

# Emerging Ethnic Agencies: Building Capacity to Build Community

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**ABSTRACT.** Ethnic agencies are important components of multicultural community systems, providing vehicles for community empowerment and self-determination in communities of color. Based on data from a qualitative study of emerging ethnic agencies, this paper explores the communities-building activities of ethnic agencies, describes the characteristics of ethnic agencies that position them to be effective in building communities, and describes what emerging agency leaders perceive they need in order to strengthen their organizations. Recommendations are offered for ways in which mainstream organizations can assist in building the capacities of emerging agencies so that they can become full partners in community-building efforts. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

**KEYWORDS.** Ethnic agencies, community building, communities of color, mainstream agencies

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Communities of color have a long history of developing self-help organizations and enterprises to meet needs that arise due to their specific cultures, their experiences in adapting to U.S. society, and experiences with racism (Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1994; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995; Jackson-White, Dozier, Oliver, & Gardner, 1997; Jenkins, 1988; O'Donnell, 1995). Central to these efforts have been community-building activities. It is through building strong communities that families can create networks of support that are so vital to their healthy functioning. Based on findings from a qualitative study, this paper explores how agency leaders view the community-building functions and capacity-building needs of their ethnic agencies.

### *LITERATURE REVIEW*

Ethnic agencies, created to meet the needs of a specific racial or ethnic community, provide some type(s) of programs for individuals and/or families, the majority of whom are members of the same racial or ethnic community. These agencies are staffed primarily by ethnic community members (Jenkins, 1981; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995). Ethnic agencies may be contrasted with mainstream agencies along several characteristics. Among these characteristics are that ethnic agencies offer programs that support and encourage awareness or consciousness of their community's cultures (Jenkins, 1981), while mainstream agencies usually lack this focus. Further, due in part to the previous characteristic, mainstream agencies are likely to underserve, or inappropriately serve, communities of color (Iglehart & Becerra, 1995).

Because of these characteristics, ethnic community members may view ethnic agencies as more approachable than mainstream agencies due to "the significance of the ethnic tie, and the propensity to associate with others of like background" (Jenkins, 1988, p. 2). In addition, people of color may be more likely to attend those programs described as offering recreation or social interaction (Lum, 1997), often provided by ethnic agencies. As Jenkins (1988) notes, "The ethnic association is one way to reach many otherwise inaccessible populations who would not be in touch with established, traditional social-service agencies" (p. 104). Because ethnic agencies may tend to consider the entire ethnic community—rather than only service recipients—as agency consumers (Arches, 1997; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995), they may actively seek to develop strong links among community members.

Several authors (e.g., McKnight, 1997; Sviridoff & Ryan, 1997) assert that an important function for agencies is to build community. Community building involves “the activities, practices, and policies that support and foster positive connections among individuals, groups, organizations, neighborhoods, and geographic and functional communities” (Weil, 1996, p. 482). These connections are particularly vital to the well-being of members of oppressed communities, as they may reduce the sense of alienation that results from living in a hostile environment (Delgado, 2000).

Several characteristics of communities of color make community building crucial. Recent immigrants and refugees may experience isolation and loss of social support due to language and cultural barriers (Arches, 2001; Hirayama & Cetingok, 1988). In addition, communities of color are disproportionately affected by poverty, lack of affordable housing, crime, and unemployment (Delgado, 2000) and live in a society in which they and their cultures often are rendered “invisible” (Young, 1990). Their experiences with these issues and other effects of racism may lead to a “sense of isolation and oppression” and feelings of hopelessness (Delgado, 2000, p. 2) that community building is intended to decrease.

These and other characteristics of communities of color, however, may make community building challenging. For example, unlike those who have lived in the U.S. for generations, new arrivals may be affected by historical and political issues in their countries of origin (Daley & Wong, 1994; Espiritu, 1996). In addition, differences in social class (Daley & Wong, 1994; Espiritu, 1996), ethnic politics (Espiritu, 1996; Hendricks & Rudich, 2000), and views regarding assimilation (O’Donnell & Karanja, 2000) may be present within communities. These differences can lead to community conflicts and distrust of ethnic agencies among some community members (Brown, Jemmott, Mitchell, & Walton, 1998). These characteristics will make it particularly difficult for an outsider to understand a community; in addition, outsiders may be viewed with suspicion (Delgado, 2000).

