Strengthening Faith-Based Nonprofit-Business Management Skills without Sacrificing Spiritual and Ethical Integrity

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Abstract

Throughout history, whenever there is a human crisis like the recent shooting in Newton, Connecticut, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, Tsunamis or Hurricane Sandy, the nonprofit sector - in particular the faith-based nonprofit subsector - responds. As sacred institutions of trust and benevolence, faith-based organizations (FBOs) are mission-and ministry-focused. Unlike many of their nonprofit counterparts, FBOs have mastered the methodology of cultivating constituency bases that yields long-term volunteers and multi-year donors that support their socially conscious missions and ministries. But are they well managed? Do rigorous nonprofit-business management skills and governance knowledge guide their mission and ministries? Has the separation of church and state unfairly served as an excuse or an allusive protective factor that precludes faith-based organizations from adopting nonprofit business-management skills and governance practices? Does the fear of becoming secular deter faith-based institutions from adopting nonprofit-business management and governance practices?

This concept paper and presentation seeks to explore the above questions and initiate a dialogue to develop universal-applicable leadership and governance practices to gain new knowledge about FBOs, the nonprofit subsector that consistently receives the largest amount charitable giving and garners a substantial percentage of the nation’s volunteers. While respecting the spiritual integrity of FBOs, the overall goals are to: 1) enhance the opportunities for cross-learning among faith-based and secular nonprofits, and 2) adopt ethical and universal business and governance practices to better manage faith-based nonprofits now and for future generations.