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## e-Government services for faith-based organizations: Bridging the organizational divide

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the challenges faced by faith-based institutions in a low-income, predominantly Black community seeking to take advantage of grants provided through the White House Office of Community and Faith-Based Initiatives (FBCI). FBCI is an e-Government program that assists nonprofit organizations in competing for Federal dollars with fewer bureaucratic barriers. Informed by the design-actuality framework, we interviewed clergy at seven faith-based organizations. The intent of this analysis is to juxtapose the design intentions of the government officials with the actualities expressed by the intended benefactors of the initiative. Our findings suggest that this e-Government initiative may unwittingly exacerbate existing disparities in the strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICT).

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### Introduction

In democratic societies such as the U.S., issues of equitable access come to the fore when government services and information are extended to citizens and the organizations that serve them. e-Government is the government's use of information and communication technology (ICT) to exchange information and services with citizens and businesses, and between various sectors of government. e-Government applications are typically used "to provide public services and to empower citizens and communities through information technology, especially through the internet" (Tat-Kei Ho, 2002). The most anticipated benefits of e-Government include improvements in internal efficiency, delivery of public services, processes of democratic governance, convenience, and accessibility of public services to citizens, private and public organizations, and other government agencies (Heeks, 2003). Public accessibility of information is perhaps the most common e-Government service (Marchionnini, Samet, & Brandt, 2003).

According to Relyea,

e-Government is a dynamic concept of varying meaning and significance. Resulting from the application of new IT to the performance of Federal responsibilities, it has arisen within a very brief period of time – largely, the final decade of the 20th century. Because e-Gov continues to evolve, the full measure of its success awaits assessment (Relyea, 2002, p. 31).

To assess how e-Government services are actually impacting historically underserved groups, we conducted interviews with clergy in low-income, African-American communities. Our goal was to examine the faith-based organizations' capacity to take advantage of resources provided through the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (FBCI), an e-Government program that was created to assist nonprofit organizations in competing for Federal dollars with fewer bureaucratic barriers.

In what follows, we describe the historical significance of faith-based organizations in African-American communities. We then describe the FBCI as an e-Government response to efficiently deliver resources to organizations that serve the nations' most vulnerable citizens. Next, we introduce the concepts of the "organizational divide" to articulate the challenges faced by faith-based organizations seeking to compete for FBCI funding, and "technology cultures" to articulate the organizations' ICT values. Using these two concepts as sensitizing frameworks, we present the results of interviews conducted with clergy at seven Black Churches in a low-income community in a northeastern U.S. city. The interviews focused on the actual and intended use of ICT to support community outreach activities, as well as the barriers to ICT usage and obtaining Federal funding. We conclude by posing implications for policymakers.

### The Black Church

The term "Black Church" is used as a sociological and theological term that refers to the pluralism of Black Christian churches in the U.S. (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The Black Church is a mediating institution that provides both spiritual and social needs that are informed by the organization's privatistic and communal orientations. "The communal

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orientation refers to the historic tradition of the Black Church being involved in all aspects of the lives of their members, including political, economic, educational, and social concerns. Conversely, the privatistic orientation – preaching, praying and singing – is concerned only with the spiritual needs of its members” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 13).

In the communal orientation, the Black Church has a long history of providing self-help and social support and fostering social cohesion (Billingsley, 1999; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994; Burris & Billingsley, 1994; DuBois, 1970; Frazier, 1964; Lincoln, 1974; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Since its inception, the Black Church has served as a focal point for social change and support, and as a resource for overcoming adversity. It is perhaps the only institution that has consistently served African-Americans. During the Antebellum period, for instance, African-American slaves were barred from social gatherings. However, they erected secret churches in the forests. These “invisible institutions” represented the first coherent and stable forms of social interaction for Black Americans (DuBois, 1970).

During the period of Reconstruction, Black Churches were instrumental in creating mutual aid societies, benevolent societies, and schools. In the 1960s, “[t]he Black Church functioned as the institutional center of the modern civil rights movement. Churches provided the movement with an organized mass base leadership of clergymen; an institutionalized financial base; and meeting places where the masses planned tactics and strategies and collectively committed themselves to the struggle” (Morris, 1984, p. 4). Black Churches, particularly those churches with substantial resources in urban communities and the leadership of a strong Black minister, continue to serve as institutional solutions to address many of the societal ills such as unemployment, drug abuse, and crime that plague urban communities (Billingsley, 1999; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994).

