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March 5, 2001

Technology

New Economy Tools to Enable the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to Succeed

by Brian Murrow

From time to time, PNNOnline features the opinions of its guest columnists. Today's column is by Brian Murrow, who leads the PricewaterhouseCoopers e-Philanthropy practice.

The Bush Administration's new Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) is a hot topic in the Washington news lately. For example, on February 26th, the Washington Post featured an in-depth article about John DiIulio, the new head of the OFBCI. The PricewaterhouseCoopers Business of Government Hour radio show on March 3rd was dedicated to a discussion about the OFBCI (endowment.pwcglobal.com).

The goals of the OFBCI are to help the Federal Government coordinate a national effort to expand opportunities for faith-based and other community organizations, and to strengthen their capacity to better meet social needs in America's communities. The OFBCI has a huge task at hand, and must be willing to consider innovative methods to achieve their goals. Leveraging New Economy tools to create a central repository of faith-based and community initiative information will enable the OFBCI to meet their goals through consolidating administrative costs, reducing overhead, and dramatically increasing programmatic efficiency while increasing the personalization of program delivery.

To achieve their goals, the White House, through the OFBCI, has outlined a series of guidelines to aid several Federal Agencies to implement initiatives and measures that support faith-based and community services. Currently, there are many uncoordinated programs across Federal Agencies that help the same stakeholder groups. However, the resources available

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stakeholder groups. However, the resources available to faith-based and non-profit organizations are organized by Federal Department, not by stakeholder. No central organizing force exists at the Federal level that oversees the Federal resources available for faith-based and community organizations. No central repository of information exists listing Federal, state, and local government or private resources to help faith-based and community organizations. Also, there is no central organizing mechanism amongst the receipt of the $190 billion in non-Federal funds, coming from individuals, foundations, and corporations each year to faith-based and non-profit organizations.

Due to the current lack of coordination of faith-based and community information between the Federal Agencies and other private sources, stakeholders are unclear about where to go to find out how many and what programs are available to help them and people they know. As a result, there are many stakeholders in need who are unaware of what Federal, state, local, and private programs and resources are available, and are not receiving recourses that are available to them. The lack of coordination and efficient delivery of resources to those in need within communities leads to less funding going toward the intended cause, lower effectiveness of faith-based and community organizations, and people left behind.

Coordination of information and resources among Federal Agencies needs to take place in order for the OFBCI to succeed, however up until this point there has been no compelling organizing catalyst. The notion of breaking down departmental barriers to service delivery is not a new idea, as administrations for over 40 years have been trying to undertake this task. However, past attempts at interagency collaboration have not been highly successful. Programs initiated in the 1960's and 1970's to address urgent and specific social problems, in fact, increased compartmentalization amongst Agencies. These efforts failed in part due to the complexity of the reform itself and lack of agreement among agencies on "turf" issues. Despite continued efforts for interagency collaboration in the 1980's and 1990's, these efforts faced many difficulties in achieving success, such as different funding and service planning requirements, lack of clear communication among various agencies, differences in professional discipline/agency orientations, and varying perceptions of the scope of mandates.

Web-based technologies and the arrival of "e-government" bring tremendous potential for positive change in the government. Hart-Teeter conducted a study on the issue of e-government on behalf of the Council for Excellence in Government, comprising surveys among the general public, government officials, and institutional "customers" of government, which includes business and non-profit organizations. The surveys found that people clearly see great potential in e-government for improving the way government

operates. Survey respondents indicated that more accountability is the greatest benefit that e-government could confer. Furthermore, the study found that e-government greatly enhances people's ability to get information they need from government agencies.

DiIulio and the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives have the opportunity to make history through successfully empowering the Federal Agencies to coordinate information and resources related to faith-based and community initiatives. In order to strengthen the capacity for faith-based and community initiatives to better meet social needs in America's communities, the OFBCI should be the organizing catalyst that encourages leveraging technology to create a central repository of information from a stakeholder's event-based perspective, starting with information from Federal resources. This central repository of information would be called the **Faith-Based and Community Information Exchange (FBIX)**.

