
STRENGTHENING THE STREET SAINTS: INTERMEDIARIES PROVIDING CAPACITY-BUILDING ASSISTANCE TO FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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Sylvia Bolling founded Aldine YOUTH in 1990 out of the back of her car in Houston, Texas. Today her organization serves 5,000 low-income households annually from a large remodeled church building in the heart of the Aldine neighborhood. Fellow Houstonian Joe Hernandez began inviting drug-addicted men to live in his home in 1995. Eight years later, approximately 200 men have gotten clean and sober with his help through Restoration Ministries. In 1998, Michigan Governor John Engler heralded the work of Ottawa County's churches as key in that locality's success in becoming the first community in America to move every able-bodied welfare recipient into a job. More than 50 congregations had answered the challenge of welfare reform by mentoring families making the transition from welfare to work—providing rides, babysitting, cheerleading, emotional support, job contacts, and even, in some cases, housing. In Fresno, California, crime rates in 25 low-income apartment complexes have dropped by 65 to 70 percent since the introduction a few years ago of "Care Fresno," a collaboration between cops and clergy. Through the program, churches rent one unit in each of the complexes and convert it into a safe and active community center boasting after-school programs for kids and support and adult education classes for parents. A common thread runs through the success stories of these faith-based initiatives in Houston, Ottawa County, and Fresno. In each, intermediary organizations play crucial roles in helping the faith communities and street saints of these cities achieve these remarkable outcomes.

THE COMPASSION INTERMEDIARIES DEFINED AND DISCOVERED

Intermediaries have become a hot public policy topic. The Department of Labor granted \$5 million in 2002 to intermediary organizations that can connect the faith community to One-Stop Career Centers and Workforce Investment Boards. Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) has invested nearly \$25 million in 21 intermediaries tasked with building capacity among faith-based organizations (FBOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), with the ultimate aim of enhancing social services for Americans in need. The federal government also is spending millions on a National Resource Center to support the work of intermediaries and another mil-

lion dollars on a formal, national study of intermediaries. Private philanthropy, too, is intrigued. The Pew Charitable Trusts are investing millions in the Faith and Service Technical Education Network, which intends to target intermediaries as its primary strategy for reaching grassroots social service providers. Last year, the Philanthropy Roundtable hosted a regional conference inquiring about the capacity-building role of intermediaries, and its magazine, *Philanthropy*, ran two major feature essays on the value of intermediaries.

But what is an intermediary and what does it do?

In brief, intermediaries are those organizations whose primary role is to build capacity among frontline social service providers. Many intermediaries also play a role as fiscal agents for startup organizations and/or operate regranting programs through which they garner public or private dollars and then channel these resources (in smaller, more manageable amounts) to grassroots FBOs and CBOs.

The punch line from a television commercial about the BASF corporation captures well what intermediaries do. The advertisement showcases individuals using a variety of household products such as stereos and dishwashers. The voiceover then remarks, “At BASF, we don’t make the stereo you listen to. We make the stereo you listen to sound better. At BASF, we don’t make the dishwasher you use. We make the dishwasher you use clean better.” The formula is repeated about other products, then the commercial wraps up with the company’s tag line: “At BASF, we don’t make a lot of the products you use. We make a lot of the products you use, better.”

Many intermediaries are of the “BASF” variety. They do not perform the frontline social services of tutoring at-risk kids, building affordable housing, mentoring families from welfare to work, rescuing teens from gangs, or running inner-city medical clinics for the homeless. Instead, they serve the servers—they support, mentor, connect, showcase, train, and resource the FBOs and CBOs fighting in the trenches. They help those grassroots groups do more of what they do, and do it better.