Ethnic agencies are in a unique position to engage in community building. Because their staff usually is composed of ethnic community members, they may share a sense of ethnic solidarity and be more trusted than outsiders (Rivera & Erlich, 1998). This characteristic increases the probability that agency staff will share the cultures of community members and possess knowledge of what is likely to work within a particular community.

Because ethnic agencies are well positioned to engage in community building within communities of color, it is essential that we find ways to support them. There is scant research about the processes of building and maintaining small organizations, including the processes and skills useful for strengthening emerging ethnic agencies. Locating adequate funds likely is a critical component of building strong agencies. Daley (2002) notes that national surveys of nonprofit organizations have found that boards of directors may lack the capacity for successful fundraising. Access to funding for ethnic agencies may be particularly difficult if ethnic community members have low incomes and most outside funders do not consider building cultural communities as important (Fisher & Fabricant, 2002). As noted by O'Donnell (1995), "Even relatively modest efforts relying heavily on volunteerism require philanthropic or public support to sustain their efforts" (p. 20). It also is important to consider that if different ethnic groups have unique management styles (Daly, 1994) related to their cultures or experiences, then the administrative, management, and capacity-building needs of ethnic agencies may differ from those of nonethnic organizations.

While some research has been conducted on various aspects of ethnic agencies such as staffing and programming (Jenkins, 1981), the role of ethnic agencies in helping to build community and develop community members' capacity has not been well explored. This exploratory study seeks to contribute to this gap in the literature by examining how leaders of ethnic agencies view their agencies' community-building activities and capacity-building needs. Specifically, a qualitative methodology was used to answer the following questions: (1) What are emerging ethnic agencies currently doing to build stronger ethnic communities? (2) What characteristics of ethnic agencies position them to be leaders in building strong communities? (3) What types of capacity-building assistance do emerging ethnic agencies need in order to develop stronger organizations so that they can continue their community-building efforts? With this information, the social work profession can better understand strategies for building ethnic communities and identify ways of supporting emerging ethnic agencies.

### **METHOD**

Data for this paper were gathered as part of a larger qualitative study focusing on the missions, services, structures, and capacity-building needs of ethnic agencies in communities of color. Because the author is

an outsider to the communities whose agencies participated in this study, community members who are active in ethnic agencies were consulted during study design, instrument development, sample selection, and preliminary interpretation of data. In addition, leaders were asked to provide feedback on preliminary analyses to increase the probability that interpretations of the data reflect their experiences (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983; Cummerton, 1986).

### ***Sample***

The population for this study comprised leaders (e.g., directors, board president) and former leaders of ethnic agencies in a large metropolitan area in the Northwestern U.S. Due to the frequency with which small associations begin and end (see Lohmann, 1992) and the lack of incorporation of many agencies, it was not possible to identify the entire population of ethnic agencies in the study's geographic area. Potential participants were identified from a group composed of people of color who are in positions of leadership in social service organizations, individuals active in local ethnic organizations, social work faculty members of color who are active in community organizations, and leaders of social service agencies that serve a large number of people of color.

The 13 agencies included in the sample for this analysis are considered to be "emerging agencies" because they are relatively small, they are not fully incorporated into the formal service delivery system, and leaders described their agencies as struggling to survive. Eight of these 13 emerging agencies had 501(c)(3) status, all but one had at least one paid staff with an average full-time equivalent (FTE) between 2 and 3, 10 had formal boards of directors, and annual budgets ranged from less than \$50,000 to \$250,000. The agencies served Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Laotian, Samoan, Vietnamese, Mexican (2 agencies), African American (3 agencies), Ethiopian, and multiethnic families.

