

Social Work's Contribution to Non-Profit Agencies

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Key Q: How Can Social Work Promote Social Justice in the 21st Century?

- What is similar/different about social work's role today from its historic function in the United States?
- How can social work complement & support the social justice work of secular & religious non-profit agencies?
- What contributions can the School of Social Work make to these efforts through its research, scholarship, teaching, and service?

Past & Present: Similarities

- Social welfare system in flux – due to major economic, demographic, social, political, and technological changes. It is less capable of responding effectively to new, chronic, and increasingly complex problems.
- Lack of clear boundaries/roles/goals among social service providers in all sectors.
- Long-standing assumptions about social welfare have been challenged by new realities, new relationships, new & more complex problems, lack of sufficient data.
- Conflicting demands of efficiency and effectiveness.

Lessons from the Past

- The Scientific Charity Movement (COS) and the Settlement Movement created and implemented a new synthetic vision of social welfare – in terms of its goals, structure, organization, coherence, & coordination.
- Linked individual problems to the environment.
- Used research to understand social problems and to guide the development of policy/program solutions.
- Used research & experience to create practice models.
- Developed greater respect/influence for social work.
- Attracted new, diverse generation to SW profession.

Applying These Lessons Today

- Help small agencies translate their social justice missions more clearly into programs & practices.
- Coordinate their efforts with other like-minded groups and reconcile differences in social justice perspectives.
- Enable small non-profits to obtain critical information and be integrated into wider social service network.
- Disseminate research to demonstrate the effectiveness of various forms of/approaches to intervention and organizational or inter-organizational practices (EBP).
- Conduct community-based/driven research projects.

Some Specific Suggestions

- Assist small non-profits in board & resource development, strategic planning, budgeting (Example: West Philadelphia Community Partnerships)
- Facilitate co-location & collaboration among small non-profits (Example: New Center in Ann Arbor, MI)
- Conduct agency-community driven research which has direct impact on organizations (Examples: Bay Area Social Service Consortium; Southwest Detroit Community-Based Initiative; SFSU Research Projects)
- Disseminate findings for legitimation & mobilization (Examples: Welfare Advocates, U of PA initiatives)

In Sum

- Social work can provide a means to integrate scientific data and political acumen with the core social justice values that small non-profits & the profession share.
- Social work can assist non-profits translate knowledge and values into action to address community needs.
- Social work can enable non-profits to utilize resources more efficiently and effectively (capacity building).
- Social work can help non-profits communicate their needs & those of clients & constituents to the general public & key decision-makers (make difficult choices).