### The White House Faith-Based and Community Initiative (FBCI)

This section provides an introduction to the mission of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative as well as barriers and challenges related to its implementation.

#### Mission

Historically in the U.S., faith-based and community groups have played an important role in assisting individuals, families, and communities in need. To support the community outreach work of faith-based organizations, the U.S. government instituted the FCBI, an e-Government program designed “to make sure that grassroots leaders can compete on an equal footing for Federal dollars, receive greater private support, and face fewer bureaucratic barriers” (FBCI, 2002). According to the FBCI:

Faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) have a long tradition of helping Americans in need and together represent an integral part of our nation's social service network. Yet, all too often, the Federal government has put in place complicated rules and regulations preventing FBCOs from competing for funds on an equal footing with other organizations. President Bush believes that besides being inherently unfair, such an approach can waste tax-payer dollars and cut off the poor from successful programs. Federal funds should be awarded to the most effective organizations – whether public or private, large or small, faith-based or secular – and all must be allowed to compete on a level playing field. President Bush created the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in eleven Federal agencies to lead a determined attack on need by strengthening and expanding the role of FBCOs in providing social services... The ultimate beneficiaries are America's poor, who are best served when the

Federal government's partners are the providers most capable of meeting their needs (FBCI, 2002).

The FBCI assists community and faith-based organizations with providing social programs in their communities and seeks to enlist organizations as partners in improving the lives of disenfranchised citizens. This partnering represents a major shift in American policy that has traditionally separated religion and government. According to the FBCI (2002), “the Federal government has often not been willing to partner with these faith-based and community groups. Instead, it has put in place complicated rules and regulations that hinder these groups from competing for Federal funds on an equal footing with other, larger charities” (FBCI, 2002). Davis (2001) noted that the FBCI is bold in its challenge to the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. The constitutional purpose for restrictions on the funding of religion is grounded in the belief that, to be most effective, religion should be autonomous and not tied to government. Under the FBCI, religious organizations can receive government funding directly rather than having to institute a formal not-for-profit arm of the organization.

#### Barriers

One of the primary FBCI goals is enabling faith- and community-based organizations to receive Federal grants on the same basis as other organizations. This is referred to as “leveling the playing field” (FBCI, 2001). One of the FBCI's initial directives was to identify barriers that kept effective faith-based and community programs from obtaining Federal funding. The audit found that “[a] funding gap exists between the government and grassroots organizations. Smaller groups, faith-based and secular, receive very little Federal support relative to the size and scope of the social services they provide” (FBCI, 2001).

In addition, the audit identified 15 barriers erected by program and process features that impeded participation in Federal programs by nonprofit organizations (FBCI, 2001). While the first 6 barriers restricted participation by faith-based organizations, the remaining barriers caused difficulties for small secular and religious organizations lacking experience with Federal funds.

1. A pervasive suspicion of faith-based organizations on the part of many government officials.
2. The total exclusion of faith-based organizations from some Federal programs.
3. Excessive restrictions on religious activities.
4. Inappropriate expansion of restrictions on religious activities to new programs.
5. The denial of faith-based organizations' legally established right to take religion into account in employment decisions.
6. Failure to require and assist State and local officials in complying with Charitable Choice.
7. The limited accessibility of Federal grant information.
8. The heavy burden of regulations and other requirements.
9. Heavy requirements that have to be met before a group can apply for funds.
10. Complex grant applications and grant agreements.
11. Questionable favoritism in some programs toward faith-based organizations.
12. An improper bias in some programs in favor of previous grantees.
13. An inappropriate requirement to apply in collaboration with likely competitors.
14. Requiring 501(c)(3) status where a program statute requires only nonprofit status.
15. Inadequate attention in the Federal grant streamlining process to faith-based and community organizations.

