



## **PROMISING PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING THE CAPACITY OF FAITH- AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS**

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
The Role of Intermediaries .....	1
The Compassion Capital Fund.....	3
About This Study .....	4
About This Report.....	5
<b>Chapter 2: The Intermediaries and the Organizations They Served.....</b>	<b>7</b>
The CCF-Funded Intermediaries .....	7
The Non-CCF Intermediaries .....	10
Recruiting Organizations .....	12
Organizations Served.....	13
<b>Chapter 3: Organizational Assessments .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Promising Practices.....	17
<b>Chapter 4: Group Training.....</b>	<b>21</b>
Promising Practices.....	23
<b>Chapter 5: Technical Assistance.....</b>	<b>25</b>
Promising Practices.....	26
<b>Chapter 6: Sub-Awards.....</b>	<b>30</b>
Promising Practices.....	32
<b>Chapter 7: Serving as a Bridge Between Organizations .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Promising Practices.....	34
<b>Chapter 8: Strengthening the Capacity of Intermediaries .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Promising Practices.....	38
<b>Chapter 9: Lessons.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>46</b>

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The federal government is turning to intermediary organizations to help both faith-based and community-based organizations strengthen their programs and improve the services delivered to residents in low-income neighborhoods. The Compassion Capital Fund (CCF), established by Congress in 2002, provides funding for intermediary organizations to provide training, technical assistance and financial assistance to faith-based and community organizations.

This report documents the range of services that intermediaries provide to their constituent organizations, and highlights those that constitute promising practices. The report defines as promising practices those efforts undertaken by the intermediaries that show potential for producing successful outcomes—they improve the organizational capacity of faith-based and community organizations, are broadly used and accepted (although not universally), and have the potential for replication among other organizations.

This study was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families, and was conducted by Branch Associates, Inc. and its partner Abt Associates, Inc. Following guidelines from HHS, about half of the intermediaries in the study were funded in the first cohort of intermediaries selected through the competitive CCF application process. The remaining were chosen from among intermediaries with a track record of working with faith-based and community organizations, but which had not received CCF funding. This report is designed to provide additional information that can be shared with intermediaries funded under CCF and, potentially, be used in defining the types of services that the CCF should support.

### **Promising Practices**

The practices documented here fall into two categories. First, those that include sound, useful and easily replicable practices governing organizational assessment, group training, the sub-award process, and the facilitation of partnerships. The second category of promising practices entails holistic activities that require more intensive engagement on the part of the intermediary and the frontline organization.

### **Organizational Assessments**

The first capacity-building activity for most of the intermediaries was to conduct an assessment that identified the organizational strengths and weaknesses of each FBO and CBO. The intermediaries then used the assessment results to tailor technical assistance in ways that addressed each organization's most immediate and pressing needs and interests. Promising practices include:

- **Participatory Organizational Assessments**

Participatory self-assessments involve multiple staff from the FBO or CBO—from senior leaders to volunteers—and allow for dialogue and discussion among them about the organization’s strengths and weaknesses. Intermediaries reported that this approach provides them with an in-depth and reliable grasp of the key issues facing grassroots organizations. They also reported that by increasing the organizational staff members’ involvement in the process, this type of assessment increases those members’ dedication to the resulting work plan and capacity-building efforts.

- **Document Review as Part of Organizational Assessment**

In addition to conducting interviews and facilitating group discussions, intermediaries can learn about FBOs and CBOs by reviewing relevant documents. This additional method of data gathering was reported to enhance the assessment process by helping intermediaries gain a fuller view of the organization with which they were working.

## **Group Training**

Group training in this report refers to seminars, workshops, courses or lectures delivered in large group settings and designed to teach key concepts related to a particular topic. Training content included grant writing, financial management, board development, personnel management, marketing and creating partnerships. Intermediaries in this study provided trainings at no cost to participants, and were delivered either by intermediary staff or outside experts. Group training exposed some direct service providers to more sophisticated approaches to managing their organizations and helped foster networking among the attending organizations. Promising practices include:

- **Integrating Hands-On Assignments into Large-Group Training**

Stand-alone workshops increased awareness about many aspects of nonprofit management—much of which was new to small FBOs and CBOs. But this awareness did not necessarily translate into action. Intermediaries reported that providing technical assistance as part of the training (involving a form of “homework” that requires FBOs and CBOs to apply training concepts to their own organizations) helped put their newly gained skills to work.

- **Building on a Shared Culture to Enhance the Benefits of Training**

Shared backgrounds and values among trainers from the intermediaries and staff from the organizations attending the workshops can help shape an environment that facilitates learning among the workshop attendees. For instance, primarily Hispanic organizations benefited from working with bilingual intermediary staff members who could move back and forth between English and Spanish, and had similar cultural backgrounds.

## **Technical Assistance**

Technical assistance—as it is defined in this report—refers to instruction or guidance provided in one-on-one or small group settings. It is tailored to an organization’s specific needs and is, thus, a more customized approach than workshops, conferences or other group training activities. The areas addressed through technical assistance reflected the needs that emerged from the organizational assessment, as well as the organization’s interests and willingness to expend time addressing these issues. Among the most common topics addressed, four dominate the list: board development, strategic planning, financial management and fundraising. Promising practices include:

- **Project-Based Technical Assistance**

Project-based technical assistance provides FBOs and CBOs with tools and expertise in conceptualizing, designing and pursuing an actual program initiative. Thus, the learning takes place in the “real world” of program development.

- **Using the Expertise of Existing Staff**

In making decisions about who will provide technical assistance, intermediaries must balance the costs associated with using existing in-house staff against those associated with hiring consultants. Leveraging the expertise of in-house staff who are either involved with direct service (e.g., running an after-school program) or administrative functions (e.g., responsible for payroll) to provide technical assistance can be more cost-effective—and it grounds the assistance in real-world problems and constraints.

## **Sub-Awards**

Each of the CCF intermediaries in this study distributed a portion of its HHS award to FBOs and CBOs with which it was working. The amounts of these sub-awards varied, ranging from several thousand dollars to grants as large as \$50,000. In accordance with federal guidelines, all of these funds were awarded on a competitive basis. The CCF intermediaries used these sub-awards to encourage two distinct types of projects: capacity building and program expansion. Capacity-building awards were used for purposes such as hiring consultants to train board members, facilitate strategic planning retreats and develop fundraising plans. The program expansion sub-awards were used by organizations for such purposes as hiring full-time and part-time staff, so they could extend their program to an additional location and/or target additional groups of people to serve. The following promising practices cover every stage of the sub-award process, from proposal writing and revision, to learning from the experience of having an unsuccessful proposal:

- **Providing Group Training to Prepare for Writing the Proposal**

The sub-award process provided an opportunity for training FBOs and CBOs in the essentials of writing a grant proposal.

- **Giving Feedback on Drafts of Sub-Award Applications**

Intermediaries reported that having an early feedback process helped the organizations strengthen their ability to write effective proposals.

- **Having FBO and CBO Leaders Serve as Peer Reviewers**

Leaders of organizations that were not applying for the sub-awards learned important lessons about grant writing by serving as peer reviewers and, in that role, examining the proposals from a different perspective.

- **Providing Feedback for Organizations Whose Proposals were Not Funded**

Unsuccessful sub-award applications can provide a learning opportunity that helps organizations ultimately write more effective grant proposals.

### **Serving as a Bridge Between Organizations**

The intermediaries served as bridges, or liaisons, between their constituent organizations and other organizations, businesses and government agencies. Intermediaries helped their constituent FBOs and CBOs to make connections that could help them secure funding, as well as bring larger numbers of organizations together to create viable and effective coalitions. Promising practices include:

- **Linking Grassroots Organizations with Funding**

Intermediaries drew on their network of resources to introduce grassroots organizations to potential partners and funders that they would not otherwise have access to.

- **Creating Partnerships Among Organizations**

Intermediaries attempted to increase the effectiveness of neighborhood coalitions and partnerships by mobilizing new organizations to join the groups, helping member organizations develop effective working relationships and training them to increase their impact.

### **Strengthening the Capacity of Intermediaries**

Intermediaries in this study took additional steps to strengthen their own capacity. Partnerships, in particular, proved to be a key strategy for providing a fuller range of services to a diverse group of organizations. One important way that intermediaries can strengthen operations is to perform evaluations of their current effectiveness. Measuring outcomes of their services to organizations provides an opportunity for intermediaries to test their own perceptions of their value, improve services, and provide evidence of this value to funders. Promising practices include:

- **Organizational Mentoring**

Organizational mentoring at the executive level involves frequent communication between senior leaders of different organizations. The mentoring relationship is focused on helping to develop specific organizational capacities. The intermediaries engaged in organizational mentoring reported that this approach enabled one of the partners to develop the skills to function as a lead intermediary and provide services on a larger scale.

- **Using External Evaluation**

Having outside professionals conduct evaluations provides an opportunity for intermediaries to make their services more effective.

- **Using Internal Approaches for Measuring Outcomes**

Well-designed reporting forms completed by sub-award recipients document, in a systematized and comprehensive manner, how the sub-awardees used and benefited from their grants. These reports can provide valuable outcomes data that can be used by intermediaries to improve their own services and provide documentation of the value of such services to funders.

## **Lessons**

Taking all of the practices together, this report draws the following specific lessons from the study and recommendations for improving intermediaries' effectiveness.

### **Intermediaries provide an efficient means for the federal government to work with faith- and community-based organizations.**

Through CCF, HHS has invested in intermediaries to work with FBOs and CBOs more efficiently than it could work with them directly. This study found that intermediaries successfully recruited a range of grassroots organizations at different levels of capacity, from some that were barely even formal organizations, to others that were sophisticated and experienced.

### **HHS should continue to recruit both faith-based and secular intermediaries. Both types demonstrate strength in building relationships with constituent organizations and providing quality services.**

Faith-based and secular intermediaries in this study represented effective vehicles for government support of grassroots organizations. Both types developed good relationships with staff from the constituent organizations, and provided a range of services designed to improve the effectiveness of both FBOs and CBOs.

**There is an important role for large group training, but the bulk of resources should be directed to more intensive technical assistance.**

Large group training sessions serve several purposes—for example, by exposing staff of emerging grassroots organizations to new terminology, the ingredients for writing a good proposal, the process for submitting a proposal and methods for developing a budget.

However, one-on-one technical assistance has several advantages for strengthening organizations. One-on-one technical assistance allows for an in-depth exploration of issues that directly affect an organization. While group training provides useful information to organizations, the goal should be for FBOs and CBOs to not only be more aware of how they should be operating, but to also take action toward improved capacity. As anyone who has attended a professional conference, workshop or training can attest, awareness does not necessarily lead to action.

**Organizational mentoring for the intermediaries, at the executive level, is an approach to consider.**

A special type of partnership, organizational mentoring, is one approach worth considering for improving intermediaries' own capacities. Unlike technical assistance that is limited by contractual specifications, organizational mentoring relationships provide an opportunity for senior leaders to receive guidance and support in an ongoing, flexible and supportive manner around a variety of related topics. This approach—involving clear goals and intensive contacts between high-level staff—was used effectively for developing and improving staff infrastructure, financial systems, and proficiency with grants management for less experienced intermediaries.

**Intermediaries should do a better job of assessing their own services.**

Other than plans to re-administer organizational assessments and compare the initial and subsequent assessment scores, intermediaries in this study did not routinely measure outcomes associated with their technical assistance services. Intermediaries should assess their own services and measure their attainment of the desired outcomes. External evaluations and the collection of uniform and specific data from participating organizations will enable intermediaries (and HHS) to improve their programs, set realistic expectations and goals, and measure progress toward achieving those goals.

## INTRODUCTION

President George W. Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiative promotes new partnerships between the federal government and faith-based and community social service providers, with the goal of better serving residents of impoverished communities. Faith-based organizations (FBOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) have a long history of delivering needed services to these low-income residents. In many poor neighborhoods, they are often the only institutions with both substantial support within and respect from outside the community.

