

# **Corporation for National and Community Service Nonprofit Capacity Building Summary of Stakeholder Outreach**

## ***Outreach Efforts***

The Corporation for National and Community Service convened a meeting of stakeholders around the topic of nonprofit capacity building on November 19, 2009 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Washington Nationals Ballpark. Attending were 102 participants and an additional 25 CNCS staff members. The following groups were represented: 26 national nonprofit organizations, three local nonprofits, 57 associations and intermediary organizations, 11 private and corporate foundations, and three academic institutions.

On December 1, 2009 from 4:00-5:30 p.m. the Corporation conducted a follow-up teleconference for those invited to attend the November 19 meeting who were unable to participate as well as additional participants who responded to a general announcement via CNCS website and e-mail lists. Approximately 134 participants joined the teleconference including eight representatives of academic institutions, five foundations, and the rest either national nonprofits or associations/intermediary organizations; many also CNCS grantees.

Two additional teleconference calls were conducted with member organizations of the National Council of Nonprofits and United Way Worldwide. The call with state nonprofit associations took place on October 28, 2009 with 28 participants and the United Way call was on December 4, 2009 with representatives of 12 chapters.

## ***November 19, 2009 Meeting Purpose and Format***

The purpose of the November 19, 2009 meeting was to engage a broad range of stakeholders in the nonprofit capacity building space to share thoughts and ideas on:

- Promising capacity building efforts, gaps, and how we can better collaborate to leverage existing assets on behalf of the sector;
- How the nonprofit sector, with its limited resources, can benefit from the Corporation's expanded role in strategically supporting nonprofit capacity building; and
- Specific design issues that would enhance the nonprofit sector's participation in the Nonprofit Capacity Building program authorized in the Serve America Act, if implemented and funded.

In order to solicit meaningful feedback from such a large group and to allow for synthesis and reaction, the Corporation procured the services of Co-vision, an interactive meeting technology company. The agenda included: 1) Welcome and overview by Gretchen Van der Veer, Director of the Office of Leadership Development and Training, 2) Setting the context and purpose for the meeting by Nicola Goren, Acting Chief Executive Officer, 3) Overview of the Serve America Act and the new programs related to nonprofit capacity building by Kristin McSwain, Chief of Program Operations, 4) A welcome from the White House and affirmation of the importance of this work by Joshua Dubois, Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and 5) Introduction to the Co-vision process.

There were 16 tables of eight participants each with a facilitator. Facilitators were assigned laptops networked to a central computer that aggregated all the comments typed in from all the tables. Additional CNCS and contractors were assigned to review the data as it came in and to group and

sort comments by theme and frequency. There were three rounds of discussion with 3-4 topics each. Following each round was a large group discussion reflecting on the themes and summaries which were posted on a large screen.

The format for the teleconference was similar but compressed using the online interactive technology. A compilation of comments from the November 19, 2009 meeting was made available to participants in advance. On the call, the facilitator provided an overview of the meeting purpose and context, update on the Serve America Act, and the topics for discussion. For each topic participants typed in their comments which were visible to all other participants. The facilitator provided a running summary of themes as they emerged from the comments. Subsequently, the phone lines were opened for participants to add a reflection or ask a question. Following the call, a compilation of all the comments from both sessions was distributed to participants with a request for final reflections and a polling function which allowed respondents to endorse certain themes. The opportunity to provide additional online feedback closed on December 18, 2009.

### ***Topics for Discussion and Key Learnings***

Below are the 11 topics discussed at the November 19, 2009 meeting followed by the key learnings from each discussion. Because the time for input was compacted during the December 1, 2009 teleconference, only three of the original 11 topics were discussed. They are marked with an asterisk below and represent topics that needed clarification after the November 19, 2009 meeting. There was one additional topic for both groups – workshop ideas for the 2010 National Conference on Volunteering and Service which resulted in outreach to suggested presenters prior to the December 11, 2009 deadline. Notes from the October 28, 2009 and December 4, 2009 conference calls with state associations of nonprofits and United Way chapters have also been analyzed for inclusion in the following summary.

#### **Define “small to mid-size” nonprofit organizations and the basis of your definition:**

- There are many different acceptable ways to define small and mid-size organizations (budget size, IRS definition, staff size, scope of community impact, etc.) and different grantmakers use different criteria.
- Size can be relative – what is small in New York City may be large in Montana.

#### **The most critical capacity issues small to midsize nonprofit organizations currently face:**

The most critical capacity building issues facing small and midsize nonprofits right now are sustainability (cash flow and consistent funding, particularly for infrastructure), leadership, ability to nurture partnerships and relationships, capacity to manage and retain volunteers, weak understanding of the role of governance, short-term thinking and stagnation, capacity to use technology, and capacity to manage and cultivate human capital, both paid and volunteer.

