

A Time for Collaboration

Now is the time for nonprofits that have expertise and a history of success in the program areas of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to explore how they can collaborate with other organizations to advance ARRA priorities in metropolitan Detroit.

The ARRA will offer a wide range of new funding grants to the region to address a variety of important community needs related to health, community and economic development, job training and creation, education, housing and homelessness, infrastructure, and others. Some grants are being funneled through existing programs of local governments and will expand programming in those areas. Established nonprofits that have a history of success and expertise related to these program areas may be able to have a voice into how these new funds are used, and in some cases, become funded partners to the public sector in the implementation of programs. Other ARRA grants to local communities will come through a direct federal Request For Proposal (RFP) approach in which communities will directly compete for the funding available. These funds may provide an opportunity for nonprofits to partner with each other and other local partners (business, faith-based organizations, local governments, schools, foundations, and others) to put together strong programs and competitive applications from metropolitan Detroit.

The first essential step is to learn what ARRA program funding is or will soon become available that matches your organization's expertise, and what the guidelines are. This is made more complicated because, to date, the federal legislative provisions, requirements and funding for some programs are in place, yet for others they are not. State and local officials report that new federal information is coming in to them daily that provides further clarity.

A key source of information to track the status and availability of ARRA grant opportunities is the State of Michigan Recovery and Reinvestment website (<http://www.michigan.gov/gov/0,1607,7-168-52827---.00.html>). In particular, the "Grant Opportunities" section provides a comprehensive list of programs that will be funded in Michigan communities through grant processes. Remember, however, that the processes for distributing ARRA funding are complex and while the website offers a guide to ARRA grant opportunities, you will need to be prepared to research each program in much greater detail (links to federal agencies websites that are in charge of a program are noted on the state's website). Also, at this point in time, with decisions still being made about programs, talking directly with staff at the Michigan Economic Recovery Office may give you the most current and accurate information.

Where you believe your nonprofit could bring needed expertise and capacity to implement a particular ARRA program area, the next step is to identify the right individual(s) and organizations to collaborate and partner with. For programs that are going to be funded and administered through local governments, look for those areas where new partners are needed for their expertise and to deliver innovative programming. For example:

- the ARRA calls for job training and placement to focus on high growth and emerging industries (renewable energy, green construction, etc.). Nonprofits with expertise in these areas could be a great resource to public sector partners that need to advance new and innovative programs.
- New funding for Health and Wellness Community Prevention Funds will be forthcoming. While there is not clear information on the approach for distributing these funds yet, this could be an area where nonprofits that are successfully implementing high-quality prevention programs could partner with local public health departments.
- Nonprofits that are successfully working with homeless families and individuals and central in advancing existing HUD approved community plans for ending homelessness may seek to influence city and county ARRA program funding related to housing and homelessness and/or be partners in implementing expanded or new programming that is needed.

Nonprofits that already work as partners with local government organizations will likely know who to contact for information to explore potential partnership opportunities. In fact, several nonprofits have recently indicated that based on existing relationships, they were contacted by a public sector official to ask for their advice and/or involvement in carrying out a specific ARRA program related to their expertise. Nonprofits that don't have existing relationships will need to identify individuals and develop a relationship with them. In either case, the key will be that your organization has what is needed to help successfully deliver the ARRA program and is able to connect with the right local governments officials to explore possibilities. To quote one local government official, "If a nonprofit is already really good at something, why should we recreate it." *Nonprofits that are recognized leaders in implementing successful programs* could prove to be invaluable partners to local governments in advancing ARRA programs.

For competitive grant opportunities that nonprofits and others can apply for directly from federal agencies, it will be important to quickly identify the requirements of these federal applications and what role your nonprofit could be strong in. Be guided by the specific criteria in the RFP to identify what you think your organization's role could best be, and what other nonprofits or organizations representing other sectors are needed. The goal is to make the application as strong as possible and have the greatest capacity to succeed in implementing the program, which a collaborative approach can so often help to ensure. As one staff member from the Michigan Economic Recovery Office noted, "This is one of the best times for communities to come together in partnership to apply for competitive grants....this will be a strength.... ask yourself, who else can you bring to the table."

For information on principles of effective collaboration, contact City Connect Detroit at 313-963-9722.