The intermediary’s work is invaluable if the scope, scale, and effectiveness of grassroots FBOs and CBOs are to be increased dramatically. And in the era of welfare devolution, the provision of social services and the strengthening of the social safety net by CBOs and FBOs are more important than ever. Currently, with a sluggish economy and many families approaching their 5-year, lifetime limit on federal cash welfare assistance, low-income communities around the nation face sobering challenges. Ramping up the capacity of FBOs and CBOs to expand the number of clients they can serve is crucial. And, because many such agencies place a philosophical “cap”

on growth (at some point, bigger is not better, as bigger can begin to change the relational character of the services these frontline groups offer), a need exists for new FBOs and CBOs to be launched. Faith-based intermediaries across the country are addressing both these needs: expanding the capacity of existing service organizations and helping create new ones.

WHAT INTERMEDIARIES DO AND WHY IT MATTERS

Intermediaries perform at least seven valuable functions. Houston's Center for Renewal (CFR)—a classic illustration of a “BASF” intermediary—exemplifies several of these. CFR has played a key role in building the capacity of the Houston heroes noted earlier, Sylvia Bolling of Aldine YOUTH and Joe Hernandez of Restoration Ministries. CFR's first contribution is playing a *bridging* role—connecting the well-resourced citizens of a city to the small agencies serving the under-resourced. CFR has connected Sylvia Bolling, for example, to relationships she admits she would otherwise be unable to access. In Bolling's case, CFR sponsored a meeting with nearly 100 wealthy Christian businessmen in an upscale section of Houston and invited Bolling to speak about her ministry. Afterward, one of Houston's millionaire real estate developers caught up with her in the parking garage. He offered to help with her dream of doubling the size of her community center. Bolling laughs, “I would never have met David Weekley, and if I'd picked up the phone to call him, I'm sure I would have never gotten to talk with him. But now, when we're ready, that door is open.”

CFR has helped others make these kinds of connections. CFR once brought the wife of a wealthy philanthropist to Houston's distressed Third Ward to see firsthand the good work of Inner-City Youth (ICY). ICY's founder walked away that day with a check covering the purchase price of a lot on which to build a new youth center—and a pledge of \$500,000 more toward the building.

The financial-multiplier effect of intermediaries can be astonishing. CFR's modest budget, for example, is just \$150,000 annually. Yet in 2001, it assisted its constituents in obtaining nearly \$1 million in new grants. That's more than a 600 percent rate of return.

This bridging work, however, goes beyond connections to dollars; it includes connections to new partners and new volunteers. Through CFR, for example, Bolling's group now enjoys strong volunteer participation from a suburban church that provides all the essentials for Aldine YOUTH's outreach to girls in junior high school.

Joe Hernandez of Restoration Ministries now enjoys support from several congregations that have become engaged as a result of CFR's bridging efforts. That new support literally has kept Hernandez's work afloat: one of the homes Restoration Ministries operates for men was damaged severely in the summer 2001 floods in Houston. Instead of going under, the home today is in better condition than ever before, as volunteers, money, supplies, and new furnishings flowed in from the new church partners. Hernandez appears almost dazed as he relates the story of this outpouring of generosity, indicating that before his involvement with CFR, he was isolated from such support.

CFR's bridging efforts are imitated by other intermediaries. In a major yearlong study of 24 faith-based intermediaries, the Hudson Institute found that more than 75 percent had helped grassroots FBOs and CBOs acquire new funding and 67 percent had assisted their constituents in accessing new volunteers.

Intermediaries perform a second key function: providing relevant, accessible *training and technical assistance*. CFR, for example, not only garners new resources on behalf of its constituent frontline agencies, it also teaches those grassroots groups how to improve their own fundraising efforts. Intermediaries sponsor grant-writing workshops, bring in pro bono fundraising consultants, connect FBOs and CBOs to veterans experienced in hosting fundraising events or conducting mass direct-mail campaigns. For shoestring ministries such as Hernandez's Restoration Ministries (which has funded its operations largely through car washes, bracelet sales, and chicken barbecues), the fundraising workshops cover the basics and lead to the development of a template grant proposal. Using this proposal, Restoration Ministries secured its first formal foundation grant in 2001.