Davis (2001) notes two divisions among clergy in response to the FBCI. The first division is between “those who fear a breach in the wall

of separation of church and state and those who question the need for a wall in the first place” (p. 413). The second division Davis observes occurs along racial lines. Black clergy view their institutions as serving as a safety net in poor urban communities. Hence, they were willing to tolerate some government interference because they view the FBCI as a major new antipoverty initiative. Their primary concern is to provide resources to a needy community. White clergy, however, were less tolerant of government intervention. They voiced concerns such as coercive evangelizing of vulnerable people, unintentionally pitting one religion against another as they compete for funding, the potential unraveling of interfaith relationships, and the exclusion of minority faiths.

While Black clergy are generally more accepting of the FBCI, Black clergy in low-income, urban communities are finding it difficult to take advantage of FBCI resources. Indeed, a national survey of 750 Black Churches by the *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (2006)* found that only 2.4% were recipients of FBCI grants. The survey results also suggest that there was insufficient outreach to Black Churches concerning the FBCI. While 75% of the respondents were vaguely aware of the FBCI program, 66% did not know about the rules and details for participating, and only 16% had been contacted about applying. Furthermore, only 11% reported applying for grants. Those churches that applied tended to be larger, had higher revenues, and were suburban.

These barriers and challenges, however, are not unique to the FBCI. A report released by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (*Robertson, 2001*) identifies a similar divide among the smaller community and faith-based organizations in the U.S., and the foundations that support them. Many nonprofits, especially resource poor organizations on the front lines of providing direct human services to historically underserved groups, could benefit from significantly increased foundation support for investments in ICT. However, few funding agencies have a clear strategy for providing the needed ICT investments to assist small nonprofits.

### The organizational divide

ICT has been used in the private sector to facilitate six business objectives: (1) operational excellence, (2) new products, services, and business models, (3) customer and supplier intimacy, (4) improved decision making, (5) competitive advantage, and (6) survival (*Laudon & Laudon, 2007*). While considerable gains have been achieved in the private sector, studies have consistently shown that the vast majority of nonprofits underutilize technology (*Kirschenbaum & Kunamneni, 2002; Schneider, 2003*). In fact, these studies have illuminated gaps that exist within the nonprofit sector, in general, and the minority faith-based community, in particular, related to their strategic use of ICT to support mission critical services. In addition, these studies indicate that nonprofits are “handicapped” by their lack of knowledge, ability and/or resources to effectively use technologies to facilitate their mission.

The ‘organizational divide’ is an emerging term in the policy literature that is used to explain the disparities in organizations’ capacity to access and process information, share and exploit knowledge, and strategically use technology to advance their mission and address pressing social problems (*Kirschenbaum & Kunamneni, 2002; Schneider, 2003*). While community-based organizations are rich storehouses of local information, they frequently lack the technology capacity to either use this valuable resource themselves or to share it with other community-serving organizations. The organizational divide may be especially salient for small, urban Black Churches that are handicapped by the lack of sufficient resources (*Billingsley, 1999*).

*Robertson (2001)* defines the organizational divide as the “gap between those organizations that have the ability to use technology to further their missions and those that do not” (p. 1). This definition goes beyond the organizations’ physical access to technology to

account for the ways in which ICT can be designed and used by faith-based organizations to support their social service mission. Similarly, *Kirschenbaum and Kunamneni (2002)* argue that technology policy must support two pillars – the creation of local content that is relevant and useful to low-income communities, and increased technological capacity of community-based organizations to achieve their existing missions.

### Technology cultures

To redress the organizational divide, *Shorters (1999)* expressed the need to assist nonprofits with the strategic use of technology to enhance the delivery of programs and services that are driven by the mission of the organization. As a first step in understanding how the organizational divide may be negatively impacting Black Churches and their access to FBCI funding resources, empirical research is needed to understand the organizations’ ICT values. Although the value-based perspective has been extensively explored, very little research has devoted attention to examining the concept of ICT values (*Leidner & Kayworth, 2006*).

While serving as a Circuit Rider for the Meyer Foundation, *Shorters (1999)* illuminated four different technology cultures that are present within the nonprofit sector (see *Table 1*). The technology cultures framework provides a conceptual scheme for understanding why are some faith-based organizations are able to strategically use ICT to support their mission, while others are not. Scholars and policy analysts can use the framework to identify the dominant technology culture that exists in the organization, and to identify ways in which the organization can evolve.

