



United Way Mass Bay and the Faith & Action Initiative (B): Going for the Gold?

In July 2002, the United Way of Massachusetts Bay (UWMB) faced a dilemma it would have considered unthinkable only five years before: whether to lead a coalition applying to the Bush Administration's Capital Compassion Fund (CCF) for a grant to fund faith-based organizations. The seeds for this decision had been sown in September 1997, when UWMB became the first United Way in the country to fund faith-based organizations precisely *because* they used faith as a tool to improve the lives of urban youth—what one committee chair termed “faith intentional” programs. It was a risky undertaking for a United Way, which traditionally reassured donors that all affiliated charities were secular and non-sectarian. But UWMB was persuaded that, particularly in under-served Boston neighborhoods, churches and other religious organizations were reaching youth with effective programs in ways that standard social service agencies were not.

Over the next several years, the UWMB Faith and Action Initiative (FAA), as it was called, grew steadily.¹ From funding six programs in its first cycle, it expanded to 18 organizations by 2002. The FAA steering committee was a committed and involved group, working proactively to encourage grant proposals from the most promising grantees, and visiting grant sites regularly. The committee also, as part of a larger UWMB program, provided training in evaluation methods to FAA grantees.

One frustration, however, was that UWMB had no additional money to offer; the FAA budget could not grow above \$300,000. In order to do more for its grantees, the FAA committee

¹ The program was originally called Faith in Action, but after a legal challenge from another program of the same name UWMB changed its title to Faith and Action.

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would have to find other sources of funding. In spring 2002, former UWMB-Senior Vice President Pat Brandes—who had founded FAA—learned that the Bush Administration would soon announce the creation of the CCF, authorized to make grants of up to \$2 million a year for three years, to help faith-based organizations. Brandes felt that UWMB's track record with FAA might qualify United Way to lead a group of faith-based organizations in applying for a grant.

But there were drawbacks. The CCF grants could not fund religious activities, only secular activities of religious organizations. This undercut the specific purpose for which FAA was created: to fund programs which included faith in their activities. Further, if UWMB and its three partner applicants received the funds, might so much money serve to divide rather than unite the tightly-knit faith-based community UWMB had come to know so well over the preceding five years? Finally, if a UWMB-led coalition won a CCF grant, would that make it appear party to a Republican-led agenda of social conservatism and religious fundamentalism with which other UWMB constituents might be uncomfortable?

Applications were due in Washington on July 22, 2002. Before then, UWMB and its partners would have to decide whether to move forward on the CCF grant proposal.

Choosing the committee

That there was any discussion of applying for a CCF grant was an indication of just how far UWMB had come since the summer of 1997 when FAA was getting underway. Once the board approved the faith-based initiative in June, co-chairs Ann Romney and Gloria White-Hammond had first to assemble a steering committee. The committee then needed to draft criteria for FAA grant recipients. Romney and other FAA supporters told the Community Investments Committee--which made UWMB funding recommendations—at a June 19 meeting that, where possible, FAA would prefer to fund intermediaries rather than individual churches. Their research showed that coalitions and collaborations of churches and other faith communities working together could accomplish a great deal.

White-Hammond and Romney knew that they wanted their committee to be ecumenical, broadly representative across the religious community. They also wanted it to be diverse. Kristen McCormack, a UWMB consultant who served as the first staff person to FAA, recalls three criteria for committee membership.

We wanted three things. One was people who were committed to the mission of the faith-based initiative... people who were, no pun intended, faithful to the mission and believed that faith-based ministry to youth is an effective thing. Number two was diversity and we had so many different ways that we wanted to be inclusive. One obviously was religious diversity, one was ethnic diversity. And Boston, because of the

way it's structured and laid out, we needed geographic diversity. And male/ female... Number three was content and knowledge. These had to be people who knew programming, and knew youth-based programming.

There was also the tricky decision of whether UWMB could invite onto the committee members of organizations likely to seek FAA funding. “The people we most wanted on the committee were the people who were out there doing the hard work,” recalls McCormack. “So we had to make a policy decision up front as to whether those people would be eligible or not.” White-Hammond, Romney, UWMB COO Pat Brandes, and McCormack designed a compromise. FAA could entertain grant applications from the organizations of committee members, but the member would have to recuse him/herself from any vote on the grant.