### ***Interview Guide***

To obtain data relevant to the research questions, semi-structured interviewing was used (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The interview guide, created in consultation with community members, framed questions so that leaders had the opportunity to recognize and describe their strengths, skills, and successes in addition to their capacity-building needs and were based on the multicultural assumption that agencies and their communities deal with racism-related experiences that mainstream agencies

do not face. Closed-ended questions included the number of staff, volunteers, and program participants; ratings of the agencies' capacities in various areas; and ratings of the importance of various trainer characteristics. Open-ended questions included descriptions of programs offered by the agencies; outreach activities; why community members participate in the agencies' programs; capacity-building needs; and desired trainer characteristics.

### *Interviews*

Prior to each interview, participants were mailed a copy of the consent form and a list of topics to be covered. The author and a colleague conducted face-to-face interviews between November 1996 and May 1997 with 12 of the 13 leaders; at her request, one leader completed a mail questionnaire, stating that she was more proficient in written than in spoken English. Interviews took place at locations selected by the interviewees (e.g., agency sites, community centers, community restaurants) so that leaders were on their own "turf." Interviews began with "friendly conversation" to allow leaders to get to know the interviewer and facilitate the creation of a "climate of acceptance" (Leigh, 1998, p. 61). The interviewer then followed the interview guide, encouraging leaders to respond at length when they so desired. These face-to-face interviews, ranging from 45 minutes to 2 hours in length, were audio taped. Interviews were transcribed, and findings are presented in the aggregate to ensure confidentiality of study participants. This interview protocol provided data sufficient to address the research questions and suggest actions that may strengthen ethnic agencies (see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

### *Data Analysis*

The qualitative software program ATLAS.ti (Murh, 1997) was used for data analysis. Following an inductive process (Miles & Huberman, 1994), each transcript was read and initial codes were assigned (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). All transcripts then were reread for the presence of concepts that emerged from later-read transcripts. Data then were analyzed to identify themes (e.g., purposes of community-building activities) relevant to the research questions. This inductive process allows for presentation of leaders' experiences and perspectives.

### *Limitations*

The sample for this study included leaders only. In addition, only nine ethnic communities were represented in the sample, and all were from the same geographic area. Further research is needed that includes agencies from additional ethnic communities, from different geographic areas, and with different agency actors (e.g., program participants, staff). Lack of ethnic matching undoubtedly affected the interviews, though it is possible that leaders shared information that they wanted “outsiders” to know. Finally, although a sample size of 13 is considered sufficient for purposive sampling for qualitative studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994), future research with larger samples might yield additional useful information.

## **FINDINGS**

This section first describes community-building activities of emerging ethnic agencies and presents leaders’ perceptions of the purposes of these activities. Findings about the characteristics of ethnic agencies that position them to be effective in community building among communities of color then are offered. Because emerging agencies must survive in order to continue their efforts in building stronger communities, leaders’ perceived capacity-building needs then are described.

### *Community-Building Activities*

The emerging agencies included in this sample offered a wide range of programs. In addition to social services such as counseling, all 13 leaders talked about community-building activities when describing the programs of their agencies. Six agencies organize family gatherings and other culture-related events, five offer youth and family mentoring programs that bring community members together to help each other, and two offer programs that include youth involvement in the community’s organizations. For example, youth in one after-school program visit an ethnic museum and other institutions that connect them with their community’s cultural heritage. Another program requires youth to visit nursing homes, businesses, and church organizations within their ethnic community in addition to tutoring younger youth.

Programs extend well beyond social services to include educational, recreational, and cultural services and programs that bring community

members together. A central feature of one agency's fathers' support group, for example, is the monthly activities that bring families together for "skating parties, potlucks, just things of that sort." Another agency offers a sport tournament for children and youth, followed by "cultural and classical dance" for the family. Other agencies ( $n = 6$ ) sponsor dealing fairs, festivals, or other gatherings that are specifically designed to bring community members together.

### *Purposes of Community-Building Activities*

Four primary purposes of community-building activities emerged from the data: building support networks that decrease isolation and engender ethnic pride; providing opportunities for community members to use their skills as they "give back" to their communities; building bridges among communities of color or between communities of color and white society; and increasing their communities' power. This section describes leaders' perspectives of these purposes.

