

Group aims to hold funders accountable

By Matthew Robinson
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In the year of America's bicentennial, a nonprofit was formed to help the philanthropic sector advance its values and encourage funders to serve more effectively those in need.

Now the Washington, D.C.-based National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy is under new leadership and aims to redouble its efforts to ensure the philanthropic sector remains accountable and committed to the nation's most disadvantaged citizens.

"We are going to take a step back and re-vision where the organization can go and chart a new course for NCRP," says Aaron Dorfman, the group's new executive director. "I hope to analyze what has contributed to our greatest successes in the last 30 years so we can build on those and take the organization and philanthropy where we want to go."

Dorfman brings a set of skills to his new role that reflect his background in grassroots advocacy and social-justice work,

"His unwavering commitment to serving the disenfranchised members of our communities, and his skill in building coalitions among diverse interest groups...will enable NCRP to continue advocating for accountability and focus on social justice in the philanthropic sector," says David R. Jones, the group's chair.

Dorfman began his career in grassroots advocacy for the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now in Chicago and St. Paul, where he served as head organizer, and later created a new chapter in Miami.

Next, he joined the Committee from People Acting for Community Together, a Florida-based interfaith coalition that works for social and economic justice for people from low- to moderate-income communities, and helped the group quadruple its membership and raise its budget more than 600 percent, he says.

"I reach out to people and really listen to them," says Dorfman, who was named the 2003 regional finalist in the Ford Foundation's Leadership for a Changing World award.

"I seek to understand what is important to them and where they want to go," he says. "When you have done that enough, you can start to see where the common ground is and formulate a plan that will engage a wide variety of stake holders."

Dorfman says he wasn't in the job market when the call came from NCRP, but was intrigued by the opportunity he saw for the organization to affect low-income communities throughout the U.S.

"I have always been a fan of their research," he says of the group. "And always felt that more could be done to make sure it results in actual policy changes and behavior changes."

Currently pursuing a master's in Philanthropic Studies at Indiana University, Dorfman says he aims to draw on his grassroots skills to help others bloom and flourish.

"I see a critical, pressing need to bring more resources to grassroots nonprofits in this country," he says. "It is one of the largest obstacles preventing more effective work that has larger impact on communities."

To do that, he aims to "rechannel" funds to grassroots organizations in an effort bring about change.

Though he is already hard at work on a series of reports for NCRP, Dorfman is also taking the organization through a "very serious and deep" planning process.

The goal is to "help usher in a new era where organized philanthropy will be more accountable to the public and more responsive to the disadvantaged," he says. "NCRP will meet that challenge by asking probing questions of ourselves, our allies, and our critics and using the information to strategically leverage the influence of NCRP throughout the nonprofit sector."

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