With these requirements in mind, they reached out to the leaders they knew: Rev. Wesley Roberts, pastor of the Peoples Baptist Church in Roxbury—one of the oldest black churches in Boston—and also president of the Black Ministerial Alliance; Nancy Kaufman, executive director of Jewish Community Relations; Karin M. Wall, a many-time grant recipient and executive director of the Bruce Wall Ministries at the Dorchester Temple Baptist Church. Rev. Roberto Miranda came from the Iglesia Bautista Central in Cambridge; Father Dan Finn from Saint Mark’s Catholic Church in Dorchester. It took longer than expected to recruit a leader from the Islamic community, but by the second meeting Imam Taalib Mahdee from the Masjid Al-Quran had joined and became an active member of the group. They also approached Robert Cowden III, a UWMB board member who was partner in a law firm that served non-profits and active in his own church. They recruited Sylvia Johnson from the Hyams Foundation.

Eventually, there were 15 members on the committee that first assembled on September 9, 1997.² Comments White-Hammond:

Collectively we all really had our finger on the pulse of the faith community and the activist faith community, so it wasn’t like we were bringing in people who didn’t have a sense of the landscape. These were seasoned people who understood it, who were well-respected, and made a critical contribution.

A few members did not stay long because they discovered that the interfaith approach which FAA insisted on was inimical to their own mission; others because they proved too busy. But the majority quickly threw themselves into the task at hand. Not that it was going to be easy. The committee itself early confronted the potential for conflict. The issue at hand was how to open and close committee meetings with a prayer. All agreed that prayer was appropriate. The right wording proved harder to settle.

² For a roster of the first committee, see Exhibit 1.

Opening prayer. At first, all agreed that each member in turn could lead the committee in prayer, and that it would be a meaningful prayer, not a blandly ecumenical one. That consensus, however, quickly broke down. At one of the first meetings, a Christian member closed the prayer with a reference to Jesus Christ. Kaufman, the Jewish member of the committee, made it clear that that formulation was unacceptable: the moment Christ was invoked, a Jew could no longer endorse the prayer. After considerable discussion, the committee agreed on a formulation that allowed members to use language that was meaningful, but inclusive.

The next challenge was to decide on what grounds FAA would give out money.

Setting the Criteria

The committee quickly discovered it was not so simple to define what faith-based meant. So in an early meeting, it polled its own members. A facilitator ran a mini-workshop that explored everybody's ideas about the criteria for a successful youth ministry program. The questions, recalls McCormack, included:

What elements make it a faith-based program? What's a faith-based program and what's not a faith-based program? How do you articulate the faith element of the program, or do you? Can something not be faith-based enough? And how do you decide that?

Another helpful approach was to understand what faith-based was *not*, by comparing faith-based to faith-filled or faith-linked programs. Faith-based meant faith was an important component, but there was no requirement to convert to take advantage of services; faith-filled meant programs that sought converts; and faith-linked meant secular programs administered by religious organizations. The FAA committee definitely wanted to fund faith-based programs.

McCormack and Romney had also asked community leaders they interviewed in the spring about the elements of success. Recalls McCormack: "We would ask those program leaders, 'Why do you think you're successful? What are the elements of what you're doing with these kids that made the difference?' We were able to incorporate those into the guidelines when we got around to doing the guidelines."

By the second or third meeting, McCormack had pulled together some draft criteria for the committee to vote on. She took existing UWMB criteria for affiliates and modified them to suit faith-based organizations. The common categories—those which required little or no change in wording—were: Management and Governance, Outcomes, Capacity Building, Collaboration and Integration of Services, Volunteer Involvement, and Greatest Needs.

But there were significant differences, too. McCormack created a new FAA category called Spiritual Development, which required that a grant recipient provide "emphasis on spiritual

development,” and that it emphasize “constructive behavior, positive thinking, personal self-development and civic responsibility.” An Outreach category called for “emphasis on engaging and involving youth outside the membership of the congregation or faith membership.” It also required that the program promote “respect for and appreciation of other religions and respect for diversity.” Where volunteers were concerned, the FAA criteria called for volunteerism as “an integral part of how the agency meets its mission.” It also encouraged volunteer leadership development.³

After some discussion over two meetings, the committee voted to adopt the draft criteria. It also adopted a recommendation from Brandes, McCormack and the newly-hired UWMB Senior Vice President for Community Investments Marilyn Chase—based on their collective experience of effective grants—that funding be for more than one year. In exchange for a promise of funding for up to three years, grantees would receive less money each successive year. This was intended to build the capacity and self-sufficiency of the grant recipient. With tapered funding, says McCormack, “people realize earlier on that this money isn't going to be here forever and they have to think of another way to raise the money.”