For more advanced organizations, the fundraising training provided by intermediaries takes up more complicated issues, such as accessing government grants and contracts or establishing income-generating operations that can provide sustainable funding over time. The Institute for Youth Development, a CCF grant awardee in Tennessee, is hosting a series of 60 fundraising schools teaching beginner-to-advanced topics that will reach hundreds of FBOs and CBOs over the next 3 years. The Faith & Philanthropy Institute, a relatively new faith-based intermediary in Dallas, has hosted intensive grant-writing seminars, bringing together African-American churches with Fannie Mae and private foundation officers.

Some intermediaries play a third key role: *regranting*. Those intermediaries sometimes acquire major grants or contracts and then redistribute funds to their constituents for specific projects or for general operating support. In Los Angeles, the

United Methodist Urban Foundation has regranted 95 percent of the \$1.4 million dollars it has garnered since 1998 to underwrite a variety of social service initiatives. For example, the Foundation secured major funding from the California Wellness Foundation to build capacity among four grassroots agencies well positioned to provide preventative healthcare services in underserved neighborhoods. The South Park Neighborhood Center, North Valley Caring Ministries, Zaferia Shalom, and Rakestraw Memorial Center each are receiving between \$10,000 and \$20,000 minigrants for 2 years. The funding provides general operational support (allowing two of the agencies to hire full-time directors) as these organizations conduct programs ranging from after-school care to parish nursing to physical education classes for low-income senior citizens. A Colorado intermediary, the Metro Denver Black Church Initiative, has garnered funds from local and national foundations and provided minigrants ranging from \$3,000 to \$70,000 to help fund 35 church-based community outreaches. These programs include after-school tutoring, youth mentoring, and family counseling programs. Regranting is a key part of the Compassion Capital Fund's strategy. CCF awardees are responsible for creating a plan for minigrants shared with their constituent agencies.

As financial intermediaries, organizations such as the Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation make it possible for grassroots groups to tap into dollars they would otherwise find difficult to access. Government agencies and large private foundations sometimes distribute their dollars in hefty chunks—grants and contracts of a scale beyond the administrative capacity of small grassroots groups to manage. Intermediaries with the administrative sophistication to acquire large grants and contracts can redistribute resources in manageable amounts to FBOs and CBOs that, because of their size, would effectively be shut out from competition for million-dollar grants.

In addition, the presence of intermediaries can encourage faith-filled service organizations to consider partnering with government agencies. These FBOs may be wary of a direct interface with government, fearing the potential secularizing pressures of the church-state divide. But when an intermediary organization stands in the gap, securing government funds and regrating them to the frontline FBO, that FBO has an arms-length, indirect relationship to the state that feels safer. In conducting the first major study of charitable choice implementation (Sherman 2000), I discovered this was a common sentiment among faith-based leaders I interviewed who collaborate with government through such arrangements with intermediaries.

Fourth, intermediaries provide the important service of *knowledge transfer*. They share information, lessons learned, best practices, and replicable models with their

constituent organizations. The Christian Community Health Fellowship and the Mennonite Economic Development Association (two other CCF awardees), for example, assist FBOs in starting or enhancing healthcare clinics and microenterprise development projects. In both instances, these intermediaries are repositories of a wealth of information about a variety of models and approaches that have been fruitful (as well as the mistakes to avoid). In other cases, such as with the Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation, knowledge transfer occurs when the Foundation sponsors discounted training sessions in asset-based community development for inner-city congregations and small FBOs. Or, as one constituent of the Center for Renewal in Houston put it, an intermediary can serve as a frontline ministry's "research-and-development arm." In this pastor's case, he desired to launch an outreach to urban junior high school students focusing on vocational issues. Barbara Elliott of the Center for Renewal scoured the country and discovered a faith-based curriculum on youth entrepreneurship that fit the pastor's needs perfectly. The church has since sponsored two summers of "Vocation Bible School" (note the "o"), training dozens of urban youngsters in financial life skills and employing them in two microenterprises.