A technology cultures approach is evolutionary and suggests that, to achieve technology integration, organizations must systematically move from one culture to the next (see *Fig. 1*). Technology integration is defined as using technologies effectively and efficiently to support the strategic goals and objective of an organization. As *Shorters (1999)* indicates, isolation is the most devastating impediment. It constrains the technology culture to the level of “unnecessary” or a “necessary evil”. Consequently, those organizations that exhibit high levels of isolationism are less able to leverage ICT to support their mission. In the intervening phase which views technology as a “necessary good”, organizations realize the value of technology, but are unable to fully integrate technology into their mission and the delivery of programs and services.

As suggested in *Fig. 1*, two conditions are necessary in order for an organization to achieve technology integration. First, the organization must be interconnected with the local nonprofit community in order to share information, solutions, and best practices. Second, the

**Table 1**  
Technology cultures in the nonprofit sector.

Technology cultures	
Unnecessary	Failing to see the benefits of technology and avoiding it as much as possible. Organization does not use email and depends more on paper files.
Necessary evil	Having a limited use of technology. Organization does not use email, but individual staff members might. Organization uses current equipment and outdated “legacy” equipment in the same office. This represents the majority of nonprofits.
Necessary good	Viewing technology as a necessary part of their work. Organization uses current hardware/software and email. However, this group often has an underutilized website.
Strategic advantage	Believing that their effective use of technology will give them a strategic advantage. Organization invested in technology and trying to integrate technology into all program functions. Technology is used extensively in delivering services, fund raising, and both internal and external communications.



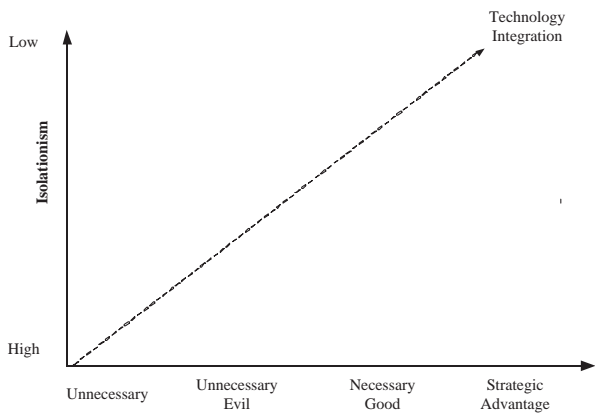


Fig. 1. Technology integration model.

organization must be in the final stage of the technology cultures that views technology as providing strategic advantage.

Another critical aspect of the technology cultures perspective is the notion that the leader of the organization is mostly responsible for shaping the technology culture. Shorters (1999) notes that when leaders understand the strategic significance of technology, they tend to embrace technology, as opposed to shying away from it. However, as Kirschenbaum and Kunamneni (2002) observe, historically, community-based organizations have been among the last to benefit from technological innovations and have struggled to find ways to use technology as a tool to advance their missions. Those community-based organizations that achieve strategic advantage promote a culture of ICT use that includes outreach activities such as online organizing, community information clearinghouses, networking and online communities, innovations in service delivery, and interactive database development and community mapping.

### Research approach

In this study, the researchers use two frameworks to understand the readiness of small Black Churches to take advantage of FBCI funding opportunities: 1) the “organizational divide” to articulate the challenges faced by faith-based organizations seeking to compete for FBCI funding, and 2) “technology cultures” to articulate the organizations’ ICT values. This work builds upon a prior study in which the second author surveyed several dozen churches of various denominations throughout the city and found that few have taken advantage of ICT tools. Of the 75 churches contacted, almost 50% didn’t have fax machines; 65% didn’t have email capability; and only a few had voice mail systems (Lee, 2003). Additionally, limited financial resources and technical expertise posed significant barriers to the adoption of technology, creating a negative impact on behavioral intention. As a result, while wanting to implement e-outreach to supplement their social service programs, the lack of ICT tools left these Black Churches and other unwired grassroots organizations out of contention for funding opportunities associated with the FBCI.

