

# Strategic Collaborations

## Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries (ACAM)

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Where do Houstonians go when they face an eviction or realize their groceries will run out before the end of the month or that they can't afford school supplies for their children? Many go to their local community assistance ministries in their neighborhoods for a myriad of basic needs emergencies.

Community assistance ministries are an important part of our city's "social service safety net," preventing homelessness, meeting basic needs and helping people remain or become self-sufficient, by providing clients with food, clothing, employment services, rent/utilities assistance, and much more.

This is why Rockwell Fund is proud to partner with the Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries of Greater Houston (ACAM), a membership support organization committed to excellence in social services and capacity building for community assistance ministries (CAMs) in the Greater Houston area.

### ABOUT ACAM MEMBERS

Community Assistance Ministries or CAMs are 501(c)(3) emergency service providers and have served neighbors in need since the early 1980's. They were started by coalitions of congregations and remain faith-based in mission and vision, yet do not require a statement of faith or participation in religious activity as a condition for receiving services. As distribution centers for resources gathered from community groups, local congregations and neighbors-helping-neighbors, CAMs are a coordinated community effort with a proven track record in helping persons having trouble meeting their basic needs. CAMs are known for serving with compassion and a minimum of bureaucracy, and their spirit of service can be seen in everything they do.

ACAM builds nonprofit capacity to increase organizational sustainability and help groups proactively respond to growing and changing community needs. Its mission is to provide social purpose ministries with a professional forum to strengthen their capacity to fulfill their mission. ACAM envisions a high-performing network of social purpose ministries, funders and community partners who, through synergistic alliances, will effect change for those in need.

Currently, ACAM has 12 members (listed on page 4) who serve more than 223,000 children, women and men each year. They are supported by more than 12,000 volunteers and are an effective outlet for community members, including 375 faith congregations, to meet needs in their neighborhoods. For its work in supporting its members, ACAM received the 2008 OneStar Governor's Volunteer Award in the Community Capacity Builder category.

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### WHAT ACAM OFFERS

*Excellence in Social Services:* ACAM promotes sound practices in nonprofit operations and programming. Organizational assessments inform members on areas of strength and weakness and are used to develop capacity building plans. ACAM supports plan implementation through training/consulting stipends and direct grants. ACAM provides network-wide training and network-wide projects (such as marketing and technology) to strengthen each member, and thus, the collective. ACAM also helps members use their collective strength to develop city-wide service streams that address root causes of poverty.

*Network Development:* This component promotes peer learning and information exchange for the following groups: executive directors, volunteer coordinators, program managers and thrift store managers. Peer mentoring relationships are developed among executive directors. This component also helps to build relationships between ACAM members and funders.

*Awareness and Education:* This component is aimed at increasing membership by reaching out to underserved parts of Greater Houston, raising the profile of CAMs as service hubs in their communities and raising awareness around the issues affecting the people served by the CAMs.

ACAM has reached into a sector that was already doing so much and is enhancing its capacity to do much more. As ACAM provides resources, tools and funds for these organizations to invest in themselves, they are creating even greater community impact.

### COMMUNITY BENEFITS

In 2008, ACAM awarded \$205,000 in capacity building funds and \$47,000 in consulting/training stipends to help members complete their capacity building plans. In addition, 85 unduplicated people benefited from ACAM by attending workshops and networking meetings or by utilizing other services.

After Hurricane Ike, ACAM supported its members by garnering and distributing more than \$700,000 to 11 ACAM members. To date, ACAM organizations have served more than 9,000 families with disaster relief and recovery services post-Ike.

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### THE LEGACY OF A SUCCESSFUL PILOT PROJECT

ACAM grew out of a three-year pilot phase, known as the Zip Code Assistance Ministries Organizational Development Project or ZCAM ODP. It was developed and implemented in 2005 by a collaboration of local funders, partners and nonprofits, with Rockwell Fund, Inc. serving as the lead entity. Prior to implementation, Rockwell conducted extensive research on the issues facing local 501(c)(3) community assistance ministries. They found that there were many areas in which capacity building activities could help CAMs be more effective, more sustainable and ultimately accomplish more in their communities.

Motivated by the opportunity to create positive change for families in need, Rockwell invited others to be a part of this new initiative. Through high-engagement philanthropy, a collaborative of 16 funders (private foundations, the United Way of Greater Houston, the Greater Houston Community Foundation and the Junior League of Houston) invested their time, talent and more than \$2 million over 3 years to accomplish ACAM's successful pilot phase. Eight program partners also contributed technical services including training, consulting and evaluation.

By providing assistance with organizational assessment, capacity building, networking, mentoring and collaborative projects, ZCAM ODP helped community assistance ministries accomplish the following results:

- Ministries equipped to meet the increase in the demand for services
- Funding increased and diversified
- Number of volunteers increased and new partnerships developed
- Personnel and volunteer management programs enhanced
- Board and executive director leadership strengthened
- Technology infrastructure improved, resulting in better data tracking and management
- Long-term strategies developed

Energized by the success of ZCAM ODP, participating funders and ministries explored the feasibility of formalizing this network in the pilot's final year. A consultant hired to staff the planning process began conducting one-on-one interviews with nearly 20 ZCAM ODP stakeholders to uncover areas of consensus, divergence and perceived obstacles. These findings became the basis for the ensuing work sessions that tackled the issues of purpose, mission, structure and potential constituency. The rigor and thoroughness of this process has ensured a firm foundation for ACAM, which was launched in January 2008. Because not all member organizations were zip code based, the name was changed to Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries of Greater Houston in 2008.

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Rockwell Fund is proud to have partnered with fellow funders and community assistance ministries to incubate this new model for supporting Houston's social service safety net.

More information on ACAM can be found at [www.acamweb.org](http://www.acamweb.org).

### ACAM Member Websites

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston [www.catholiccharities.org](http://www.catholiccharities.org)

East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry [www.humanneeds.org](http://www.humanneeds.org)

Emergency Aid Coalition [www.eachouston.org](http://www.eachouston.org)

Epiphany Community Health Outreach Services [www.echos-houston.org](http://www.echos-houston.org)

Humble Area Assistance Ministries [www.haamministries.org](http://www.haamministries.org)

Interfaith Caring Ministries [www.icmtx.org](http://www.icmtx.org)

Katy Christian Ministries [www.ktcm.org](http://www.ktcm.org)

Memorial Assistance Ministries [www.maministries.org](http://www.maministries.org)

My Brother's Keeper Outreach Center [www.mbkoutreach.org](http://www.mbkoutreach.org)

St. Vincent's House [www.stvhope.org](http://www.stvhope.org)

Wesley Community Center [www.wesleyhousehouston.org](http://www.wesleyhousehouston.org)

West Houston Assistance Ministries [www.whamministries.org](http://www.whamministries.org)