A fifth contribution intermediaries often make is as *mobilizers* of untapped human resources. Ottawa County, Michigan, was noted earlier as the first locality in the United States to move every able-bodied welfare recipient into a job. An intermediary organization, Good Samaritan Ministries, was critical to that achievement. "Good Sam" cast vision among the faith community to engage in welfare reform and then trained the churches in principles of effective mentoring. Good Samaritan received approximately \$100,000 in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds from the county's Family Independence Agency (FIA) to operate the mentoring initiative. Good Samaritan recruited the churches, trained the volunteer teams, matched teams with families referred by FIA, and provided ongoing support to the mentor teams as they walked alongside their mentees for a year. (Good Samaritan is staffed by Christian social workers who helped the mentors understand the families with whom they were matched and taught them how to be effective and non-patronizing helpers.) Good Samaritan mobilized approximately 50 congregations in less than 6 months, largely because it possessed a long-standing, credible reputation among the faith community.

In this mobilizing role, intermediaries provide a valuable service to public-sector social welfare agencies. After all, had the county FIA taken on the responsibility of mobilizing the churches for action, chances are the process would have taken much longer and seen far less success. County officials lacked the personal relationships, connections, and credibility enjoyed by Good Samaritan, as well as the subculture

knowledge of how to navigate the faith community efficiently (for example, who the key gatekeepers were, how to approach leaders of different denominations and institutional structures, what language to use). Anne Arundel County in Maryland tried a similar mentoring initiative a few years before Ottawa County. But in Maryland, the county had no intermediary to help. As a result, it took county workers twice as long to mobilize half as many congregations.

In Fresno, an intermediary called One by One Leadership sponsors an initiative called City as Parish (CAP) that focuses on moving people from the pews to the 'hood. The training equips individuals to understand their personal gifts and educates them about (and exposes them to) the needs of their community. Thus far, parishioners from 62 congregations have completed the 50-hour training; as a result, 4,100 volunteers have been deployed for service in the community. Some labor with the Care Fresno initiative mentioned earlier. Others volunteer with Covenant Mentor Center, the Samaritan Women's Home for women leaving prison, the Poverello Homeless Shelter, and the Fresno Rescue Mission, as well as the Fresno Unified School District and local libraries. Four hours to the south, in Oxnard, California, a Latino-led intermediary called City Impact mobilizes hundreds of church volunteers for service as teen mentors in the city schools and with troubled youth in the juvenile justice system (those on parole and those in juvenile detention centers).

Sixth, intermediaries *build administrative and organizational capacity* among their constituents by assisting with management issues (of staff and volunteers), board development, accounting and financial recordkeeping, strategic planning, and training in performance evaluation. Not every intermediary focuses on all these issues; some specialize in helping their constituents with one or another of these key areas. The Islamic Society of North America's (ISNA's) Community Development Department, for example, helps Muslim mosques equip themselves for launching 501(c)(3) non-profit affiliates to operate community ministries. ISNA also hosts an annual conference teaching Muslim leaders about legal and administrative issues in launching new agencies and offering grantwriting workshops. The Indianapolis Center on Congregations conducts similar work in the mainline Protestant community. The National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry and the Latino Leadership Foundation provide leadership training to equip Latinos of faith in enhancing their religious communities' social services. In Pennsylvania, the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation helps incubate new FBOs, providing assistance with startup issues, fund development, strategic planning, and board development.

