

Compassion Kansas: Strengthening Community and Faith Based Organizations through Capacity Building

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1. Introduction

Non-profit, faith- and community-based organizations (FBO/CBOs) have long provided essential services to the communities in which they are based. Much of the charitable work in communities is performed by small, under- or non-funded organizations that are driven more by their passion to help those in need than by a formal mission or structure. These smaller organizations have traditionally faced restrictive barriers in accessing federal funding to support their efforts (1). Some of these barriers, particularly those related to prohibitions against religious activities, have been addressed through the “charitable choice” amendment to the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1, 2). However, the lack of organizational capacity, defined by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (3), as “the ability of an organization to fulfill its mission through a blend of sound management, strong governance, and a persistent rededication to achieving results.” (p. 33), continues to hamper these FBO/CBOs. The Compassion Capitol Fund was created through the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to address this disparity in capacity. In 2004, Wichita State University’s Self-Help Network: Center for Community Support and Research (SHN) received a Compassion Capitol Fund award and became the intermediary organization for Compassion Kansas, a three-year initiative through which small grassroots organizations receive mini-grants and technical assistance to enhance organizational capacity.

2. Compassion Kansas Implementation

In the first year of Compassion Kansas, 20 Kansas FBO/CBOs have been receiving capacity-building assistance since the beginning of 2005. Out of approximately 110 applicants, Year One sub-awardees included a fairly equal mix of primarily faith-based and primarily secular organizations. See Table 1 for service areas of the organizations.

Table 1. Service areas and number of organizations providing services to specified population

Service area/population	Number of orgs. serving population
Homeless	9
Elders in need	9
At-risk youth	18
Families in transition	10
Intensive rehabilitation	3
Marriage ed. and prep.	2

(Note: Numbers do not equal 20 because most organizations serve more than one population).

The primary components of the Compassion Kansas initiative are as follows:

Mini-grants – Non-profits and FBO/CBOs from across Kansas with budgets under \$500,000 were invited to apply for Compassion Kansas mini-grants. Organizations were asked to submit proposals for up to \$10,000 to support capacity-building needs related to areas such as technology, board and staff development, etc.

Organizational Capacity Assessment Survey (OCAS) - The OCAS, created by the TCC Group (3), is completed online by a board member, executive director and staff member from each organization. The survey assesses an organization based on the five organizational capacities described below:

- A) **Leadership Capacity:** the ability of organizational leaders to create and sustain the vision, inspire, model, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction and innovate in an effort to achieve the organizational mission.
- B) **Adaptive Capacity:** the ability to monitor, assess, and respond to internal and external changes.
- C) **Management Capacity:** the ability to ensure the effective and efficient use of organizational resources.
- D) **Technical Capacity:** the ability to implement all key organizational and programmatic functions.

- E) Organizational Culture: the organization’s unique history, language, structure, set of values and beliefs.
- F) Technical assistance – In addition to mini-grants, sub-awardees receive technical assistance related to areas in which capacity is low, as identified through the OCAS. A project facilitator from SHN is assigned to each organization and provides on-going technical assistance that generally includes such activities as strategic and/or outcome-based planning, board development, program evaluation, etc. See Figure 1 for an example item from an OCAS report that is provided to the organization and is used by project facilitators to develop technical assistance goals.

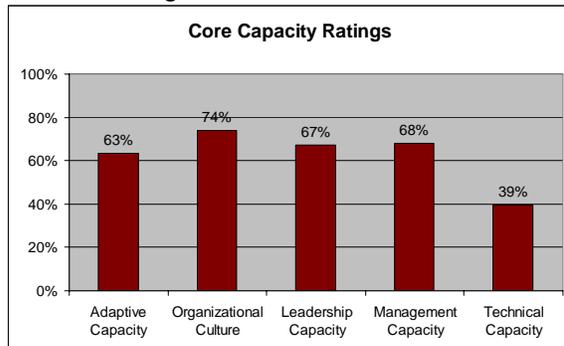


Fig. 1. Example of capacity ratings in core areas

3. Conclusions

Although only baseline data is currently available, the following “lessons learned” pertain to the group of 20 sub-awardees for 2005:

- FBO/CBOs tend to be similar to other non-profits in their needs for capacity-building assistance, looking for assistance with strategic planning, board and staff development, community awareness, and management.
- An initial assessment of the capacity building needs of FBO/CBOs can help in directing services and assistance.
- Some FBOs and CBOs are struggling with issues related to becoming a 501(c)3 organization. Some found that it is better to be subsumed under an umbrella non-profit. Others found the requirement of maintaining a board to be too prohibitive or unappealing and opted not to pursue nonprofit status. Consideration of the structure of FBOs and CBOs can help in providing the appropriate types of capacity building.
- FBO/CBOs represent a great resource to communities, especially in light of increasing needs and dwindling public and private resources. Public awareness is lacking regarding the preponderance of services provided by FBO/CBOs. Also, many FBO/CBOs lack connections to other non-profits in their area. Greater attention is needed to develop the awareness and relations of FBO/CBOs within their communities.
- Newly formed FBO/CBOs typically have a great deal of difficulty meeting the requirements of grant applications. Most RFPs require a level of sophistication and skills, as well as tangible resources such as internet connection and accounting software, that precludes many small, new organizations from accessing these funds.
- An understanding of the typical life-cycle of organizations is essential to providing the appropriate level and type of capacity building services. Support such as provided through Compassion Kansas appears to be particularly beneficial in sustaining organizations through the difficult start-up phase of the organizational life-cycle.

Next steps:

Following the completion of the post-test OCAS by year one organizations, SHN plans to investigate effects of the intervention (technical assistance) as well as possible differences between FBOs and CBOs. For year two, 20 additional FBO/CBOs were awarded mini-grants and began receiving technical assistance in December 2005. In the fall of 2006, FBO/CBOs will again be invited to apply for the third round of Compassion Kansas awards.

Acknowledgements

Technical assistance and support to Compassion Kansas sub-awardees has been provided by the following project facilitators: Kevin Bomhoff, Heidi Brandenburger, Christy Calvert, Barry Carroll, Sarah Ealey, Sam Demel, Laura Turner-Gering, Paulette Goines, Maaskelah Thomas, and Scott Wituk, PhD.

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