We also wanted to give faith-based organizations more experience raising money and feeling more comfortable with philanthropy and with foundations... Our thought was that there would in fact be other funders who would see the success of this and that would be there to support this kind of work.

Senior Vice President Chase had joined UWMB in the summer of 1997 and became an easy convert to, and eventual steadfast supporter of, the faith-based initiative. Chase had come to UWMB from an elder services agency, and before that had worked in the governor’s office and at the Roxbury Multi-Service Center—a UWMB affiliate. As a member of a church herself, Chase quickly saw the merits of FAA. Churches, she says, “were the organizations that were actually meeting the needs of kids in the neighborhoods.”

By late 1997, the committee was ready to distribute Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to Neighborhood Fund target communities. The first grant request to come in the door was from the Paraclete Center, a new organization housed in the St. Augustine’s Convent in South Boston which provided educational enrichment programs to middle school youth in the afternoons and evenings.

³ To compare standard UWMB with FAA funding criteria, see Exhibit 2.

First grantees

In December 1997, Sister Ann Fox and co-founder Barry Hynes made the Paraclete presentation to the FAA Committee. But the presentation left the committee unimpressed. At its conclusion, remembers White-Hammond, “we just said, ‘Where’s the faith factor here?’” Fortunately, adds Brandes, “before [Fox] left, thank God we had the chutzpah to say to her, ‘We don’t really see why you consider your program to be faith-based.’”

Fox and Hynes, recalls Brandes, “looked at each other with shock and kind of did this in-breath and then started talking about the situation in South Boston, which is where they operate, and Catholics and these families and the relationship of faith to the program and how they do pray with them.” Paraclete became FAA’s first grantee. The committee, remembers White-Hammond, “gave them \$25,000 and sent them back with the charge to think about it, to think about ways that they might incorporate faith into what they did every day.” In fact, Chase says FAA learned later, Paraclete “was already doing things like prayer circles, but were astounded that we would want to know about that.” With the Paraclete experience, the FAA committee demonstrated to itself that it meant what it said about “faith-intentional.” Notes Chase:

Very early on the members of the committee were really clear that they wanted the organizations that were funded to demonstrate the use of faith in their service delivery. It was real clear that they didn’t want proselytizing, but they did want faith. They challenged organizations to make the distinction between proselytizing and being conscious about helping young people recognize that there is something beyond themselves—without defining what the something is—but something beyond themselves that, if they could tap into it, it not only has the power to help transform them personally but also to help them see the world around them very differently and to interact within it very differently.⁴

At the same time, FAA did require financial and other statements similar to those required of standard UWMB grantees. Says then-FAA staffer Sarah Alvord: “We don’t fund ineffective organizations.” While the grant application was simple and straightforward, it requested full financial reports that demonstrated accurate accounting of revenues and expenses. It required a list of officers. The committee wanted a full description of the program, how it used volunteers, and its results. Finally, FAA asked for a budget. Most applicants were registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. If a church made direct application, FAA would take an extra look at the characteristics of the program.

⁴ Author’s interview with Marilyn Anderson Chase, Boston, MA, on March tktk, 2004. All further quotes from Chase, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

In April 1998, FAA funded another three programs at \$30,000 each. God's Posse worked with young men who were gang members or in the juvenile justice system. Bruce Wall Ministries won a grant to support an after-school program and a summer camp/internship program. Straight Ahead Ministries proposed to establish an aftercare program for juvenile offenders in Dorchester. In June 1998, FAA funded another three organizations, added two more in October, and a final one in December. Total grants in the first full calendar year of 1998 reached \$245,000 to 10 organizations.⁵ The average operating budget of recipients was between \$150,000 and \$200,000. The average size of grants was \$30,000.

For grant recipients, the experience of dealing with FAA was rewarding but also, for those used to conventional funders, disconcerting. "The main difference," says Alvord, "is that we were explicitly asking 'How is faith important in what you're doing?'... They never had had a funder want to know that."

Why so few? But the real FAA committee itself was also in for a disconcerting surprise: there were not enough applicants. Remembers Chase: "We thought that we were going to get bombarded with organizations looking to apply for these funds. We did not get bombarded." Churches were particularly conspicuous by their absence. Eventually, that made sense to the committee. "When we stopped to think about why," says Chase, "we realized that one of the reasons perhaps was that we have a very explicit expectation that the organizations that we fund are reaching out in the community and are meeting the needs of a population of young people that is broader than their church congregation."

