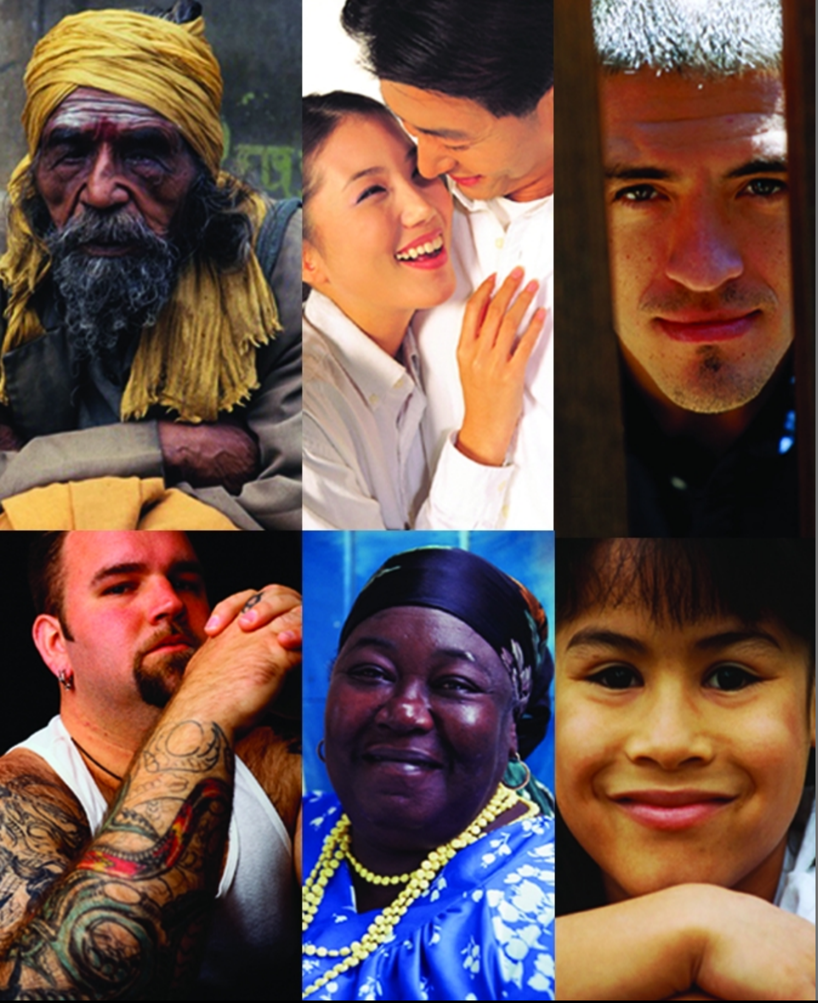

Intermediary Development Series

Identifying and Promoting Promising Practices

Compassion Capital Fund

Intermediary Development Series

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Compassion Capital Fund

The National Resource Center gratefully acknowledges the expert and experienced practitioners who assisted in the development of *The Intermediary Development Series* guidebooks:

Acquiring Public Grants
Building Multiple Revenue Sources
Delivering Training and Technical Assistance
Designing Sub-Award Programs
Establishing Partnerships
Identifying and Promoting Promising Practices
Managing Public Grants
Measuring Outcomes

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Welcome to *The Intermediary Development Series*—a multi-volume series designed to outline the key steps and elements necessary to help intermediaries build capacity in the faith-based and community-based organizations (FBO/CBOs) they serve. This series represents more than the sharing of information. It represents a common commitment to an intermediary's ideals—providing the most effective services in a more efficient manner to the grassroots organizations that are reaching those in our country with the greatest needs.

Who is the audience for *The Intermediary Development Series*?
An *intermediary* is something that exists between two persons or things, or someone who acts as an agent or mediator between persons or things. An intermediary organization, then, exists between the people with the resources and the organizations needing the resources—namely finances or information.

The Compassion Capital Fund, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, helps FBO/CBOs build capacity and improve their ability to provide social services to those in need. In this context, an intermediary acts as a mediator between the Federal government and grassroots organizations to help accomplish these goals. This series will prove useful to both existing and emerging intermediaries (those currently funded through CCF as well as an expanded audience of potential recipients) and the FBO/CBOs they serve.

What is *The Intermediary Development Series*?
Think of it as help when and where it's most needed—a ready reference for common priority issues and comprehensive answers to critical questions. It was developed as a key component of the Compassion Capital Fund in response to the questions and concerns consistently posed by intermediaries representing all areas of expertise and experience levels. The following titles are included in this eight-volume series:

Acquiring Public Grants
Building Multiple Revenue Sources
Delivering Training and Technical Assistance
Designing Sub-Award Programs
Establishing Partnerships
Identifying and Promoting Promising Practices
Managing Public Grants
Measuring Outcomes

How is *The Intermediary Development Series* used?
It is intended to be used as a practical guide for intermediaries to help FBO/CBOs in a variety of tasks including securing more funding, providing services more effectively or on an increased scale and also helping them operate more efficiently. As such, it's flexible—readers who wish to use it as a self-guided reference for specific questions are likely to keep it nearby. Key terms (bolded within the text) are defined in a glossary of terms included in the appendix of each guidebook. It's also comprehensive—emerging intermediaries may find the volume, *Delivering*

Training and Technical Assistance, especially helpful for more in-depth assistance. Finally, regardless of the audience, its user-friendly format makes it easy to share with the variety of organizations intermediaries serve.

Who developed *The Intermediary Development Series*?
This series was developed for the Department of Health and Human Services by the National Resource Center—an information clearinghouse designed to provide customized technical assistance, specialized workshops and other useful tools to help increase intermediaries' scale, scope and effectiveness. Expert practitioners were enlisted to develop and field-test each topic in *The Intermediary Development Series*, ensuring each volume would provide accurate and, most of all, *practical* answers to common questions.

Identifying and Promoting Promising Practices

By reading this particular volume in *The Intermediary Development Series*, intermediary organizations will be equipped with the knowledge and information needed to be able to identify, validate and promote best practices among themselves and the faith-based and community-based organizations they serve.

In their most basic form, best practices can be said to be no more or no less than practices that have been tested and found to work "on the street" for a number of practitioners. After reading this guidebook, intermediaries will better understand the key elements required to identify and promote promising practices including:

- Understanding what best and promising practices are
- How to identify existing best and promising practices
- How to identify and validate new best practices
- How to promote best and promising practices among the FBO/CBOs they serve.

This guidebook will also help organizations answer these key questions:

- Why are best practices important?
- What are the differences between research validated best practices, field tested best practices and promising practices?
- How do you identify existing best practices?
- How do you identify and validate new best practices?
- What are some current examples where best practices for FBO/CBOs are being identified?
- What are some useful tools for teaching others to identify and incorporate best practices?

Identifying and Promoting Promising Practices Overview

Intermediaries are the organizations best positioned and equipped to assist in identifying best **practices** and promoting their use. Faith-based and community organizations, on the other hand, are the organizations that will most benefit from incorporating best practices into their organizational systems and structures.

What Are Best Practices?

The process of identifying and incorporating best practices was first utilized extensively in the business sector in areas such as manufacturing operations, information technology and health care management. Over the past decade, increasing efforts have been made to encourage the adoption of best practice methodologies within the nonprofit sector. While some progress has been made, the broad acceptance of best practices as a key management tool for the nonprofit sector has only happened in the last few years.

As awareness of the issue of best practices has grown, the need for the development of a standardized skill set in identifying, validating and promoting best practices has surfaced. To date, this skill set has resided predominantly in research-based institutions such as universities and policy research institutes. More recently, work has begun to define and develop methodologies more broadly used by operating nonprofits and nonprofit intermediaries. Since these practitioner organizations generally focus on providing direct program services, or on capacity building activities, they often do not have access to the research skills or other resources used by research institutions to identify best practices. However, nonprofits have a definitive need for tools that are accessible and useful in addressing the issues of identifying and promoting best practices.