These organizations often have direct and consistent contact with those who are in the greatest need of social services. In fact, their inherent mission to serve those less fortunate can mean they are willing to work with the most difficult of populations—populations that more established service agencies are unlikely to reach. Their presence and status within these low-income communities provides them with relevant information about the challenges these residents face, and allows them to earn the trust of those they serve. In addition, the FBOs share a unique connection to service recipients through religion.

Despite the promise that FBOs and CBOs hold for delivering a broad array of services and making a difference in the lives of those in need, some may lack the organizational resources necessary for reaching their full potential. They frequently rely almost exclusively on the dedication of staff and networks of volunteers. Among FBOs, those volunteers are typically members of their congregations. These organizations often need assistance with such essential tasks as strategic planning, management and volunteer mobilization. Some lack the capacity for administrative and financial operations. They often do not have the knowledge or resources to monitor and evaluate their work, both for purposes of program improvement and for reporting to funders and policymakers. And they may not be well positioned to develop the institutional partnerships that can prove vital to the success of a small organization, allowing it to continue to focus on its core competency of delivering social services, while being supported in other areas.

In addition, until nine years ago, there were substantial barriers to the participation of faith-based organizations in federally funded projects. It was only with the passage of the Charitable Choice provisions of the 1996 welfare reform law that FBOs of all kinds were specifically allowed to compete for government funding to support their work with low-income residents in their communities. More recently, President Bush expanded efforts to increase the access of these organizations to federal funding sources by removing administrative barriers to their participation, particularly by creating Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in key government agencies.

### **The Role of Intermediaries**

Beyond the removal of administrative barriers, grassroots faith-based organizations, like many small community-based organizations, also need training and technical assistance to help them become more effective organizations and, ultimately, more viable candidates for federal funding.

To address the need of both FBOs and CBOs for strengthening their programs, the government turned to intermediary organizations—a class of organizations that, in the words of Hudson Institute researcher Amy L. Sherman, “helps frontline organizations do what they do better”<sup>1</sup>—as the conduits for the new partnerships between government and these grassroots groups.

Intermediaries, as the name suggests, connect local organizations with government, foundations and businesses, and can provide the strategic assistance that allows FBOs and CBOs to serve more people more effectively. In a recent study of faith-based intermediaries, Dr. Sherman found that “intermediary organizations currently make enormous contributions to the scope, scale, and effectiveness of grassroots, faith-based social service agencies, and often do so at low cost.”<sup>2</sup> Among the benefits facilitated by the intermediaries on behalf of the grassroots organizations were increased funding, development of alliances, increased volunteer pools and increased public exposure. In addition, the study notes that much intermediary support to faith-based organizations is “intangible,” but related to mentoring, coaching, and assistance with the articulation of program vision or mission.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, in an in-depth study of a Philadelphia intermediary, Branch and Taylor found that it had facilitated a wide range of benefits for the congregations with which it worked. Among the benefits were access to dialogue with grantmakers in the private and philanthropic sectors, often for the first time; access to technical expertise in a variety of fields including law, accounting and architecture; access to a network of congregations that were similarly interested in social service provision; improvements in overall operations, including upgrading their boards, and developing strategic plans and long-term budgets; new programs, improved outreach techniques and contact with more community residents; and significant steps toward fundability—including establishing 501(c)3 status, initiating contact with grantmakers, submitting proposals and writing letters of appeal.<sup>4</sup>

While the structure and service mix of intermediaries vary considerably, their common objective is to strengthen the capacity of the frontline organizations with which they work. Intermediaries help build on the strengths of grassroots organizations and address gaps in organizational capability where needed. They strengthen the resources of faith-based and community groups through a broad menu of services, among them:

- **Organizational Assessment**—Identifying organizations’ strengths, weaknesses and most pressing needs. The relationship between an intermediary and an organization commonly begins with such an assessment.
- **Group Training**—Workshops on organizational capacity delivered to large groups. Intermediaries offer training on a broad range of topics, including marketing and public relations, volunteer and human resource management, and creating partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> Amy L. Sherman, *Empowering Compassion: The Strategic Role of Intermediary Organizations in Building Capacity Among and Enhancing the Impact of Community Organizations*. Hudson Institute, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Alvia Y. Branch and Lynne Taylor. *An Evaluation of the Center for Urban Resources’ Inner City Impact Institute*, 1995.

- **Technical Assistance**—Instruction or guidance provided in one-on-one or small group settings. Intermediaries provide technical assistance in such topics as board development, strategic planning, financial management and fundraising.
- **Re-Granting or Making Sub-Awards**—The distribution of funds, received from the federal government or other funders, to smaller organizations. Those organizations might otherwise lack the administrative infrastructure required for the management and monitoring of such funds.
- **Bridging**—Serving as a liaison between constituent organizations and other nonprofit institutions, or foundation and governmental funding sources. In this role, intermediaries help organizations develop partnerships or secure funding.
- **Serving as a Capacity Surrogate**—Performance of administrative or service functions for organizations. In this role, an intermediary might, for example, serve as a fiscal agent or handle record-keeping functions.

## The Compassion Capital Fund

The Compassion Capital Fund (CCF), established by Congress in 2002, provides funding for intermediary organizations to work with faith-based and community organizations, performing responsibilities similar to those listed above. In the first round of CCF funding:

- A group of 21 intermediary organizations was selected through a competitive application process. Those intermediaries received grants so they could begin to provide training and technical assistance to faith-based and community organizations, along with making sub-grants to them on a competitive basis.
- A National Resource Center was established to provide information and training to the CCF intermediary organizations themselves. Dare Mighty Things, a Virginia-based organization, received a grant to operate the resource center.
- Awards were made for the support of research activities designed to assess the effectiveness of faith-based and community organizations.
- Awards were made to support a study that would document the practices of the intermediaries and delineate the “value added” that intermediaries bring to the work of faith-based and community organizations.

## About This Study

Branch Associates, Inc., partnering with Abt Associates, Inc., was selected to conduct the study of the intermediaries, which has four components: a study of promising practices drawn from an examination of 10 exemplary intermediaries, some of them funded through the Compassion Capital Fund and some of them not; the development of recommendations and an evaluation design, should the government choose to conduct an impact analysis on the effectiveness of Compassion Capital funding; the development of a benchmarking strategy—a series of quantitative and qualitative descriptors that can be used as uniform measures of the performance of faith-based and community organizations; and the development and dissemination of operational guides that will serve as practical tools for the ground-level implementation of some of the key activities identified in the study of promising practices.

This report completes the first of these study components. It documents the range of services that intermediaries provide to their constituent organizations, and identifies those among them that constitute promising practices. We define as promising practices those efforts undertaken by the intermediaries that:

- Show potential for producing successful outcomes
- Are widely used and accepted and/or have the potential for replication among other organizations.

We included practices that, during the course of site visits, impressed members of the research team as being particularly strong, as well as practices nominated by the faith-based and community organizations themselves as having been helpful and resulting in significant improvements to their operations.

The practices that were observed and documented in this report generally fall into two categories. The first category—the larger of the two—includes sound, useful and easily replicable practices that govern organizational assessment, group training, the sub-award process and facilitating partnerships. These practices, *when well implemented*, contribute to increased organizational capacity in the frontline organizations with which they are used. They are neither new nor groundbreaking—in fact, previous research on intermediaries confirms that similar practices do lead to desired changes. These practices are nevertheless *not* universal; they had not been implemented by the majority of the intermediaries we visited, leaving considerable room for intermediaries to improve their own efforts.

The second category of promising practices, involving project-based technical assistance and organizational mentoring, entails holistic activities that require more intensive engagement on the part of the intermediary and the frontline organization. These practices emphasize “teaching in the process of doing.” While also sound, valid and useful, replication of these practices would require the right set of actors and circumstances, as well as significant dedication. The appeal of these practices is their potential for bigger breakthroughs in improved organizational capacity. In defining these practices as “promising” the research team was guided by the literature on intermediaries, which suggests that intensive practices provided in the context of strong and

close relationships “makes it more likely that the practical skills and tools frontline staff acquire through the intermediary’s training are actually put to use”<sup>5</sup>

## Methodology

The first step in this study involved selecting a sample of intermediaries that exhibited promising practices. In order to do so, a database of 65 existing intermediaries was developed. This database served as a sampling frame from which the research team selected the 10 intermediaries to be included in the report. The intermediaries in the database were identified by experts in the field, including members of the project’s Technical Review Group, or through reports, publications and document reviews. Each of the intermediaries was considered—either in the literature or in the opinion of relevant experts—to be implementing interesting or exemplary practices in interactions with their constituent organizations.

Brief telephone interviews with the intermediaries in the database provided basic information about each organization’s religious or organizational affiliation; geographic location and service area; operating budget and source of funding; and types of services provided. These interviews also identified promising practices used by the intermediary.

Guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) directed that about half of the intermediaries in our sample were to be selected from among the first group of 21 intermediaries funded by CCF. The others were to be chosen from among a group of intermediaries that had a track record of working with faith-based and community organizations but had not received CCF funding. Additional criteria included a minimum of three years of experience operating as an intermediary and an operating budget of \$500,000 to ensure a minimum level of stability. The final sample was also intended to reflect geographic diversity, and include both secular and faith-based organizations.

Using matrices that categorized intermediaries on these variables of interest, the research team chose the sample of 10 intermediaries that are the subject of this report. This sample was selected to highlight promising practices and is, therefore, not representative of all intermediaries.

The primary data collection strategy consisted of site visits to the 10 case study intermediaries. During each site visit, researchers interviewed staff from the intermediary and its partner organizations, as well as from two or more FBOs and/or CBOs served by the intermediary. The research team also observed training or technical assistance sessions conducted by the intermediary and reviewed relevant documents.

## **About This Report**

This report highlights practices that show promise in building the capacity of faith- and community-based social service providers. It examines the types of services intermediaries offer and the constituent organizations they target, and addresses the following questions:

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<sup>5</sup> Sherman, *Empowering Compassion*, 19.

- What are examples of promising practices of intermediary organizations, practices that are worthy of replication by other intermediary organizations?
- What strategies should HHS promote and encourage among its intermediary partners?

The following chapter provides a brief description of the intermediaries in this study, the kinds of organizations with whom they worked and how they recruited them. Chapters 3 through 7 then describe intermediary functions and highlight the promising practices discovered in this research. Chapter 3 describes intermediary efforts to assess the FBOs and CBOs—the first task undertaken as part of their Compassion Capital grants. Chapters 4 and 5 document the ways that the intermediaries provide group training and one-on-one technical assistance, while Chapter 6 discusses the intermediaries' sub-award programs through which they handled the redistribution of federal funds. Chapter 7 describes ways in which the intermediaries serve as bridges between their constituent organizations and funders and other nonprofit groups, while Chapter 8 examines strategies used by the intermediaries to foster and measure their own success. The final chapter presents lessons learned from this study, with recommendations for how HHS can support and enhance the effectiveness of its intermediaries. Throughout the report, we present stories of FBOs and CBOs, showing how they have benefited from their work with the intermediaries.

## THE INTERMEDIARIES AND THE ORGANIZATIONS THEY SERVED

In this chapter, we present the intermediary organizations that were chosen for this study of promising practices and provide an overview of the types of organizations with which they worked.

Table 1 describes the 10 intermediaries that participated in the study. As it shows, the selection process succeeded in yielding a diverse group. The selected intermediaries and their service areas span all regions of the country, and include six intermediaries that were funded under the first round of CCF grants and four that, though not funded through CCF, also work to help faith- and community-based organizations improve their abilities to deliver services to their constituents. The sample also includes both faith-based and secular intermediaries.<sup>6</sup>

### The CCF-Funded Intermediaries

Among the six intermediaries in the sample that were funded under the first round of CCF grants, two are secular (Associated Black Charities and JVA Consulting) and four are faith-based (Boston Capacity Tank, Father Joe’s Villages, Mennonite Economic Development Associates and Nueva Esperanza). All six provided similar types of services, at least in part because of requirements for receiving CCF support. CCF intermediaries were obligated to provide training and technical assistance to FBOs and CBOs, and to offer financial support through sub-awards to some subset of those organizations. The technical assistance activities had to be provided at no cost, and sub-award recipients had to be chosen through a “fair and open competitive process.”