Finally, intermediaries serve their constituents by telling their stories. Their efforts to *spotlight and publicize* the work of street saints draw attention from the media,

potential donors, and public administrators, leading to new support or partnerships. According to Joe Mazzu of The Brookwood Community, a Texas FBO that provides residential care for people with a wide variety of physical and mental disabilities, this has been the Center for Renewal's greatest service. Brookwood pursues an innovative approach to rehabilitation, employing every resident in one of the Community's range of businesses. These business ventures raise one-third of its \$5.5-million operating budget. Brookwood refuses to accept government money so it can maintain full autonomy over its programs. But government regulations still impinge on their activities from time to time. In such situations, Brookwood finds it crucial to be understood. CFR's efforts to document Brookwood's work, clearly articulate their philosophy, and showcase their model in a variety of professional publications have given Brookwood an added measure of credibility. Mazzu uses the publications to help explain his organization to public officials. CFR also publicizes its constituents' work by granting them space on CFR's website, giving groups such as Aldine YOUTH and Restoration Ministries an Internet presence. AMEN, a national Hispanic intermediary serving evangelical Latino congregations in North America, sponsored an initiative through which professional writers produced colorful, published profiles of models of Hispanic church-based community outreach. AMEN will distribute these profiles among their government contacts, informing public administrators about housing, medical, and educational programs operated by Hispanic congregations that are "beneath the radar screen."

In summary, the Hudson Institute study determined the following:

Intermediary organizations currently make enormous contributions to the scope, scale, and effectiveness of grassroots, faith-based social service agencies.... Intermediary organizations have assisted grassroots FBOs in obtaining millions of dollars of funding they most likely otherwise would not have secured. Intermediaries have connected frontline groups to new sources of volunteers and in-kind donations. Intermediaries have provided grassroots leaders with relevant, accessible training and technical assistance they otherwise would not have gained. And intermediaries have increased the public exposure of grassroots groups' work, winning them public recognition, endorsements, and media coverage (Sherman 2002).

Specifically, Hudson's study showed that more than 75 percent of the intermediaries provided training and technical assistance to their constituents; 72 percent helped constituents establish a new partnership; 78 percent helped them to secure increased funding; 67 percent assisted constituents in accessing new volunteers; and 78 percent facilitated a public endorsement of a constituent ministry (Sherman

2002). Impressively, these organizations achieved these goals on relatively limited resources. Two-thirds operated on annual budgets of less than \$2 million; one-third did all this hard work on a yearly budget of less than \$500,000 (Sherman 2002).

HOW FAITH-BASED INTERMEDIARIES DO THEIR WORK

Clearly, intermediaries provide valuable services. The manner in which they accomplish their work is equally important. After all, other institutions build capacity among community-based organizations. For example, some community colleges, nonprofit resource centers, the United Way, and community foundations offer training and technical assistance, networking opportunities, and, in some instances, minigrants. In this sense, faith-based intermediaries cannot claim to be unique. What, then, makes faith-based intermediaries critical elements in expanding faith-based and community-based social services? Faith-based intermediaries, though offering some similar services to secular agencies, often conduct their work in a manner qualitatively different.

Grassroots FBOs interviewed in Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Fort Worth, Fresno, and Houston through the Hudson study typically did not or could not access the capacity-building services provided by secular agencies. Sometimes they were ignorant of the services offered or could not afford them. Sometimes those services were difficult to access because they occurred at locations geographically and culturally distant. And sometimes the FBOs feared that these organizations would not understand their unique mission and challenges as faith-based ministries. By contrast, these FBOs reported that the *faith-based* intermediaries often brought the training and technical assistance “right to our neighborhood.” Such training also was offered for free or for significantly discounted prices. Faith-based practitioners also felt they could relate to the intermediaries because the trainers shared similar faith commitments.

The Hudson study revealed that the intensity of engagement was another common difference between the capacity-building services of the faith-based intermediaries studied and some secular institutions. The faith-based intermediaries in the Hudson study offered much more than a few training workshops each year. The Hudson survey asked two key questions concerning intensity of engagement:

Q: “Typically, how long do you work with your constituents (i.e., the ministries you assist?)”

Long term (2 or more years)	50%
Both mid term, (1 to 2 years) and long term	33%
Short term (less than 1 year)	16%

Q: “On average, how frequently do you meet with, get together with, provide services to, etc., your constituents?”