It is also important to note that there currently is no single standardized definition for what constitutes a best practice within the nonprofit sector. A review of the literature on best practices in the nonprofit sector clearly indicates that different organizations use different criteria for identifying a best practice. This is also true across sectors—different definitions are used within the business world and the healthcare industry, for example.

In addition to a variety of definitions, there is also limited agreement on the terms used to refer to a best practice. Often, the terms, "best practice" and "effective practice" are used interchangeably to refer to the same set of criteria. And some organizations identify the broad category of best or effective practices and then differentiate levels of practices within the broader definition.

In spite of these broad variations in definitions and terminology, a preliminary review of practitioner literature as it relates to the nonprofit sector does suggest that there is some common use of and criteria for identifying best practices. For example, a general working definition used by the Department of Health and Human Services in referring to a promising practice is:

> "A 'promising model' is defined as one with at least preliminary evidence of effectiveness in small-scale interventions or for which there is potential for generating data that will be useful for making decisions about taking the intervention to scale and generalizing the results to diverse populations and settings."[1]

[1] Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Program Announcement. *Federal Register*, Vol. 68, No. 131, (July 2003), p. 40974

For the purposes of this guidebook, it is useful to distinguish between three different types of practices: ***research validated*** *best practices*, ***field tested*** *best practices and promising practices*.

- **Research Validated Best Practice**
  A program, activity or strategy that has the highest degree of proven effectiveness supported by objective and comprehensive research and evaluation.

- **Field Tested Best Practice**
  A program, activity or strategy that has been shown to work effectively and produce successful outcomes and is supported to some degree by subjective and objective data sources.

- **Promising Practice**
  A program, activity or strategy that has worked within one organization and shows promise during its early stages for becoming a best practice with long term sustainable impact. A promising practice must have some objective basis for claiming effectiveness and must have the potential for replication among other organizations.

The following chart provides a comparison of the criteria characterizing each type of practice:

Criteria for Differentiating Types of Practices	
Research Validated Best Practice	■ Proven effectiveness in addressing a common problem. ■ Proven effectiveness in more than one organization and in more than one context. ■ Replicability on a broad scale. ■ Conclusive data from comparison to objective benchmarks with positive results. ■ Conclusive data from a comprehensive and objective evaluation by an external, qualified source (most often an academic institution or individual with the appropriate academic credentials).
Field Tested Best Practice	■ Effectiveness in addressing a common problem. ■ Effectiveness in more than one organization and in more than one context. ■ Replicability on a limited scale. ■ Supporting data from comparison to objective benchmarks with positive results. ■ Supporting data from an internal assessment or external evaluation.
Promising Practice	■ Suggested effectiveness in addressing a common problem. ■ Successful use in one organization and context. ■ Potential for replicability. ■ Limited supporting data from comparison to objective benchmarks with positive results. ■ Limited supporting data from internal assessment.

Differentiating between research validated and field tested best practices acknowledges that much of the work with practitioners to identify best practices does not, and realistically cannot, pass the high standard of research due to resource limitations in staff time and organizational finances.

As a result, we will focus on field tested best practices with the intention that the knowledge and tools provided here will enable **intermediaries** and **FBO/CBOs** to move toward a higher degree of **programmatic** and **organizational** excellence through the identification and incorporation of field tested best practices. In order to meet this goal, the guidebook draws on the theory provided by the academic community for a sound approach and methodology, but leans toward the practitioner in terms of implementation.

For the purposes of this guidebook, a practice qualifies as a best practice when it meets the following criteria:

- Addresses a common problem experienced by a broad spectrum of organizations.
- Works effectively to address the problem in more than one organizational setting and more than one context.
- Has shown replicability at least on a limited scale.
- Compares positively to data gathered from other organizations and research studies of other practices addressing the same problem.
- Shows supporting data from internal assessments or external evaluations.

Understanding Best Practices

The Definition of a Practice

When identifying a best practice it is important to begin with a clear understanding of what qualifies as a practice. We have already established that a practice can be defined as a program, activity or strategy. A practice can also be a:

- System
- Methodology
- Process
- Formula
- Technique
- Tactic
- Approach

What is important is that the practice has clearly defined parameters that can be assessed for effectiveness and compared against other similar practices.

The Dimensions of Best Practices

A second factor to keep in mind is that for purposes of nonprofit, social service organizations, there are six key dimensions where practices reside. Each of these dimensions is equally valid and equally important to the long term success and effectiveness of organizations. Therefore, it is important to identify and incorporate best practices from each of these six dimensions. Following is a brief description of each of the key dimensions for best practices.

One: Programmatic Practices
The programmatic dimension includes those parts of an organization involved in responding to an issue or problem through providing some type of service. Areas for best practice use within the programmatic dimension can include, but are not limited to:

- Needs assessment
- Program design
- Work plans
- Project management
- Information or reporting systems
- Community organizing
- Volunteer recruitment
- Evaluation

Two: Organizational Practices
The organizational dimension includes those areas of the organization that impact the effective implementation and management of programs. Areas for best practice use within the organizational dimension include, but are not limited to:

- Governance
- Human resources management
- Financial management
- Grant acquisition
- Grant management
- Strategic planning
- Partnerships and collaborations
- Outcomes and quality improvement
- Informational technology management
- Fundraising
- Marketing

Three: Generalizable Practices
Generalizable best practices are those practices that apply broadly to most nonprofit organizations regardless of the sector they serve. An example of a generalizable best practice would be board development, as this applies to almost any nonprofit serving all sectors.

Four: Context Specific Practices
Context specific best practices apply only to organizations working in a specific context such as those running after-school programs or homeless shelters. Practices developed for use within a specific program context may be specifically valid for another similar program context, but they probably are not generally valid across a broad range of applications.

A best practice that works well for one FBO/CBO may not necessarily work well for all FBO/CBOs. Each organization is different and has is working within its own context and sector. What is a best practice for one organization may in fact be a very poor practice for another organization.

For example, the majority of FBO/CBOs may have a need for best practices in public sector funding. However, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work as each organization will have its own particular context and needs within the arena of public sector funding. Instead, the general principles underlying acquiring and managing public sector funding will need to be adapted to fit the particular context of the FBO/CBOs served. You will want to make sure that best practices appropriately fit the context in which they are being applied.

Five: Present Need Practices

Present needs are those areas of current programmatic and organizational operations in which FBO/CBOs are in need of identifying and incorporating best practices to increase and enhance capacity. You will want to work with FBO/CBOs to identify those domains that are vital to current operations and then to further determine the specific areas within each domain in need of best practices. The list of present needs may appear to be mundane, but this can be very positive. It will help you focus on building strength into the basics of programmatic and organizational operations in the organizations you serve. Present best practice needs may include areas such as:

- Program design
- Project implementation
- Strategic planning
- Human resources management
- Volunteer management
- Private sector fund development
- Partnership development
- Program evaluation

Six: Future Need Practices

Present needs are important in terms of ensuring that the basic programmatic and organizational practices of FBO/CBOs are sound. However, it is vital to the **capacity-building** effort to identify those needs that will impact areas of future operations. You will want to engage in a discussion with the organizations you serve to determine the best practices they need in order to be able to move into new areas of programmatic and organizational operations.

Six Key Dimensions of Best Practices

Programmatic Practices
Organizational Practices
Generalizable Practices
Context Specific Practices
Present Need Practices
Future Need Practices

For example, while many FBO/CBOs may not currently receive any public sector funding, they may have a strong desire to pursue public sector funding opportunities in the future under the new government guidelines for faith-based and community initiatives. This becomes an area of need for best practice identification and incorporation affecting the future capacity of the organization.

Some additional areas of future best practice needs may include:

- Acquiring public sector funding
- Grant management
- Outcomes measurement
- Developing and managing partnerships and collaborations
- Developing and managing cross-sector partnerships
- Research design

Potential Benefits of Best Practices

It is important to understand the impact identifying and incorporating best practices can have on an organization's success. Best practices can offer intermediaries and FBO/CBOs significant long term benefits including, but not limited to:

- Improved quality of services offered to clients/beneficiaries.
- Cost savings resulting from increased productivity and efficiency.
- Increased quantity of services offered to clients.
- Improved use of resources by avoiding "reinventing the wheel."
- Identification and replacement of poor practices with proven strategies and programs.
- Increased funding from public and private funders interested in funding programs and strategies based on a proven track record of success.
- Cost effectiveness resulting from using limited resources for increased impact and outcomes.
- Increased performance from management and staff.