As a result of the government’s guidance, expectations and stipulations, CCF intermediaries focused most of their work with FBOs and CBOs on those required services (training, technical assistance and sub-awards). Despite that similarity, however, CCF intermediaries differed in their size (overall budgets ranged from approximately \$3 million to \$47 million), organizational histories and experience, and in how the CCF program fit into their mission.

The sample includes both locally based and international organizations. **Associated Black Charities (ABC)** is a nonprofit secular intermediary that has been operating since 1985. ABC provides technical assistance and grants to organizations in Baltimore and across Maryland on issues of special significance to the state’s African-American communities, including family preservation, health promotion, economic empowerment, youth development and community revitalization. Its Compassion Capital Fund Demonstration Program, which has been implemented in three regions of Maryland, including the Baltimore metropolitan area, the Eastern Shore, and Prince Georges County, focuses on organizational assessments, sub-awards, and group training.

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<sup>6</sup> The faith-based intermediaries were all Christian, and although their services were available to constituent organizations of any faith, Christian FBOs predominated.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the Case Study Intermediary Sample**

	CCF	Faith-Based	Location	Service Area	Total Staff <sup>d</sup>	CCF Staff	Annual Budget	CCF Annual Budget
<b>Associated Black Charities (ABC)</b>	Yes	No <sup>a</sup>	Baltimore, MD	Baltimore, Eastern Shore, Prince Georges County, MD	44	9	\$23 million	\$1.5 million
<b>Boston Capacity Tank (BCT); United Way Mass Bay; Black Ministerial Alliance; Emmanuel Gospel Center; Boston Ten-Point Coalition</b>	Yes	Yes <sup>b</sup>	Boston, MA	Boston, MA	12 <sup>e</sup>	2	\$20 million	\$2 million
<b>Father Joe's Villages (FJV)</b>	Yes	Yes	San Diego, CA	Southern CA	600	4	\$47 million	\$673,041
<b>Good Samaritan Ministries (GSM)</b>	No	Yes	Holland, MI	Holland, MI	17	Not applicable	\$1.5 million	Not applicable
<b>JVA Consulting, LLC</b>	Yes	No <sup>c</sup>	Denver, CO	Colorado	23	8	\$2.8 million	\$1.8 million
<b>Local Initiatives Support Corporation Palm Beach (LISC)</b>	No	No	West Palm Beach, FL	Palm Beach County, FL	5	Not applicable	Not available	Not applicable
<b>Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)</b>	Yes	Yes	Lancaster, PA	5 regions in US	Not available	5	\$5 million	\$1 million
<b>Nueva Esperanza</b>	Yes	Yes	Phila., PA	6 regions in US	140	11	\$8 million	\$2.4 million
<b>Seedco</b>	No	No	New York, NY; Birmingham, AL; Memphis, TN	10 states in US	150	Not applicable	\$21 million	Not applicable
<b>Urban Strategies Council</b>	No	No	Oakland, CA	Oakland & national	11	Not applicable	\$1.3 million	Not applicable

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> ABC partnered with other secular organizations (The Resource Mentoring Project, The After School Institute, The Center for Community Technology Services and Social Solutions) and one faith-based organization (Kingdom Community Builders).

<sup>b</sup> Three faith-based organizations partnered with a secular organization, operating as The Boston Capacity Tank.

<sup>c</sup> JVA partnered with a faith-based organization, the Metro Denver Black Church Initiative (MDBCI).

<sup>d</sup> Includes full-time and part-time staff.

<sup>e</sup> Refers to staff at the Black Ministerial Alliance.

While ABC has always operated locally, **Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)**—a faith-based intermediary—has a 51-year history of international economic development work and 10 years of working in economic development across the United States. Started by a group of Mennonites, MEDA is a membership-based organization of about 3,000 business people interested in faith and its integration with business development. MEDA assists communities around the world to sustain themselves through micro-enterprise. In its CCF project, MEDA has broadened its role as an intermediary to include organizations that focus on issues ranging from at-risk youth to hunger and homelessness.

The sample of CCF-funded intermediaries has one collaborative (**The Boston Capacity Tank—BCT**), which includes the United Way of Massachusetts Bay (UWMB) and the Black Ministerial Alliance (BMA), who joined with the Emmanuel Gospel Center and the Boston Ten-Point Coalition to provide support for organizations that serve high-risk youth. Each of the partners brings different strengths to the initiative, ensuring that the team is able to meet a broad range of needs among its target organizations; and the relationships among the partners are consistently recognized as honest, transparent and non-competitive.

During BCT’s first year, UWMB—as the partner with the most experience in managing large government contracts and funding faith-based organizations, and with the greatest capacity among the four—served as the lead agency, setting up systems for grant management and financial reporting. UWMB provided support to the other three partners, and especially to BMA, the organization slated to take over BCT leadership functions after the initial year. With this transition well underway, the intermediary collaborative is now officially housed at BMA.

In another distinctive partnership, the sample’s only for-profit intermediary—**JVA Consulting, LLC (JVA)**, located in Denver—joined with the Metro Denver Black Church Initiative (MDBCI), a faith-based membership organization serving African-American churches, to serve FBOs and CBOs in Denver and across the state of Colorado. JVA was formed 17 years ago, primarily as a grant-writing firm for nonprofit organizations, schools and government agencies. Over the years, it has expanded its services to include more capacity-building projects, such as helping organizations to develop strategic plans and resource development plans.

The CCF funding has allowed JVA to assist less sophisticated groups that otherwise could not afford its services, expand its geographic reach from the Denver metropolitan area to the entire state, and develop a more comprehensive approach. In its CCF project, the intermediary has specialized in working with smaller organizations—those whose capacity-development needs are greatest. And in order to maximize the number of organizations with which it works, JVA strives to limit each organization to an average of 30 hours of customized technical assistance, which typically takes place within a period of six to nine months. The organization then “graduates.” JVA admits new organizations through an annual application process in the fall. Its partner in the CCF project, the MDBCI, operates somewhat differently. MDBCI has opted to work with the same small number of organizations over several years to deepen their mastery of nonprofit management areas.

While the majority of the intermediaries in our sample had at least fairly substantial experience, two were new to that role—although they were able to draw on their organizations’ experiences

and reputations as well-established direct service providers. **Father Joe's Villages (FJV)** began 50 years ago with a modest operation in downtown San Diego, providing food to the homeless. Over the years, that has evolved into the expansive campus of the St. Vincent DePaul Village in downtown San Diego, which provides emergency, short- and long-term transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing for the homeless. In addition to housing nearly 1,000 individuals per night, it offers clients access to a comprehensive array of support services, ranging from assessment, licensed childcare, elementary and high school education, case management, health services (including psychiatry), career education, and mental health counseling and recovery services.

While St. Vincent DePaul Village serves as an organizational anchor point, Father Joe's operation has expanded both its scope of services and its geographic reach. It now operates six other comprehensive rehabilitation centers in Southern California and Mexico, including Toussaint Youth Villages, which address the needs of homeless teens; Josue Homes/National AIDS Foundation, which provides housing and related services to those living with AIDS or HIV; and Martha's Villages, which provides rehabilitation services for homeless families, women and men. As the size and scope of FJV grew, other organizations became interested in learning from its success. Thus, expanding its role to serve as an intermediary seemed like a logical step. In 2003, with its CCF grant, the organization created the Village Training Institute, a self-contained entity within FJV, to operate its first intermediary project.

**Nueva Esperanza**, located in Philadelphia, also has extensive experience as a direct service provider. The largest Latino faith-based community development corporation in the country, Nueva was founded in 1987. It currently offers housing, economic development and job training services, and operates a charter high school, junior college program, and campsite and retreat center.

Nueva Esperanza's work as an intermediary began in 2002, when it launched the first prayer breakfast in Washington, D.C. for Hispanic clergy. With its CCF funding, Nueva Esperanza provides training, technical assistance and sub-awards in six regions around the country. Nueva brings all participating FBOs and CBOs together in Washington, D.C. as part of a national training event.

## **The Non-CCF Intermediaries**

In providing details on promising approaches for improving the capacity of FBOs and CBOs, we wanted to document a wide array of practices that would be appropriate for replication by a far-reaching group of intermediaries. For this reason, we did not restrict the research exclusively to intermediaries that had been funded by CCF at the time this study began, but also included four non-CCF-funded intermediaries in order to better document the roles and services of intermediaries across the board.

While some of these non-CCF organizations provided training and technical assistance which was similar to that provided by the CCF-funded sites, they also played other important roles. Three focused their work on helping FBOs and CBOs to develop new partnerships and coalitions. And although it was less prevalent than other services, two of the intermediaries also

served as “capacity surrogates”: they lent staff or performed administrative or service functions for the FBOs and CBOs. Providing this type of service to grassroots organizations can enable them to operate more effectively until they have sufficient funds to hire their own staff.

These non-CCF intermediaries include three nonprofit secular organizations (Palm Beach County Local Initiatives Support Network, the Urban Strategies Council and Seedco) and one faith-based intermediary (Good Samaritan Ministries). With the exception of Seedco (a large, multi-site operation), the non-CCF intermediaries have budgets of about \$1.5 million and work primarily with FBOs and CBOs in their city or region.

The Local Initiatives Support Network is a national intermediary founded in 1980. The largest community development support organization in the country, it serves as the umbrella for 38 regional program offices across the nation. One of those offices is the **Palm Beach County Local Initiatives Support Network (LISC)**, which serves Palm Beach County and parts of Broward County in Florida.<sup>7</sup> Founded in 1991, LISC has been integral to organizing different segments of Palm Beach County around economic development and housing issues. As a part of its community organizing activities, it has directly supported the establishment of 25 community development corporations (CDCs) that are currently focusing on creating affordable housing and supporting retail infrastructure in some of the county’s most underserved regions.

LISC has experience offering a wide range of technical assistance and training opportunities to its partner CDCs and other nonprofits, and it provides grant and loan assistance by acting as an intermediary between private lenders and neighborhood groups. It has also developed the South Florida Community Development Training Institute (CDTI), through which it offers locally based and regional seminars, workshops, and assessments for a wide range of entities, including CDCs, other nonprofits, government agencies, financial institutions, and builders and developers.

The **Urban Strategies Council** is another community-focused intermediary. Founded as a secular, nonprofit organization in Oakland, California, in 1987, it is a community-building support and advocacy organization that assists stakeholders in creating partnerships and alliances for collective action that will reduce poverty and transform low-income neighborhoods. The organization takes a leadership role by identifying issues that have an impact on urban communities—including employment, public safety and public education—and building an understanding of the issues among stakeholders, and developing plans for addressing them. One of the council’s key functions is conducting research that provides data relevant to the issues being addressed and disseminating those data to stakeholders so the information can be used to plan and manage community-change efforts.

A third non-CCF intermediary, **Good Samaritan Ministries**, is located in Holland, Michigan. Founded in 1969 as a non-denominational, faith-based organization, Good Samaritan was created by individuals from a variety of churches who collectively recognized growing social needs in the region and felt that the faith community had a calling to respond.

Good Samaritan fills a variety of roles. The organization collaborates with local agencies to provide a limited number of direct services, including financial counseling and life skills

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<sup>7</sup> There are three other regional LISC field offices in the state of Florida: Jacksonville, Miami and Tampa.

mentoring. It performs assessments on individuals and families seeking assistance for essential needs such as housing, maintains information on available services in the area, and refers clients to appropriate organizations and other resources. To strengthen the services the individuals and families receive, Good Samaritan provides training and technical assistance to those organizations, most of which are faith-based. It also works to build networks of churches that can identify and address community needs through joint programming.

Unlike the other three intermediaries, **Seedco**, headquartered in New York City, with regional offices in Birmingham, Alabama and Memphis, Tennessee, is a large organization that serves more than 200 CBOs and FBOs a year. It works with organizations that range widely in size and sophistication, from those with only one or two employees to those with a staff of more than 200 people. The intermediary's focus includes training and technical assistance connected to economic development, affordable housing, entrepreneurship, workforce development and increasing the supports available to working families. It also provides financing to support selected program activities of the organizations it serves.