#### **Given limited funds and an expanded role, identify the most strategic way you think the Corporation could support small to midsize nonprofits:**

- The most critical role the Corporation can play and where the Corporation can have the greatest impact for limited investment is in continuing to convene the stakeholders across sectors – government, nonprofit, and foundation/corporate; conduct and disseminate research on what’s working and not working in the nonprofit sector; establish a “framework of standardized or effective practices – “be the go-to place” for tools and funding opportunities; help to define the metrics for measuring social impact and train nonprofits on

this; recognize and affirm what works; train the trainer; invest in the development of emerging leaders; support interagency collaboration; and streamline our grant processes.

- The Corporation was strongly encouraged to not duplicate what already exists, to work with existing intermediaries, encourage other funders to invest in nonprofit capacity building, and to encourage interagency communication and collaboration.
- Cultural competency is critical to the effectiveness of capacity building strategies.

**Provide thoughts on how “hardship” could be defined for the purposes of awarding grants under the Nonprofit Capacity Building program:**

- The Corporation should define “areas where nonprofits face resource hardship challenges” as locations where nonprofits do not have access to intermediaries, to foundation support, no natural resources, talent, infrastructure, with high unemployment, population decrease, lack of specific services, natural disasters.
- Focus on helping organizations with a successful track record but whose access to resources has diminished because of the economy or who continually struggle in resource poor areas.

**Provide thoughts and a rationale on whether or not the organizational development assistance provided under the Nonprofit Capacity Building program should be targeted to specific best practices (in addition to the other training topics specified in the Act), or should be open for individual grantees to determine the services offered:**

- There was a wide diversity of opinion on the topic of whether or not to specify specific best practices for intermediaries to focus capacity building services (in addition to the specific training mentioned in the Act). About half of the respondents strongly endorsed a needs-based approach allowing intermediaries to determine which services they would provide based on an assessment of recipients. The other half strongly advocated for the provision of assistance in specific topic areas because of trends in the sector (measuring social impact) or because of the traditional mission of the Corporation (recruiting and managing volunteers).
- There was a strong advocacy to narrow given limited funds and to not try to be everything to everyone.
- The specific best practices that came up repeatedly were financial management, board governance, leadership and succession planning, sustainability planning, and evaluation/program impact.
- The Corporation should require intermediaries to conduct organizational assessments with recipients.

**Provide thoughts on the capacities CNCS should look for in selecting nonprofit capacity building intermediary grantees:**

The Corporation should select intermediaries who demonstrate an ability to convene and partner with other intermediaries, have a solid infrastructure to measure their success, have the ability to provide the matching funds, a track-record of ongoing assistance with recipients, and have expertise in at least one of the key assistance areas defined in the Act (financial planning, grant-writing, applicable tax laws).

**Provide thoughts on how the impact and success of the grants awarded should be measured and ways to collect and report the data:**

- The Corporation should consider the following metrics to measure the success of this program: the ability of recipients to attract more resources, increased number of volunteers, return on investment, increased knowledge and intent to apply that knowledge.
- Strategies for collecting data include pre-and post-surveys, web-tools, peer reviews, and appreciative process.
- The Corporation should consider bringing intermediaries together to agree on common baseline measurement practices.
- Develop across the board standardized performance measures to show impact, keep it simple, and provide tools for intermediaries to use.

**Identify specific, evidence-based promising nonprofit capacity building practices/initiatives that you are aware of:**

- There is not much evidence-based TTA that we know of...
- Some best practice organizations cited included Venture Philanthropy Partners, National VOAD, Gulf's Compassion Fund, 2007/2008 Newark Capacity Foundation, Communities In Schools Working to Strengthen , Philadelphia's Child Quality of Care Program, New Haven's Learning Network, DOE's New Leaders for New Schools, the Taproot Foundation, Social Solutions, Grameen, TechSoup, GoogleApps/Education Edition, Salesforce, MD Standards for Excellence, Entrepreneurs Foundation, BoozAllen Executive Sessions in Fairfax, KCCD, Esperanza

**Identify gaps between what is available and what is needed or accessible to the sector as a whole:**

The biggest gaps in available nonprofit capacity resources for the sector include simple multi-purpose, multi-audience data collection for federal and nonfederal funders, engaging skills based and older volunteers, governance training, sustainability training, leadership development, and benchmarking metrics, basic organizational budgeting and completing 990 forms, etc.

**Ideas for how representatives in the room can collaborate and work together to leverage existing assets on behalf of the sector:**

The participants at the Nov. 19 meeting identified the following opportunities to collaborate and continue to work together: collect and share best practices, form a nonprofit advisory group to support a potential interagency working group (mentioned by Joshua DuBois of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships), share conference info and participate in each others' events, link to Billion+Change, set up a wiki, continue to meet face-to-face for these kinds of dialogues.