

Civic Engagement/Grassroots Leadership Development Strategy:

Capacity Building and Lessons from the Immigrant Leadership Fund - The Hyams Foundation's mission is "to increase economic and social justice and power within low-income communities in Boston and Chelsea." Consistent with this, the Foundation funds constituent engagement, leadership development and community organizing work especially among youth, minority and immigrant communities as a part of its social change strategy. Over a decade ago, with the growth of immigrant communities in the state, Hyams was especially interested in finding out how to support and help build the capacity for this work in the grassroots immigrant-led groups and organizations that serve them. The Foundation commissioned a field survey by Mosaica and solicited feedback from immigrant-led groups that led to a capacity building initiative to support immigrant-led groups in identifying, exploring, implementing and sharing best practices in civic engagement, leadership development and community organizing.

The immigrant capacity building initiative underwent several iterations in response to process evaluations and grantee feedback. The evaluation of the last phase of this work, the Immigrant Leadership Fund (ILF) that ended in 2009, reaffirmed a more comprehensive approach that combined operating and technical assistance grants with structured opportunities for skills development and networking in helping to build stronger, more effective grassroots groups in the diverse communities. The participating groups were better able to engage and develop constituent activists and leaders who felt capable of impacting community issues of concern. In addition, these groups were able to learn from and become better connected with one another and access other resources in the community to enhance their work. *(The Executive Summary of the ILF evaluation is available in the "download" section of the Hyams website: <http://www.hyamsfoundation.org/downloads.html>.)*

Since the conclusion of the ILF, the Hyams Foundation has had internal discussions as well as with our grantees on how to apply the ILF experience in building a more robust civic engagement strategy. As a result, the Foundation is making more general operating grants instead of more targeted program grants and more multi-year commitments to "core" grantees that have been strong partners in the grassroots leadership development area. We also are integrating grants for technical assistance (TA) into our funding strategy to help groups secure external assistance as needed in refining existing and/or building new capacities.

Foundation staff also sponsored a series of focus groups with grantees from different communities of color in order to learn more about their organizational needs and aspirations; looked at capacity-building initiatives and resources in other parts of the country; and surveyed grantees about their specific staff and constituent training and convening interests. The Foundation used this information to develop a potential "framework" *(also available in the "download" section)* for deepening the capacity of local grassroots leadership development organizations.

The Foundation increasingly recognizes that successful social or systems change requires grassroots groups to not only have the capacities to engage their own constituents but also to develop external relationships that lead to powerful collaborations with activists and grassroots groups across diverse communities. Correspondingly, we have been engaged in deep discussions with our foundation colleagues in the "social justice" arena to share our learning and to explore how we can better coordinate, if not collaborate, to build the capacity of the community engagement, leadership development and organizing/advocacy field. We are excited about the possibility of aligning our collective resources and the work of our grassroots

partners to have greater impact on issues that we all care about, especially during this critical and challenging period for our state and the nation.

We look forward to updating you on the progress of these discussions in the future. Until then, we thank you for your ongoing commitment and work to ensure that low-income communities have a collective voice in advocating for racial, social and economic justice. If you would like any additional information about this work, please contact Program Officer David Moy at dmoy@hyamsfoundation.org.