

Zip Code Assistance Ministries Organizational Development Program

High Engagement Philanthropy ● Capacity Building ● Collaboration



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Final Program Evaluation

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The Zip Code Assistance Ministries Organizational Development Program (ZCAM ODP) was conceived as a means for faith-based organizations that provide assistance to clients in need of a range of services to increase their capacity to do more mission. Two sets of principles informed the project, underpinned the curriculum of trainings and guided program monitoring and evaluation. These principles were (1) the program goals of high engagement philanthropy, capacity building and collaboration; and (2) the Nine Elements of Organizational Capacity.

Upon conclusion of the third year of the project, an evaluation of final project outcomes was conducted. Inputs to the evaluation included in-depth interviews with ZCAM participants; extensive reviews of the initial ZCAM organizational capacity building proposals and semi-annual progress reports; prior evaluations for Year 1 and Year 2 of the effort; results of a social network mapping exercise; and an analysis of individual ZCAM Logic Models and the extent to which designated outcomes were achieved. What follows are the findings of that evaluation.

The vision of ZCAM ODP was for Houston area congregational assistance ministries to be able to do more mission, or achieve their missions more efficiently.

History

Zip Code Assistance Ministries (ZCAMs) were formed throughout the Houston/Harris County area, prompted by the economic downturn of the 1980s. At that time, houses of worship were faced with requests for food, rent, utility assistance and clothing. Because each church could assist in only a small way, people in crisis were traveling from one place to another to receive assistance.

To alleviate this problem and to better meet the needs of their neighbors, several religious congregations pooled their resources – funds, volunteers, in-kind donations and office

space – to create one central place in their community where basic emergency needs could be met.

ZCAMs were thus created, each being assigned a geographic territory based on zip codes, as nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations, separate from the houses of worship that initiated them. Though some ministries have kept a focus on emergency services, a number of them have expanded their programs to address underlying causes of poverty by offering health care, GED and ESL classes, job preparation and temporary housing.

Community Needs

Thousands of people in the Houston metropolitan area live in the shadow of poverty and on the edge of homelessness. The United Way of Greater Houston receives over 100,000 calls on their 2-1-1 Helpline, a 24-hour, multilingual information and referral hotline for all types of social service resources. Each year, the top three needs of callers are requests for assistance with rent, utilities and food. The 2003-2007 Harris County Consolidated Plan found that there are limited services for preventing homelessness in the region, causing it to rate homeless prevention as a “high” objective to address.

Overall Findings

- Through strong program management, constant monitoring of the project and a willingness to make ‘mid-course corrections’ to reach the desired outcomes, the ZCAM ODP project is viewed by the Executive Directors and Funders as an unequivocal and resounding success.
- All participants agree that five key accomplishments are the grounds for the overall success of the project:
 - The relationships and trust that were built among the Executive Directors;
 - The establishment of a common language and tool for understanding and assessing organizational capacity;
 - The increase in the knowledge, skills and capacity of the Executive Directors;
 - The transformation of the ministries from agencies that ‘do good’ to more mission-oriented businesses that are meeting the needs of their clients; and
 - New visibility, recognition and understanding of the work of the ZCAMs and their importance in meeting the needs of the community.
- The effect of the Nine Elements of Organizational Capacity in creating a common language among Executive Directors and Funders was another powerful result of the initiative. The Nine Elements offered a means to assess the capacity development of the ministries and were a catalyst to the ‘professionalization’ of the ministries.

Program Achievements

Goal 1: High Engagement Philanthropy

Developing relationships among ODP Participants

On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'completely achieved'), Executive Directors and Funders gave this Goal an aggregate score of 4.2. However, because each group felt that the growth in relationships between the different participants varied, most gave separate, individual scores to each category of relationships:

Relationships between Executive Directors

Executive Director to Executive Director relationships scored a 5 by both groups. Overwhelmingly, both Executive Directors and Funders thought that the greatest impact of the ODP was on the Executive Directors and the relationships they built among themselves.

Relationships between Executive Directors and Funders

Funders who participated in the program were offered the opportunity to go beyond a traditional "transactional" funding role to be more directly and personally engaged with grantees through a high engagement philanthropy approach (see sidebar). Executive Director-Funder relationships received an average score of 3.5 by Executive Directors and a 4 by Funders. Building relationships with Funders was a main, if not primary goal of the Executive Directors when they first joined the effort, and all Executive Directors felt that their expectations for these relationships were more than fulfilled.