This web browser-based FBIX can serve as an intermediation vehicle for beneficiary stakeholder groups, Federal Departments, and faith-based and community organizations to match those in need of community and faith-based resources with those who have resources to make available in communities. Implementing this online information and resource exchange would help the OFBCI achieve its objectives in the following ways:

- **Providing all available resources in one place.** Creating the FBIX would allow all faith-based and community organizations to see, from a beneficiary stakeholder's perspective, all of the resources available to them within their community. By coordinating the information in one place, Federal Departments will be able to work together to more effectively determine how to incorporate faith-based and community organizations into their programs. This data exchange could start with Federal data, but could also include local government and private information.
- **Supplying a template and data collection taxonomy.** The exchange will provide a template and data collection taxonomy for performing department-wide audits of barriers to the participation of faith-based and community organizations and the delivery of social services by the department. This aggregation of data will allow for the collection of cross-departmental performance measures to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of these initiatives.
- **Matching stakeholders with resources and increasing the personalization of program delivery.** Building and utilizing a web-based information and resource exchange with comprehensive resource information will enable groups to more easily match available faith-

based and community resources with the stakeholders who need them. The web-based technology will also allow for the personalization of programs and resources to each American's individual needs.

- **Lowering costs, increasing efficiency, and allowing more money to go to people in need.** An online exchange will enable for the coordination of resources within multiple faith-based community initiatives, which will result in lower administrative costs and reduced overhead. This will also lead to an increase the efficiency in the delivery of resources. For example, in the private sector, it is estimated that organizations have realized up to a 90% saving in the use of web-based technology in the delivery of information and resources (e-procurement) through lower administrative costs. Through consolidating administration costs and lowering overhead, stakeholders will see a dramatic increase in programmatic efficiency and program delivery while increasing the personalization of program delivery. These cost savings will result in a higher percentage of money going to the actual recipients of the resources.

- **Ensuring transparency and accountability.** One unified exchange will help to ensure transparency and accountability in the delivery of resources to individuals in communities. An exchange will allow for the tracking of accountability in the delivery of resources. For example, this will enhance the ability of foundations to track performance measures in the grant-management process, resulting in increased effectiveness and efficiency of community grants, over time.

- **Reducing the barriers to giving.** The information and resources centrally provided through the exchange will empower users to volunteer time, money, goods, and other information through faith-based and community outreach throughout the country.

- **Using New Economy tools to empower.** We are at a point in history where the use of web-based exchange technology can empower the government and national organizations to re-empower local faith-based and community organizations in effective and efficient program delivery.

- **Creating and sharing best practices, which could lead the way to large-scale reform.** The FBIX would enable the coordination and sharing of lessons learned and best practices in increasing the participation of faith-based and community organizations in Federal, state, and local government programs. The lessons learned from creating and implementing the exchange could be used as a model to lead large-scale reform and consolidation for other government

agencies.

By initially conducting a FBIX pilot project focusing on coordinating information and resources for one stakeholder group, such as children and young people, the OFBCI can create an immediate success story. During his first week in office, President Bush issued his education plan, "No Child Left Behind", that emphasizes the need to focus on helping children and young people during his presidency. By partnering with organizations experienced in dealing with children and youth initiatives, the OFBCI can quickly and successfully make a huge impact to help children and youth, and provide a concrete immediate illustration of success that DiIulio and the OFBCI can share as a new Best Practice for both the public and private sectors.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Brian Murrow leads the PricewaterhouseCoopers e-Philanthropy practice. This practice works with nonprofits, dot-coms, and large multinational organizations to develop and implement internet strategies, create customized web-based applications, and encourage and foster inter- and intra-sector collaboration of web-based tools and standards. For its clients, PwC's e-Philanthropy practice has created online volunteer listing and management systems, internet donation and corporate intranet pledge systems, and online auction and commerce applications. A sample of Brian's e-Philanthropy clients include America's Promise, The Alliance for Youth, CreateHope.org, an online giving portal for organizations' employees, MissionFish.com, an online auction that benefits nonprofits, and SERVEnet.org, a volunteer listing and management web site.

In addition to the area of e-Philanthropy, Brian has experience in the design and implementation of large-scale web sites, web-based applications, financial management systems, customer relationship management systems, and large-scale statistical, econometric forecasting, and marketing models. Brian's clients have included large multinational corporations, housing finance agencies, federal and state government agencies, and start-up businesses. In addition to consulting to clients, Brian managed a $150 million private investment portfolio.

Brian regularly speaks at industry conferences on e-business and e-Philanthropy, regularly publishes and is quoted on e-business, and appears on business-oriented television programming. Brian is a contributing author to two books being published in the Summer of 2001, "Management Consulting, a Guide to the Industry" and "Fundraising on the Internet: The ePhilanthropyFoundation.Org's Guide to Success Online" Brian serves on various boards of foundations and nonprofits and has earned his BA from the University of Maryland and MBA from the George

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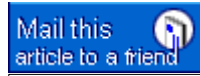
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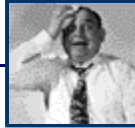
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