Key Tasks Regarding Best Practices

1. *Identifying Best Practice Needs among FBO/CBOs*—In order to effectively build capacity among FBO/CBOs, it is vital for you to identify the specific training and technical assistance needs of these organizations and to target the promotion of best practices to meet these needs. To do this, you will need to both identify and prioritize the needs of the FBO/CBOs you serve.

2. *Identifying Existing Best Practices*— Intermediary organizations can identify existing best practices that have already been validated to meet the criteria of a best practice and that meet the needs of the FBO/CBOs served. The primary way in which you can identify existing best practices is through conducting research examining those practices that have been identified and validated by other social service organizations and academicians.

3. *Identifying and Validating New Best Practices*—When new best practices first surface, they often meet only the criteria for a promising practice because they have not yet undergone the **validation** process necessary to qualify as an effective practice. It is your task to help FBO/CBOs identify, document and validate these potential best practices.

4. *Promoting and Fostering Best Practices among FBO/CBOs*—The end goal for intermediary organizations is to identify a number of validated best practices in both the programmatic and organizational dimensions that meet the current and future needs of the FBO/CBOs they serve and then distribute these best practices through providing training and technical assistance.

This guidebook will provide practical tools that can be incorporated into an intermediary organization's training materials to assist in teaching these concepts to FBO/CBOs as a key component of capacity building. For more information and tools for capacity building among FBO/CBOs, see the *Delivering Training and Technical Assistance* guidebook, part of the National Resource Center's *Intermediary Development Series*.

Identifying Best Practice Needs

In order to effectively build capacity among FBO/CBOs, it is vital for you to identify the specific training and technical assistance needs of these organizations and to target the promotion of best practices to meet these needs. To do this, you will need to both identify and prioritize the needs of the organizations you serve.

Methods for Identifying Needs

Some intermediaries may have already conducted needs assessments among the FBO/CBOs they serve as part of other capacity building exercises. If so, this information can be used to determine categories of need for best practice identification and promotion.

However, many intermediaries may need to conduct new needs assessments specifically focused on identifying those areas in which FBO/CBOs are in need of best practices. In cases where intermediaries are serving organizations from around the country, the use of surveys, conference calls, etc., may be the best way to obtain feedback regarding needs. Below is a suggested methodology for conducting a needs assessment.

Sample Process for Identifying and Prioritizing Needs

Step One: Ask each FBO/CBO to list the top 8-10 practices that they feel are most important to the *present* success of their organization and the top 8-10 practices that they feel are the most important to the *future* success of their organization. Practices from both the programmatic and organizational dimensions should be included.

Step Two: Gather the lists of best practice needs and begin the process of consolidating these needs into broad categories based on areas of overlapping consensus among the FBO/CBOs.

Step Three: Consolidate and narrow down the list of present and future best practice needs to between 25-30 needs.

Step Four: The consolidated list of 25-30 present and future best practice needs is then distributed back to the FBO/CBOs for a forced ranking exercise in order to end up with a prioritized list of best practices.

Step Five: To conduct the forced ranking exercise, ask the FBO/CBOs to pick the top 10 best practice needs from the final consolidated list of 25-30 needs that has been distributed and then to rank their top 10 picks in order of priority from 1 through 10.

Step Six: These ranked lists are then returned to the intermediary organization and compiled and consolidated a final time. This ranking exercise should result in a list of 10-15 practices that consistently scored the highest among the group of FBO/CBOs.

Step Seven: The final list defines the categories of present and future programmatic and organizational operations for which best practices will be identified and incorporated.

Checklist for Identifying and Prioritizing Needs

- ❏ Assess present and future needs
- ❏ Consolidate needs into broad categories, and narrow list to 25-30
- ❏ FBO/CBOs rank broader needs into "Top Ten Picks"
- ❏ Consolidate into top 10-15 best practice needs

Identifying Best Practices

In order to identify and promote best practices as part of the capacity building services offered to FBO/CBOs, you have two options:

- Identify *existing* best practices that have already been validated to meet the criteria of a best practice and that meet the needs of the FBO/CBOs served.

  OR

- Identify and validate *new* best practices that meet the needs of the FBO/CBOs served.

You may want to do a combination of both, identifying existing practices where possible, and new practices where needed to fill in the gaps in knowledge and practice. Let's take a closer look at each of these options.

How to Identify and Validate Existing Best Practices

There are several starting points for you to begin the process of conducting research to identify best practices. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Use the National Resource Center's *Intermediary Development Series* guidebooks to identify best practices in key areas of nonprofit operations. Each of the guidebooks in the series provides detailed information and resources regarding a key area of capacity building for FBO/CBOs. This is a great place to begin the process of identifying existing best and promising practices.

2. Utilize the articles, resources and websites included in this guidebook and the Appendix to search for best practices in a certain dimension or sector.

3. Identify existing best practices through networking with other nonprofit organizations and academics to determine the practices they have identified as successful. Suggested organizations and groups for networking to identify best practices are listed below. If the source being used does not fit one of these categories, exercising due diligence will ensure that the source is using sound processes and criteria to select and evaluation best practices.

   - National and local foundations
   - Regional Associations of Grantmakers (RAGs)
   - State and Federal grant programs
   - Universities and academia
   - National and local think tanks and research institutes
   - United Ways
   - Other corporate giving programs
   - National policymaker associations such as the U.S. Conference of Mayors or the National Governor's Association
   - Faith-based networks and associations such as the Christian Community Development Association or the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability
   - State and national nonprofit associations

4. You can also search for existing best practices through utilizing searchable web-based databases that house descriptions of best practices. Some sample sources are included in the Appendix.

The primary way in which you can identify *existing* best practices is through conducting thorough literature reviews to pinpoint those practices that have been identified and validated by other social service organizations and academicians. For example, the University of Nebraska, a 2002 **Capital Compassion Fund (CCF)** grantee, has identified a research validated best practice for use by the behavioral health FBO/CBOs it serves—the Wraparound approach. The University's NEBHANDS Project, focusing on creating an integrated behavioral healthcare system for the State of Nebraska, is providing extensive training and individual consultations to assist FBO/CBOs in implementing Wraparound.

Wraparound is an approach to treatment to help families (typically those with the most challenging children) function more effectively in the community. Wraparound empowers parents by involving them in the planning and implementation of the services for their family.

The approach has been extensively researched by social scientists and defined as a best practice.[2] In providing training and technical assistance on Wraparound, NEBHANDS staff not only provides mentoring themselves, but the team has engaged an expert in the field to conduct video conferencing training and to provide one-on-one coaching to organizations. In addition, FBO/CBOs desiring to implement Wraparound are linked with local experts with extensive experience in the treatment approach.

St. Vincent de Paul Village (Father Joe's Villages), a 2002 CCF grantee, has been cited by the University of Southern California's Center for Religion and Civic Culture as an organization demonstrating "promising practices" in the provision of comprehensive care for homeless individuals and families. On their website, the Center outlines why St. Vincent de Paul's programs qualify as promising practices:

> **St. Vincent de Paul Village represents an effective and innovative provider of homeless services. First, it has been a groundbreaker in programming, pioneering what is now widely referred to as the Continuum of Care model. Next, it has successfully widened its scope through meaningful collaboration with other community organizations in both the public and private spheres. And recently, it has been a leader in leveraging the capacity of other faith-based organizations through the Village Training Institute, a Compassion Capital Fund based initiative. Thus, St. Vincent de Paul Village offers many features that have proven to be effective, can be replicated by other similar organizations, and hold promise of attracting stable public and private financial support.[3]**

[2] Burchard, J.D., Bruns, E.J., & Burchard, S.N. (2002) The Wraparound Approach. In B. Burns & K. Hoagwood (Eds.) Community-Based Interventions for Children and Families. Oxford: Oxford University Press. University of Vermont website: www.uvm.edu/~wrapvt/approach.htm.

