

Iowa Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

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Fostering local and statewide partnerships

The Iowa Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (ICFBCI) is a private, faith-based, 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity located in West Des Moines that has served distressed Iowa areas and organizations since 1995. It was formed, in part, to reflect the concept of Charitable Choice, a part of the federal welfare reform law that encourages the involvement of community and faith-based organizations by, among other things, providing federal funds for such organizations that provide social services to the poor and needy.

ICFBCI is a resource for small Iowa FBCOs and serves as a companion to services provided by, for example, the Larned A. Waterman Iowa Nonprofit Resource Center at The University of Iowa, the designated state resource for faith-based and community organizations. ICFBCI's mission is to improve the well-being of Iowans by providing resources and funds to strengthen and expand Iowa faith-based and community organizations (FBCO). It does so by fostering local and statewide partnerships, building capacity in collaboration with various individuals and organizations, and helping FBCOs measure outcomes.

The Center has conducted extensive work in distressed, rural, southern Iowa counties and in Des Moines' inner city. Most work involves grant project development, which motivates FBCOs to form area partnerships, develop sound program and organizational infrastructure, and evaluate outcomes.

Center staff help organizations build capacity by working with FBCO staff on an ongoing, collaborative basis to help ensure that knowledge, skills, and activities are integrated within the fabric of the organization. These activities include, for example, in-depth SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analyses, area assessments of need, board and staff alignment with contemporary concepts of leadership, grant writing, organizational development, and outcome measurement. ICFBCI's strong and productive relationships with state, local and private agencies throughout the state have allowed it to help FBCOs form collaborative partnerships to address area societal needs.

Compassion Iowa Evolves

During 2005-2007 the Center's director, together with four partner organizations, led a seventeen month Compassion Capital Fund Demonstration Grant Program, an \$800,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to serve small, grassroots Iowa FBCOs. This project, branded *Compassion Iowa*, offered training and technical assistance to one hundred small Iowa FBCOs and provided twenty-seven of them with sub-grant awards designed to build capacity in five critical areas: leadership, organizational development, programs and services, revenue development, and community engagement. Seven state agencies provided invaluable assistance to FBCO project participants.

Of these 100 organizations, approximately 60% were FBOs and 40% were CBOs. Sixty five percent of the awardees served primarily minority clients. Sub-awardees received grants ranging from \$8,000-\$15,000 and used them to, for example, achieve 501(c)(3) status, and develop strategic planning processes, computer systems, organizational policies and procedures, fund development structures, and other capacity building functions.

Outcomes data for the *Compassion Iowa* project show that participants grew significantly in the five critical areas cited above, and participants found relationships with similar organizations and government agencies and training in new models of service to be valuable. All applicants were eligible to attend other capacity building programs that address the *Compassion Iowa* project's focus areas. These programs include transformation leadership program sessions held in Des Moines as well as on-site in other locations, and sixty regional management series courses conducted across the state in cooperation with Iowa State University Extension.

ICFBCI's Future Activities

Based on its *Compassion Iowa* experience, ICFBCI will focus on the following activities:

- 1) further developing and implementing an innovative electronic, interactive strategic planning process system to help Iowa FBCOs in this important organizational activity;
- 2) assisting and equipping FBCOs to better determine the outcomes of their efforts through integrated measurement resources;
- 3) helping Iowa FBCOs to strike a balance between grant procurement and fund-raising donor cultivation, the latter of which is indelibly linked to community engagement. The Center plans to address this through work with a national organization experienced in grassroots fund-raising and its link to vision, mission, values and goals;
- 4) working with an Iowa service provider with strong marketing and community customer/client service expertise to help FBCOs develop stronger community interaction, deliver more relevant social services, and to achieve greater results for their efforts.