Some organizations simply did not need or want any assistance from United Way. Comments McCormack:

We were very aware that ... there are some faith-based organizations out there doing really great work [but] they don't need nor want a grant from Faith and Action. Even the little amount of bureaucracy or paperwork that's involved with that is more than what they're willing to do. And honestly don't really need to do.

But the lack of applicants changed the way the committee approached grantsmaking. "Our thought was that somewhere out there somebody else is doing something we don't know about, and it just was not the case," explains White-Hammond.

We began to understand that we wanted to think about this as a partnership. It wasn't going to be the standard kind of funder thing where I set up the criteria and look over your shoulder to make sure you're doing okay with my money. It was still sort of a nascent thing, and we were all interested in growing.

⁵ For a list of the 1997-1998 grant recipients and amounts, see Exhibit 3.

The committee, for example, admired the work being done by God's Posse and wanted to help it expand. "We could see that it had to get beyond the place where it was being supported by chicken dinners and fish fries," says White-Hammond. "But that was going to take some collaborative effort on our part as funder and on their part as grantee."

It also meant taking an aggressive stance toward looking for programs or initiatives to fund. The committee made the application as simple as possible to accommodate the grassroots character of most potential applicants. "I knew that a lot of the faith-based programs didn't have the capacity to do fancy grants, to write a fancy proposal," remembers McCormack. "So that first application was pretty straightforward and pretty simple but effective."

Their search for winners did not, however, blind the FAA committee to the fact that there were also losers out there. Although FAA looked for programs to fund, it did not simply approve all applicants. In July 2001, for example, McCormack visited one prospective program which proved disappointing. The FAA committee members on the site visit questioned the program's efforts to be inclusive, as well as its leadership. "There wasn't a track record of reaching out to young people beyond the church community," recalls McCormack. "There wasn't an understanding on the part of the lead minister as to what the elements of a successful youth program are, and there wasn't a feeling of stability within the church." The FAA visitors came away with the strong impression that the program was neither established nor well thought through and, adds McCormack, they suspected "that this organization was looking for United Way to kind of foot the whole bill." FAA did not fund it.

But while the first grantees may have been few in number, what they did with their UWMB dollars was impressive. "What a faith-based group can do with \$5,000 is just mind boggling, because so much of what faith-based organizations do runs off of volunteers," says McCormack. "So you're not paying overhead, you're not paying administrative costs, you're not paying staff half the time." Adds White-Hammond: "For most of those groups, it was the first real funding that they'd ever gotten."

Most grantees were doing a laudable job. But even the best, the FAA committee discovered, rarely documented the results they were getting. FAA decided it would be beneficial to all concerned if the faith-based grant recipients were offered outcome (results) evaluation training.

To evaluate or not?

By 1999, UWMB was in the midst of evaluation training for all of its affiliates. During 1997, United Way of America had developed a training framework that provided step-by-step instructions on how to implement new outcome measurements, and had trained staff from United

Ways across the country in how to use the new system.⁶ Previously, affiliates had measured success in terms of quantity: number of participants registered, or number of applications filed. The new emphasis was on trying to capture how programs had made a difference in the lives of participants. In 1998 and 1999, UWMB trained its affiliates in how better to measure their impact on their target communities.

FAA wanted to offer the same training to its faith-based grant recipients. As Brandes remembers it: “Outcomes evaluation was a big theme at the United Way across the country at that time and certainly our United Way was doing a lot with our affiliates on it.” At the same time, the Annie E. Casey Foundation learned about the FAA initiative, and offered to finance a two-year outside evaluation of FAA. Getting the Annie E. Casey offer, says White-Hammond, “was when we realized we were very much onto something.” Step One would be to help FAA decide how to train its grantees in evaluation methods.

FAA understood that it faced a particular challenge unique to its grant recipients: how to measure faith. The usual measurement criteria would have to be modified to accommodate the special claim of FAA grant recipients to effect the “spiritual transformation” of their program participants. In October 1999, therefore, the FAA with Casey Foundation support assembled a day-long roundtable of experts from around the country to advise on whether faith could be measured and, if the answer was yes, how best to design measurement standards for faith-based organizations.

The round-table. Professor Mary-Jo Bane of the Kennedy School of Government was one of the co-moderators. She opened the discussion by noting that “United Way, I think most appropriately, has taken the position that just doing God’s work isn’t sufficient. One also has to show that it works.”⁷ The 13 participants in the roundtable hoped to answer four questions: what should be evaluated in faith-based programs; what special considerations should there be; what are appropriate evaluation tools and methods; and who should do the evaluating?⁸

Views split on whether or not spirituality could or should be measured. One participant observed that it “is something that we might not want to even try to measure.”⁹ Others were bothered by the assumption that secular programs do not communicate values. On the contrary, said one, “I’m not ready to give up on viewing a secular organization as a place where there is this faith or spirituality.”