[3] St. Vincent de Paul Village, San Diego. Current Roster of Promising Practices. Private Partnerships and California's Faith Communities: The Center for Religion and Civic Culture. The University of Southern California. www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/religion_online/welfare/promising.html.

Validating Existing Best Practices

Because there is such a wide range of definitions and criteria applied to best practices among the social service sector, it is important for you to carefully assess the validity of best practices that are identified through research. One way to do this is to ask several key questions:

- What process was used to select this practice?
- What criteria were used to measure the success of this practice?
- Was the practice compared against relative objective data with positive results, or did it appear to have been primarily compared against subjective data?
- Was the practice tested in multiple settings for replicability and adaptability?
- Was the practice nominated by one person or organization or by a number of organizations or individuals?
- Is there enough information included in the description of the practice to enable implementation or adaptation?
- Does the source of the best practice appear to be a valid resource for identifying best practices?
- Is the source transparent in terms of the process and criteria used to select best practices?

How to Identify and Validate New Best Practices

Faith-based and community organizations are on the front lines where new best practice identification takes place. Therefore, it is often among FBO/CBOs that new best practices will first surface. As a result, it is vital that FBO/CBOs are made aware of the key areas in which best practices are being sought.

There are three key steps involved in the process of identifying and validating a new best practice including: 1) finding potential best practices; 2) describing and documenting best practices; and 3) validating best practices through a comparative assessment.

Step One: Finding Potential Best Practices

For those intermediaries that need or want to identify and validate new best practices, the primary place to find these potential best practices will be among the FBO/CBOs they serve. Some intermediaries may decide that it is most appropriate for them to focus on identifying new best practices only among those organizations who have received sub-awards under the CCF grant. Other intermediaries may want to broaden the scope to include both sub-awardees and other FBO/CBOs involved in related projects. Still other intermediaries may decide to include the entire range of FBO/CBOs they serve.

As you begin the process of identifying new best practices there are two primary ways in which these potential best practices can surface.

1. The FBO/CBOs can self-identify a potential best practice and submit it to the intermediary organization for documentation and validation. United Way of Massachusetts Bay and its Compassion

Capital Fund grant partner, the Black Ministerial Alliance, use their sub-award program to identify and fund select FBO/CBOs whose programs demonstrate promising youth practices.

Through the sub-award application process, each FBO/CBO applying for a sub-award must provide documentation (program components, outcomes) to support that its program exemplifies one or more promising practices. These applications became a pool representing potential promising youth programs. Volunteer peer reviewers then evaluate the applications, rank them according to set criteria and make a determination about sub-award funding. One of the funding criteria relates to the program's meeting best practice standards. The programs the reviewers select represent the project's promising youth practices programs.

2. You can identify potential best practices during training conducted among FBO/CBOs and flag them for follow-up. Consider including a component introducing the concept of best practices as part of the general capacity building training already being conducted among FBO/CBOs.

   This training can provide an overview, acclimating them to the definitions, benefits and uses of best practices. As training on different capacity building topics is conducted, FBO/CBOs will share stories and information regarding what they are doing in different arenas and what has and has not worked. Intermediaries can identify those groups that indicate they are experiencing success in a particular area for follow-up documentation and validation of the practice.

   For example, CCF intermediary, JVA Consulting, LLC, provides a workshop, *Designing a Fundable Program*, which equips FBO/CBOs to identify and incorporate best practices. Here is JVA's description of its training:

   Designing a Fundable Program
   In this workshop, participants will learn how to develop a strong program based on community needs and strategies that work. Organizations will first understand the term "best practices" and how to find and interpret best practices on the Internet. But what good are best practices if you don't know how to incorporate them into your program? Participants will leave this workshop with an understanding of how to align their program with strategies that work or adopt a program in its entirety. Finally, participants will learn how to put together an evaluation plan that will help them communicate their work to funders and continually improve their programs.

Training Ideas/Topics on Best or Promising Practices

1. The potential benefits of identifying best practices and incorporating best practices into organizational systems and methods as a vital part of the capacity building process.
2. Defining research validated best practices, field tested best practices, and promising practices.
3. The indicators that a program, activity or strategy may qualify as a best or promising practice, such as:
   - ❑ Favorite methods or strategies used by management, staff or beneficiaries.
   - ❑ Excitement around the results produced by a particular activity.
   - ❑ Patterns revealing consistently positive results over time.
   - ❑ Qualitative or anecdotal data from program reviews.
4. An overview of the process and methods the intermediary organization will use as they work with the FBO/CBOs to identify, validate and promote best practices.

Step Two: Describe and Document the Best Practice

Once a potential best practice has been identified and flagged for follow-up either by the intermediary organization or by FBO/CBOs themselves, the next step is to describe and document the potential best practice. The purpose of documenting the best practice is to provide a detailed description of the practice and its success in addressing the targeted problem.

Documenting a potential best practice differs from a typical program description in that different information in needed—information that can provide a basis for validation. This detailed description is then used to facilitate the process of validating the best practice.

EpiCenter, an online searchable database of effective practices sponsored by the National Service Research Center at the Corporation for National and Community Service, has suggested describing the practice in terms of the following components:

- The problem it solves
- The context in which it has been successful
- The evidence of its success
- The outcome or impact it helped to achieve[4]

Methods for Documenting a Best Practice

For many FBO/CBOs, the documentation process will be a new and more rigorous type of description process than they are used to doing. As a result, you will want to provide as much encouragement and assistance in the area of documentation as possible.

One of the best methodologies for documenting a potential best practice is to conduct either a *programmatic* or an *organizational* review of the practice.

The programmatic or organizational review draws predominantly on subjective data sources and is intended to:

- Identify the critical elements that are inherent to the practice.
- Capture procedural information supporting each critical element.
- Identify the tools, processes and systems that support the potential best practice.

Which type of review you'll want to use is dependent on whether the potential best practice falls into the programmatic or organizational dimension. While different individuals with varying skill sets are involved in each type of review, the process is largely the same for both. See the following helpful sample process of an organizational/programmatic review.

[4] www.nationalserverresources.org/epicenter

Organizational/Programmatic Review—Sample Process
1. ***Identify a review team***—The review team is made of individuals from the intermediary organization and can include a limited number of peer reviewers from other FBO/CBOs. The key to a strong review team is ensuring that the individuals on the team have the proper skill set and expertise for reviewing the practice at hand.
2. ***Create a standardized list of review questions***—This list of questions can be sent in advance to those FBO/CBOs who are involved in the programmatic or organizational review of a potential best practice. These questions provide an outline indicating the types of information and source documents needed to conduct the review so that the FBO/CBO can gather the appropriate staff and resources in advance.
3. ***Conduct the review***—The review team conducts the programmatic or organizational review on site at the FBO/CBO that has initially documented the best practice. The review is a collaborative "meeting of the minds" as the review team and FBO/CBO staff come together to try to identify the core elements of the potential best practice. The programmatic or organizational review can include an analysis of any source documents, policy and procedural manuals, etc. that the organization has on hand. However, the review team will also need to be prepared to create documentation where none currently exists. For example, the team may need to document the basic process flow of the potential best practice in terms of key steps. Or they may need to document procedural guidelines or policies that have previously only been implied or assumed. A vital part of the review process involves identifying and documenting knowledge about the potential best practice that has previously been so much a part of the organization and its staff that they are not consciously aware of it. Teasing out this "embedded" knowledge and making it explicit through documentation is a key task of the review team.
4. ***Analyze the review findings***—This critical step in the review process focuses on identifying the key elements of the practice and determining which elements are *proprietary* and which are *replicable*. Proprietary elements are those pieces of the methodology that work only in the specific context of the FBO/CBO where they originated or are methodologies that are original and not intended for public distribution or replication. Replicable elements are those pieces of the methodology that have demonstrated their effectiveness in more than one context or location and can therefore be replicated on a wider basis. The review team will want to document both the proprietary and replicable elements, although the replicable elements will be of most interest for use as a best practice.
5. ***Document the findings from the review***—Following the on-site programmatic or organizational review, the review team can document the findings based on the information from source documentation and interviews with FBO/CBO staff.
6. ***Meet with the FBO/CBO to present the review findings***—During this meeting, the findings of the review will be presented to the FBO/CBO for discussion and feedback. The methodology and critical elements of the potential practice will be presented and discussed.
7. ***Finalize the documentation and prepare for validation***—After the meeting with the FBO/CBO to present the findings and receive feedback, the review team will finalize the documentation of the potential best practice. At this point, the potential best practice is ready to enter into the validation process.