One defining characteristic of Seedco's technical assistance is the emphasis it places on measuring and improving the performance of organizations' program activities. Seedco developed its own system—known as Performance Measurement & Management<sup>sm</sup>—to help organizations articulate outcomes, collect data about these outcomes, and then use the data to continually inform and improve their programs.

## **Recruiting Organizations**

For the CCF-funded intermediaries in particular, the first major task was to recruit organizations that could benefit from the services they offered. The intermediaries used multiple methods—including mailing lists, e-mail, word of mouth, information sessions and introductory group training workshops—to inform social service providers about their services. Some of the intermediaries had already established reputations for effective work, and this helped attract FBOs and CBOs to their services. In addition, a couple of the CCF-funded intermediaries continued to work with organizations they had already been serving by bringing them into the CCF project.

Intermediaries' staff and resource capacities meant that they could serve only a limited number of organizations through technical assistance, although some opened their larger group training workshops to any organization in the community. Geography was also a limiting factor, with most intermediaries targeting specific areas. A few intermediaries operated multiple program sites across the country, but each of those sites served a defined region.

Intermediaries attempted to enlist FBOs and CBOs small enough to benefit from capacity-building services, but established enough to survive, so that the training and technical assistance efforts would be a good investment. In general, the intermediaries based their decisions on who would receive services—and, particularly, technical assistance—on at least some of the following eligibility criteria:

- Type of services provided. The HHS Request for Proposals (RFP) had listed six areas of service provision: hunger, homelessness, substance abuse, prisoners re-entering the community, at-risk youth, and families in transition from welfare to work. Some intermediaries included organizations that provide services in any of those areas while others focused on a particular service area, such as at-risk youth.
- Track record. Some intermediaries looked for FBOs and CBOs that had been operating for at least a minimum number of years, rather than start-up organizations.
- Size (budget). Some intermediaries, for example, targeted organizations with an operating budget under \$300,000 or under \$500,000.
- Limited prior experience with receipt of government grants.
- Lack of technical assistance services from other sources.

## Organizations Served

For the most part, intermediaries reported that they successfully recruited sufficient numbers of FBOs and CBOs. The group training sessions attracted large numbers of participants, and the number of organizations interested in receiving technical assistance generally met intermediaries' expectations. The intermediaries also received a larger number of acceptable applications for sub-awards than they could fund.

All intermediaries in this study recruited both faith-based and secular organizations. The religious character of the intermediary did not necessarily determine the type of organization served. Secular intermediaries proved adept at recruiting FBOs, while several faith-based intermediaries reported difficulties recruiting FBOs.<sup>8</sup>

As Table 2 illustrates, the number of organizations served varied across the intermediaries. These FBOs and CBOs included start-up and established organizations, and ranged from very small, volunteer-run programs to large, multi-million dollar operations. These organizations sought to improve their communities through a broad range of social services: serving the homeless, mentoring children of prisoners, helping welfare recipients find employment and providing after-school opportunities, among many others.

The following chapters describe the services these organizations received from the intermediaries and detail some of the promising practices that contributed to the effectiveness of those services.

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<sup>8</sup> These difficulties were attributed to concerns about regulations that accompany federal funding and the labor and time-intensive requirements of participating in the grant program.

**Table 2: Characteristics of the FBOs and CBOs Served by the Intermediaries**

	Number of FBOs & CBOs Served <sup>b</sup> (first year of the CCF project)			Budget Size (range)	% FBOs	Focus of Services	Eligibility Criteria Set By Intermediary
	Technical Assistance	Group Training	Financial Assistance (sub-awards)				
<b>Associated Black Charities (ABC)<sup>a</sup></b>	90 <sup>c</sup>	659 <sup>c</sup>	46	Up to \$500,000 <sup>d</sup>	40%	All <sup>f</sup>	Have 501c3 Operate 3+ years No previous government funding
<b>Boston Capacity Tank (BCT)<sup>a</sup></b>	12	99	32	\$225,000 - \$1,070,000 <sup>e</sup>	50%	At-risk youth	Operate 1 year Have 501c3 Have paid staff
<b>Father Joe's Villages (FJV)<sup>a</sup></b>	200	922	10	\$50,000 - \$500,000 <sup>e</sup>	37%	All <sup>f</sup>	None specified
<b>Good Samaritan Ministries (GSM)</b>	97	14	14	n/a	87%	All <sup>f</sup>	None specified
<b>JVA Consulting, LLC<sup>a</sup></b>	84	137	39	\$3,000 - \$500,000 <sup>e</sup>	50%	All <sup>f</sup>	Budget under \$300,000 (sub-awards); under \$500,000 (technical assistance)
<b>Local Initiatives Support Corporation Palm Beach (LISC)</b>	25	25	25	n/a	12%	Housing, community development	Committed to good business practices
<b>Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)<sup>a</sup></b>	32	321	22	Up to \$500,000 <sup>d</sup>	56%	All <sup>f</sup>	None specified
<b>Nueva Esperanza<sup>a</sup></b>	32	138	29	Up to \$5,000,00 <sup>e</sup>	75%	All <sup>f</sup>	Primarily Latino-owned or operated organization Operate 1 year Have 501c3
<b>Seedco</b>	30	215	30	n/a	n/a	Low-wage workers, workforce development, asset building, economic development	Implementing community building projects
<b>Urban Strategies Council</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	Up to \$2,500,00 <sup>e</sup>	Few	Low-income communities	None specified

Notes:

n/a means information is not available.

<sup>a</sup> Information in this table refers only to the intermediary's CCF program.

<sup>b</sup> Organizations may receive more than one service. The number of FBOs and CBOs served through the different activities is a duplicated count.

<sup>c</sup> This number is a count of individuals (not organizations) who received services.

<sup>d</sup> Budget size represents eligibility criteria set by the intermediary to determine which organizations receive services.

<sup>e</sup> Budget size represents the budget size of organizations served during the time of the case study site visits.

<sup>f</sup> "All" refers to the areas included in the RFP for first year CCF intermediaries: hunger, homeless, prisoners reentering the community, at-risk youth, addicts, families in transition from welfare to work.

## ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

The first capacity-building activity for most of the intermediaries was to conduct an assessment that identified the organizational strengths and weaknesses of each FBO and CBO they recruited. The intermediaries used the assessment results to tailor technical assistance in ways that addressed each organization's most immediate and pressing needs and interests.

Five of the six CCF intermediaries conducted an assessment.<sup>9</sup> One intermediary collaborated with a specialist in nonprofit organizational development to conduct the assessments. The others developed new assessment tools and conducted the assessments themselves. Although each instrument was unique, they covered the same key topics in organizational development: organizational purpose and legal status, board development, fundraising and marketing, financial management, program development and evaluation, community collaborations, personnel management, and information technology.

Several assessments used questionnaires to quantify capacity levels by assigning scores to the answers. Some of the questionnaires relied on yes/no statements. A sample question reads: "The board has adopted a clearly written mission statement that reflects the organization's purpose, values, and constituency served." The sum of all the "yes" responses was totaled for an overall score. Other questionnaires had assessors rate criteria along a scale; they would then average all responses to obtain a quantitative measure. In this approach, a sample question reads: "The organization's mission statement is reviewed periodically." Response categories include "never," "seldom," "occasionally," "often." The reliability or validity of any of these scales is not known, since they have been used with small samples and not validated against other measures of capacity or measures of organizational effectiveness. However, their practical usefulness seems clear. Intermediary staff believed these instruments helped them to pinpoint the areas of greatest need, and the FBO and CBO staff generally concurred.

Intermediaries used two valid approaches to using these questionnaires: external assessment and participatory assessment. In external assessments, intermediaries collected information through interviews with FBO and CBO staff, generally spending several hours with one or two key informants from the faith- or community-based organization. While some interviewers asked the questions exactly as they appeared on the assessment tool, some of the more experienced intermediary staff adopted a conversational tone. For example, a lead-in question such as "Tell me about your board of directors" got them much of the information they needed, and they asked follow-up questions when necessary.

In participatory assessments, FBO or CBO members completed the questionnaires themselves, and also engaged in group discussions or open-ended interviews. This innovative and inclusive approach (described more fully below) typically involved at least three representatives from the organization, including a board member, the executive director and a staff person; and it helped

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the non-CCF-funded intermediaries in this study also conducted organizational assessments.

them identify organizational issues and needs that, before the assessment, they had not necessarily recognized as important priorities.

## Benefits

Intermediary staff reported several benefits of the assessments and the work plans that followed. The assessment process educated FBO and CBO leaders both about their specific strengths, weaknesses and potential, and about general organizational principles. As one intermediary staff member noted, “It gives everyone a picture of what is good, what is weak, what is missing, and lets us work on these things.” Many organizations do not take time out of their day-to-day operations to think about the “big picture” of where they are heading. And leaders of small organizations that lack a background in nonprofit management often have not thought about these organizational issues before: “Most don’t know they are supposed to have x, y, or z until we go in there.”

Another benefit of the assessment and resulting work plan was that it focused both the intermediary and service organization on a small number of achievable steps. (See the box on the next page for an example of steps taken by one organization.) The work plan listed the areas or activities to be undertaken, who was responsible (for example, consultant, executive director, board) and a timeline for completing the tasks. An overriding issue raised by many intermediary staff members concerned the need for grassroots organizations to “stay focused on their mission.” The assessment process helped channel their efforts. While these benefits accrued to both external and participatory assessments, below we describe a particularly strong implementation of the participatory approach.

## **Promising Practices**

### **Participatory Organizational Assessments**

*Participatory self-assessments involve multiple staff from the FBOs or CBOs—from senior leaders to volunteers—and allow for dialogue and discussion among them about the organization’s strengths and weaknesses. Intermediaries reported that this approach provides them with an in-depth and reliable grasp of the key issues that grassroots organizations face. They also reported that by increasing the organizational staff members’ involvement in the process, this type of assessment increases those members’ dedication to the resulting work plan and capacity-building efforts.*

**Associated Black Charities (ABC).** Research that showed grassroots service organizations were “not getting the help they needed, just the help they asked for” inspired ABC’s partner, the Resource Mentoring Project (RMP) of the University of Maryland’s Social Work Community Outreach Service, to formulate, in partnership with ABC staff, an assessment process that collected more accurate information about organizations’ needs.

### **An FBO Story**

**Organization: Operation Nehemiah**

**Intermediary: Mennonite Economic Development Association**

Operation Nehemiah is a Pittsburgh-based 501(c)3 affiliated with Petra International Ministries. Established 11 years ago with a focus on youth services, this faith-based organization has grown into a multi-service agency, whose programs include drug and alcohol treatment, economic development activities, a residential facility for males involved with the juvenile justice system, and in-home services for families. It has 24 permanent staff members and an operating budget in excess of \$1 million, with funding from a variety of sources, including several grants from local county government.

A major challenge facing Operation Nehemiah, as identified by MEDA through its organizational assessment, was reducing its dependence on county funding. MEDA provided support in this area by granting a sub-award that allowed Operation Nehemiah to develop a website and public relations materials, including an organizational logo and stationary. It is hoped that the “branding” of the Operation Nehemiah organization will assist with name recognition and fundraising. Building on these materials, the organization plans to receive technical assistance from MEDA on developing a volunteer base and launching an individual contributions campaign.

To this end, ABC and the RMP adapted the Capacity Assessment Grid developed by McKinsey & Company for Venture Philanthropy Partners. The ABC/RMP tool contains 62 items, divided among eight categories in the following areas: mission and goals; human resources, such as staffing levels and board composition and commitment; and organizational skills, such as financial planning and budgeting, grant writing, and outcomes measurement.