*Building support networks.* Leaders perceive that bringing community members together allows people to build support networks that would otherwise be absent. As one leader said, fellow participants become "like your extended family." These support networks are particularly important for nurturing the self-esteem of new immigrants. As one leader explained,

They move here . . . and they're [in a] completely different environment, completely different life. So they feel down and they feel—they put themselves lower than they are because they look at [white people who] seem to have things in life . . . But [coming] together as a group and being around their own people [whom] they can identify with [is helpful]. Some of them can't speak [English], but that doesn't mean they're nobody.

Another leader described how an "English as a Second Language" (ESL) program also focused on building community:

The teacher [was a member of a different ethnic community]. The other [teacher] was white. And they were still able to communicate because there was a relationship built, and a trust, and by the end they . . . brought food, they shared times, they shared each other's phone numbers . . . they had a dance, and they played and invited each other in . . . The sense and the value of being somewhere they

felt comfortable, where they met other people, where they were away from their own isolation, it was a great feeling.

Three leaders stressed that community gatherings allow people from different generations to learn from each other. As one leader said in describing a regional community gathering that draws from 7,000 to 15,000 community members, "It's a very good program because it involve[s] everybody in the community . . . We can all learn from different . . . people with different ages." Intergenerational activities also serve another purpose for immigrant families by countering youth's negative attitudes toward their less-aculturated parents:

We want to do . . . families activity . . . for the kid to feel, "Hey, it's okay that my parent doesn't speak the language fluently, but they're right here with me, they're ready to support me." That way it keeps [youth] from feeling isolated, it keep them from feeling like they don't have a support system and it keep them from getting to the wrong crowd.

These networks also engender ethnic pride. For example, youth participating in one agency's cultural history class come to "understand what hard times [their community members] had to go through in getting there; what their parents did, what they can be proud of, [what] has been accomplished by someone that was same ethnic group as they."

*"Giving back" to their communities.* Through these activities, community members have the opportunity to share their skills and knowledge with others. As the leader of an agency serving refugees said, "the intellectual who understand this system in this country . . . help the population help themselves." A primary aim in another program is for youth to "become productive citizens who give back to their community." The self-esteem of community members is fostered through active involvement in planning and carrying out events. One leader motioned to posters in her agency site and said,

A lot of these pictures that you see have a lot of cooking . . . That's how they feel they can contribute . . . They need to feel they are part of the event . . . [They] go into the welfare office, people hardly look at [them] . . . People do not want to be dehumanized, they want to be part of it, they want to be confident, to push their self-esteem up. So by having them do the cooking, that's something they can be proud of.

*Building bridges.* While all agencies described intra-community activities, 7 of the 13 leaders also spoke about efforts to connect their communities with other communities of color (n = 3) or with the larger white society (n = 6). For example, one leader described her agency's children's program as follows:

Each quarter . . . they have . . . sort of "around-the-world-ethnic [event]." Each of the ethnic group [prepares] a performance to share with all the children [to demonstrate] that this is what our dances look like or this is what our songs sound like, so a kid can be educated so when they [see or hear something new, they don't] think it's "abnormal" . . . That's where racism happens.

In explaining why her agency engages in cross-ethnic events, another leader explained,

In the past, probably because Caucasians [are] the majority, if they say "cross-culture," they only looking at . . . from white culture to my culture. They never look at . . . Black [culture, for instance] . . . We need to understand them, too, because otherwise we're . . . buying [that] there's just one model . . . But if [we] really want other people to appreciate [our] culture, we need to start appreciating other people's culture first.

*Increasing power.* Eight leaders used the terms "power" or "empowerment" when explaining the purposes of their community-building efforts. For example, one leader said that community gatherings and community centers are important because "people empower people" and that bringing community members together will "create power for the community." Another leader, noting that most decision makers are "white Americans," said that the agency's focus is "to bring [the ethnic community] more into the mainstream while helping them keep their cultures. More into the mainstream of power . . . [so we] can negotiate effectively with other institutions on behalf of [the ethnic community]."

