



Toolkit Items

Tool Name: Examples of Outreach Strategies

Definition: These are examples of how various State Commissions are reaching out to community organizations (secular and faith-based). They include staff outreach efforts, barriers encountered and overcome, use of Commissioners to assist with outreach efforts, and utilizing CNCS resources (members, volunteers) to do the outreach.

Purpose: These examples can be helpful to generate ideas on how best to reach out to community organizations (secular and faith-based).

Examples of Outreach Strategies

Outreach to community organizations (secular and faith-based) can be challenging. Very often grassroots organizations have very limited or volunteer staffing. Finding them is the first challenge. Making contact is the second challenge. Experience from State Commissions suggests that there is no one answering the phone or returning phone calls when staff reaches out, and letters tend to have a very low rate of return in terms of response. In some cases they are being inundated by multiple contacts from several state agencies around this initiative. Connecting with them requires sensitivity and persistence.

Using Member/Volunteer Resources to do Outreach

Florida: AmeriCorps*VISTA allocated an additional 45 VISTA training slots for FBOs to participate in a pre-service orientation (PSO) in January 2002. The Florida State Office used Promise Fellows to scour neighborhoods to identify FBOs that might be interested in participating. As a result of their personal visits and outreach efforts, Florida had the highest number of FBOs participate in the PSO training.

Working with Faith-Based Liaisons

South Carolina: The state of South Carolina has an appointed Faith-Based Liaison whose role is to identify and reach out to FBOs, to build effective partnerships with FBOs, to increase their awareness of opportunities to apply for funding, and to reduce barriers to their participation. This position is placed within the State Commission, creating a natural synergy between building volunteerism in the state and engaging all community organizations (secular and faith-based) in positive community building activities. The Faith-Based Liaison is able to include a strong message about CNCS resources available to community organizations.

Using Commissioners for Outreach

Massachusetts: Using Commissioners to assist with outreach efforts is one of the strategies the Massachusetts Service Alliance uses to increase its capacity to do outreach. Commissioners are geographically dispersed throughout the state; they are trained and provided briefing materials to help them serve as effective advocates for AmeriCorps. They attend speaking engagements that get the word out on a local level to community organizations (secular and faith-based).

California: CA GOSERV uses Commissioners to support regional awareness sessions by having Commissioners and additional staff available to provide one-on-one time with organizations new to CNCS following the training sessions. This helps to reassure and address the concerns that community organizations may have, based on the administrative and financial commitments of applicants.

Tennessee: The Commission in Tennessee draws on Commissioners to identify contact lists of community organizations (secular and faith-based) that they work with or have access to in order to expand its database for outreach.

Staff Outreach

Massachusetts: Staff used several strategies to build a database of community organizations (secular and faith-based). First, they asked their current grantees to identify the community organizations they already work with. Second, they combed the state for directories, phone books, and other existing databases to identify organizations. Third, they reached out to United Ways throughout the state and other foundations to identify organizations they work with or are aware of.

Challenges experienced in creating the database:

- Requests to outside agencies were often met with suspicion about how the information shared would be used and some reluctance to do so

- It was difficult to get responses even from United Ways; calls often had to be made several times before information was shared

Challenges experienced with the outreach to community organizations (secular and faith-based):

- Calls were seldom returned, persistence was necessary

- Letters seldom generated participation in outreach meetings

- Grassroots community organizations (secular and faith-based) are already stretched so thin that they tend to respond when there is a relationship in place, but not in the absence of one

Solutions used:

- When organizations did not respond, staff continued to reach out

- The database generated by staff was shared with current grantees as well as with potential grant applicants. This was as a means of giving them help with potential partners or host sites, particularly where newly identified organizations might not be prepared to make an application themselves

Conclusion

Outreach, whoever the target audience is, requires Commission and specific staff commitment to carry out the work. The FACES Initiative tends to identify grassroots organizations with no experience or limited experience with CNCS programs, administration, and programmatic requirements. Steps to build their comfort level and capacity require intermediate steps such as connecting them with current grantees, developing partnerships that may include generating volunteers to support CNCS programs, assisting with recruitment, serving as a host site, or providing an interim application process such as concept papers or planning grants.