

The Civic Engagement Fund

2006 – 2009 Program Assessment

Summary

Background and Context

The 9/11 attack on America and the subsequent “war on terror” translated, in many instances, into attacks on Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian (AMEMSA) communities in America, their institutions and their religion. “Criminalized” by government institutions and subject to violations by their agencies, AMEMSA communities turned to their own communities for assistance, protection and support. However, the community based organizations within AMEMSA communities, most of which were founded in the past twenty years, did not have the capacity to adequately address the increasingly complex demands. Therefore, not only was 9/11 a clear demarcation in the history of the United States, but it was also the baptism of the new experience of AMEMSA communities in America, and the expansion of their efforts to address that experience.

A group of concerned grant-makers from the San Francisco Bay area came together to learn more about who was being impacted in their own region, how, and also what institutions exist to support these communities and what their needs and concerns were to be able to better respond to their constituencies. Based on findings and recommendations from a community and organizational scan, a consensus was reached that philanthropic action is needed to address this critical and emerging grouping of communities and issues, and that the model be based on continued learning on all sides.

The Civic Engagement Fund (CEF), founded in 2006, aims to increase the capacity of Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian nonprofit organizations, it’s community partners, in order that they may better serve their respective communities in a post 9/11 environment. The CEF provides AMEMSA organizations in the Bay Area of California with small organizational support grants, technical assistance, and peer learning opportunities. What began as an educational initiative has developed into a program that has had a tremendous impact on the landscape of AMEMSA communities in the post 9/11 environment in the Bay Area.

Grants awarded from the pooled fund have allowed these organizations to:

- Strengthen their organizational infrastructure and effectiveness,
- Foster greater exchange and collaboration with other immigrant organizations and networks, and
- Strengthen the quality of their programs and overall effectiveness.

Between 2006-2009, the Fund provided:

- \$350,000 in small organizational capacity building grants to over 18 AMEMSA community organizations in the Bay Area; and
- Eight capacity building convenings that addressed several of the organizational needs defined by the AMEMSA community organizations.

The Fund succeeded at:

- Launching the first initiative addressing the collective capacity building needs of AMEMSA communities in the Bay Area.
- Substantively increasing the organizational capacity of AMEMSA community organizations in the Bay Area.
- Facilitating a relationship between organized philanthropy in the Bay Area with organizations in AMEMSA communities, many of which had never interacted with organized philanthropy in the past.
- Building a relationship of trust between CEF staff and the AMEMSA communities.
- Leveraging an additional \$950,000 from foundations for AMEMSA community organizations in the Bay Area through less direct means (ie. CEF staff participation in conference calls, CEF staff advisory roles on related philanthropic initiatives, CEF assistance to CEF community partners when submitting proposals to new foundations).
- Providing a new AMEMSA framework that intricately connects the diverse ethnic and religious communities that have been impacted in the post 9-11 environment.

- Providing a unique space for field-building among AMEMSA communities in the Bay Area that ultimately resulted in increased awareness, connectivity and collaboration among AMEMSA community organizations.
- Developing a pool of foundation representatives in the Bay Area who are better informed about the needs, challenges, and ways to support AMEMSA communities and organizations.

The Fund's willingness to concentrate on addressing the capacity building needs of AMEMSA communities and field building within this sector was groundbreaking.

Evaluation Findings: GRANTEE FEEDBACK

Capacity Building Resources are Transformative

Given the range in age and size of the organizations within the CEF cohort, they are grappling with different capacity needs. The CEF resources, both the capacity building grants and the cohort-wide convenings, allowed them to address longstanding concerns with targeted resources and assistance. Furthermore, the capacity building convenings provided the community partners with hands on access to training, tools, and exposure to sustainable frameworks that they said they have directly applied in the management of their organizations. Several community partners said they were better positioned to approach other foundations and to develop a more sustainable plan due to CEF support, while a few advisory committee members (from participating philanthropic institutions) commented that there was a marked improvement and analysis in grant submissions by organizations participating in CEF.

