

Forum of African Immigrant Associations:
Workshop on CBO Capacity Building Workshop

Facilitator: Aron Goldman, Policy Development goldman@policydevelopment.org

Rapporteur: Erin Stiles, Columbia's [Institute of African Studies](http://www.columbia.edu/~es2196/), es2196@columbia.edu

The participants in this workshop agreed that they admired the way in which other immigrant and ethnic communities have prospered, notably Asian and Jewish communities in New York. The workshop proceeded as follows: after Aron Goldberg's discussion of how his organization might be useful to the associations, the discussion centered on various aspects of fund-raising and project development, and concluded with suggestions about an umbrella organization for immigrant associations and the benefit of joint fund-raising projects.

I. Affecting Policy

Aron suggested he could be helpful to the associations represented today by helping them understand what kind of US policy affects them directly, and how they can eventually influence policy. He emphasized that one way that immigrant associations can prosper is through affecting policy relevant to people in the US and in Africa; examples given were HIV/AIDS and gender equity in Africa. He stressed that the associations should look at larger policy and legal issues that affect them in addition to focusing on improving aspects of daily life.

Aron suggested that the participants might want to directly address issues of fund-raising and fiscal management because all of the groups face such issues, and the subject of fund raising is "easy to teach" in that there are specific suggestions he can give and the associations can give one another about what works or does not work. He summarized what Ms. Denise Williams presented in the plenary sessions and made his own suggestions about what the associations might consider in capacity building. The following are the issues he emphasized that the associations might want to discuss in detail:

- Human resource management
- Planning a board of directors
- Education and training of immigrant associations on policy issues
- Achieving 501C3 status as a non-profit organization, including tax-exemption
- Networking between peer organizations
- Building community awareness about associations and issues concerning them

I. Capacity Building through Fund Raising: Ideas and Pointers

Aron then turned the floor over to the participants, all of whom were eager to talk about ideas to generate income. The participants agreed that there were two main aspects of fund-raising: some associations focus on raising money for projects in the US, and others emphasize money for

development at home (e.g. orphans, clean-water). They noted that some philanthropies which will fund immigrant organizations in the US will not fund projects in Africa, and will not let the associations send money back to Africa. Also, a participant noted that there are specific clauses that non-profit organization must follow regarding the use of funds.

Participants were most eager for suggestions about how to raise money. As an example, the representatives from the National Council of Ghanaian Organization described their annual picnic, which is their primary source of funding each year. They charge admission, and they estimated that about 10,000 people have attended in past years. The representatives from the Council described some of the problems associated with the event, the primary one being clean-up costs. They estimated that garbage collection takes up 35% of the budget for the event. A related problem is finding a picnic ground that is large enough for the event.

Participants had many questions and suggestions about the logistics of the event, and Aron isolated some important points about it that other associations might take into consideration in planning their own events, including:

- Associations might focus only on one or two high profile events. For many organizations, one or two yearly events are the primary source of revenue because they attract so many people. Suggestions offered were picnics, awards ceremonies, concerts, dances, formal dinners, and film festivals.
- Participants stressed that they felt it was important to offer cultural activities at such events. In addition to attracting adults, the cultural events can teach children about their parents' homeland.
- The National Council of Ghanaian Organizations suggested that one good way to raise money is to bring famous musicians from Africa in for a festival. Musicians get to promote their albums while giving back to the community by volunteering their services. Another participant suggested that this would require planning many months in advance to secure visas for performers.
- A suggestion was made to involve African airlines in such events by either contributing money or flying musicians or other performers to the US: the airline gets publicity, and gives back to the community at the same time. The Ghanaian Council has had success with Ghana airlines.

II. Making the most of a high-profile event

Aron suggested that associations should make the most of such events from a public relations standpoint in addition to fund-raising. He suggested notifying the media, for example local newspapers and radio stations. Newspapers feature such events in culture/arts/politics/metro sections. By attracting the media, the association positions itself as an organization with a voice and raises awareness about issues it is concerned with. He also suggested that associations get in touch with UN representatives or politicians who might want to be involved and can make sure the events run smoothly.

Aron also suggested that associations should consider asking philanthropies to match funds raised at such events. He noted that philanthropies are often more eager to help associations that

have proven their ability to raise funds. Also, he suggested that associations might encourage in kind contributions other than money; sometimes it is easier to donate goods or services than cash. For example, a park might donate space free of charge, or a police or fire department might contribute volunteers to help run the event.

Finally, a very important point was made by a participant who stressed that one of the best things an association can do to successfully raise funds is to have a specific project in mind: for example, a scholarship fund for students. People are more likely to donate money to credible, concrete projects than to vague causes. Also, associations should highlight projects that they have funded before because a good track record legitimizes future projects. Aron noted that a specific project is an important marketing tool.

III. How do associations use funds?

The next subject discussed in the workshop was how funds are spent. Participants posed many questions to the National Council of Ghanaian Organizations about how they use the revenue generated by the picnic project. The representatives said that they began using the picnic as a fund raising tool 4-5 years ago. They are saving money for an office and a hall where they can host large events and visiting dignitaries. They also sent money to Ghana last year to the families who were victims of an accident of a soccer game last year; they noted that they sent the money directly to the families—not to the government. Finally, they said they were interested in using funds to continue a scholarship program and an SAT program for students. In the past, they would train students to take the SAT and would give \$1000 to the top student who applied for the scholarship, and they would like to revive the program with the aim of training future leaders of the Ghanaian community in New York.

IV. Joint Projects and Umbrella Organizations

The workshop closed with a brief discussion on the benefits of an umbrella organization for African immigrant associations. The subject came up when it was pointed out that it is difficult for small associations to expand to host large events (like the Ghana picnic) and then shrink back down. One participant suggested that the strain might be alleviated if associations joined together to host events: for example, East African associations or West African associations might host joint fund-raising events. The participants and Aron agreed that cultural diplomacy, as represented by UNESCO, was an important kind of diplomacy, and fund-raising cultural events held jointly might be a good way to start. This discussion echoed the opening of the workshop, when participants agreed that although they represented different organizations, the notion of Pan-Africanism was important to all of them. As one speaker put it, “Unity is the name of the game.”