Step Three: Validate the Best Practice

The purpose of validation is to ensure that a potential practice meets the criteria required to be considered a best practice. Without the application of the type of validation process outlined here, a practice remains only a promising practice and is therefore much more limited in its potential to be used successfully by a broad spectrum of organizations.

Types of Validation Data

Validation involves a comparative assessment of the practice against both *objective* and *subjective* data. The best validation process will include a comparison and evaluation of the best practice against both categories of data.

Subjective data

Subjective data is data gathered from internal reviews, assessments, and feedback mechanisms regarding the success of the practice and is often more autobiographical or qualitative in nature. Sources for obtaining subjective data can include:

- Management and staff
- Customers/beneficiaries
- Internal auditors
- Reports from on the job experience
- Peers

Objective Data

Objective data is data gathered from sources both internal and external to the organization that provides an objective basis for comparison of the success of the best practice through like-kind analysis. Sources for obtaining objective data can include:

- Subject matter experts
- External auditors
- Consultants
- Research evidence
- Independent evaluations

Methods for Validating a Best Practice

There are two methods of comparative assessment that an intermediary can utilize: a *quantitative data* review and a *practitioner peer review*. Both are equal and valid options. However, if possible, a combination of some degree of both methods will yield the most useful results when working with practitioner organizations.

In order to choose which method or combination of methods may be the best fit, the intermediary organization may want to conduct some preliminary research in order to determine what comparative measures are available or what standards or guidelines exist that will qualify as a comparative standard for the potential best practice. The following is a detailed description of each method of comparative assessment:

Method One: Quantitative Data Review
The quantitative data review draws primarily on objective data sources to compare the findings produced in the programmatic or organizational review to similar best practices of other organizations. The purpose of the quantitative data review is to validate the results of the programmatic or organizational review through comparison to data gathered from sources external to the organization. The following is a listing of possible sources for finding comparative data:

- **National, Regional or Local Benchmark Data**—This type of data is most often found in program or organizational case studies conducted by external groups interested in assessing the scope of a problem and identifying those programs, activities or strategies that have proven most successful in solving the problem.
- **Case Studies of Organizational Performance**—This type of data can be drawn both from the FBO/CBO that initially documented the best practice, as well as from other social service organizations working in a similar geographical location or in the same or a similar sector.
- **Logic Models or Logical Frameworks in Program Design**—Logic Models are often used either in program design or program evaluation. Again, this type of data can be drawn from the FBO/CBO that initially documented the best practice, as well as from other social service organizations working in a similar geographical location or in the same or a similar sector.
- **Comparative/Competitive Market Analysis**—This type of data provides information about the external context in which the best practice has been functioning and can be particularly useful when evaluating the practice's potential for replicability.
- **Academic Research**—Academic research provides one of the most rigorous types of comparative data. You will want to look for studies conducted in the same geographic areas or around the same sector of activity as the best practice. Universities, think tanks and other academic institutions are great sources for academic research. However, many of the larger social service organizations may have on file reports of past or current academic research conducted on certain programs or practices that may also be a relevant source of data.

Method Two: Practitioner Peer Review
The practitioner peer review draws on the judgment of peers and other practitioner organizations to analyze and affirm the findings of the programmatic or organizational review of the potential best practice. This is accomplished through presenting the findings resulting from the programmatic or organizational review to a number of peers (individuals and organizations) to see if the findings hold up and meet with the general consensus of the practitioner community. The goal is to determine if there is agreement among practitioners that the practice does indeed qualify as a best practice.

The practitioner peer review is a critical step in the comparative assessment process in terms of building ownership for the FBO/CBO in the best practice. A practice that has received consensus among the faith-based or community organization's peers is far more likely to be embraced and incorporated into the FBO/CBO's organizational processes and structures.

Strengths and Limitations of the Two Methods of Comparative Assessment
The chart on the following page provides an overview of the strengths and the corresponding limitations of the two types of comparative assessments and can be useful to intermediaries in

helping to determine which type or combination of types of comparative assessment best fit for validating a particular best practice.

Once the new potential best practice has undergone the documentation and validation processes, the intermediary organization assigns the practice the appropriate determination according to the criteria outlined in the definition section above. The practice is determined to be either a field tested best practice or a promising practice.

Sources of Quantitative Data Summary

- ❑ National, Regional or Local Benchmark Data
- ❑ Case Studies of Organizational Performance
- ❑ Logic Models or Logical Frameworks in Program Design
- ❑ Comparative/Competitive Market Analysis
- ❑ Academic Research

Type of Comparative Assessment	Strengths	Limitations
Quantitative Data Review	1. Based on objective data. 2. Avoids the influence of personality or relationships in the assessment process. 3. Provides a new lens for viewing the best practice revealing previously unnoticed aspects of effectiveness. It can also depersonalize the results making it easier to adapt new attitudes toward or understanding of the practice.	1. It can be difficult to obtain complete "apples to apples" comparative data. 2. Limits ability to take into account the qualitative aspects of effectiveness that cannot readily be measured. 3. Reduces the best practice to a number or set of numbers that for social service and community development organizations often leaves out critical dimensions of community participation and personal life change that are vital concerns to FBO/CBOs.
Practitioner Peer Review	1. Provides immediate feedback from other practitioners engaged in similar programs or efforts. 2. Through the process of direct involvement in the selection of best practices, practitioners build a sense of ownership and therefore increase their receptivity toward adopting best practices and making organizational change.	1. Peers can often be only generally aware of the practices of other organizations and can lack the in-depth understanding needed to render sound comparative judgment. 2. Individual bias and organizational self-interest sometimes make it difficult for practitioners to render objective comparative judgment or be willing to admit that other organizations have practices that their organization may need to adopt.

Formal Evaluation: The Next Level

For organizations that want to go a step further and reach the highest level of research validated best practices, a formal evaluation or research component is the next step. A formal evaluation is essential in order to make the claim that a best practice is the best practice in the field. Formal evaluations are:

- Most often conducted by individuals or organizations that combine strong research capabilities with subject matter knowledge (e.g., academic institutions and private consulting businesses).
- Extremely intensive in terms of time and resources and, therefore, may be beyond the capacity of many FBO/CBOs.

While there are a number of advantages to conducting a formal evaluation and reaching the research validated best practice level, it is not necessary for a working use of best practices. Best practices are in essence simply a collection of programs, activities and methods that work and that others can implement with the strong likelihood of producing similar positive results. In this sense, evaluation provides certain advantages but is not necessary to meet the benchmark or standard of a best practice.

Key Steps in Promoting and Fostering Best Practices

There are many ways in which best practices can be promoted and fostered among FBO/CBOs, and each intermediary will have its own creative ways of doing this. For more information and ideas, see the *Delivering Training and Technical Assistance* guidebook, part of the National Resource Center's *Intermediary Development Series*.

It is critical to note the difference between communicating with FBO/CBOs about best practices and actually ensuring that FBO/CBOs incorporate the best practices into their organizational processes and structures. You are responsible for both the key tasks of promoting best practices (distribution) and fostering best practices (incorporation into the FBO/CBO).

Promoting and fostering best practices requires a combination of training and one-on-one consultation and technical assistance with FBO/CBOs. This task can be accomplished in one of two ways.

First, intermediary organizations can create peer-to-peer networks and communications systems that enable FBO/CBOs to share and exchange best practices among themselves. This peer-to-peer method of distribution places you in the role of organizer or facilitator.