Another leader spoke about the potential for interethnic alliances to increase the power of all communities of color. She said, "So all these immigrant group, refugee group, English as their second language, if we all come together, we have a lot of common issues. Then it becomes a significant proportion the people need to pay attention to . . . If everybody start thinking that way, after a few years probably [society] will be different."

### ***Characteristics Conducive to Community Building***

*Languages.* Nine of the 13 agencies served primarily immigrant and refugee populations. Not surprisingly, leaders of these agencies emphasized that programs related to language were critical components of their agencies. Language-related services included tutoring (8 agencies), interpretation and mediation between community members and mainstream institutions (6 agencies), ESL classes (5 agencies), and translation of written documents (3 agencies). Staff members, thus, were fluent in at least two languages. One leader explained, "All my staff are . . . from the university . . . and of course they are fluent in English and our job is helping young people and translate in hospital, school." This ability of staff members to cross from the groups' ethnic community to the larger, English-speaking community positions such agencies to play critical roles in collaborative community-building efforts.

*Community networks.* The community networks described by Sviridoff and Ryan (1997) as central to community building were evidenced in leaders' responses to interview items addressing agencies' outreach efforts. Leaders reported that relationships with community members were "close," so that they rarely had to focus on developing specific outreach strategies. Ten of the 13 leaders said that "word-of-mouth" is the primary way of spreading information about their programs. As one leader said, ". . . I think everybody that has [the ethnic community's] 'blood' knows about us. I don't know how they went about it, advertising the agency in the beginning, but [the agency is] on [the] seventh year, and everybody know[s]." Another leader said that "We haven't been really circulating that information [about our programs] because we're so overwhelmed with the need right now . . . Just by word-of-mouth, we're maxing everything out!"

*Trustworthiness.* Leaders stressed that community members participate in their programs due to the trust that is more easily developed when staff and program participants share similar cultures and experiences. One leader stressed the effectiveness of her agency's strategy of building informal relationships with community members: "[T]hat's why you need a place that they can come and—because they need to feel the trust . . . It's like they see you all the time and you[re] kind of like . . . their friend or you always talk about positive things, so they don't feel . . . intimidated."

In contrast, leaders said that community members perceive that mainstream agencies are not considered approachable by ethnic community members. For example, one leader said that her ethnic commu-

nity's youth do not participate in youth recreation programs offered by a certain mainstream agency, even though it is located in their neighborhood. When asked why not, she said:

Well, they don't feel like the [organization] is there for them . . . The majority of the staff . . . speak English-English only . . . [A]nd do they feel welcome? There's nothing on the wall that says "Welcome" in different languages, there's nothing in term[s] of the [organization's] rule and regulation in various language. And does anybody come up to talk to them? I mean, when we do an event, we want to make sure we translate it in different languages, we want to make sure we have people that can speak the languages floating around, include them in events . . .

*Commitment to community.* Finally, all leaders who participated in this study indicated a strong commitment toward strengthening their communities. As one leader said in contrasting his agency to mainstream agencies, "Typical social service agencies are only interested in just straight giving the services, and not really caring whether the community grows or not." Some also described board members as "giving of their time, their talents, and their money," and staff as "very dedicated, very committed" to the agency's goals.

Several leaders (n = 6), however, said they would like additional community participation. Four barriers to full participation were described. Three leaders said that some community members who are more acculturated are not involved. As one leader said, "More professionals in this community need to be more cultivated and committed to this agency's community rather than isolating themselves." One leader attributed lack of full participation to two different factors—the community's tradition of creating family-based, rather than community-based, networks and the lack of a term for "volunteer" in her native language. Another leader said that historical and current political issues among various ethnic groups within his community's country of origin hindered the development of a sense of community. Finally, one leader said that community-building is challenging because members of his community must move often to follow employment opportunities.

### ***Building the Capacities of Emerging Ethnic Agencies***

As with other agencies, emerging ethnic agencies must achieve organizational stability in order to effectively serve their communities. Fol-

lowing are findings related to the capacity-building needs of emerging ethnic agencies, including leaders' perspectives about desired trainer characteristics or qualifications.

