



DAILY NEWS

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Aid Groups Needing Help

Beep survey reveals a deep crisis

BY BILL EGBERT

STRUGGLING NONPROFITS, Adolfo Carrión feels your pain-or at least he wants to hear about it. The Bronx borough president's office has created a survey to measure the impact of the economic crisis on groups. They face a double-whammy in a deep recession-both sharp cuts in government funding and a dropoff in the grants from donor-supported foundations.

"We have a deep understanding and appreciation of the benefits and services that nonprofit organizations provide," Carrión said, "and we want to do all we can to ensure our nonprofits can successfully serve the public."

Nonprofits are especially important in the Bronx, the poorest urban county in the nation. After the South Bronx became a symbol of urban blight in the 1970s and many policymakers wrote off the borough as a lost cause, homegrown nonprofit groups largely led the area's recovery.

Though the survey information is confidential, Carrión's office said the 46 groups responding so far range from fewer than 10 employees to more than 100. The "overwhelming majority" said they need help weathering the crisis. "So far, a majority of respondents are reporting that they are experiencing serious financial difficulties due to less revenues and grants," said Carrión spokeswoman Anne Fenton. "They are also experiencing an increase in demand for services-particularly emergency services like food, clothes and shelter."

Nancy Biberman, president of the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation, noted her clients "were struggling long before the recession," but she agreed that her business booms when everyone else's goes bust. "In our business, demand is increasing exponentially," said Biberman, who has worked on poverty in the Bronx for 20 years, "but our customers can't pay us." She said families start lining up at 6 a.m. for WHEDCo's food pantry, which opens at 10 a.m. "It's like bread lines from the Depression," Biberman said.

With most nonprofits depending on state and city contracts, and those same governments facing catastrophic budget crises, Biberman said what's really needed is federal aid to fill local budget gaps. Such help could be forthcoming, with Carrión widely rumored to be President-elect Barack Obama's pick to head a new urban policy office in the White House.

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