A second way of promoting and fostering best practices among FBO/CBOs is for intermediary organizations to take the new and existing best practices that have been identified through research and validation and distribute these among FBO/CBOs through training and technical assistance. This direct training and distribution method places intermediaries in the familiar role of trainer and capacity builder. Each of these two methods has been outlined in greater detail below.

Peer-to-Peer Learning Method

A recommended starting point for promoting and fostering best practices among FBO/CBOs is for intermediary organizations to create peer-to-peer networks and communications systems that enable organizations to share and exchange best practices among themselves. FBO/CBOs working in similar sectors or locations can communicate with one another to share best practices and provide peer support in replicating or adapting practices in other organizations.

This method of promoting and distributing best practices provides an entry level, low cost and low effort venue for sharing best practices that yields high value for the FBO/CBOs. Through creating a "clearinghouse" for best practices, intermediaries function as a facilitator or organizer as well as a source of support for collaborations among organizations to learn and share.

There are several venues through which peer-to-peer learning can be enabled. The following list provides several examples but is by no means comprehensive.

1. *An online searchable database of best practices*—One way to enable peer-to-peer learning is to create an online searchable database of best practices where FBO/CBOs can post practices to share with their peers. The key to an effective online database is ensuring that posted practices meet a minimum standard of criteria and have employed a recognized validation pro-

cess, as well as ensuring that the database is searchable by sector, area of programmatic activity and organizational operations.

2. *List Serves*—A list serve is an e-mail mailing list that allows members to send messages to one another. A public list serve allows anyone on the public list to initiate communication with someone else. You can host a list serve that enables FBO/CBOs to sign up to communicate with one another regarding best practices and their adaptation, replication and implementation. For an example of a list serve, see the Community Technology Centers' Network website at www.ctcnet.org/connect/.
3. *Face-to-Face Peer Learning*—There are many ways for intermediaries to facilitate face-to-face learning among FBO/CBOs. Holding best practices peer learning groups as part of regular capacity building training seminars is one idea. Another is to form a best practice team made up of members from FBO/CBOs who design creative ways for sharing best practices among organizations.

Direct Training and Distribution Method

A second method for promoting and fostering best practices among FBO/CBOs is to take the new or existing best practices you have identified and distribute them through providing direct training and technical assistance.

Father Joe's Villages, noted earlier in the guidebook, has a best practice approach to addressing the needs of the homeless. Over the past seventeen years, it has frequently offered tours for interested parties. With the Compassion Capital Fund grant, Father Joe's Villages established the Village Training Institute (VTI) in 2002. VTI provides free workshops and mentoring on best practices and specializes in working with homeless populations in addition to other capacity building training for smaller faith-based and community organizations.

In order for FBO/CBOs to arrive at the point where they are incorporating best practices successfully, you will need to implement four key steps:

Step One—Match Supply with Demand

The first step in the process of promoting and fostering best practices is for you to determine which best practices to promote and to whom they will be promoted. Not all best practices will be a good fit for all the FBO/CBOs served by an intermediary. Therefore, you will want to match each best practice with those FBO/CBOs most in need of that type of practice.

Step Two—Define Elements of the Practice for Incorporation

In order to incorporate a best practice successfully, it will be important to help FBO/CBOs to determine which elements of the practice are best suited for incorporation and if the organizational structures needed to support the best practice are in place. The following is a list of key questions that can be asked in order to help intermediaries determine those elements of the practice to incorporate and if the support structures are adequate:

- Are the elements of the best practice clearly defined?
- Does it appear that the elements of the best practice to be incorporated will work within the organizational context of the FBO/CBO?

- Are the human resources needed to support the elements of the best practice in place?
- Are the financial resources needed to support the elements of the best practice in place?
- Are the technology and management systems needed to support the elements of the best practice in place?[5]

It is also important to note that many best practices are relatively simple and can be easily incorporated into an organizations structures and processes. For example, use of a new software program or making a modification to data collection can be relatively easy to adapt and implement

Step Three—Incorporate the Best Practice
You must help FBO/CBOs in facilitating the change from current practice to best practice. Training and technical assistance play a key role in this step as the knowledge needed to incorporate a best practice is most effectively transferred through face-to-face communication. Again, the guidebook, *Delivering Training and Technical Assistance*, part of the National Resource Center's *Intermediary Development Series*, can be a helpful resource in implementing this step.

Step Four—Evaluate the Success of the Best Practice
The final task in promoting and fostering best practices is to evaluate whether the best practice has been successfully incorporated into the FBO/CBO. You will want to develop you own timeframe for conducting follow-up evaluations based on the time needed to incorporate the best practice and duration of implementation needed before results are produced.

Four Key Steps to Incorporation of Best Practices[6]

Step 1 **Match Supply with Demand**	**Step 2** **Define Elements of the Practice for Incorporation**	**Step 3** **Incorporate the Best Practice**	**Step 4** **Evaluate the Success of the Best Practice**
Determine which FBO/CBOs will receive capacity building training in which best practice(s).	Determine which elements of the best practice are best suited for incorporation into the FBO/CBO and if the organizational structures needed to support the best practice are in place.	Assist FBO/CBOs in implementing organizational change from current practice to best practice.	Evaluate whether the best practice has been successfully incorporated into the FBO/CBO.
Intermediary's Role: Catalyst	Intermediary's Role: Facilitator	Intermediary's Role: Trainer	Intermediary's Role: Evaluator

5 Adapted from, "Guidelines for Transferring Effective Practices: A Practical Manual for South-South Cooperation." Commissioned by: CityNet, Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements, UNDP Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, and UNCHS Best Practice and Local Leadership Programme, (November 1998), p. 8.

6 Ibid, p. 10.

Current Initiatives in Faith-Based Best Practice Identification

Currently there are a number of initiatives and collaborations underway in both the practitioner and academic communities focused on identifying best practices. A few of these initiatives have been summarized below.

Branch Associates Research, Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families
Funded by CCF, the Branch Associates, located in Philadelphia, PA are conducting research into best practices and services. The title of the research project is, "Examining Services and Best Practices of Intermediary Organizations and the Faith-Based and Community Organizations They Serve." The purpose of the project is to examine the role of intermediaries in building capacity among FBO/CBOs, innovative and best practices among intermediaries, promising practices among FBO/CBOs and methods to evaluate the services provided by both intermediaries and FBO/CBOs. For more information, please visit the website at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccf/citizens/citz_resrch

Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC), University of Southern California
The CRCC is a research center studying the civic role of religion in Southern California. Funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts has enabled the launching of a new program to conduct interdisciplinary research on religion. In addition, CRCC's Faith at Work project conducts research regarding public/private partnerships in Southern California involving faith-based organizations. As part of Faith At Work, CRCC has identified promising practices among collaborating organizations and provides a searchable online archive of promising practices. For more information about CRCC, please visit their website at www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/religion_online/index.html.

Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society (CRRUCS), University of Pennsylvania
CRRUCS was founded in 2000 as part of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. The purpose of CRRUCS is to produce and disseminate empirical research about the role of religion in contemporary urban America. CRRUCS collaborates with other universities, think tanks and research institutes to examine the following topics: crime and religion; religion, health and spirituality; religion and survey research; religion and evaluation research; and civic engagement and spiritual capital. For more information, please visit the website at www.sas.upenn.edu/crrucs.

Faith and Service Technical Education Network (FASTEN)
FASTEN is an initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts focused on building capacity among faith-based organizations delivering social services in urban communities. The centerpiece of the FASTEN initiative is a website showcasing best practices. To learn more please visit the website at www.fastennetwork.org. The following four key partners work together under the FASTEN initiative, each with its own separate roles:

- Baylor University—Serves as FASTEN's resource for rigorous empirical research focused on identifying promising and exemplary practices in faith-based social service provision.

- National Crime Prevention Council—Conducts program reviews and assessment investigating effective practices in faith-based crime prevention programs, violence reduction efforts and mentoring of prisoners' children.
- Harvard University's "Executive Session on Faith-Based and Community Approaches to Urban Revitalization"—Equips public administrators with the information and skills needed for effective collaboration with local faith communities.
- Hudson Institute's Faith in Communities Initiative—Provides technical assistance, peer-to-peer learning, training and educational materials and research.