Shortly before the survey was conducted in 2003, the city launched a digital divide initiative that provided free computer hardware, software, and training to community- and faith-based organizations. To understand how churches were benefiting from and being challenged by their participation in this digital divide program, the researchers conducted follow-up interviews with African-American ministers at seven churches. African-American clergy were selected for three reasons. First, Black Churches and African-American clergy have served historically as a primary resource for their communities, providing support, education, identity, and fellowship. It is, therefore, important to understand how ICT is being, or could potentially be, used to support and sustain this social service mission.

Second, the ministers selected to take part in the interviews participated in a City-sponsored digital divide program. Consequently, all of the organizations in our study had computers but only five had internet access at the time of the interviews. In addition, the faith-based organizations and leaders shared a belief that by embracing technology in the church they were modeling ICT use for their members and their efforts would begin to address the digital divide. Thus, the ministers were not only technology users; they understood the significance of the digital divide for their churches and their members, and viewed themselves as technology advocates within their communities. Thus, the churches had evolving technology cultures that were shifting from towards technology integration.

Finally, these ministers were selected because they expressed interest in working with the researchers to secure funding to support community-based action research projects. The researchers used the Action-Reaction-Interaction (ARI) framework to design action research projects with the churches (Kvasny and Lee, 2003). The framework depicts three categories of activities: *action* to initially engage community interest in ICT, *reaction* to build the capacity of organizations to obtain computing resources and to deliver computer-supported services, and *integration* to raise ICT literacy skills within the community.

Thus, the overall goal of these interviews is to provide a baseline understanding on how the organizational divide is experienced in the small urban Black Church environment as well as the technology culture of the churches. This baseline can then be used to envision capacity building activities such as summer technology camps for teens and technical job training for single parents that could be funded through the FBCI.

The interview questions focused on the actual and intended use of ICT to support the social mission of the church, as well as the informational, technological, economic, organizational, and human factors that both facilitated and hindered ICT usage. Six of the interviews were conducted at the churches. One interview was conducted at the home of the minister; however, the researchers had visited this particular church on several occasions both before and after the interview. Through visits to the churches, the researchers had the opportunity to observe the physical infrastructure of the buildings, the ICT infrastructure, as well as the operation of the social service programs such as food banks and clothing drives. The interviews averaged one hour, and each interview was recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts (50 pages in total) were then analyzed using the organizational divide and technology cultures as sensitizing frameworks. The results of the interview analysis are presented in the following section. The findings are organized around five dominant themes: isolation, staffing, physical infrastructure, organizational processes, and external pressures. However, in reporting these findings, we acknowledge that we are reporting on interviews with seven ministers in a single urban area. Thus, the issues faced by these clergy may not necessarily be generalizable to Black Churches in other cities or to large Black Churches.

### Findings

In this section, we present the findings from our study. The findings are broken down into the following elements: isolation, physical infrastructure, organizational processes, staffing, and external pressures.

#### Isolation

When delving further into understanding how and why faith-based organizations are underserved with respect to technology acquisition and use, we found that the churches suffer from isolation and often lack the financial, technical, and human resources necessary for effective and sustained ICT use. Isolation was expressed by the lack

of opportunities for clergy to share information and best practice regarding the strategic use of ICTs.

"I don't know where they [the other clergy in town] are. I know that I can call out names and tell you where they are. I know where Dr. Cooley is. We email. I don't know where Rev. Babor is. Dr. Ike we email. Around here that's about it. Rev. Cash. I met Cash once and he is just right up the street. We have a couple of churches up the strip here and I don't know who they are and they don't know who I am. Millennium wants to build a million dollar church in [town], they are right up the street and I just met the pastor... Yes, we have a low-end fax machine here! There was not one here when I got here. I said "you know we need a fax" and so I got my way. It is heavily used, you know it's just like a miracle but it's just the way that the traditional church is. They are not thinking outside of these walls." [Reverend Banks]

Isolation was also expressed in how churches use their websites. Most clergy used their websites to stay in touch with their congregation, to increase their presence and visibility in their local communities, and to explain their beliefs.