Relationships between Funders

Funder to Funder relationships did not receive a score from Executive Directors, but ranked a 5 among Funders. The development of relationships among Funders was one of the bigger surprise achievements of the ODP and viewed by Funders as one of the 'best' outcomes of the effort.

Relationships between Executive Directors and Program Partners

Program Partners were brought on to provide expertise in bolstering ZCAM thrift stores, executive director leadership, technology, marketing and staff development. The average score Executive Directors gave to this relationship was a 3.

Goal 2: Capacity Building

Strengthening organizations

The Nine Elements of Organizational Capacity served as the foundation on which the evaluation of ministry capacity building was based. Because the Nine Elements were not introduced until well into the first year of the ODP, no baseline data was captured against which to measure growth. However, other significant measures of the ministries' growth in capacity provide evidence that the 8 ministries that completed the program made great progress (a sampling of results for selected element areas follows):

Effective Board Leadership

- All ministries either held Board retreats or engaged Board members in Board training. As a result of that training, 75% of Executive Directors perceived that their Boards had better understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- Four ministries created or revised strategic plans and engaged Boards in revising mission statements.
- Five ministries revised their bylaws.

Effective Executive Director Leadership

- All Executive Directors gained leadership skills through recognized programs such as the University of Houston's Nonprofit Executive Certificate Program or Rice University's Continuing Studies Program.
- One Executive Director went back to college and received her Bachelor's degree and is now studying to receive her Professional Coach certification. Another received her Human Resources certification.



A Different Dialogue

"The most important aspect of the project is the relationship building. These relationships are vital to my development and the opportunities to network and share knowledge is immeasurably important."

~Ministry Executive Director

"I enjoy the relationship building with the funding world as it helps me to understand the bigger picture in the world of philanthropy, nonprofits and the private sector, and helps me understand how I can help shape policy to create social change. I didn't used to see that as I was focused in my little corner of the world."

~Ministry Executive Director

"We are starting to create a new standard for the philanthropic community. We are improving the field since this project will be the standard that we use to evaluate all others...To bring this diverse group together to talk about what we can do collectively is wonderful. It is a different kind of dialogue."

~Funder

Beyond Grantmaking as Usual

Members of the Funders Collaborative went beyond a "transactional" funding role through a high engagement philanthropy approach that allowed them to learn more about the ministries, directly assess the impact of their investment and enhance their ability to allocate funds more strategically in the future. Funders were invited to participate in the research and development of the program model; assist Program Managers in oversight and guidance of the program; participate in quarterly business meetings and co-learnings; offer mentoring and support to ministry Executive Directors; and monitor the external evaluation.



Nine Elements of Organizational Capacity

During the program's first Annual Retreat, attending stakeholders created a common language around which discussions about the goals of capacity building could proceed and that would serve as the basis for the final evaluation. The Nine Elements of Organizational Capacity emerged as the main criteria for capacity building:

1. Effective Board Leadership
2. Effective Executive Director Leadership
3. Skilled Personnel & Volunteers
4. Technology Capacity Commensurate with Need
5. High Quality Service Delivery
6. Effective Communication & Information
7. Sufficient and Sustainable Funding
8. Adequate Physical Space
9. Credibility in the Community

Skilled Personnel & Volunteers

- All Executive Directors provided training and professional development for ministry staff and/or volunteers in the areas of technology, grant writing, customer service training and/or time management and exposed them to new approaches/thinking in the field of service delivery.
- Five ministries created or revised job descriptions, established performance measures, implemented salary increases or developed new personnel policies and procedures for staff recruitment and retention.
- On average, ministries experienced a 41% increase in volunteers, with increases ranging from 20% to 96%.

Technology Capacity Commensurate with Need

- Seven ministries upgraded or revamped websites and two of these have online fundraising capability.
- Every ministry implemented new software for accounting, tracking clients and/or donors and fundraising.
- Three installed new cash registers at the resale stores to better track sales by department and/or to tie in with organization's accounting system.
- Significant improvements in data handling were made at every ministry, especially in regards to tracking unduplicated client counts.