Faith in Communities Initiative, The Hudson Institute
With the new focus on the role of faith-based organizations in providing social services, the Hudson Institute recently launched the Faith in Communities Initiative. The goal of the initiative is to conduct research that contributes to the shaping of public policies that facilitate effective grassroots organizations and empower faith-based community practitioners through a variety of technical assistance and capacity building initiatives. For toolkit resources, ministry models, research articles and other resources, please visit the website at www.hudsonfaithincommunities.org .

Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), Philadelphia, PA
Public/Private Ventures is an action-based research, public policy and program development organization. As a national nonprofit with offices located in Philadelphia, New York City, and Oakland, CA, P/PV works to improve the effectiveness of social policies, programs and community initiatives, especially as they affect youth and young adults. P/PV's Replication and Expansion Unit works to identify effective practices and assist in the distribution and replication of these practices among social service programs and agencies. For more information, please visit the website at www.ppv.org.

The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy, Pew Charitable Trusts
The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy is an initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts, created to assess the emerging role of faith-based organizations in America's social service sector. This is accomplished through an independent review of current research and conducting new scientific research studies on the effectiveness and efficiency of faith-based organizations as compared to their secular counterparts. For more information about the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy, please visit the web site at www.religionandsocialpolicy.org.

Summary

CCF has designated the identification and promotion of best practices as one of the primary tasks that all intermediary organizations will carry out to some degree as part of their capacity building efforts. The following is a summary regarding identifying and promoting best practices among FBO/CBOs.

1. As you begin identifying best practices, it is important to keep in mind that involving FBO/CBOs in the process as much as possible at each step along the way is a critical way to build ownership and acceptance on the part of FBO/CBOs in the capacity building process. When it comes time to incorporate best practices into their organizational processes and structures, FBO/CBOs will already have a vested interest in the practice and be more inclined to make the necessary changes.

2. For the purposes of this guidebook, a distinction has been drawn between research validated best practices and field tested best practices. Research validated best practices are defined more narrowly as those practices which have been validated by thorough research and comparative assessments with practices of peer organizations across the U.S. Field tested best practices, on the other hand, have been shown to work effectively and produce successful outcomes and are supported to some degree by subjective and objective data sources.

3. As you begin to think about the different areas of social service organization operations that may be in need of best practice identification, it is essential to note that there are two different dimensions in which best practices can be found: the organizational dimension and the programmatic dimension. In addition, FBO/CBOs will be in need of best practices for areas of current programming and organizational structures, as well as for future programming and organizational operations.

4. In terms of identifying best practices, you can either work to identify existing best practices that have already been validated according to sound criteria and that meet the needs of the FBO/CBOs served. Or, you can work to identify and validate new best practices that meet the needs of the FBO/CBOs served. You may want to do a combination of both, identifying existing practices were possible and new practices where needed to fill in the gaps in knowledge and practice.

5. Whether you identify existing or new best practices, the process of validation is vital to both. In order to be considered a best practice, a practice must meet certain criteria including:

   - Effectiveness in addressing a common problem.
   - Effectiveness in more than one organization and in more than one context.
   - Replicability on a limited scale.
   - Supporting data from comparison to objective benchmarks with positive results.
   - Supporting data from an internal assessment or external evaluation.

The validation process is used to ensure that a practice meets the minimum standard of adhering to these criteria. You can either validate a new practice themselves or ensure that the validation process used by the source organization is programmatically sound.

6. All best practices contain two different types of elements: proprietary elements (related to the specific context of the originating organization) and replicable elements (general replicable on a broader scale). Pay particular attention to the process of separating out the elements that are replicable from those that are proprietary. The process for doing this can often be more art than science, and each intermediary will discover its own best method for going about this process.

7. Though a potential practice may have gone through the identification and validation process and have been determined to be a best practice, it is important to note that not all best practices work for all organizations. You will want to assess which FBO/CBOs can most benefit from each best practice and deliver training and technical assistance where it will have the most impact.

8. Once new or existing best practices have been identified, you have the key task of promoting best practices (distribution) and fostering best practices (incorporation into the FBO and CBO). Promoting and fostering best practices requires a combination of training and one-on-one consultation and technical assistance with FBO/CBOs.

Appendix

Resources

Articles and Studies

Anderson, Karen L. (comp.) “Best Definitions of 'Best Practices.'” *Foundation News & Commentary 40* (November-December 1999): p. 29.

A number of grantmaking professionals define what the term "best practices" means to them.

Backer, Thomas E. and John Bare. "Scanning the Environment for Philanthropic Best Practice Systems." *Foundation News & Commentary 40* (November-December 1999): p. 25-8.

Discusses the findings of the environmental scan used by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation of Miami to gather information on the use of evaluation, collaboration and best practices by foundations. Sidebars provide suggestions for foundations seeking to improve their philanthropic practice; examples of innovative foundation approaches to evaluation and collaboration; and a listing of related reports.

“Guidelines for Transferring Effective Practices: A Practical Manual for South-South Cooperation.” Commissioned by: CityNet, Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements, UNDP Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, and UNCHS Best Practice and Local Leadership Programme, (November 1998).

Discusses the principles involved in transferring effective practices and provides helpful charts, illustrations and lists.

Green, John C. and Sherman, Amy L. “Fruitful Collaborations: A Survey of Government Funded Faith-Based Programs in 15 States.” Hudson Institute Inc., (2002), www.hudsonfaithincommuncities.org.

A research study examining faith-based contracting for social services in 15 states to determine how many contracts each state held with faith-based organizations and how well the relationships were doing.

Johnson, Byron R.; Tompkins, Ralph Brett and Webb, Derek. “Objective Hope: Assessing the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Organizations: A Review of the Literature.” Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, www.sas.upenn.edu/crrucs/8_research_pdf/objective_hope.pdf.

Provides a systematic review of over 800 studies published in recent years, evaluating the effectiveness of faith-based organizations.

Nathan, Richard; Goggin, Malcom; Roper, Richard; and Wright, David. “Exploratory Research on Effectiveness.” (Transcript from Annual Conference, October 23, 2002, http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org.)

This article is a direct transcript from a workshop on exploratory research in effectiveness at The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy’s annual conference.

Orr, John and Spoto, Peter. "Promising Public Practices: Implementing Charitable Choice in California." www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/religion_online/welfare/pub_pubpractices.pdf

Discusses three promising public practices enhancing the ability of California's welfare agencies to interact more effectively with faith-based organizations in social service partnerships and collaboration.

Sherman, Amy L. "Empowering Compassion: The Strategic Role of Intermediary Organizations in Building Capacity Among and Enhancing the Impact of Community Transformers." Hudson Institute Inc., (2002), www.hudsonfaithincommuncities.org

Profiles the many different types of intermediary organizations and the various areas of capacity building that intermediary organizations are engaged in including a review of effective methodologies.

Yancy, Gaynor; Rogers, Robin; and Garland, Diana (Baylor University School of Social Work) and Netting, Elen F and O'Connor, Mary Katherine. "Identifying Effective Practices in Urban Faith-Based Social Service Programs: The Challenges of Designing and Conducting Research." www.religionandsocialpolicy.org.

Discusses the many challenges and issues involved in designing and conducting research on effective practices and provides a review of some of the research parameters chosen.

Web-based Resources

EpiCenter
www.nationalserviceresources.org/epicenter

Sponsored by the National Service Research Center, a service of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Epicenter is an online searchable database of effective practices for national and community service programs.

Faith at Work
wwwusc.edu/dept/LAS/religion_online/

Faith at Work is a project sponsored by the California Council of Churches and the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California and funded by the James Irvine Foundation. Faith at Work offers a website on Promising Practices featuring criteria for identifying promising practices and a searchable archive of Promising Practices.