Twelve of the 13 leaders completed a table, developed in collaboration with ethnic community leaders, that asked them to indicate how well their agencies conducted specific organizational tasks and whether they desired capacity-building assistance in these areas. The list included hiring staff, recruiting volunteers, staff development, managing staff/volunteers, planning program/services, financial management, board leadership, strategic planning, identifying potential grant sources, identifying other potential funding sources, grant writing, meeting with potential funders, program evaluation, support for diversity, expanding the community's support of the agency, and other fund-raising (e.g., sales, raffles, bingo). Eleven of the 12 leaders reported that they did "well" or "ok" at supporting diversity, planning programs and services, and recruiting volunteers. None of the leaders reported that their agencies did well in the areas of board leadership, identifying potential grant or other funding sources, or meeting with potential funders, although several agencies reported that they did "ok" in these areas.

At least 10 of the 12 leaders indicated that they "definitely" wanted assistance in building their capacities to identify potential non-grant funding (n = 11), identify potential grant sources (n = 10), meet with potential funders (n = 10), conduct strategic planning (n = 10), and develop board leadership (n = 10). At least three-fourths of leaders also desired assistance in building their capacities in grant writing (n = 9), other fund-raising (n = 9), and program evaluation (n = 9).

In response to an open-ended question asking leaders to describe the qualifications or characteristics that they desired in capacity-building trainers, two or more leaders said that they should have knowledge of and experiences with multiple cultures (n = 5), the ability to tailor training to meet their needs (n = 3), some college or a degree in the training area (n = 2), or a malleable schedule (n = 2). After responding to this open-ended question, leaders were asked to rate 12 trainer characteristics, developed by the researcher in conjunction with ethnic community leaders, as either Very Important, Sort of Important, or Not Important. At least 12 of the 13 leaders rated "Experience with other cultures" (n = 13), "Experience in providing training" (n = 13), "Good listener" (n = 13), and "Expert in training area" (n = 12) as being either Very Important or Sort of Important, with more than two-thirds of the leaders rating each of these characteristics as Very Important. The remaining characteristics also were considered to be either Very or Sort of Important by

the majority of leaders, although only 8 or fewer leaders considered these items to be Very Important. The two characteristics that were most often rated as Not Important were “Member of my ethnic community” ( $n = 5$ ) and “Bilingual in English and the community’s language” ( $n = 5$ ).

### *DISCUSSION*

All emerging ethnic agencies whose leaders participated in this study are engaging in community-building activities. Findings support Jenkins’s (1981) conclusion that ethnic agencies support and encourage cultural awareness or consciousness. In addition, ethnic agencies in this sample focus on “community identity and responsibility” as did the African American agency described by Jackson-White, Dozier, Oliver, and Gardner (1997, p. 247) and teach history and culture as a means of transformation, as described by O’Donnell and Karanja (2000).

The four primary purposes of community building that emerged from the data are compatible with the community-building literature that emphasizes the importance of fostering connections among community members as the basis for mutual support (McKnight, 1997; Weil, 1996), providing “cultural, social, and recreational opportunity” (Sviridoff & Ryan, 1997, p. 130), and building on community assets (McKnight, 1997). It is critical to recognize that the primary purposes that emerged from the data directly or indirectly address the effects of racism and/or nativism. Building support networks allows community members to counter their invisibility in the larger society and reinforces a sense of pride in themselves and their communities. Providing opportunities to “give back” to their communities increases self-esteem and reinforces skills within a society that often “dehumanizes” them. Building bridges, likewise, is intended to counter racism through education, and increasing the power of communities directly addresses the lack of power experienced by communities of color in our racist society.

Findings from this study also indicate that ethnic agencies have characteristics conducive to building strong communities. Language skills, strong community networks, and trustworthiness all are critical factors necessary for building strong communities. As described by Rivera and Erlich (1998), ethnic agency actors—as community insiders—are better able to understand and develop interventions consistent with the situations of their communities. Most of all, agency actors have a strong commitment to improve the circumstances of their communities rather

than seeking only to address the problems of individuals. This final attribute, consistent with the literature about ethnic agencies (Arches, 1997; Iglehart & Becerra, 1995; Jenkins, 1981) is critical to the success of community-building efforts.

