

THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

COALITION BUILDING AT ITS FINEST

Over a four month period in 1787, our nation's founders hammered out a four page agreement that continues to provide the framework for our government. While some have referred to the founders' construction of the Constitution as a "miracle," in fact it was the founders' ability to **build coalitions** that allowed the creation of a set of laws which has persisted for over 225 years.

How did they do it? What rules did they establish? What principles did they follow to minimize and personal conflicts? An examination of the factors leading to the Constitutional Convention, which delegates chose to attend the meeting, and of course the actual debates in Philadelphia, offer great insights into building coalitions and the sub-competencies of **partnering, political savvy, and influencing/negotiating**.

Ultimately, 39 men signed the Constitution, while three would dissent. Ironically, it is one of those dissenters, George Mason, who offers perhaps the greatest leadership insights from this entire saga. We conclude with the story of Mason's dissent, and what that example offers for all of us. A final activity asks participants to reflect upon what lessons they can take from the Constitution Convention regarding **building coalitions**.

This session combines the insights from Russell Linden on collaboration in government, Roger Fisher and William Ury on negotiating (from their classic *Getting to Yes*), and Peter Block's work on coalitions to offer practical insights into the factors leading to the founding father's ability to craft such a revolutionary document.

This session can be done as a stand-alone seminar, or paired with a visit to an associated site such as the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, or Gunston Hall, Mt. Vernon, or the National Archives in the Washington D.C. area.