PEPNet: Promising and Effective Practices Network
www.nyec.org/pepnet/

As part of the National Youth Employment Coalition, PEPNet is one of the country's premier resources on what works in youth development and employment. The PEPNet website offers an online index to effective practices featuring over 500 specific effective practices identified from PEPNet awardees.

Points of Light Foundation
www.pointsoflight.org/research
Provides a list of research efforts currently being undertaken by the Points of Light Foundation in the area of defining principles of excellence.

SAHMSA National Registry of Effective Programs
www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/
Provides a list of model programs that have proved effective in preventing or reducing substance abuse. The web site also includes information on defining and identifying effective practices and model programs.

UCLA Service Learning Clearinghouse
www.gseis.ucla.edu/slc/modelp.html
This web site provides a review of model programs in service learning and many links to course syllabi and to sites that describe model service-learning programs and courses.

Western CAPT
www.unr.edu/westcapt/bestpractices
The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's Western Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies website offers information on best practice identification and incorporation as well as a searchable database of best practices.

Whatcom Council of Nonprofits
www.wcnwebsite.org/practices
A downloadable file of an article entitled, "Best Practices for Executive Directors and Boards of Nonprofit Organizations" focuses on best practices in the area of organizational development.

Glossary

Capacity building – Capacity, very simply, is the ability to perform or produce. Therefore, to build the capacity of an organization, you do something that increases its ability to perform or produce. As a result of your capacity building activities, the nonprofit organization can accomplish more than it could before.

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) – Private, nonprofit organizations that have an overt, self-identified religious affiliation, background or motivation. FBOs include organizations from the broadest spectrum of faiths and beliefs. The use in this guidebook refers to those faith-based organizations that include an intentional social service or community development mandate within their mission and programs.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) – Private, nonprofit, organizations focused on providing social and community development services and targeting problems within a designated location. The term CBOs is generally used to differentiate between private nonprofits providing social services without an overt faith-based affiliation or identity (FBOs) and those private non-profits providing social services which are nonsectarian or secular in identity.

Capital Compassion Fund Demonstration Program (CCF or CCFDP) – The Compassion Capital Fund is a flagship initiative designed to build capacity and promote best practices among FBO/CBOs which have not traditionally had access to Federal resources for their social service programs. A key strategy of the CCF is to identify intermediary organizations already committed to building the capacity of FBO/CBOs and to utilize these existing intermediaries in the delivery of training, technical assistance and the sub-granting of Federal funds for capacity building.

Field tested best practice – A program, activity or strategy that has been shown to work effectively and produce successful outcomes and is supported to some degree by subjective and objective data sources.

Intermediary organizations – Those organizations that conduct significant activities designed to build the capacity of other organizations providing social service or community development programs which directly serve or service individuals and families at–risk or in need.

Practice – A program, activity or strategy used by an organization that has clearly defined parameters that can be assessed for effectiveness and compared against other similar practices.

Research validated best practice – A program, activity or strategy that has the highest degree of proven effectiveness supported by objective and comprehensive research and evaluation.

Validation – The process of conducting a comparative assessment using objective and subjective data to evaluate the effectiveness of a practice in solving the targeted problem.

Identifying and Promoting Best Practices Flow Chart

Task #1:
Identify Best Practice Needs among FBO/CBOs

Task #2:
Identify Existing Best Practices That Meet Identified Needs

- Conduct research to identify best practices
- Ensure criteria and selection process is valid

Task #3:
Identify & Validate New Best Practices

- Find potential best practices
- Describe and document the practice
- Validate the practice

Result
A number of existing & newly validated field tested best practices that meet the needs of the FBO/CBOs served by the intermediary.

Task #4:
Promote and Foster Best Practices

- Through peer-to-peer network and communication systems.
- Through direct training and technical assistance.

Result
Increased capacity for organizational and programmatic effectiveness among FBO/CBOs and intermediary organizations.

Field Tested Best Practice
A field tested best practice is a program, activity or strategy that has been shown to work effectively and produce successful outcomes and is supported to some degree by subjective and objective data sources.

Research Validated Best Practice
A research validated best practice is a program, activity or strategy that has the highest degree of proven effectiveness supported by objective and comprehensive research and evaluation.

Checklist for Identifying Existing Best Practices

❑ Task #1: Identify Best Practice Needs Among FBO/CBOs.

❑ Task #2: Identify Existing Best Practices

1. Conduct research to identify existing practices among social service organizations and academicians. Resources for research include:
   - ❑ Use the Guidebook series provided by CCF to identify best practices in key areas of nonprofit operations.
   - ❑ Utilize the articles, websites and resources included in the appendix and bibliography of this Guidebook.
   - ❑ Network with other nonprofit organizations, social service agencies and academic institutions to identify practices that have been deemed successful.
   - ❑ Utilize web-based searchable databases of best practices.

2. Ensure the practice meets the criteria for qualifying as a best practice. Criteria include:
   - ❑ Addresses a common problem experienced by a broad spectrum of organizations.
   - ❑ Works effectively to address the problem in more than one organizational setting and more than one context.
   - ❑ Has shown replicability on a limited scale.
   - ❑ Compares positively to data gathered from other organizations and research studies of other practices addressing the same problem.
   - ❑ Shows supporting data from internal assessments or external evaluations.

3. Assess the validity of the practice through asking the following key questions:
   - ❑ What process was used to select this practice?
   - ❑ What criteria were used to measure the success of this practice?
   - ❑ Was the practice compared against relative objective data with positive results or did it appear to have been primarily compared against subjective data?
   - ❑ Was the practice tested in multiple settings for replicability and adaptability?
   - ❑ Was the practice nominated by one person or organization or by a number of organizations or individuals?
   - ❑ Is there enough information included in the description of the practice to enable implementation or adaptation?
   - ❑ Does the source of the best practice appear to be a valid resource for identifying best practices?
   - ❑ Is the source transparent in terms of the process and criteria used to select best practices?

❑ Task #3: Identify and Validate New Best Practices

1. Find potential best practices
   - ❑ Intermediaries identify potential best practices through training conducted among FBO/CBOs.
   - ❑ FBO/CBOs self-identify potential best practices and flag for follow-up documentation and validation by the intermediary.

2. Describe and document the potential practice through conducting a programmatic or organizational review.
   - ❑ Identify a review team.
   - ❑ Create a standardized list of review questions and send ahead to the FBO/CBO in order to prepare for meeting with them.
   - ❑ Conduct the review on site at the FBO/CBO.
   - ❑ Report in writing the findings from the review.
   - ❑ Analyze the review findings to determine which elements of the practice are proprietary and which are replicable.
   - ❑ Meet with the FBO/CBO to present and discuss the review findings.
   - ❑ Finalize the review and prepare for validation.

3. Validate the best practice through conducting a comparative assessment. Types of comparatives assessments include:
   - ❑ Quantitative Data Review—this type of review draws primarily on objective data sources external to the organization originating the potential best practice.
   - ❑ Practitioner Peer Review—this type of review draws on the judgment of peers and other practitioner organizations to affirm the potential best practice.

❑ Task #4: Promote and Foster Best Practices Among FBO/CBOs.

1. Promote best practices through the creation of peer-to-peer network and communication systems such as:
   - ❑ Online searchable databases of best practices.
   - ❑ List serves.
   - ❑ Face-to-Face peer learning.

2. Through direct training and technical assistance.
   - ❑ Match supply with demand.
   - ❑ Define elements of the practice for incorporation.
   - ❑ Incorporate the best practice into organizational operations or programmatic activities.
   - ❑ Evaluate the success of the best practice.

Potential Programmatic and Organizational Arenas for Best Practice Identification and Incorporation

Programmatic Best Practice Arenas

- Needs assessment
- Program design
- Research and testing
- Work plan
- Project management
- Information or reporting systems
- Community organizing
- Volunteer recruitment
- Volunteer management
- Evaluation

Organizational Best Practice Arenas

- Governance
- Human resources management
- Financial management
- Grant acquisition
- Grant management
- Strategic planning
- Partnerships and collaborations
- Private sector fund development
- Outcomes and quality improvement
- Informational technology management
- Fundraising
- Marketing