"Well one of the things I think is that it [the church website] allows you to broaden your audience as far as being able to preach sermons on the internet, be able to state your beliefs, display mission statements, it's a way to inform the community, and so I do think it is a way of being able to reach a different audience, um especially because many people today are internet users and it's a way for those who may be homebound to be able to stay and keep in touch with their congregation and to benefit from the church." [Reverend Jones]

"We do [have a website] and in fact, let me put it this way, it is under construction but we've had a website for a few years now... It has not been as maintained as well as it could have been, it was more just kind of an informational kind of thing....If you went to our site you would see, you know, who we are, what our general philosophy is, where we meet and that kind of thing. But we, I want it to be more interactive and more dynamic and fluid." [Reverend West]

All church websites posted information such as sermons and church calendars, but only one minister implemented interactive features such as spiritual discussions, fundraising, and prayer requests via email.

#### *Physical infrastructure*

The physical infrastructure of the building created a second barrier to technology adoption and use. Electrical and telephone wiring had to be replaced, and additional electrical and telephone outlets had to be put in before installing computers and other contemporary office equipment. Reverend West's church required extensive renovations that prohibited his ability to create a computer lab. When asked when the church would make the required renovations, he responded:

"We don't. We are so small. We had it through the [local digital divide] program and so we were going to have it done, but we did not do it because I was working at the time for [company name] and they had the program... So we decided to just not get a lab because we are just too small you know and they did not get the wiring and all that kind of stuff. So that's down the line." [Reverend West]

In addition to the computing infrastructure, financial costs associated with recurring ISP and web hosting charges proved challenging. Organizations also had to find creative ways to upgrade and replace old computers with limited memory, processing speed, and hard drive space.

#### *Organizational processes*

The clergy, in general, were knowledgeable users of ICT but felt that they could do more to use their computers strategically to improve their organizational processes.

"Well interestingly enough, here sits one who does not have the knowledge, I am on the computer a lot, but I don't have, I don't know the computer as much as I should." [Reverend Wright].

Only two churches used the computer to support internal business processes such as payroll, job advertisements, and record keeping. For these churches, computers were viewed as tools that improved organizational efficiency and costs.

"Certainly, with technology you can respond to people better with reduced time and being more available, whether it's through email and having that available or through the fax and having that available. My administrative assistant works on the internet and the word processor so he can get things out. You can get a ton of things out with a minimum of people. In terms of the money, you save as a result of having the technology is awesome... so it's less, it's cheaper. And it is particularly important for small churches with small congregations. It allows you to be as efficient and effective as a larger church with more resources. So it really saves you a ton of money if you can get the people who can use it because that's where the small churches run into problems because you have to have the budget to pay \$35k–\$40k to get that kind of person." [Reverend Evans]

Communications were also improved by ICT. For instance, Reverend Hatfield achieved significant savings on telephone and postage costs by using email. He noted how to move from paper and fax machines to email and the internet may also be more environmentally responsible. However, email is no replacement for follow-up and face-to-face interaction.

"I believe that it [email] has enriched it, but we try to be very careful. I am always saying if you send me email make sure I have a hard copy, because especially with the problems that I'm having with my computer. But I also stress that it should not be your only form of communication you should follow up with a phone call or follow up with a personal one on one visit because that's where the hindrance would come in and people will, especially when there is a discrepancy or a disagreement. People will say, well I *did* send an email (emphasis added and laughing takes place). That's not always good enough; the other part of hindrance could be just a misinterpretation of the content." [Reverend Hatfield]

#### *Staffing*

While clergy embraced technology, they tended to rely on the goodwill and volunteerism of members. Only Reverend Evans' church had a salaried administrative assistant to work in the main office. Even so, Evans and all of the other clergy we interviewed relied on the voluntary labor of members whose skills furthered the outreach activities of the organization.

"[Our computer lab] has improved because we've had people who are technology minded who know what to do with it...And so in order to be where the action is, where the needs are, then we need to be about the business of having a computer lab that teaches, that trains, that empowers." [Reverend Marshall]

"Remember we have those persons that you met earlier. They were all techies. That's my little group that I work with, the techie stuff. They can become a cohort...Those computers came from one of my member's jobs. We wrote the letter and we went and got

the computers and we set it up, and I had one of my members' put all this software on and all that." [Reverend Banks]

None of the organizations in our study budgeted for technology.