⁶ The training program was called the United Way of America Measuring Program Outcomes Training Kit.

⁷ “Evaluating Faith in Action An Initiative of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay,” Report of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and United Way of Massachusetts Bay’s Faith in Action Evaluation Roundtable, October 1999, p.4.

⁸ For a list of the Roundtable participants, see Exhibit 4.

⁹ Annie E. Casey Report, p.7

Some roundtable participants observed that churches and other religious organizations might perceive evaluation as disrespectful or interfering. However, they concluded that with the correct language, churches could come to see evaluation as being in their own best interest. Theological or biblical language could re-cast evaluation as spiritual stewardship. Said one former pastor who previously rejected evaluation, “now I have a philosophical, theological resistance to the notion that efficacy is not a concern of faith.”¹⁰

White-Hammond was one of the roundtable participants. “We looked at it in the context of stewardship,” she says.

Most people, you say evaluation and they recoil. And again, church people just do the ministry. But to think about it in the context of stewardship, which is sort of familiar to people, it then became exciting to think about developing a whole language that sprung from what was familiar to help people think about how to do this work of evaluation.

Once the group reached consensus that spirituality *should* be measured, the next question was whether it could be and, if so, by what methods. The panel concluded that one good strategy was to involve the evaluated agency in designing its own evaluation. They recommended using questionnaires, surveys, focus groups and a consultant to help agencies design their own measures for success. They also suggested that, especially initially, evaluation be kept separate from funding decisions. The intended uses of the evaluation should be clearly spelled out in advance. Finally, panel members stressed that any evaluation should include both quantitative and qualitative measures. The qualitative ones would essentially be stories from program participants about their experiences.

By the end of the roundtable, United Way had little doubt that it could—and should—train the FAA grantees in evaluation methods, both quantitative and qualitative. It took a while, however, to get the pieces in place to do so.

Evaluation training

In the spring of 2000, UWMB contracted with Prof. Victoria Lee Erickson of Drew University as principal researcher for the qualitative part of the evaluation. Over the next several months, Erickson created what she called a “community of investigation” to collect personal testimony from FAA grantees and their clients. The Youth Storytelling Project she organized collected stories from 20 young people at nine programs, who described how FAA programs had changed them for the better.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.12.

The testimonials were personal and moving. One youth, for example, said: “My director lets teens know that it’s okay to make mistakes because God forgives. She is a strong over-comer.”¹¹ Another commented that his involvement with an FAA program has “had a major impact on my life and the way I choose to go with it... I have a tight relationship with God: I am on the right path now.”¹² Erickson produced a final report in May 2001. White-Hammond says of Erickson’s project: “It needed to be written down and she wrote it down for us. And in the context of her conversations with the grantees, she helped them to think about what they were doing differently, to really appreciate the stories.”

Workshops. On the quantitative front, FAA in early 2001 contracted with the TenPoint Coalition for \$31,500 for Ellen Bass to conduct workshops for grantees in evaluation measurement. Bass had joined TenPoint only in August 2000; earlier she had learned evaluation techniques from the United Way, so was well versed in their new approach. She was also married to Jeff Bass, executive director of the Emmanuel Gospel Center, which was an FAA grantee. Notes White-Hammond: “On the one hand, people could say this is a pretty incestuous project. On the other hand, because the people involved were such quality people with real expertise, it just really augmented what we did.”

Bass had volunteered to do the training out of her own personal commitment. “As a person of faith, I was very interested as I was learning all about evaluation and outcome measurement, how you could apply these tools in a ministry setting,” she says.¹³ She was keenly aware that evaluation could look risky to FAA-funded organizations because many of them were dealing with at-risk youth who were harder to reach than most teens. The usual success measures would be beside the point. As Chase puts it: “Many of the faith-based programs that we deal with engage youth who are extremely high risk, who would never be accepted into the more standard and mainstream programs.” The goals for these children were not necessarily whether they graduated from high school, but whether they refrained from gang activity or stayed out of jail.