High Quality Service Delivery

- During Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, a joint collaboration of the ZCAMs to address the dramatic increase of individuals in need demonstrated the potential of collaborations to increase their capacity to serve more people. A minimum of 7,563 evacuees were served across reporting agencies in the three months of most demand, assisted by more than 670 volunteers.
- Two ministries expanded their target areas to include 5 additional zip codes.
- One ministry embarked on an effort to completely revamp their programs to better meet client needs and another has added case management to their service delivery.
- One ministry received the Better Business Bureau's charity seal of approval.

Effective Communication and Information

- Three ministries re-branded their organizations with new logos and developed corresponding brochures and websites.
- All ministries developed marketing plans and several purchased email databases to extend their marketing reach into the community.
- Every ministry increased its participation in local Chambers of Commerce and other business and civic clubs.

Sufficient and Sustainable Funding

- Two ministries moved from consistent budget deficits to positive net income, bringing all ministries into positive net income status.
- Four ministries reported a net gain in new member congregations and an increase in funds from congregation contributions.
- Five ministries reported significant new corporate contributions over the three years.
- Of the seven ministries that operate thrift stores, five reported increases in sales ranging from 1% to 33%. One had no data and another saw a decline in sales revenues apparently due to external factors beyond their control.
- Two ZCAMs were able to increase sales floor space in thrift stores and/or maximize donated goods processing by more efficient use of space.
- Based on an analysis of productivity measures of participating ZCAM thrift stores, three stores saw significant increases in their net cash income per square foot and two saw net cash revenues remain constant.

Program Achievements (cont.)

Goal 3: Collaboration

Increasing participation in relevant collaboratives

All ZCAM ODP participants give this Goal a score of 5 as it related to the ZCAMs working together, either in crisis, as was seen with Katrina, or for mutual benefit, as was evident in the Thrift Store Institute. In regards to external collaborations, ODP participants gave this goal a score of 2, noting that the ODP process did not focus much on external collaborations. Several Executive Directors and Funders felt that as the project matured and participants continued to coalesce, it would be more likely that ZCAMs could participate in other coalitions with a truly collective voice.

Executive Directors did see value in participating in collaboratives and offered several areas where collaboration would be particularly useful, including:

- Public transportation
- Joint purchasing and joint health insurance
- Service related collaborations, such as flu shots
- A citywide conference for all ZCAMs
- Health issues, in collaboration with hospitals and children's clinics

Effective Practices

A second purpose for the end-of-project evaluation was to identify aspects of project implementation that contributed the most towards achieving the goals that could be used to guide future efforts. Executive Directors and Funders shared the same perspective on what was most effective in the implementation of the project:

1. Monthly Executive Director meetings and Quarterly Funder meetings
2. The establishment of the Nine Elements of Organizational Capacity
3. The grants themselves, ranging from \$35,000 to \$50,000 per year over three years; technology grants were cited as particularly useful
4. Board development, including board training and board breakfasts
5. Co-learnings, or workshops that allowed all program stakeholders to engage in collective learning
6. Leadership of the Program Managers

In addition to these six, Executive Directors alone added two more effective practices:

- The Thrift Store Institute (*see sidebar*)
- The CapMap Assessment, where ministries were invited to participate in an extensive assessment of their organizational capacity using the Local Initiatives Support Corporation's CapMap tool; Executive Directors reported that they found value in their CapMap results, which offered clear objectives and directions on steps to take to increase their organizational capacity

Lessons Learned

Opportunities for improvement were identified in the end-of-program evaluation process so that they could be incorporated into future efforts. These lessons learned include:

- Have clarity about definitions and expectations at the beginning of the project
- Have measurable and consistent goals established before the project begins
- Establish a rigorous participant selection process
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities for all partners in the effort
- Be respectful of time



Sustainable Progress

"Before (ZCAM ODP) we didn't put boundaries on our services; we'd open the door and have a long line of people all day in the lobby. It was like a zoo in here every day. It was a drain on staff and on the people who would come here.

We decided that our services weren't so great because of this and that we needed more consistency with our service delivery. Now we are developing strategies for mentoring and case management of clients who are coming repeatedly. As a result, I think we are making impactful, sustainable progress."

~Ministry Executive Director

Thrift Store Institute

For most ministries, thrift stores are the life-blood of ministry income and so are critical to the sustainability of the organizations. Thus, the Thrift Store Institute was developed to enhance thrift store operations and revenue by bringing retail and marketing expertise to the stores in a way that would increase the volume of sales. The project was very successful in improving the efficacy of the thrift stores and demonstrating to the Executive Directors that collaboration on areas of mutual interest held significant benefits for all participants.