Community Partners Leveraged Resources from CEF Advisory Committee and from other Foundations

For newly established organizations, receiving a grant from AAPIP provided them with increased confidence and a degree of recognition and credibility when approaching other funders. Furthermore, the trainings and capacity building support enabled organizations to develop more robust proposals, identify and articulate their strengths and weaknesses, and develop clear strategies for their organizational development, making them better candidates for foundation funding. **In the two-year time period, some organizations increased their funding by 36%.**

Community Partners Acknowledge the AMEMSA Frame is Critical to Field Building

Although many community partners did not identify with the AMEMSA framework prior to joining the CEF cohort, they acknowledge that it has helped them identify the common challenges that this diverse set of organizations face. While Arab and Muslim organizations in the Bay area are older and more developed than some of the South Asian and African organizations, they feel that connecting all of these organizations allowed them to develop alliances they otherwise would not have created.

CEF Convenings Provides a Unique Space for Field Building: Organizations Tapped into this Network to Develop Collaborative Proposals and During Times of Crisis

Organizations in the CEF cohort said they have limited time to individually seek out other AMEMSA organizations working on similar issues. Furthermore, the lack of resources in the AMEMSA community creates a certain degree of competition among organizations that are trying to fundraise for similar programs. Therefore, the CEF trainings and convenings provided a unique opportunity to network, identify their shared challenges, and learn about the work of organizations in their cohort. The convenings also allowed participants to take a step back from their daily activities and address the bigger picture of the AMEMSA communities as a collective. This framework also contributed to a more collaborative rather than competitive environment.

Community Partners see CEF Staff as an Ally and Advocate. Staff Support Extends Beyond the Grant and Convenings

As many of these communities are deemed high risk by foundations across the country, it has been difficult for some of the CEF community partners to access foundations, let alone obtain funding and guidance from them. Every grantee interviewed commented on the unique relationship, and guidance and mentorship received, they have developed with CEF staff, especially when compared to their experience with other foundations. Each noted that CEF staff played an instrumental role in helping them network and connect with other foundations.

Impact on Foundations Participating in the Fund

Participation in CEF Provides Foundations with Deeper Knowledge of AMEMSA Communities

All CEF foundation partners joined the Fund as a result of the 2005 report, and specifically out of their concern with immigrant rights, civil rights, and economic and social integration of immigrants. With the exception of one or two foundations, the majority of the foundations in the CEF advisory committee had had limited to no interaction with AMEMSA communities before their involvement with the CEF. Their participation in the Fund, the site visits, the information sessions, and their attendance at the convenings provided the foundations with a deeper understanding of the diversity within the AMEMSA communities, their organizational infrastructure, the communities' challenges, and the impact of the post 9-11 environment on these communities.

CEF Offers an Opportunity to fund AMEMSA communities Despite Lack of Expertise or Human Capital and Enables Advisory Committee Members to Expand and Leverage Funds

For foundations that had never engaged with AMEMSA communities, their ability to fund AMEMSA communities was only possible because of their participation in a collaborative fund. Furthermore, a few foundations did not have a history of making small capacity building grants, or were unable to fund at such small levels (i.e. budget or infrastructure). Their participation in this collaborative pilot program allowed them to provide resources both to communities they have not supported in the past, and through a different mechanism, and enabled them to look at these communities separately and contribute to a sustained process even with limited staff resources.

CEF Offers Foundations Opportunities to Engage Directly with AMEMSA Organizations

Although all of the foundation representatives stated that they wished they had more time to participate in more site visits and convenings, they all appreciate the opportunity and flexibility to participate in these activities when their schedules permit. The interactions provide them with greater insight into the organizations and the needs within AMEMSA communities, and they provide them with a chance to interact more intimately with the CEF staff and community partners.

Advisory Committee Reflections on CEF Structure

The advisory committee members appreciate the leadership role that AAPIP has taken in hosting the Fund and guiding its development. They stated that they have full confidence in AAPIP and CEF staff, and they are comfortable with them continuing to lead this process. However, as the group enters this next phase of the Fund's development, they have asked for additional clarity on how the CEF fits within AAPIP, assuming it were to continue to be housed there.