Bass contacted the 18 organizations FAA had funded since 1997. She offered two separate training sessions of two days each—one in the spring and one in the fall. Eventually, all 18 programs sent representatives. The grantees would first decide which indicators best captured the successes of each program, then learn how to gather the necessary data to measure those indicators. Senior pastors and program directors were particularly encouraged to come. Day One of the first session was on May 7, 2001, with the follow-up on June 11. Some 27 people from 10 programs attended. Bass conducted the second two-day workshop on September 24 and October 29, 2001, for another 18 individuals from eight programs.

¹¹ United Way of Massachusetts Bay, Final Report: “Faith and Action and Improving the Lives of At-Risk Youth,” August, 2003, p.7

¹² Ibid, p.13.

¹³ Author’s interview with Ellen Bass, March 3, 2004, in Boston, Massachusetts. All further quotes from Bass, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

Bass knew her audience, so started off by asking whether there was evaluation in the Bible, whether evaluation was a spiritual activity? Some were skeptical, responding that it felt like they were evaluating God. But Bass could identify Bible passages which referred to evaluation. Her training materials called the prophet Nehemiah, for example, “a project director with unparalleled record-keeping skills and sound evaluation practices.” She cited numerous Biblical passages attesting to Nehemiah’s skills in conducting a needs assessment, recruiting volunteers, keeping records, celebrating accomplishments and praying. Bass says measuring program success is not evaluating God:

You’re measuring to what extent has your activity had an impact on another person... You’re investing in activities in somebody else’s life in the hopes of influencing a change in their life... So you’re not evaluating God, you’re just looking to see if that change has happened.

At the sessions, Bass says, she versed participants on the many parameters of evaluation. What they measured, she emphasized, depended on what they wanted to know. They could measure, for example, how great the need was for their program in the community. They could evaluate program activities—did they accomplish what they intended, and how well? They could evaluate how much service was delivered, and the results of that. She stressed two questions: how do you want participants to change because of your program; and how do you know whether that change has happened? After the first day, each program was required to develop a so-called logic model to bring to the second day of the workshop. A logic model, says Bass, is generally a “one-page conceptual map of how a program benefits its participants” with four components: inputs (resources), activities, outputs (units of service), and outcomes. On the second day of the workshop, participants refined their logic model, and prepared the questionnaires and other forms which would get them the information they wanted.

Bass helped participants identify indicators for spiritual change among youth by asking themselves what it would look like.

Do they pray every day? Do they talk about a spiritual experience that they’ve had? Are they now reading the Bible on their own initiative? Are you talking about improved relationships? Are you talking about a certain length of time they’ve sustained the change in their life? You can get real specific.

Bass, commends Chase, “did a wonderful job of translating outcomes measurement into terms that were acceptable to a faith-based audience, which typically is averse to any kind of research.” She was able to persuade the grantees that it was in their best interest to know, as Chase puts it, that “you’re doing quality work and that you’re continually improving upon your outcomes.”

Nearly all of the participating programs submitted reports by early 2002 outlining the new outcomes measurement system each had designed and implemented. A number of grantees asked for further training. Bass had also, in July and August 2001, conducted a train-the-trainers workshop. Those new trainers went on to do more work within their home organizations. The grantees, says White-Hammond, appreciated the training and the opportunity it gave them to look at their work in a new way. She elaborates:

Over and over again the grantees talked about how valuable it was to have [Bass] do that outcomes measurement training for them... She was someone who had credibility, so there were a number of things that people gleaned from that. One, of course, was the information and set of tools to help them think about what they do, and how to capitalize on what they do well, and take it to the next level. And then how to strengthen the steps that aren't doing so well and move that to the next level as well. And it gave them an opportunity to interact with each other.

Play in the Big Game?

As proof emerged that FAA-funded programs were successful, and that their success could be measured, supporters began to wonder if FAA could be expanded. UWMB, however, had no more dollars to contribute. Then in March 2002, Brandes had a phone call from an old friend in the non-profit community. Brandes had left United Way by then and gone to the private Barr Foundation, but she remained interested and involved in FAA and faith-based organizations.

The friend told Brandes that the Bush Administration was preparing to issue a Request for Proposals to the newly established Compassion Capital Fund, designed to help faith-based and community organizations build their capacity to provide social services. The Fund, it said on its website, "reflects President [George W.] Bush's recognition that faith-based and community organizations are uniquely situated to partner with the government in serving poor and low-income individuals and families."¹⁴

Brandes, sensing an opportunity to direct more funds to faith-based organizations, invited her friend to Boston to explain the CCF in greater detail. After their discussion, she determined that the best way to win a CCF grant would be to assemble a coalition of organizations interested in promoting faith-based programs. Ideally, the lead agency would be a faith-based organization.