"We just go for it; you know – we make it happen. If we want anything, look, we just tell the church we want this and we are going to get it and we are not going to the bank for it and the church produces." [Reverend West]

Like labor, technology resources were acquired through strong personal relationships. This suggests that the hours that the clergy spend at the church may play a major role in improving the organizational capacity.

"[The city] has a lot of small churches that are really Sunday morning churches where they come and they're not open seven days a week and I believe that that's a factor. Many pastors are not full time pastors and so most of their work is not done necessarily Monday through Friday in the office where you need the same amount of technology, and I think many of them do things from home." [Reverend Jones]

Church leaders were aware of the FBCI, and felt that owning and using ICT was required if they were going to be taken seriously by their constituents, by their community, and by the Federal granting agencies. When asked about a local newspaper article that discussed the inability of grassroots organizations to capitalize on FBCI funding, one minister noted:

"It did two things. I think it helped us to look at where we are. Where are we in the scheme of what the expectations are as far as for our communication, what are they looking for you to have... The other thing was... how are you being good stewards of the finances that you receive? So there are, again, some expectations about what is the public perception of a congregation that is so outdated that they're still using typewriters... Because, if the people you're serving, if they are far more advanced than the church itself, you got problems." [Reverend Smith]

#### *External pressures*

Churches not only had to keep up with the members of their congregations; they also had to keep up with the technical acumen of their peer institutions and society more broadly. However, in becoming more formal in their organizational pursuits, there is a belief that the church may lose its spirituality.

"Why can't we as a church do the same thing? This is something that I tell my church all the time. Hey ya'll, why do we have to be 30 years behind the rest of the world? You leave here and go to your job, you sit there "typing sound" all day long and come home and give me a headache about getting computers so that we can "typing sound" all day long (laughter). And that is just keeping it real. And so you got the churches that have picked up the concept and you know they call them your "mega churches" and they run with it and the issue is sometimes you can't tell them from any other corporate business. You know they take the spirit of God out of it. But we want to keep it. It's church and we ought to have everything that world has, because it's that old gospel song, 'My father's rich and he has many houses and land in which the world he is in, if he is rich and I'm his child and I'm rich.' And I want everything that they got for the kingdom so we can run right along with them." [Reverend Banks]

Clergy felt that technology could help them to communicate with entities outside of the church. In sharing of ideas and information,

faith-based institutions could help each other stay relevant and abreast of societal issues. This need to stay relevant was seen as crucial for building solidarity and collective effort among the churches to take on large social problems like crime and health.

"Well you know ummm we are always sharing ideas and information. We are always trying to connect ourselves to the world. If the information technology is hooked up and we are able to utilize the information, whether it's for research, if it's for just exploring other ideas and options, if it's for staying in touch with ummm you know the cutting edge things of society, then of course. If we use it, you know it will benefit us, but if we use it correctly and I guess the question that I would have is 'How can the Church better utilize the technology that is there for us?' Ahhh as whole and I am not talking about the individual church setting as an island, but all the churches connected. If we are really concerned about poverty you know and premature death ummm criminal activities then how do we connect with one another to do something about the problems?" [Reverend West]

#### **Discussion**

All of the Black clergy in our study are aware of the FBCI and are interested in seeking funding from this program. They recognize the historical social orientation of the Black Church, and agree that the government should support outreach efforts, especially in disadvantaged communities. However, these small under-resourced churches were hampered by their ability to raise the technological, financial, and human resources to provide social services to their communities.

In terms of technology culture, these churches view ICT as a necessary good. They realize that their ability to provide much needed social programs is impaired and that they are operating on the brink. In addition, the external societal pressures to embrace ICT are mounting. The volunteers and spiritual leaders that are called upon to manage these organizations often hold other jobs, so time remains a limited commodity. The small Black Churches often do not have the financial, human and technology resources to devote to business planning, program development and grant writing. Thus, their current ability to compete for and successfully administer grants is limited. Yet, without the infusion of external resources, they will continue to operate at a deficit.