Weekly	44%
Monthly	28%
Weekly with some, monthly with others	11%

Remarkably, more than 50 percent of the intermediaries reported they typically work with constituent ministries for 2 or more years at a time. Seventy-two percent get together with grassroots leaders at least monthly (and almost half have weekly interactions). Intermediary leaders build deep and genuine friendships with the grassroots practitioners, contrasting with the transactional nature of the work of many secular intermediaries. This relational model enhances the training and technical assistance the faith-based intermediary provides because the intermediary really *knows* the ministry. Trainers are adept in “scratching where the ministry is itching” because of familiarity with the ministry’s particular weaknesses and challenges. The relationship also makes it more likely that the practical skills and tools frontline staff acquire through the intermediary’s training actually are put to use. (As most workshop leaders know, audience participants may be excited about new material during a half-day training session, but return to the office and shelve the new information when they are inundated by the day-to-day pressures of running the service agency.) Intermediary staff follow up with practitioners, helping them think through how to apply, practically, the new lessons and skills.

This deep involvement over time is a great boon for visionaries launching new ministries, as it helps them lay a solid foundation for their work. Staff from the intermediary organization can walk novice practitioners through the process of defining mission, creating a well-functioning board of directors, establishing strong financial and recordkeeping systems, and designing a workable launch plan. Some intermediaries, such as the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, actually formalize the process, incubating new faith-based nonprofits, providing seed funding, office space, administrative help (such as overseeing payroll), and the like.

The ongoing relationship grassroots leaders develop with intermediaries also means they have consulting advice available through long periods when they may be

reevaluating a program, tackling a crisis, or developing a new initiative, capital campaign, or significant ministry expansion. Indeed, the strong relationships intermediaries form with grassroots leaders provide a level of emotional support, cheerleading, and handholding whose value should not be underestimated. As one leader from California interviewed in the Hudson study noted, startup ministries are much like startup businesses—and everyone knows that new small businesses fail at a high rate. This woman asserted that the personal and emotional support she felt from intermediary leaders would be the key factor in assisting the survival of her young nonprofit.

The intensity of the intermediary's relationship with its constituents should also serve donors. Foundations looking to intermediaries for wisdom in assessing which FBOs most deserve support can know with confidence that the intermediaries are well informed, having invested substantial time “kicking the tires” and “test-driving” the various grassroots groups. Intermediaries often provide grassroots groups with a kind of “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.” Grassroots leaders gain credibility through their association with intermediaries. Public officials, directors of secular nonprofits, business leaders, and foundation executives trust intermediary leaders' opinions of grassroots groups because of their deep, long-standing relationships with these practitioners.

CREDIBLY CONNECTED INTERMEDIARIES

The findings from the Hudson study imply that a vital characteristic of effective intermediaries is credible, ongoing relationships of trust among the FBOs and CBOs they serve. Authentic intermediaries can effectively convene faith leaders, serve as fiscal agents, mobilize FBOs and houses of worship, and provide training that is put into practice at the grassroots because their constituent ministries truly know them. The CBOs and FBOs consider them friends, not outsiders.

This point must not be overlooked by public administrators hoping to engage and strengthen FBOs and CBOs through a strategy that utilizes intermediaries. Not all intermediaries are equal. Not all possess credible connections to grassroots FBOs that need the capacity-building investments policymakers want the intermediaries they support to make. Some organizations may have the *capability* of delivering capacity building services among FBOs, but not *the relational connections and credible reputation* required if those services are going to be enthusiastically accepted and digested by the targeted grassroots groups.

It does not matter if FBOs deal with faith-based or secular intermediaries (though, as noted earlier, some grassroots FBOs may find it difficult to accept training from secular agencies). Rather, the question concerns the depth of the relationship the intermediary forges with the grassroots groups. A secular intermediary with a long history of partnering with FBOs and a reputation for providing helpful and relevant technical assistance could have greater credibility than a faith-based intermediary without these characteristics.