Brandes' first task was to identify potential co-applicants. In her view, there were three—possibly four—candidates. One was the Black Ministerial Alliance (BMA), the second was the Emmanuel Gospel Center, and the third was the Boston TenPoint Coalition. UWMB should

¹⁴ See: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccf/citizens/citz_about_ccf.html

probably also be involved—but it was not an obvious choice to lead the coalition. Each was an intermediary organization, one which had provided either technical assistance, grants or direct services to at-risk and high-risk youth.

The CCF's RFP was published on June 7, 2002. Grants were for up to \$2 million dollars a year for three years. The deadline for applications was July 22, scarcely six weeks later. If Boston's faith-based organizations were to benefit, decisions had to be taken and taken quickly. "I decided," says Brandes, "that we needed to have a bigger meeting and see, if we could, who were going to be the applicants for it out of this meeting."

Brandes scheduled a dinner at the Barr Foundation for June 18, 2002. She invited not only leaders of those organizations, but individuals from the philanthropic world who sat on those organization's boards or who simply cared about their advancement. The guests included Marilyn Chase from UWMB, Wesley Roberts from BMA, Reba Danastorg and Ray Hammond from the Boston TenPoint Coalition, Sylvia Johnson and Elizabeth Smith from the Hyams Foundation, Richard Ward from the Boston Foundation and Dana Wade from the Emmanuel Gospel Center.¹⁵

But Brandes knew that June 18 would be too late to introduce thorny questions. They had to be resolved largely in advance. The first and most urgent question was: who would apply? So she approached Roberts (and his soon-to-be executive director, Harold Sparrow) about whether BMA would serve as the lead agency within a grant application partnership. BMA, however, pleaded that it was not sure it had the financial sophistication to handle a multi-million dollar federal grant. Emmanuel Gospel Center had considerable expertise in managing grants, but did not want to take on the paperwork associated with a large federal grant. The TenPoint Coalition had split into three after its glory days during the 1990s; the one-third which wanted to take part in the grant application was too small to manage a federal grant.

By mid-June, Brandes felt UWMB was the only possible contender for lead agency. She says:

I really wanted the BMA to be able to come to it, to be the lead agency because I really wanted it to be the black churches themselves. But I also was close to their financials and I knew that they were still in a struggling place... Then I had these conversations with Jeff Bass over at Emmanuel Gospel Center because I thought they would be the second best choice, and Jeff said I've done federal grants and it's so difficult, it's such an undertaking. And Jeff is good, he's really good, but he just said we don't

¹⁵ The entire list of invitees was: Pat Brandes and Kimberly Haskins, Barr Foundation; Jay Broadnax and George Thorn, BMA/Black Church Capacity Building Project; Marilyn Anderson Chase and Kevin Peterson, UWMB/FAA; Ray Hammond (also BMA) and Reba Danastorg, Boston TenPoint Coalition; Wesley Roberts, Richard Richardson and Ed Gaskin, BMA; Elizabeth Smith and Sylvia Johnson, Hyams Foundation; Dana Wade, Emmanuel Gospel Center; Richard Ward, The Boston Foundation.

really have the capacity to handle that. So when it got down to the 11th hour before we came into this room, I already knew that the United Way was the only organization.

“Before the dinner,” Brandes recalls, “I called Marilyn [Chase] and said I have talked to everybody else, and I don't think there's the capacity for anybody else to do this but the United Way. So I'm hoping you'll ante up and do it.”

The Dinner Meeting

But even if Brandes felt that UWMB should take the lead, it was far from clear either that UWMB wanted to, or that the other partners would agree. On June 18, the dinner meeting opened with a prayer. There were four urgent matters on the agenda: agree on a general strategy for the proposal; agree on a lead agency and other organizations' roles; establish an advisory group that could make decisions; determine next steps. But it all really boiled down to two big decisions the committee had to take that night: Should we apply? If so, who should apply?

The group considered the two interrelated questions together. The question of who would lead seemed the easiest to tackle directly; the answer to that would implicitly address whether or not to apply. The group revisited together the conversations Brandes had had with each individually, considering each proposed partner in turn and weighing the pros and cons of giving that organization the lead.

The United Way would have preferred to be a silent partner in the effort. UWMB, says former staffer Kim Haskins, who was at the meeting, “was not interested in being the lead, but was willing to be the lead if it were necessary.” But over the course of the dinner debate, all agreed that the other three partners were unsuited to lead for a variety of reasons. BMA was in financial difficulties, and in the middle of a leadership change. The Emmanuel Gospel Center could have done it, but was a Christian organization—while the CCF wanted to sponsor interfaith programs. The Boston TenPoint Coalition was too small.

