

INSTITUTIONAL SELF-DISCOVERY

Organizational self-examination is an important first step toward improving an NGO's capacity to reach its program goals and contribute more effectively to public/private sector dialogue about critical national development issues. Self-examination can be simply defined: determine what the organization is, where the organizations wants to be, and what the organization needs to get there.

During a recent survey of Eastern Caribbean NGO's (Island Resources Foundation, 1986-87), it was found that many NGO's have a difficult time doing this. In the smaller islands of the Eastern Caribbean, many NGO's start out with an issue or sector based focus and then adjust that focus over time -- often without making comparable adjustments to the organizational structure to accommodate new objectives and new programs. While there is a tendency among North American and West European NGO's to specialize or focus program agendas, this is not as readily an option in small islands. Here NGO program concerns tend to be linked or merged. Here NGO's often give the appearance of fragmentation when trying to define who they are, where they have been, and where they are headed.

Nevertheless, it is important that an NGO regularly -- at least annually -- undertake a self-evaluation to learn more about itself. Completion of a check-list such as found on the page below forces those in leadership positions to answer some difficult questions and often face some hard realities. The result, however, will be an improved awareness of the organization's strengths and weakness and a greater flexibility in reaching organizational goals.

If your organization must answer "no," "none," or is unable to fully complete the check-list, the NGO should consider committing more time to planning and evaluation. A healthy organization continually reviews program goals in light of changing external factors and internal resources.

NGO SELF-EXAMINATION CHECK LIST

- State the NGO's purpose in two or three sentences.
- List the organization's major accomplishments in the last 12 months.
- What community need does the organization meet?
- What services does the NGO provide?
- Who delivers/provides these services?
- List the strengths and weaknesses of the NGO in each service area.
- What other organizations in the community provide these services?
- Can the organization demonstrate community demand/support for its services?
- What are the NGO's short- and long-term goals?
- Are they consistent with the organization's purpose and services?
- Have these goals changed in the last year? Why?
- Does the NGO have an annual "action plan"? If no, why not?
- How are program priorities determined?
- What internal and external factor(s) could have a positive impact on the NGO's ability to achieve its goals?
- What factors could have a negative impact?
- What are the NGO's funding sources?
- Have these changed significantly during the last 2-3 years? Why?
- What non-cash support does the NGO receive?
- Does the NGO have an annual budget? If no, why not?
- Have there been substantial shifts in the last 2-3 years in how funds are expended? Why?
- Where would the NGO like to be in 5 years in terms of:
Funding level? Staff? Program activity?

The check-list above has been drawn in part from "Discover Total Resources: A Guide for Nonprofits," published by the Mellon Bank Corporation, Pittsburgh, PA.