VARIETIES OF INTERMEDIARIES

In addition to so-called “BASF” intermediaries that strengthen frontline service providers, some intermediaries are “blended.” These intermediaries offer some direct service programs while engaging in the provision of intermediary services. Nueva Esperanza, a premier faith-based Latino community development corporation in Philadelphia, illustrates the work of a blended intermediary. Nueva has successfully developed affordable housing, launched a variety of educational and vocational training programs for youth and adults, and sponsored comprehensive summer programs for kids. It invests more than half its energies in direct service provision. But Nueva’s expertise in conducting successful community development efforts makes it a magnet for inquiries from many Latino (and other) faith leaders who want to learn from its experiences. This “consumer demand” created Nueva’s informal intermediary services: staff responding to requests for assistance, information, training, and consulting. Today, Nueva provides such services more formally and with more intentionality and self-awareness. It captured a major CCF grant and launched the Hispanic Capacity Project. Through this project, Nueva hopes to train 600 Hispanic FBOs and CBOs in major cities such as Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and Philadelphia for effective community development efforts.

Fort Worth’s Cornerstone Assistance Network has a similar story. As a blended intermediary, it pioneered faith-based ministry among the homeless of Tarrant County. Cornerstone runs residential rehabilitation programs and a variety of short-term, emergency relief efforts. Like Nueva, it eventually achieved a reputation for knowing how to perform effective community services, provoking many calls from church leaders with desires to expand and improve their own outreach programs. Cornerstone’s executive director, Mike Doyle, soon was personally mentoring many local leaders, coaching them through ministry startups. Today, Cornerstone operates a Rockefeller Foundation–funded training and regranting initiative among five CBOs in the city.

Large, administratively sophisticated religious social service agencies such as Catholic Charities or The Jewish Federation may also sometimes engage in intermediary activities, though not as a major focus. They appear to play the role of ad hoc fiscal agent for specific opportunities or partnerships and some may host regional conferences at which some training for social ministry occurs.

Coalitions that emphasize convening, networking, and advocacy are another type of intermediary. In Miami, the Family and Children Faith Coalition (FCFC), successfully organizes more than 100 CBOs and FBOs to cooperate more effectively in reaching the needs of low-income children and families in Miami. FCFC has brokered partnerships between its members and between members and local public agencies (such as TANF agencies and Workforce Investment Boards). The Interfaith Community Ministries Network places similar emphasis on networking, training groups for collaboration, and advocating on public policy issues affecting the poor.

THE UNIVERSE OF INTERMEDIARIES

While some different types of intermediaries can be defined, no research available now indicates the size of the “intermediary sector.” No one really knows just how many intermediaries effectively serve the faith community. Only rough guesses can be made based on observations of recent efforts that have shined the spotlight on the intermediary sector. The Hudson study, as noted earlier, examined 24 faith-based intermediaries, including a few members of a larger network of intermediaries, the Council of Leadership Foundations (CLF). CLF boasts approximately 25 members with 12 more affiliate members. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services selected Branch Associates, a nonprofit research firm, to conduct a major study on the role of capacity-building intermediaries. In the initial months of their work, researchers from Branch have built a database of 60 intermediary organizations that serve the faith community (some degree of overlap occurs between Branch’s list of 60 and Hudson’s list of 24). A recent conference in Washington, D.C., targeting Christian intermediary organizations gathered close to 90 participants. More than 300 organizations competed for the Compassion Capital Fund grants; so at least that many agencies consider themselves intermediaries, though not all would be identified as such by grassroots leaders. Anecdotally, then, it appears that the number of intermediaries serving FBOs and CBOs range in the dozens or scores, not in the hundreds or thousands. More research is needed to secure a more accurate count of authentic intermediaries in existence today. Yet, almost certainly not enough authentic intermediaries are available to serve the tens of thousands of grassroots FBOs and CBOs that could benefit from their help.

