Outreach Brief

Utilizing Faith-Based Organizations to Outreach to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities

The purpose of this brief is to assist service providers in developing effective community outreach strategies to increase their capacity to deliver employment-related services to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities by utilizing faith-based organizations. (Portions are adapted from: National Services Resource Center [2003]. Implementing the President's Faith-Based and Community Initiative.) [1]

One of the most difficult problems facing vocational rehabilitation (VR) service providers who want to increase services to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) communities is reaching into the various communities themselves to disseminate information, increase awareness of available services and develop trusting relationships. This is due, in part, to the fact that AAPIs tend to rely on their family members for support before seeking professional help and tend to distrust and, therefore, not to seek assistance from authority establishments such as state VR agencies (Hampton, 2000). They also tend to sequester their family member with a disability at home, hidden away from public view, and may only seek help when the family's tolerance and resources are exhausted. In addition, providing services to AAPIs with disabilities incorporates great challenges because they are diverse in ethnicity, generation, language, dialect, culture, and socioeconomic needs. These cultural differences have not been clearly understood by individuals or organizations designing programs to support minority persons with disabilities and the result has been a disparity in rehabilitation services provided to AAPIs (Pi, 2001).

Even with ethnic diversities of such monumental proportions, a common thread that runs throughout these communities is religion. An array of faith-based organizations represents the cornerstones of many of these communities. From Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism to Islam and Christianity, religion profoundly impacts Asian American and Pacific Islander cultures. In India, for example, religion is a way of life. It is an integral part of the entire Indian tradition. For the majority of Indians, religion permeates every aspect of life, from common-place daily chores to education and politics (Pinto & Sahu, 2001). For many Koreans, the emphasis on spiritual aspects of life and religion are a source of strength and support, emphasizing the importance of family and social order (Kim-Rupnow, 2001). Vietnamese cultural values rest on the principles of

Confucianism (Hunt, 2002). Contrary to the Western idea of individualism, AAPI cultures generally emphasize the importance of family and community. Its core values include harmony, duty, honor, respect, education and allegiance to the family. It is precisely this allegiance to family and the foundational role religion plays in the family structure that offers potential inroads into AAPI cultures through collaboration with their myriad faith-based organizations. To develop the trust of leaders within these faith-based organizations would greatly assist service providers in developing effective community outreach programs and strategies to increase delivery of services to this target group.

However, it is apparent that numerous differences between AAPI and mainstream American cultures cause barriers that restrict AAPIs with disabilities from fully accessing rehabilitation services they may qualify for. In addition, according to Pi (2001) both mainstream and minority communities and religious organizations tend to overlook their capability to support minority individuals with disabilities. The following is a compilation of outreach strategies and programs designed to engage faith-based organizations collaboratively in the vital work of providing services to improve the quality of life for AAPIs with disabilities and their families within the communities they serve.

Background

The signing of Executive Orders and the establishment of the White House Office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives has made it a priority of the Departments of Justice, Labor, HHS, HUD, Education, Agriculture, and the Agency for International Development to partner with and distribute resources to community organizations (both secular and faith-based).

Connection between the Faith-based and Community Initiative and Service Providers

Community organizations, both faith-based and secular, play a critical role in strengthening the social fabric of neighborhoods and communities, mobilizing residents to address community issues, promoting volunteerism, and delivering direct services across a broad spectrum to address critical unmet human needs. These organizations serve to enhance the development of social capital and infrastructure within neighborhoods. They tend to be staffed by residents and members who reflect the diversity of the community, who have shared experiences, who have walked in their neighbor's shoes. Services delivered by these organizations tend to:

• respond to the felt needs of the community they originate from
• grow out of a desire to serve others, particularly the less fortunate
• solve problems present in the population they serve
• mobilize residents or members as volunteers for service delivery
• be physically present in the neighborhood

• better represent the ethnic and language diversity of the neighborhood
• build relationships in addition to delivering services.

Outreach Strategies: Start with the Glass Half Full

The most important step to implementing this initiative is to start with the glass half full. Very often in the past, concerns about the separation of church and state have caused government funders, faith-based organizations (FBOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) alike to avoid working together. Do not assume something cannot happen. Rather, begin by asking the appropriate questions and seeking solutions that fall within the law. Try to be fair and equitable, but take a problem-solving approach; there is a way to make a partnership work.

• Recognize that outreach may need to focus on building capacity over time. Begin with relationship-building and by helping new organizations become familiar with the benefits and challenges of being a partner.
• Try doing public awareness meetings in partnership with other state agencies attempting to reach the same audiences.
• Identify current organizations that could partner with new community organizations (secular and faith-based) or serve as mentors.
• Consider using dispersed site management strategies similar to AmeriCorps* VISTA to address the needs of rural organizations. Fully utilize Commissioners and staff to help expand the diversity of the pool for outreach and engage them in doing awareness trainings.
• Develop partnerships with other government resources, such as the Department of Labor and Social Security Administration, to support outreach efforts.

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

Hawaii: The National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC), University of Hawaii, developed a strategy to increase job opportunities and community awareness of AAPIs with disabilities through local AAPI church communities. NTAC staff developed relationships with church leaders and invited them to co-host an event

featuring a prominent AAPI figure with a disability with a model success story. Results included: more than 400 attendees at a 3-day intensive outreach; participation of more than 100 volunteers; 15 AAPI employers committing to hiring qualified workers with disabilities; 10 AAPI consumers receiving training on available services; two new clients for VR Services; statewide publicity via television, newspaper and radio coverage producing increased community awareness of disability issues and the need for increased job opportunities. This strategy proved effective in reaching consumers, employers and service providers. NTAC will continue to identify faith-based organizations nationwide with capacity to assist AAPIs with disabilities. NTAC may be contacted through its website at www.NTAC.hawaii.edu.

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 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 they tend to respond only when there is a relationship in place, 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 a means of helping with potential partners or host sites, particularly where newly identified organizations might not be prepared to make an application themselves

Resources

Additional information on how to implement the President's Faith-Based and Community Initiative, including examples of outreach materials, can be found in the following web sites:

White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives
http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/

National Service Resource Center
http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/initiatives/faces/state_commission_toolkit_faces/step_iv_reach_out_to_new.php

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life http://pewforum.org/faith-based-initiatives/?source=gfbi
Covering Kids & Families Communications Kit: Faith-Based Outreach Materials
http://coveringkidsandfamilies.org/communications/materials/faith/http://coveringkidsandfamilies.org/communications/materials/business/

References

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