The items are scored along a 1 to 4 scale, with “1” indicating the greatest need for development: 1) clear need for increased capacity; 2) basic level of capacity in place; 3) high level of capacity in place; and 4) exceptional level of capacity in place. Bulleted descriptions provide criteria for scoring each item. For example, the rating scheme for “mission” includes:

	1. Clear need for increased capacity	2. Basic level of capacity in place	3. High level of capacity in place	4. Exceptional level of capacity in place
<b>Mission</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No written “mission statement”</li> <li>• No widely shared or expressed reason for group’s existence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some expression of mission</li> <li>• Lacks clarity; not often cited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear mission statement</li> <li>• Held by many</li> <li>• Often cited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear mission statement</li> <li>• Broadly held</li> <li>• Frequently cited</li> </ul>

The assessment begins with at least three people in each FBO or CBO (for example, a board member, executive director, and line staff or volunteer) using this tool independently to rate their organization, a process that takes about an hour.

One week later, the intermediary representative facilitates a meeting with everyone who completed the assessment from the organization. During the meeting, they work through the questionnaire item by item: organization members report their ratings for each item and discuss differences in their responses. Through this process, they often learn a great deal about each other’s perceptions of the organization. In one organization, for example, a volunteer staff member did not know that the organization had a mission statement, while the executive director had given the mission category the highest rating.

For RMP staff, the point is not to come to a consensus on rating each item. Instead, the discussion provides the chance for participants to explain their ratings. Once they start talking about the ratings, other issues surface (for example, lack of engagement by the board or the need for a stronger focus on fundraising). This meeting, which lasts up to two hours, gives the RMP staff insight into the organization. RMP then takes the assessments and analyzes the results. They present the scores to the organization and also prepare a written narrative that reflects the discussion and offers recommendations for the organization. The organization then uses this document to develop an action plan. ABC used this information to direct technical assistance, training and sub-award funding to grantee organizations.

### **Document Review as Part of Organizational Assessment**

*In addition to conducting interviews and facilitating group discussions, intermediaries can learn about FBOs and CBOs by reviewing relevant documents. This additional method of data gathering was reported to enhance the assessment process by helping intermediaries gain a fuller view of the organization with which they were working.*

**Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA).** While many intermediaries limited their organizational assessment procedures to taking an organization's word that they have a "concise mission statement" or "a strategic plan," MEDA requests and reviews 15 documents from each organization, including:

- Documents that articulate the organization's current mission, goals and vision.
- Bylaws and other policies or guidelines used by the board, as well as board officer and committee job descriptions.
- An organizational chart, job descriptions for key staff and employment policies.
- A strategic plan.
- The annual operations plan and budget, and an annual report or financial statement.
- Information brochures used to promote the organization.

MEDA staff members, all experienced nonprofit managers, analyze the information collected during the document-review process to develop an in-depth look at the organization and the issues "holding it back." This approach uncovers issues that do not necessarily come up in interviews and helps the intermediary to better target its technical assistance.

## GROUP TRAINING

While group training is often considered as a type of technical assistance, this report treats it as a distinct service category. Group training here refers to seminars, workshops, courses or lectures delivered in large group settings, and designed to teach key concepts related to a particular topic. Training content focused on common needs and interests related to organizational capacity including grant writing, financial management, board development, personnel management, marketing and creating partnerships.

Intermediaries in this study provided trainings at no cost to participants, and many of the sessions were open to any interested organization in the community. Typically, between 10 and 50 representatives from faith- and community-based organizations attended a training event. The number of training workshops offered varied across the intermediaries, ranging from a single two-day training to 43 workshops over the course of a year.

The trainings were delivered either by intermediary staff or outside experts. Father Joe’s Villages (FJV) adopted a hybrid approach. A core team of two in-house instructors led group training sessions and, when necessary, FJV also brought in outside professionals with specialized knowledge. As one example, a workshop on nonprofit 501(c)3 status featured a question-and-answer period with a lawyer who specialized in advising nonprofit clients.

### Benefits

Group training exposed some direct service providers to more sophisticated approaches to managing their organizations. For example, a number of the FBOs and CBOs working with the intermediaries had never written a grant proposal or did not know what terms such as “in-kind contributions” meant. (See the box on the next page for the experiences of one small faith-based organization.) However, service organizations differed in the support they needed. While small organizations with limited experience in submitting proposals were pleased that intermediaries walked them through the grant application process, the more experienced organizations felt that they did not necessarily benefit from such introductory workshops.

At the same time, group training sessions were valuable for more than the material they provided. Most sessions mixed whole-group lecture presentations with small-group and other peer-to-peer learning efforts, question-and-answer periods, and other activities designed to engage the participants. These shared learning activities helped foster networking among the attending organizations. Intermediaries reported that attendees learned about the services provided by their peers and explored potential collaborations. Several intermediaries reported cases of joint proposals or new partnerships that were formed among participating organizations.

### **An FBO Story**

**Organization: Door to Life Ministries**

**Intermediary: Nueva Esperanza**

Door to Life Ministries, a faith-based residential drug rehabilitation program in Brooklyn, New York, uses both “clinical and spiritual healing approaches” to serve the 25 men in its care. The organization’s intensive approach helps the men heal their addictions, gain employment, strengthen their English skills, and become economically self-sufficient. But with an annual operating budget of \$110,000, and dependent on its sponsoring church for 60 percent of its income, Door to Life Ministries has not been able to pay steady salaries to its employees, offering instead only monthly “donations” to them for their work. Increasing and diversifying its income sources by maximizing the ability of board members to garner new donations and by tapping new funding streams are crucial priorities.

To help Door to Life Ministries increase its capacity in those areas, Nueva Esperanza provided training and customized technical assistance through its Hispanic Capacity Project. As a result, the organization was able to apply for 501(c)3 status and develop its first formal budget. Its director then began working with members of the board to clarify their roles, encouraging them to take on more responsibility and become more proactive.

The organization had also never submitted a proposal in response to an RFP and had very limited experience using the Internet. When the Door to Life director approached staff at Nueva for assistance in responding to the intermediary’s web-based RFP for a CCF sub-award, Nueva guided him through the web-based application and clarified questions he did not understand. Following advice from Nueva, Door to Life decided against applying for one of the larger grants, and instead submitted a proposal for an \$8,000 grant to purchase computers that would enable it to systematically collect outcomes data on men who successfully graduate from the residential program and remain drug-free, sober and employed.

Group trainings also benefited intermediaries that operated in areas where they were not well known. Training sessions offered these intermediaries the opportunity to publicize their technical or financial assistance, and to distribute applications to large groups of FBOs and CBOs. In the first year of its CCF grant, for example, Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) held large training events in each of the four regions in which it planned to operate the CCF project. In each region, MEDA utilized existing relationships with a small group of local organizations to promote the two-day training sessions. While the intermediary intended that the training would get organizational leaders thinking about capacity development, the major purpose was to build participants' awareness of MEDA's CCF project and encourage attendees to apply for technical assistance.

## **Promising Practices**

### **Integrating Hands-On Assignments into Large-Group Training**

*Stand-alone workshops increased awareness about many aspects of nonprofit management—much of which was new to small FBOs and CBOs. But this awareness did not necessarily translate into action. Intermediaries reported that providing technical assistance as part of the training helped organizations put their newly gained skills to work.*

**Boston Capacity Tank (BCT).** BCT used a form of “homework” during a two-day training event that focused on logic models and outcomes evaluation. A logic model is a graphic depiction of the links among programmatic resources, activities and anticipated outcomes. It is used to develop a corresponding action plan for implementing the program so it will achieve the desired outcomes. The plan outlines the goals and tasks to be completed, specifies who will assume responsibility for each task, and sets time frames for completing all tasks.

Between the first and second sessions of the training, participants completed logic models for their own organizations, in order to apply concepts they had learned during the opening day of the workshop. Then, during the second session, they met in small groups of two or three people to present their models and receive feedback. This second session also focused on developing an outcomes measurement plan, drawing on the outcomes identified in the logic model. Most of the participants had never focused on outcomes measurement before the seminar. Preparing the logic model and getting feedback on it gave them hands-on experience that deepened their understanding and encouraged them to use what they had learned when they returned to their organizations.

### **Building on a Shared Culture to Enhance the Benefits of Training**

*Shared backgrounds and values among trainers and staff from the organizations attending the workshops can help shape an environment that facilitates learning among the workshop attendees.*

**Nueva Esperanza.** Because many of the grassroots, faith-based organizations that work with Nueva Esperanza are primarily Spanish speaking, the intermediary's project director hired

bilingual individuals to staff its CCF initiative. Language is connected to identity; and while trainings and meetings were, to a large extent, conducted in English, it was important for the trainers and other Nueva Esperanza staff to be able to move back and forth between English and Spanish in order to facilitate communication and understanding, and underscore their kinship with FBO staff.

In addition, the fact that group training sessions were held with Hispanic organizations immediately placed the participants in an environment where they felt comfortable. That, in turn, added to the trainings' success because, as the project director said, "Stress negates learning." As one FBO executive director who attended the trainings explained, "There are certain cultural issues that are unique to Latinos. There is an affinity with people at the trainings because there is a common story and a willingness to hear criticism and be open and less vulnerable."

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In contrast with large group training sessions, technical assistance—as it is defined in this report—refers to instruction or guidance provided in one-on-one or small group settings. It is tailored to an organization’s specific needs and is, thus, a more customized approach than workshops, conferences or other group training activities.

The intermediaries in our sample differed in the numbers of organizations they served in this way over the course of a year, and in the amount and intensity of technical assistance provided to each organization. For example, one intermediary served 84 FBOs and CBOs in its first year, with each organization receiving an average of 30 hours of consultant or staff time; another supplied almost seven times as many hours (200 hours) to 12 organizations. Intermediaries provided assistance over the course of a few months to a year or longer. Technical assistance was usually governed by an official agreement, signed by both the intermediary and FBO or CBO,<sup>10</sup> which identified the areas the technical assistance would address, who from the intermediary and the FBO or CBO would be the primary contacts, and a timeline for the technical assistance services.

The areas addressed through technical assistance reflected the needs that emerged from the organizational assessment, as well as the organization’s interests and willingness to expend time addressing these issues. In some cases, the availability of experts also played a role in determining the focus of technical assistance. Among the most common topics addressed, four dominate the list: board development, strategic planning, financial management and fundraising. Where appropriate, intermediaries also assisted organizations in learning to use specific software that would increase their capacity in such areas as financial management.

Depending on the intermediary, technical assistance was delivered by in-house staff, consultants, or some combination of the two. Some intermediaries had staff with both specific subject matter expertise (e.g., workforce development, housing, business development) and expertise in such organizational areas as performance measurement, MIS and financial management, which allowed these people to serve as technical assistance providers. Others created consultant pools, and allowed the individual FBOs and CBOs to interview several consultants from a group and to select the one they felt was best suited to work with them on a particular issue.

### Benefits

One-on-one assistance allowed intermediaries to meet the needs of diverse organizations at varying stages of development. For example, one intermediary reported that approximately one-third of its constituent organizations had not previously received technical assistance. The intermediary used this information to decide how best to allocate its staff and other resources,

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<sup>10</sup> Intermediaries also provided informal technical assistance in which they fielded sporadic and unscheduled questions, usually via phone or email.

and, as a result, reconfigured its offerings so it could introduce these relatively inexperienced organizations to the basic elements of board development, writing a proposal and developing a budget.

FBOs and CBOs valued the concrete benefits of technical assistance. One CBO noted that the intermediary's critique of its fundraising proposal had improved the organization's funding prospects by strengthening the wording in the proposal, making it more action and outcome oriented. In addition to these kinds of tangible benefits, organizations benefited from the exposure they gained to ideas that they might not have thought of on their own, such as developing partnerships for joint funding. (See the box on the next page for a description of how one organization benefited from technical assistance.)

The CBOs and FBOs particularly valued technical assistance that increased their capacity for using technology, especially assistance with new software. One intermediary even incorporated a technology component into its overall organizational assessment, and provided technical assistance in such areas as website development, virus protection, and broadband access to those organizations that could benefit from it. Another intermediary provided assistance in using "Quick Books" financial management software to improve the CBOs' and FBOs' financial record keeping. And a third intermediary strengthened organizations' capacity to conduct outcomes measurement by teaching them to use a customized web-based database that enabled them to track such measures as attendance, grades and students' goals.