The gaps found in this study illustrate the organizational divide that emerges when e-Government services impose organizational governance and technology standards that make it even more difficult for nonprofits to compete for scarce resources. On the one hand, designers of the e-Government initiative are extending new opportunities to faith-based organizations. On the other hand, resource poor organizations cannot partake in these offerings because participation requires levels of competence and resources that are beyond their current capacity. Some scholars (Bertot & Jaeger, 2008; Verdegem & Verleye, 2009) contend that the design of online public services should be guided by users' needs as well as technology possibilities. However, some e-Government initiatives aimed at serving the grassroots faith-based and community organizations have had the unintended effect of creating preconditions that preclude marginalized organizations from equal participation. Failure to address the consequences of this phenomenon may lead to "digital balkanization" (Katz & Rice, 2002) whereby the government's FBCI which was intended to level the playing field may instead amplify the organizational divide. This structuring of privilege and disadvantage is not novel. Historically, network technologies such as the telephone and internet tend not to diffuse equitably if left solely to market forces; purposeful legislative and policy interventions are needed (Graham & Simon, 2001).

To begin to redress these gaps, Congress created the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) in January 2002 with the passing of the Armies of Compassion Bill. The CCF is a \$30 million fund that was appropriated



to the Department of Health and Human Services to provide technical assistance and capacity building for community and faith-based organizations.

“Nearly \$25 million will be awarded to 15–25 ‘intermediary organizations,’ which will in turn help smaller organizations operate and manage their programs effectively, access funding from varied sources, develop and train staff, expand the types and reach of social services programs in their communities, and replicate promising programs” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002)

The organizations in our study have not had access to the services provided through the CCF. Without such assistance, many small organizations would lack the capacity to produce strong outcomes even if FBCI resources were provided.

### Implications for policymakers

This study is not an indictment of the U.S. Government, but serves as an indication that more effort needs to be taken to ensure that grassroots organizations are not further disenfranchised by e-Government innovations. The government has done much to enact legislation that extends Federal resources to faith-based and community organizations. In a speech given on July 1, 2008, then Senator Obama echoed the critical importance of establishing the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. “The challenges we face today – from saving our planet to ending poverty – are simply too big for government to solve alone. We need an all-hands-on-deck approach” (Zeleny & Luo, 2008). Meckel (2009) adds, “Mr. Obama’s goal, much like President George W. Bush’s, is to harness the power of churches and other religious groups to solve some of the nation’s toughest social problems.” However, Obama noted that the office “never fulfilled its promise” because former officials promoted partisan interests that had the effect of short-changing those organizations at the grassroots level that were touted as the armies of compassion. In order to foster a new commitment, the Obama administration intends to establish the Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. We argue that the organizational divide framework may be useful in informing the FBCI policies of the Obama administration. In particular, we find that following policy considerations are critically important:

- Developing stronger institutions. Efforts need to be made to assist organizations with their technology strategy and other capacity building practices such as developing business plans, marketing and pricing services, and grant writing. Universities are uniquely equipped to partner with communities and assist in these endeavors (Robertson, 2001). While most policy discussions center on the nonprofits, the Federal government agencies can also help its designers to better understand the needs and competencies of these organizations. Faith-based and community organizations have a wealth of knowledge about their local milieus (Kirschenbaum & Kunamneni, 2002). These firsthand experiences would go a long way towards the development of more accessible government solutions.
- Maintaining traditional channels. In the interim, efforts should be made to continue to support nonprofits through traditional paper-based means. Federal agencies and organizations could make calls for proposals available in outlets such as post offices, police stations, and other accessible neighborhood institutions. While this approach is limited in that it does little to build the capacity of the organizations to deliver services effectively, it does help to overcome the physical barriers that may keep vital information out of their reach. Moreover, in doing so, it symbolizes a commitment to reach out and put information into the hands of ICT-marginalized organizations.
- Sharing risks. Regardless of the opportunities for improving the life chances for America’s most disadvantaged citizens, the Federal government will regard the neediest organizations as uncertain and

therefore risky investments. To lessen the risk, the Federal government should provide small, low-risk grants to nonprofits that lack a record of accomplishment. Another possibility would be to provide incentives to the more privileged organizations to collaborate with the less privileged organizations on grant proposals and to mentor these organizations during the implementation process. The opportunity to appropriate ICT in a meaningful way is real, and should be open to nonprofits that are willing to engage and learn.

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