So after considerable discussion, the group reached a compromise. UWMB would lead for a year and mentor the BMA, so that it could assume operating responsibility in the second year of the grant. The Emmanuel Gospel Center and Boston TenPoint would be full partners. As Chase remembers it:

What the United Way would agree to do would be to develop the capacity of the Black Ministerial Alliance to actually be in a position where it can apply for a grant like this and serve as the lead entity at some point in the future. They could actually take over the management of this grant that we originally proposed in year two of the grant.

Brandes admired UWMB's willingness to take the lead. "I want to take my hat off to the United Way," she says, "because they weren't going to get a lot out of this; they were going to get a lot of headaches." With the question of who would apply settled, the group had to discuss the knottier question of whether to apply.

The agenda for the dinner meeting had highlighted the arguments in favor of applying for the CCF grant. The benefits for faith-based organizations could be considerable. CCF money was designated specifically for building the capacity of recipients to grow and do even more. From UWMB's perspective, this might be a way to channel more money to FAA grant recipients. CCF also proposed to replicate effective programs, and to increase the access of faith-based programs to federal and other pools of funds.

Those were the pros, and based on them the group at dinner voted to go forward with the grant application process. The group created a proposal advisory group and proposal writing team. On June 21, 2002, they sent off a Letter of Intent to apply for a CCF grant.

But there were also cons to applying for the CCF money—and these emerged over the next four weeks as the designated proposal writing team, plus a facilitator, worked on the fine points of the application. Discussion shifted from lofty goals to nitty-gritty details of implementation. The most critical argument against applying was that the criteria for spending CCF money undercut the most important principle articulated by Faith and Action: that grant recipients be intentional in bringing faith into their programs.

At what cost?

"You cannot use Compassion Capital funds for any kind of faith-based activity," clarifies Chase. "In order for our committee to accept these program funds, they had to figure out a way in which those funds could be used by our grantees that did not conflict with their programs having some aspect of faith in it." The partners, therefore, had to accept that if they won the CCF grant, they could use the CCF monies to fund only secular activities. For UWMB, that meant a return to the standard grant-giving guidelines—which would be of small use to FAA grantees. Yet it was the FAA experience which had enticed UWMB to join the coalition in the first place.

Concretely, that meant no CCF funds could go, for example, to God's Posse for its programs that used prayer to develop spiritual, social, economic and educational maturity in young men. CCF money could not fund the "Massachusetts Mentoring Partnership—Greater Boston 1 to 1" to develop mentoring programs based on faith. It could not fund the Bruce Wall Ministries summer camp which wove Christian ideals and biblical themes into its activities. On the other hand, CCF monies *could* be used to build up the organizational capabilities of each of these organizations. What's more, nothing prohibited FAA from continuing to support their faith-based activities with UWMB funds.

As the small group worked on the CCF application, the question also arose of whether accepting such a large sum of money could be corrosive, destroying the cohesiveness of the partnership created to apply to CCF and eroding its sense of mission. “There was significant concern,” says Haskins, “that the competition for the CCF funds, and the competition when those funds were re-granted locally, would undermine healthy relationships.” Adds Brandes: “I can remember saying to Dr. Roberts, who was the head of the BMA, do you want this money? You know, where are you on Caesar?” UWMB VP Chase had her own worries—about mission creep. She says:

What was the probability that a faith-based organization having this amount of money available, or having federal resources available, how was that going to affect their mission? Often introducing money into a situation can just change the nature of the entity and of the work. How were they going to ensure that that wasn’t going to happen?

The group also debated the politics of applying. The Bush Administration had created CCF for the same reason UWMB had created FAA: to support proven and effective faith-based organizations in their work. But the co-applicants feared the CCF would be perceived as a Republican venture promoting religion in the US. Recalls Chase: “At the time, there were real questions about the motivation of the administration in even making these funds available. Was there the possibility that we were being duped into something that would have repercussions that we couldn’t anticipate at the time the funds were being offered?”

Should the partnership win the grant, there were also questions as to whether and how much of the grant monies could be used by the partners themselves for their own capacity building. Finally, there were still unanswered questions about the role each group would play within the partnership. While the co-applicants did not have to resolve every question before they submitted their application, they did have to be certain that they were making the right choice. During the weeks before July 22 and the application deadline, recalls Chase, “we prayed a lot.”