## **Promising Practices**

### **Project-Based Technical Assistance**

*Project-based technical assistance provides FBOs and CBOs with tools and expertise in conceptualizing, designing and pursuing an actual program initiative. Thus, the learning takes place in the "real world" of program development.*

**Seedco.** Seedco's technical assistance philosophy is to enhance organizational capacity through a comprehensive, practical "hands-on" approach that leads FBOs and CBOs through the process of developing and implementing a specific project. This philosophy is embodied through the intermediary's rigorous Capacity Building Institute model.

The institute begins with a day-long orientation, to which 50 or more FBOs and CBOs are invited to attend. There, in addition to learning about the institute model, the organizations have an important opportunity to meet and network with groups that have similar missions or interests. Organizations that want to be considered for ongoing participation in the institute then develop a preliminary proposal that describes the idea or strategy they are interested in pursuing. Using these proposals, Seedco selects a subset of 8 to 10 organizations to participate as a cohort in the next phase, and then provides grants to those organizations to cover expenses related to planning their project.

### **An FBO Story**

**Organization: Crossroads of the Rockies**

**Intermediary: JVA Consulting**

Crossroads of the Rockies, a 15-year-old faith-based 501(c)3 associated with the Church of the Nazarene, serves families and high-risk youth in Southwest Denver. Initially, Crossroads ran a food and clothing bank. Over the years, the organization has expanded, and it now includes adult education and ESL programs, as well as a youth program.

Crossroads relies on a variety of methods to staff these projects, including paid staff, volunteers and partnerships with other organizations. One unique approach is the manner in which it staffs its food and clothing bank. The organization created a “Very Important Volunteer” team, whose members receive food and clothing in exchange for serving six hours a week. The volunteers also receive leadership training and learn team-building skills, in the hope that they will transfer those skills to a paid position.

Because of Crossroads’ reputation in the Denver community, its programs are outgrowing their present facilities. Its most urgent need at the present time is to raise money to completely renovate its building to include a gym for youth recreation.

It was this need that drew Crossroads to JVA’s Compassion Capital Program. Crossroads had only an ad hoc fundraising plan, and its board—potentially a key element in successful fundraising—was not fully engaged with the organization. To address these problems, JVA assisted Crossroads in developing and implementing a strategic planning retreat for the staff and board. Among the major outcomes of this retreat were a detailed fundraising plan, a board manual with expectations clearly laid out, and functioning board committees. The technical assistance from JVA paid off for Crossroads, as their first fundraising event after the retreat raised approximately \$20,000. The organization has since won two awards involving federal funds: a \$60,000 Latino Coalition grant through the U.S. Department of Labor, and an Emergency Services Grant through the Denver Mayor’s Enterprise Community Office, which receives federal funds.

The second phase typically centers on a two-to-three-day workshop in which participating organizations receive intensive support and guidance to fully develop their proposal into a comprehensive plan. (A plan might, for example, involve designing a four-week workforce development training program for a class of 20 people seeking employment in the hospitality field.) During the workshop, the FBOs and CBOs receive group instruction and intensive one-on-one guidance from subject matter experts, as well as peer input from cohort members. The technical assistance is often devoted to strategic implementation and operational issues, such as identification of partners, funding options, and marketing and communication strategies.

The third phase of the Capacity Building Institute model provides for ongoing technical assistance as organizations face the protracted challenges associated with implementation. This technical assistance, provided by Seedco staff on a flexible, “as-needed” basis for as long as a year, is often highly customized to accommodate the unique needs of the individual organizations at varying stages of implementing wide-ranging initiatives.

This approach to technical assistance allows Seedco to effectively support a diverse group of FBOs and CBOs. While much of the technical assistance is individualized for each organization, the intermediary’s strategy is based on a consistent set of principles. Seedco: 1) Focuses on “doing”—capacity development becomes nearly a by-product of the development and implementation of an actual plan; 2) Requires each FBO and CBO to demonstrate extensive commitment by developing its own project idea and dedicating staff time to pursue it; 3) Emphasizes the importance of an entrepreneurial outlook in which even the smallest organizations must incorporate key management concepts of accountability and performance measurement; and 4) Underscores the importance of a realistic appraisal process in which investments are curtailed if a promising idea ultimately is determined to lack viability.

Another defining characteristic of Seedco’s technical assistance is the importance it places on identifying and tracking programmatic outcomes. To support its approach, Seedco has developed several proprietary resources. Most noteworthy is the Performance Measurement & Management<sup>sm</sup> (PM&M) system, which provides the tools needed to develop and assess a business plan, as well as measure and track program performance. PM&M helps organizations identify the outcomes most important to their project, as well as the measurable indicators associated with these outcomes. Organizations then develop methods to track these indicators and measure their performance over time. Though all constituent organizations reportedly benefited from implementing the PM&M model, Seedco staff felt it was particularly useful for smaller organizations with little prior training in this area.

### **Using the Expertise of Existing Staff**

*In making decisions about who will provide technical assistance, intermediaries must balance the costs associated with using existing in-house staff against those associated with hiring consultants. Leveraging the expertise of in-house staff who are either involved with direct service (e.g., running an after-school program) or administrative functions (e.g., responsible for payroll) to provide technical assistance can be more cost-effective—and it grounds the assistance in real-world problems and constraints.*

**Father Joe's Villages (FJV).** Father Joe's Villages is a large, well-established and highly regarded community service organization dedicated to the provision of homeless rehabilitation services in Southern California. These services are delivered through more than 600 employees who operate transitional and longer-term housing facilities, a residential teen center and school, a food pantry and soup kitchen, and facilities for those with HIV and AIDS.

To leverage this vast array of expertise and experience, FJV used part of its CCF grant to form the Village Training Institute (VTI). VTI offers highly specialized technical assistance that is provided by 35 FJV employees who have been trained to serve as "mentors" to outside organizations seeking assistance. To ensure that these employees see this role as an essential part of their work, mentoring responsibilities are formally incorporated into staff members' job descriptions.

Through these mentors, VTI can provide technical assistance in a wide range of managerial and operational areas, including payroll and accounting, fundraising, grant management and compliance, volunteer mobilization, adult residential programs, after-school programs, case management, emergency shelters, and facility management. The mentors have a depth and breadth of knowledge that comes from their day-to-day experience working in these areas.

To maximize the value of the individual mentors, technical assistance is targeted to a specific problem or issue. VTI requires organizations to submit descriptions of their questions or specific needs in order to match them with appropriate mentors. The mentor and organization staff then meet in person, through telephone conversations and/or by e-mail to discuss and address the issue. Organizations have the option of seeking mentoring assistance in more than one functional area, but they must complete their work with one mentor before moving on to the next. FJV has found this to be an effective and cost-efficient method for providing expert and targeted assistance to a broad group of FBOs and CBOs.

## SUB-AWARDS

In conjunction with, and as a complement to, technical assistance, intermediaries sometimes provide financial assistance to FBOs and CBOs through grants and low-interest loans. As required by its agreement with HHS, each of the CCF intermediaries in our study distributed a portion of its HHS award to FBOs and CBOs with which it was working.<sup>11</sup> The amounts of these sub-awards varied. On the low end, some intermediaries provided “seed” grants that averaged about \$8,000, while intermediaries making grants in the mid-range provided awards that averaged from \$16,000 to \$30,000. Two intermediaries provided grants as large as \$50,000. In accordance with federal guidelines, all of these funds were awarded on a competitive basis. Intermediaries issued a Request for Proposals (RFP), with each intermediary developing its own review process. While they all engaged multiple reviewers to rate each proposal, about half drew on external reviewers.

The CCF intermediaries used these sub-awards to encourage two distinct types of projects: capacity building and program expansion. The FBOs and CBOs applied for small and mid-range capacity-building awards for purposes such as hiring consultants to train board members, facilitate strategic planning retreats and develop fundraising plans. While these activities were similar to capacity-building efforts supported through technical assistance, a key difference was that the sub-awards transferred responsibility to the FBOs and CBOs, and offered them greater freedom to hire their own consultants and determine the area of capacity on which they wanted to focus. Other organizations used small capacity-building sub-awards to buy computers or other equipment to increase their operational efficiency.

The program expansion sub-awards, which were typically mid-range and larger, were used by organizations for purposes such as hiring full-time and part-time staff so they could extend their program to an additional location and/or target additional groups of people to serve. One organization, for example, used its program expansion award to hire teachers for an after-school program. Another used the funding to develop a youth-focused curriculum on drug and alcohol awareness and prevention, teen pregnancy prevention, and violence prevention, thus strengthening its ability to effectively target and serve young people who were at risk. (See the box on the next page for a description of how one organization used its program expansion sub-award.)

For the most part, intermediaries granted one-time awards. The size of the sub-award may have affected the type of service organization interested in applying. For instance, small sub-awards did not interest all FBOs and CBOs. One intermediary respondent commented that for large church-based organizations that “can collect \$5,000 in a collection on Sunday,” it was not worth it to apply for anything less than \$20,000. Conversely, for organizations that had never applied for a grant before, developing an application for a \$5,000-to-\$10,000 grant represented a major accomplishment.

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<sup>11</sup> Although some non-CCF-funded intermediaries in this study also provided grants and loans to FBOs and CBOs, less information was collected about these services for the non-CCF sites.

### **An FBO Story**

**Organization: Boston Urban Youth Foundation**

**Intermediary: Boston Capacity Tank**

The Boston Urban Youth Foundation (BUYF) is a faith-based organization that originated from a collaboration of Boston clergy, school personnel, law enforcement officials and the District Attorney's office. The partnership recognized the urgent need for early intervention with truant youth in order to prevent their involvement with the juvenile justice system down the road. BUYF, whose mission is to help at-risk youth develop "spiritually, emotionally, academically, and economically," helps fulfill this mission through a comprehensive school truancy program that begins with youth when they are in middle school.

BUYF has been receiving several forms of support from its intermediary, the United Way of Massachusetts Bay (UWMB), one of the partners in the Boston Capacity Tank. BUYF received funds from UWMB to hire a consultant to assist with a needs assessment. Based on findings from the assessment, the consultant worked closely with BUYF to develop a data-tracking software program that provides real-time information on case management services, youth attendance and youth academic grades. This information allows the organization to perform an ongoing internal assessment of how effectively it is operating and to make the necessary changes for program improvement.

UWMB also awarded BUYF a program expansion sub-grant that enabled the organization to hire a full-time staff member, who will provide case management services to 50 high-risk middle-school youth. The new case manager will be assigned to a school where BUYF currently has three other case managers. With this addition, the program will be able to offer services to all 200 of the high-risk youth at the school, providing not just a substantial impact on the youth but also on the school itself.

## **Promising Practices**

Among the intermediaries, there were promising practices for virtually every stage of the sub-award process, from proposal writing and revision, to learning from the experience of having an unsuccessful proposal.

### **Providing Group Training to Prepare for Writing the Proposal**

*The sub-award process provided an opportunity for training FBOs and CBOs in the essentials of writing a grant proposal.*

Before the second round proposals for CCF sub-awards were due, **Associated Black Charities (ABC)** held a day-long group training session on grant writing geared specifically to the sub-award proposal. The trainer walked through each part of the proposal in detail, reviewed common grant writing “dos and don’ts,” and helped participants understand the requirements for the needs assessment, work plan and evaluation components, and how to compose such elements in their proposal. These sessions reportedly helped organizations write better sub-award proposals. Based on their experiences and on tracking, intermediary staff believed there was a correlation between program staff attending the session and submitting a better proposal and, thus, having an increased chance of being funded.

### **Giving Feedback on Drafts of Sub-Award Applications**

*Intermediaries reported that having an early feedback process helped the organizations strengthen their ability to write effective proposals.*

**JVA Consulting** allowed service organizations to submit a draft proposal before the deadline, receive feedback from its grant writing staff and then revise their applications based on the feedback. The intermediary reported that the FBOs and CBOs who took advantage of this opportunity benefited greatly, both boosting their likelihood of receiving the sub-award by strengthening their proposals and refining their skills in seeking grants elsewhere. The final grant proposals were then reviewed by a volunteer community panel that made award recommendations to JVA. JVA’s sub-award application resembled grant applications for most foundations in the state. Thus, applicant organizations received “a big dose of practical help” that prepared them for future foundation proposals.