"The thrift store initiative has been very beneficial to the organization. As a result, the store has set sales records for 17 out of the last 18 months."

~Ministry Executive Director

Participating Agencies

Ministries

- East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry
- Emergency Aid Coalition
- Humble Area Assistance Ministries
- Interfaith Caring Ministries
- Katy Christian Ministries
- Memorial Assistance Ministries
- Northwest Assistance Ministries
- West Houston Assistance Ministries

Funders

- The Andrews Foundation
- Bridgeway Charitable Foundation
- The Enrico and Sandra di Portanova Charitable Foundation
- The Frees Foundation
- Greater Houston Community Foundation
- The Hamill Foundation
- The Henley Foundation
- Houston Endowment Inc.
- Jewish Federation of Greater Houston
- Junior League of Houston, Inc.
- McIntosh Foundation
- Powell Foundation
- Rockwell Fund, Inc.
- The Simmons Foundation
- Swalm Foundation
- United Way of Greater Houston

Program Partners

- BTW Consultants, Inc.
- Carolyn Grovey-Brown & Angela Caughlin, Facilitators
- Center for Faith & Health Initiatives, VISTA Program
- Dr. Ritalinda D'Andrea Lee & Jessica Pugil, Working Partner, Evaluators
- Ellen Cokinos Consulting, Facilitator
- Executive Service Corps of Houston
- Greater Houston Community Foundation
- Texas Nonprofit Management Assistance Network
- United Way of Greater Houston Management Assistance Program

Recommendations

Together with the understanding of what worked best in the ODP and lessons for how the ODP could improve, the external evaluators offered the following recommendations to consider for future efforts:

1. **Make sure to clearly articulate and define the goal of the project & roles of participants.** For example, if organizational development is to be the goal and the Nine Elements of Organizational Effectiveness remain as the definition of organizational development, this should be clearly stated to participants.
2. **Make Year 1 of the project a 'development phase.'** Year 1 could be used to teach participants about organizational development and the Nine Elements, and to assess each organization as to where they stand in regards to each of the Elements. After careful training and assessment, Year 1 should conclude with participating organizations submitting their capacity building plans for approval. Following this process is likely to result in more substantive proposals for increasing organizational capacity and will offer baseline information about the agencies that will allow for measuring growth over time.
3. **Build different 'tracks' in which to organize participating agencies.** It is likely that participating agencies will come to the project with different strengths. To ensure more targeted and effective training, putting agencies into 'tracks' with 'like agencies' and customizing specific training and monitoring for each track will yield a more beneficial outcome for all participating agencies. Similarly, increasing the 'depth' of the ODP into organizations by involving all members of top management will help to deepen the 'culture' of organizational capacity within the organization and ensure that the investment in the organization is not lost when an Executive Director departs.
4. **Use Year 1 to develop a 'roster' of potential Program Partners.** Again, recognizing that each agency will come to the project with different needs, by developing a 'roster' of technical expert providers/consultants from whom the agencies can select to work with is likely to yield more beneficial use of Program Partners.
5. **Engage an evaluator at the beginning of the process.** Having an evaluator involved at the beginning of the project to observe its planning and development will help them to understand the intent of the program and develop evaluation and measurement tools that will capture the impact of the project on participating agencies. Additionally, the evaluator should work to develop evaluation tools and train agencies on using the tools during the first year development phase so that use of the tools will be consistent over time and across agencies. Finally, compliance in reporting must be a non-negotiable requirement and paired with tailored data handling support.

Conclusion & Next Steps

Many resources were brought in to build the capacity of each ministry, but it was the power of the collaboration, among ministries and between the ministries and funders, that made the greatest impact on participants of the ODP. Through this collaboration, Executive Directors and individual ministries grew and improved, and a new 'force' was created that shows promise to strengthen their capacity to affect change for those in need. But it doesn't end with the pilot program.

Energized by the successes of ZCAM ODP, participating funders and ministries engaged in six months of focused inquiry, discussion and planning, which resulted in development of The Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries of Greater Houston (ACAM), a legacy of ZCAM ODP, with the mission to "provide social purpose ministries with a professional forum to strengthen their capacity to fulfill their mission." More information on ACAM can be found at www.acamweb.org.