CHALLENGES/TENSIONS INTERMEDIARIES FACE

The intermediaries in the Hudson study reported that their number one obstacle is that charitable foundations do not recognize the legitimacy of their work. They sense a “foundation bias” against them. In a gathering of study participants hosted by Hudson, intermediary leaders hypothesized a number of reasons:

- Many foundations are wary, in general, of regranting.
- Some foundations mistakenly believe that the First Amendment, dealing with the separation of church and state, precludes them from partnering with faith-based organizations.
- Some foundations worry that if they make grants to one religious persuasion, they will receive criticism from other faith groups.
- Turf wars or lack of collaboration among FBOs and congregations discourage private philanthropy from investing in the faith community.
- Some foundations have a bias against funding “middlemen.”

It is hoped, as further documentation of the unique and valuable role played by intermediaries is published, private philanthropies will be persuaded to reevaluate their prejudices.

Intermediaries face other challenges. Regranting, for example, raises liability issues, in the sense that lines of accountability must be firmly specified. Does the donor hold the intermediary, alone, accountable for the performance objectives of the subgrantees? Or do subgrantees maintain some responsibility to the original funding agency and not just the intermediary? Blended intermediaries confront the dilemma of balancing their own direct service work with their intermediary functions. The competition for the Compassion Capitol Fund awards revealed additional challenges. Some applicants (mainly blended intermediaries who viewed the CCF awards as an opportunity for formalizing their intermediary work) had genuine connections to grassroots FBOs and CBOs and hard-won wisdom to share through technical-assistance efforts. They lacked, however, the ability to write strong grant applications. By contrast, some organizations that lacked genuine networks among grassroots agencies composed articulate proposals. Now funded, these organizations find it difficult to execute their plans because of their lack of credible relationships among the FBOs and CBOs they attempt to assist.

Moreover, one key strength of effective intermediaries—their ability to work intensively and over a lengthy period of time with their constituents—limits the role that can be played by national intermediaries. Local or city-scale intermediaries appear to be best suited for the work of building capacity among grassroots FBOs, but that local focus can hinder their attractiveness to some public and private donors more interested in funding national initiatives. Again, we must overcome this bias. National intermediaries can contribute to capacity building, but mainly when they are composed of local affiliates with credible and lasting grassroots connections. National intermediaries that try to “go local” simply by opening up branch offices in a variety of cities do not accomplish that genuine sense of community rootedness. (By contrast, national intermediaries such as the National Jobs Partnership have found success coming alongside local faith leaders to help launch new programs to serve the unemployed.) The best strategy for expanding the work of faith-based intermediaries is creating many more local intermediaries, not a few national organizations.

CONCLUSION

Some champions of grassroots FBOs and CBOs understandably look skeptically at the newfound interest in intermediary organizations. They fear that resources may be diverted from the community transformers on the front lines to middlemen engaged in dubious training initiatives. To the extent these suspicions are based on the skeptics’ observations of inauthentic intermediaries—those groups boasting of ability to provide capacity-building services but lacking the credible connections with the grassroots—their concerns are valid. But many genuine intermediaries *are* serving and strengthening frontline FBOs and CBOs—and serving them effectively. These intermediaries help grassroots groups overcome their problems of limited reach and immature organizational and administrative prowess. They bolster street saints’ internal operations; connect them to new financial and human resources; teach them critical skills in management, fundraising, and outcomes evaluation; and perform the often unheralded service of simply helping overwhelmed community healers maintain their own sanity.

America has answered the question, “Whose job is it to help the poor?” Widespread agreement abounds that it is not government’s job alone. We expect private citizens, religious organizations, and nonprofits to contribute. And we have faith in communities—faith that local people often are the best equipped to solve their own problems. In many communities across America, FBOs and CBOs have taken the leadership role for addressing their communities’ challenges—poverty, unemployment, crime, family

breakdown, racism, gangs, and educational underachievement. A more pressing question for today is, “Whose job is it to help the helpers?” Authentic intermediaries—some long-standing and some relatively new—have accepted that mandate. Intermediaries offer great promise for expanding the contributions made by grassroots community transformers. We welcome the newfound attention to their work, for they are worthy of greater public and private support.

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