### **Having FBO and CBO Leaders Serve as Peer Reviewers**

*Leaders of organizations that were not applying for the sub-awards learned important lessons about grant writing by serving as peer reviewers and, in that role, examining the proposals from a different perspective.*

Inviting individuals from non-competing FBOs and CBOs to serve on sub-award review panels allowed them to see, first hand, the elements of a convincing and fundable proposal. **JVA Consulting** solicited organizational representatives to serve on a panel that reviewed and rated

sub-grant proposals, as long as they had not submitted an application for financial or technical assistance in that round. Participation as a peer reviewer offered valuable insights. Organizational representatives who reviewed CCF sub-award proposals reported that they now had a better understanding of the importance of clear, concise program descriptions, and of carefully described budgets. One FBO director who took advantage of this opportunity commented on how important it was to be able to write about a program in a manner that is a good reflection of how it actually operates: “To look at a grant application that was disorganized, but to know that the quality and integrity of the program as it lives is powerful...I see how important it is to have things concise and numbered. I realized the importance for me to communicate to my board that I need to have time to write grants.”

### **Providing Feedback for Organizations Whose Proposals were Not Funded**

*Unsuccessful sub-award applications can provide a learning opportunity that helps organizations ultimately write more effective grant proposals.*

Several intermediaries provided feedback for organizations that did not write successful proposals. Sessions for declined organizations reportedly helped them understand why their application was not approved. While intermediaries did not have information on whether organizations that received this help were subsequently funded in later rounds of applications, they did report that FBOs and CBOs appreciated the service. **ABC** held a group session for declined organizations, during which the intermediary provided a general sense of reviewers’ comments. It then offered each organization a one-on-one phone consultation, which lasted about an hour, during which an ABC staff person reviewed the proposal page by page, discussing problems and providing suggestions for improvement. **Father Joe’s Villages (FJV)** similarly provided one-on-one sessions for declined organizations, in which FJV staff reviewed reasons why the proposal was rejected.

## SERVING AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to the direct services they provided through group trainings and technical assistance, as well as support offered through the sub-awards, the intermediaries served as bridges, or liaisons, between their constituent organizations and other organizations, businesses and government agencies. Succeeding in this role required intermediaries to have external relationships that were both broad and deep.

In some instances, intermediaries devoted substantial resources to making links, or forging partnerships, between their constituents and other like-minded nonprofit institutions, or they brought larger numbers of organizations together to create viable and effective coalitions. In this role, intermediaries served as brokers, mediators and representatives for their constituent organizations and the issues they supported. (See the box on the next page for a description of an intermediary's work with one community-based organization that is often involved in larger community partnerships.)

In other cases, intermediaries helped their constituent FBOs and CBOs make connections that could help them secure funding. This is a potentially important role for intermediaries, as grantmakers increasingly seek and favor proposals from collaboratives or partnerships rather than from individual organizations. Particularly for projects where the goal is to have neighborhood-wide or community-wide impact, grantmakers often require collaborative efforts because they prevent duplication, draw on the multiple skills and interests of disparate organizations, and, it is believed, make for stronger programming. In response, larger nonprofit organizations (and even entities of local government) often find themselves seeking partners to make their proposals more competitive. The organizations they seek are frequently those with strong connections to residents of low-income communities.

### Promising Practices

#### *Linking Grassroots Organizations with Funding*

*Intermediaries drew on their network of resources to introduce grassroots organizations to potential partners and funders that they would not otherwise have access to.*

**JVA Consulting.** JVA facilitated partnerships between organizations participating in its CCF project and other organizations and agencies that were submitting proposals for federal funding. Some of these links were with nonprofit organizations that were larger than the grassroots organizations working with JVA; at other times, the links were with local or state government entities that were in search of organizations capable of piloting new program models.

### **A CBO Story**

**Organization: East Bay Asian Youth Center**

**Intermediary: Urban Strategies Council**

The East Bay Asian Youth Center's (EBAYC) mission is to empower California's Bay Area youth "to be life-long builders of a just and caring multi-cultural society." Founded in 1976, the CBO has 26 staff members and serves close to 600 families through after-school programs and family support services. While EBAYC's programming is creative and responsive to community needs, the organization has lacked the capacity to collect and analyze data on outcomes, and was thus unable to provide prospective funders with evidence-based information on its successes.

Technical assistance from the Urban Strategies Council, located in Oakland, California, has addressed this problem. The Council helps local community-based organizations collect data, with the hope that they will use the findings to plan, manage and assess community-change initiatives. The intermediary's approach is to "democratize" data analysis and policymaking. Data have traditionally been collected, interpreted and used by experts. "Democratizing" data is intended to empower citizens and community groups by providing them with access to data and the tools to use those data to develop their own arguments about what is best for their communities.

The Urban Strategies Council has now been assisting EBAYC for more than a decade. It initially provided the organization with training and technical assistance on data collection and coalition building in connection with an EBAYC initiative that organized parents and youth from five area junior high schools to advocate for educational reform in the early 1990s. The council has since provided additional technical assistance in data collection techniques, including the development of survey measures, for several other EBAYC projects.

For example, JVA connected Colorado's Department of Corrections to one of its CCF organizations, when the department was seeking an FBO or CBO with which to partner on a proposal that would create a mentoring program in a low-income community. The potential benefits were mutual: the city agency could write a stronger proposal because the collaboration extended its reach into a neighborhood where it might not otherwise have the contacts, legitimacy and goodwill that the grassroots organization possessed. And the organization, never having previously submitted a proposal for federal funding, gained a strong partner in its first effort, thereby increasing its chances of being funded.

JVA believes that this is one of the most important functions it serves as an intermediary. As one staff member said, JVA's "greatest asset is being a bridge between the organization on the ground and the organization with a track record who is more competitive in getting the grant." Once the match has been made, JVA often works with the two organizations to help them jointly write a strong, competitive proposal that incorporates promising practices and delineates the advantages of the partnership. Indeed, many proposals submitted by groups that JVA initially brought together have gone on to receive significant funding from the federal government or other funding opportunities.

In determining which of the organizations participating in its CCF project are likely candidates for joint or solo submissions for federal funding, JVA uses its organizational assessment, as well as its own interactions with the key parties, to determine whether the FBO or CBO has the capacity to meet the proposal's eligibility requirements and to implement the program should the proposal be successful. JVA's project director estimates that 10 to 15 percent of its CCF participants meet these criteria, although it also depends on current funding availability and opportunities.

To help prepare organizations for such partnerships, as well as to introduce them to writing federal grant proposals on their own, JVA's technical assistance and training strategy includes educating its constituent organizations about the federal grants process. The intermediary requires CCF organizations to attend six mandatory training sessions, one of which is devoted to accessing federal grants. The workshop incorporates strategies developed over JVA's 17 years of successfully writing federal grants and includes information on how to research available grants, tips for analyzing the grant application and finding the right partner, steps in writing the grant application, and guidance in understanding financial requirements. Successfully applying what it learned from its work with JVA, one of the CCF organizations has gone on to receive a \$50,000 grant on its own from HHS.

### **Creating Partnerships Among Organizations**

*Intermediaries attempted to increase the effectiveness of neighborhood coalitions and partnerships by mobilizing new organizations to join the groups, helping member organizations develop effective working relationships, and training them to increase their impact.*

Three of the non-CCF intermediaries, in particular, used this approach to capacity building. **The Palm Beach County Local Initiatives Support Network (LISC)** works primarily with community development organizations (CDCs), whose success in generating sufficient financing

for projects is affected by local and national economic conditions and policies. Thus, LISC believes that its responsibilities include advocating for local CDCs, as well as convening and organizing them to respond to policy developments and legislation that may affect their work. Additionally, LISC has trained local CDC executive directors to engage and educate policymakers, and has linked the CDCs to a statewide community development coalition through which the Palm Beach County organizations can advocate for legislative changes at the state level that will increase opportunities for the success of their community-specific projects.

**Urban Strategies Council.** The Urban Strategies Council also serves as a convener to build and support partnerships among community organizations that are working toward similar goals. In this role, the council facilitates meetings of community organizations, including detailed work such as developing meeting agendas and organizing conference calls, as well as coordinating and facilitating strategic planning and decision-making processes among partnership members. When needed, the council also serves as a mediator among the partners. Another key element of the council's work in strengthening community collaboratives involves providing a variety of community- or neighborhood-specific data that can be utilized in proposals. The council also trains organizations in data collection and analysis, which enables partnerships to better assess, plan and manage their community initiatives.

Like the Urban Strategies Council, **Good Samaritan Ministries (GSM)** helps groups—in this case, churches—work together to address community issues. The Neighborhood Alliance project, spearheaded by GSM, organizes neighboring churches to assess community needs and run programs that address those needs. In this effort, GSM is helping the networks of churches to work side by side with government, business and nonprofit agencies. The intermediary's pivotal role has involved recruiting churches to join the network, and working with them to develop the overall goals, identify the roles of member churches, and formalize the agreements in a document signed by all participating churches. GSM facilitates monthly roundtable meetings among all the partners, where they work on joint planning, coordination and evaluation of their efforts.

## STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF INTERMEDIARIES

In addition to funding intermediaries and research on promising practices, the Compassion Capital Fund also established the CCF National Resource Center to provide training and other support to the intermediaries themselves. The center disseminates information to the intermediaries through websites, guidebooks, workshops and technical assistance provided on-site and through teleconferences, and it leads annual workshops that provide opportunities for intermediaries to learn from each other and from expert presenters.

In addition to utilizing this support, intermediaries in this study took additional steps to strengthen their capacity. Partnerships, in particular, proved to be a key strategy for providing a fuller range of services to a diverse group of organizations. These partnerships benefited intermediaries, and the FBOs and CBOs they served, by enabling them to provide technical assistance in substantive areas they would not otherwise have been able to cover, such as Internet technology and the use of specific software. And some CCF intermediaries joined with partners to manage the large-scale sub-award program, conduct organizational assessments of faith-based and community organizations, and manage fiscal reporting.

For some intermediaries, partners also made it possible to extend their reach. Partnering with entities that had their own networks and constituencies allowed the intermediaries to expand their target audience, and their services, to groups which they otherwise might not have been able to access, such as small, grassroots faith-based programs.

One important way that intermediaries can strengthen operations is to perform evaluations of their current effectiveness. Measuring outcomes of their services to organizations provides an opportunity for intermediaries to test their own perceptions of their value, improve services, and provide evidence of this value for funders.

### Promising Practices

#### Organizational Mentoring

*Organizational mentoring at the executive level involves frequent communication between senior leaders of different organizations. The mentoring relationship is focused on helping to develop specific organizational capacities. The intermediaries engaged in organizational mentoring reported that this approach enabled one of the partners to develop the skills to function as a lead intermediary and provide services on a larger scale.*

**Boston Capacity Tank (BCT).** BCT—a partnership of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay (UWMB) and three faith-based organizations (the Boston Ministerial Alliance, the Emmanuel Gospel Center and the Boston Ten-Point Coalition)—is a new entity created to deliver CCF intermediary services. The partners all brought different strengths to the initiative, ensuring that they would be able to meet a broad range of needs.

The UWMB was selected to function as the lead agency in this partnership because of its capacity to manage large contracts and award grants to small organizations. It also had a successful history of funding faith-based organizations during the previous seven years through its Faith-in-Action program. While the Boston Ministerial Alliance (BMA) had previously provided capacity-building services to small black churches, at the time the CCF project began, none of the faith-based intermediaries was strong enough to manage the contract on its own. In order to address the need for stronger faith-based intermediaries in the Boston area, the partners' application to HHS proposed that the UWMB would build the capacity of the other three organizations—in particular, the Boston Ministerial Alliance—in preparation for an eventual transfer of lead agency status from the UWMB to the BMA.

In order to ensure progress in implementing their CCF intermediary project, all of the partners initially met weekly to make strategic decisions. The UWMB set up the systems for performing some of the complex functions of grant management and financial reporting. While the BMA did not have the capacity to handle these functions during the early stages of the project, the UWMB provided ongoing support and executive coaching to enable that organization to take on more responsibilities over time. As one key BMA staff member stated, the UWMB is “empowering the BMA to become the lead agent.”