As with all communities, differences among community members presented obstacles to building stronger organizations and communities. Almost half of the leaders indicated that although they had much community involvement, their agencies encountered some barriers in building inclusive communities. Some leaders indicated that social class differences, ethnic politics, cultural traditions, or community mobility prevented involvement of some community members.

Leaders indicated that, as with other emerging organizations, emerging ethnic agencies need to build their organizational capacities if they are to reach their full potential. Leaders perceived that they were adept at supporting diversity, planning programs and services, and recruiting volunteers. None of the leaders, however, was satisfied with her/his board leadership, nor with the agency's skills in identifying potential funding sources and meeting with potential funders. In addition to desiring capacity-building assistance in these areas, leaders indicated that they desired guidance in strategic planning, grant writing, program evaluation, recruiting volunteers, expanding the community's support of the agencies, financial management, and staff development.

### ***IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION***

Although all leaders who participated in this study described their agencies as "struggling to survive," findings indicate that they are making tremendous contributions toward building stronger communities. Whether as "insiders" or "outsiders," practitioners concerned with empowerment within communities of color can support the work of ethnic agencies in several ways.

Leaders indicated a desire for capacity-building assistance in order to thrive so they can continue to serve their communities. A particularly important finding of this study is that while almost all leaders desired that trainers have knowledge of and experience with members of their ethnic communities, leaders were not as likely to indicate that being a member of their ethnic community was crucial. Thus, findings from this study suggest that community "outsiders" can offer the capacity-building assistance desired by leaders of emerging ethnic agencies.

As is implied by leaders' desire that a trainer be a "good listener," it is critical that a practitioner approach this work as a "teacher-learner" (O'Donnell & Karanja, 2000, p. 78). Such an approach will ensure that training will lead to the development of organizational processes and structures that meet agencies' perceived needs and are consistent with the traditions and cultures of the agencies' communities, in addition to creating an agency that outside funders consider to be stable enough for the awarding of grants and contracts. In addition, this approach has the potential to lead to the development of innovative organizational structures and processes that may inform the wider social service community.

Trainers may want to consider developing a training-of-trainers format that allows participants to share their new knowledge and skills with other agency actors and other community-based organizations (Ramos & Ferreira-Pinto, 2002). Trainers utilizing this approach, however, should take care that the training is flexible enough to meet the needs of each participating agency.

Community practitioners also may assist ethnic agencies in their work to build bridges with other communities. In addition to supporting their existing efforts, practitioners might assist leaders in developing intergroup dialogues (DuBois & Hutson, 1997; Zúñiga & Nagda, 1993) if such an intervention is consistent with communities' cultures. These dialogues might be useful in building bridges not only among communities, but within communities that are experiencing conflict related to intergenerational, social class, or other differences.

Community outsiders also can serve as allies for ethnic agencies by advocating with funders to make two changes critical to supporting emerging ethnic agencies. This role is consistent with the call of Rivera and Erlich (1998) for community outsiders to fill secondary or tertiary, rather than primary, roles in organizing communities of color. First, funders need to be educated about the important work such agencies are doing in building cultural capital. Second, funders can be helped to understand that institution building is indeed an important endeavor worthy of funding.

Practitioners also can assist ethnic agencies in conducting research about their interventions. What approaches are effective in encouraging more community members to become involved in their efforts? What types of community-building strategies are most effective with which communities? Such information then can be shared with other ethnic agencies in similar situations.

Rivera and Erlich (1998) state that “Although [communities of color] get little attention or help from mainstream society—indeed, in some areas, overt opposition is more typical—many of those communities are trying to tackle their problems with strategies unique to their situations” (p. 8). Findings from this study indicate that ethnic agencies are leading this critical work. As social workers concerned with social justice, it is imperative that we cease to ignore these agencies, and instead support their efforts (Iglehart & Becerra, 1996). In doing so, we will be playing a part in making these agencies stronger and more visible as they work to strengthen their communities.

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