates and the national organization shifting to a transactional relationship based on perceived “value” received by affiliates from the national network.

Even more challenging is UCP’s overall mission. After decades of progress in disability legislation, funding, and growth of services, it often feels like UCP and its affiliates struggle to simply survive. Progress seems to be measured by stopping budget cuts, saving a needed program or service, or reducing overhead. Many of us feel that UCP’s mission of ensuring a life without limits for people with disabilities has not moved forward. People with disabilities and their families continue to face difficult challenges living a full life, whether it’s early intervention, education, employment, housing, or securing a path out of poverty.

The Board of Trustees of UCP, composed of volunteers and executives from affiliates, family advocates, and industry/community leaders, commissioned a series of studies on public policy and positioning to identify external challenges and opportunities to achieving UCP’s mission in the current environment. These investments in UCP’s future laid the groundwork for a strategic planning process that ultimately called on UCP and its affiliate network to make some major, additional commitments to the future. The first survey and study conducted by Maslansky Partners informed us that people with disabilities and their family members are politically diverse yet highly engaged, and above all else are thirsty for participation in a broader movement for change. The second positioning study by Maslansky Partners told us that the language we have been using for years as advocates to improve the lives of people with disabilities and their families is not resonating with the larger audience. We have not positioned “disability,” for lack of a better word, in such a way that those who do not directly experience it are hearing us. In order to be heard, we have to change what we are saying. The UCP Board recognized that based on all of the external challenges and opportunities that we face, a new path forward must be charted.

**Process**

The Board of Trustees established a Steering Committee made up of affiliate executive and board members, national board members and community leaders. Members of this committee convened repeatedly over nearly two years, defining the issues, selecting the consultants to do the external studies and strategic planning and then steering the process. During this process, affiliate executive and volunteer leadership both participated in the planning process and were provided opportunities to participate in setting the future direction for the UCP network. These included:

(a) regional convenings of affiliate executives in the spring and fall of 2013;

(b) the UCP annual conference in San Diego, CA in 2013;

(c) regional convenings of affiliate executives in the fall of 2014;

(d) a large convening of UCP national and affiliate executive and volunteer leadership in Dallas, TX in January 2014;

(e) regional convenings of affiliate executives in the spring of 2014;

(f) the UCP annual conference in Nashville, TN in 2014; and

(g) webinars and conference calls open to affiliate executives and volunteer leadership to hear about and discuss the process and the progress of the strategic planning effort along the way.

Last June, after receiving feedback from the affiliates at the 2014 UCP Annual Conference, and making some significant changes to a draft version of the strategic plan as presented by La Piana Associates, the Board of Trustees approved the strategic direction of a new five-year business plan and directed management to begin implementation. Pointedly, the Board did not approve a detailed five-year budget, preferring to implement the plan on a more fiscally prudent year-by-year basis. The Board also asked management to develop metrics for assessing performance of plan implementation.