The critical piece of the partnership enabling the BMA to assume the lead has been the intensive mentoring that the vice president of community investments at the UWMB provided to the executive director of the BMA. During the first year of the project, these executives spoke every day by telephone, and they met in person for two to three hours every week, in addition to attending the weekly meetings of the partners. During the second year, as the capacity of the BMA grew, the contact between UWMB and BMA executives deliberately became less intense, although they still spoke occasionally by phone and met in person once a month. Their conversations were guided by the BMA leader's agenda, often revolving around such issues as staffing, financial systems, and policy and governance issues. As a result of this coaching, the BMA has successfully undertaken a variety of critical organizational changes, such as hiring a comptroller, strengthening its financial and computer systems, and developing its staff infrastructure.

The UWMB also provided other staff to support the BMA, including arranging for a consultant to train the BCT assistant director (a BMA employee) in conducting financial reviews and overseeing financial reporting. By working with the partners consistently through the initial stages, and by providing flexible support (staff, money and time), the UWMB ensured that the project moved forward and overcame challenges.

Frequent communication, respect and active participation among the key players enabled the partnership to succeed. One participant suggested that the “key to establishing trust between the partners is to come to all the meetings, or at least send a representative, [and] do the work you say you'll do.” Another discussed the importance of “taking time to hammer out well-defined roles for each partner and formalizing those roles in a contract.”

### Using External Evaluation

*Having outside professionals conduct evaluations provides an opportunity for intermediaries to make their services more effective.*

**Nueva Esperanza.** External evaluators have been involved with Nueva Esperanza’s CCF project from the start. One goal of the evaluation is to measure outcomes—primarily whether, over time, there are higher levels of organizational capacity among participating organizations. Nueva Esperanza developed a “Continuum of Capacity” framework. Using this approach, the evaluator plans to measure individual organization’s gains in capacity between the first organizational assessment (completed at the beginning of the project) and a second assessment (completed after the organization’s involvement in training and technical assistance). Nueva staff are tracking the number of hours of training, the amount of one-to-one technical assistance received by each service organization, and the additional contacts between Nueva’s regional field staff and the participating organizations. Their hope is to correlate changes in the assessment to participation in training, technical assistance and contact hours.

A second goal of the evaluation is to use information on how the project has been implemented to inform improvements in training and technical assistance. To help gauge the project’s success, evaluators held six focus groups (one in each region where Nueva operates) with representatives from 44 service organizations and conducted 14 one-on-one in-person interviews and 26 phone interviews at the end of the first year of the project. One issue that emerged during the focus groups concerned the training content, with some finding it too basic and others feeling it was too advanced. This finding contributed to Nueva’s current plan to group organizations by capacity level for some of the training sessions.

### Using Internal Approaches for Measuring Outcomes

*Well-designed reporting forms completed by sub-award recipients document, in a systematized and comprehensive manner, how the sub-awardees used and benefited from their grants. These reports can provide valuable outcomes data that can be used by intermediaries to improve their own services and provide documentation of the value of such services to funders.*

**Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA).** Intermediaries commonly request narrative reports from sub-grantees that cover the status of their activities and accomplishments during the reporting period, challenges and how they were addressed, and activities planned for the next reporting period. MEDA recently instituted a more specific semi-annual report that tracks sub-awardees’ progress in achieving particular capacity-related outcomes.

MEDA asked grantees to report on the following:

- Whether the CCF sub-grant strengthened the organization in the following areas, and how those changes are concretely demonstrated within the organization’s operations: increased ability to do effective long-term planning; improved governance of the organization; increased access to funding; upgraded use of technology; improved

program monitoring, reporting and evaluation processes; increased capacity to do effective publicity; and improved financial management systems.

- How clients of the organization benefited from the project that the organization undertook with its CCF sub-award.
- Whether fundraising was part of capacity-building work during the period. If so, organizations were asked to report each source to which they applied, the results and whether the organization had previously received funding from the source.

This report format will make it possible for MEDA to track the most common outcomes attributed to its sub-awards and analyze whether specific services it offers as an intermediary are associated with particular outcomes.

## LESSONS

Over the course of the past 18 months, Branch Associates, Inc., and our partner Abt Associates, Inc., undertook case studies of 10 exemplary intermediaries. Rather than select a group of organizations that were representative of all intermediaries, we deliberately focused on intermediaries with considerable experience working with FBOs and CBOs, expertise in nonprofit organizational development, and an abundance of promising practices. Our examination of the range of services those intermediaries provided and how they worked with their constituent FBOs and CBOs leads to the overall conclusion that the intermediaries successfully strengthened FBOs and CBOs in a variety of ways. Looking across the intermediaries, we identified practices in all areas of their work that seem worthy of replication.

Taking all of the practices together, we have drawn the following specific lessons and recommendations for improving intermediaries' effectiveness.

### **Intermediaries provide an efficient means for the federal government to work with faith- and community-based organizations.**

Through CCF, HHS has invested in intermediaries to work with FBOs and CBOs more efficiently than it could work with them directly. This study found that intermediaries successfully recruited a range of grassroots organizations at different levels of capacity, from some that were barely even formal organizations, to others that were sophisticated and experienced.

Intermediaries developed various approaches to accommodate this diverse group. By conducting initial assessments, intermediaries identified specific areas of each organization's development—such as board development or strategic planning—that was holding it back in terms of its fundraising or other aspects related to its organizational health. Assessments served to educate FBO and CBO leaders about their own organizations' strengths and weaknesses, and focus the leaders on a small number of achievable steps. The participatory assessments we observed in this study, all of which involved group discussions with three or more organizational representatives, led to in-depth and sometimes unanticipated assessments that engaged the FBO and CBO leadership and led to steps for addressing critical issues and concerns.

Once organizations' most pressing needs (and interests) were known, intermediaries acted by providing services such as leading board retreats, hiring consultants to develop long-term fundraising plans, and awarding grants that allowed organizations to modify programs according to proven practices.

Through these targeted services delivered over months or even years, intermediaries nurtured organizations to reach higher levels of capacity in ways that government agencies cannot. What is not fully known—but will be examined in future research efforts—is the response of FBOs and CBOs to intermediaries' efforts. Our early interviews with a small sample of these

organizations are encouraging. We hear from them that they developed fundraising plans, re-engaged their boards of directors, acquired 501(c)3 status, and upgraded their computer and Internet technology.

**HHS should continue to recruit both faith-based and secular intermediaries. Both types demonstrate strength in building relationships with constituent organizations and providing quality services.**

Faith-based and secular intermediaries in this study represented effective vehicles for government support of grassroots organizations. Both types developed good relationships with staff from the constituent organizations and provided a range of services designed to improve the effectiveness of both FBOs and CBOs.

Although faith sometimes provided an immediate bond for FBOs working with faith-based intermediaries, reputations for providing “good quality work” enabled exemplary intermediaries—both faith-based and secular—to recruit organizations to their CCF project and develop strong relationships with them. In the end, quality services are what is necessary for sustaining any relationship between intermediaries and grassroots organizations.

**There is an important role for large group training, but the bulk of resources should be directed to more intensive technical assistance.**

Large group training sessions serve several purposes. Group training exposed staff of emerging grassroots organizations to new terminology, the ingredients for writing a good proposal, the process for submitting a proposal and methods for developing a budget. Sessions on strategic planning and board development introduced these organizations to more professional ways of running their operations. These trainings can also be used to advertise intermediaries’ services. By getting the word out to the large numbers of organizations who attend a training, these sessions can serve as a forum for recruiting organizations interested in participating in a new project or applying for a grant.

However, one-on-one technical assistance has several advantages for strengthening organizations. First, group training sessions, which typically last one or two days, tend to cover topics in a broad but limited or cursory way that does not necessarily address the specific needs of individual organizations. In contrast, one-on-one technical assistance allows for an in-depth exploration of issues that directly affect an organization. One intermediary commented on the importance of covering topics in detail: “Capacity building is about going deep as opposed to going wide.” Intermediaries that took a long-term approach to capacity building and worked one-on-one with a set of organizations for a year or more allowed organizations the time to thoroughly tackle a series of steps leading to improved capacity.

While group training provides useful information to organizations, the goal should be for FBOs and CBOs not only to be more aware of how they should be operating, but also to take action toward improved capacity. As anyone who has attended a professional conference, workshop or training can attest, awareness does not necessarily lead to action. Technical assistance can help organizations put newly gained information to work. Project-based technical assistance helps

organizations undertake new projects, moving them from initial ideas through implementation. The motivation associated with receiving funding for a particular project may hasten the achievement of capacity-related goals, such as engaging the board in fundraising or developing new partnerships.

Other specialized support, such as assistance on the implementation of software (e.g., “Quick Books”), provides a tangible benefit in the form of improved financial management. Similarly, help in using a database for tracking outcomes data gives FBOs and CBOs actual program results to show funders.

Finally, technical assistance allows for maximum customization. Organizations have different needs: new organizations may need assistance in obtaining 501(c)3 status, while more sophisticated organizations may benefit from a marketing campaign. A customized approach allows intermediaries to work with each organization starting from the place where it currently is and bringing it to the next level of capacity. For example, not all organizations are ready, or will be ready in the short term, to seek federal funding. But some are, or can be with modest investments. Responding to this, a few intermediaries took steps to link appropriate CCF participant organizations with larger partners for federal grant proposals.

Sub-awards, when used to fund activities aligned with organizational assessment results, can also provide customized, action-oriented assistance. In many cases, sub-awards were used to achieve the same goals as technical assistance, such as attaining 501(c)3 status, developing an organizational marketing brochure, or re-energizing the board of directors through a strategic planning retreat. The sustainability of using sub-award funds for program expansion, however, remains a question for future research.

**Organizational mentoring for the intermediaries, at the executive level, is an approach to consider.**

The array of services provided by intermediaries requires expertise in such areas as implementing outreach efforts, facilitating large group sessions, providing one-on-one consultations and managing a sizable sub-award program. Intermediaries did not necessarily possess in-house capabilities in all areas. To different degrees, intermediaries in this study obtained complementary skills and expertise by hiring staff, using consultants and developing partnerships with other organizations.

A special type of partnership, organizational mentoring, is one approach worth considering for improving intermediaries’ own capacities. Unlike technical assistance that is limited by contractual specifications, organizational mentoring relationships provide an opportunity for senior leaders to receive guidance and support in an ongoing, flexible and supportive manner around a variety of related topics. In our study, this approach—involving clear goals and intensive contacts between high-level staff—was used effectively for developing and improving staff infrastructure, financial systems and proficiency with grants management for less experienced intermediaries.

Organizational mentoring should not be considered lightly as it requires considerable commitment of time from both sides of the partnership. In the model relationship we observed, the mentor and mentee executives held in-person meetings each week and spoke daily by phone during the first year. The people involved credited this frequent communication and their active involvement, as well as the respect and trust among the key players, as critical to their success.

Another possible application of organizational mentoring—although not one that we observed in this study—involves an organizational mentoring relationship between an intermediary and an FBO or CBO. Many intermediary staff have experience running nonprofits, and their knowledge about organizational development issues would qualify them to serve as mentors.

### **Intermediaries should do a better job of assessing their own services.**

HHS identified several goals that intermediaries should be working toward (e.g., diversifying funding of FBOs and CBOs, creating collaborations). However, we saw few serious attempts at self-evaluation by the intermediaries and few external evaluations to measure the extent to which they were achieving their own goals. Intermediaries' limited efforts to measure the outcomes of their own initiatives mainly involved administering satisfaction surveys to group training participants. Other than plans to re-administer organizational assessments and compare the initial and subsequent assessment scores, intermediaries did not measure outcomes associated with their technical assistance services.

Intermediaries should assess their own services and measure their attainment of the desired outcomes. External evaluations and the collection of uniform and specific data from participating organizations will enable intermediaries (and HHS) to improve their programs, set realistic expectations and goals, and measure progress toward achieving those goals.

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