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**Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches  
Organizational Profile**

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**Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches**

Prepared for



**January 2005**

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Organizational Profile**

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**Prepared for**

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In addition, we would like to acknowledge the Marguerite Casey Foundation for its generous support of this work.

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## **ABOUT BTW CONSULTANTS**

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The mission of BTW Consultants is to inform change in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. We have been working with our clients, both locally and nationally, for over five years to increase organizational effectiveness and learning by providing the following services: planning, evaluation, client tracking and information system development, and applied research. We guide our work by our three core values: integrity, intelligence and compassion.

## FOUNDING & OVERVIEW

Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches (LAM) is an association of small to mid-size African American churches that formed in the aftermath of the 1992 South Central Los Angeles riots. At that time, a group of concerned Los Angeles pastors attended a training in Philadelphia, sponsored by an organization called the Regional Congregations and Neighborhood Organizations (RCNO) and conducted by Reverend Eugene Williams, a Philadelphia pastor and community organizer. The training deeply inspired the Los Angeles pastors with its combination of leadership training, community organizing, empowerment and faith at the heart of the RCNO model. After the training, the Los Angeles Pastors then invited Reverend Williams to lead their churches in an organizing effort.

*“Our overall vision is to develop faith leaders. The African American church is one of the oldest models of organizing and one of the only ones that has produced lasting change. We are using what works.”*

— LAM Staff Member

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After conducting an extensive “listening campaign,” which included over one hundred interviews of Los Angeles area congregation members, Reverend Williams moved to Los Angeles and founded LAM with close ties to the RCNO. Eventually the headquarters of the RCNO relocated to Los Angeles as well. LAM received its first funding and established itself as a 501(c)(3) organization in 1994 with the following mission: ***“To train and develop the capacity of clergy, lay and community leaders to revitalize communities.”***

The LAM offices sit in the heart of South Central Los Angeles, a community struggling with issues of poverty, unemployment, health care access and inadequate education. LAM leaders believe the history of these problems can be traced to the reconstruction following the Civil War. In LAM’s quarterly periodical, *Challenge of Faith*, Reverend Williams cites the similarities between the “First Reconstruction” and what he refers to as the “Second (current) Reconstruction.” He asserts that similar to the “First Reconstruction,” we are in a time of a shifting economy, a growing discrepancy between the rich and poor, and the rise of more dysfunction and despair in families.

Reverend Williams references the conditions from the “First Reconstruction” that provide the context for current work around issues of race and poverty:<sup>1</sup>

- Concepts of compassion and concern for the poor will take a back seat to the acquisition and consolidation of wealth.
- Race relations will continue to deteriorate. As a result, many of the gains made by people of color will be reversed.
- The prison industrial complex will flourish.
- These challenges provide opportunities for communities of need to come together in self-determination in the new political and economic reality.
- Small to mid-size African American churches are the effective organizations to take on these challenges.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the LAM annual report, 1997, now posted on the LAM website.

From this historical foundation—the power of the African American community churches and problems these communities face—LAM developed its own theory of change as a guidepost in promoting civic participation. *“We believe culture, epistemology and historical analysis are the basis for effective community building in civil society. We also believe that a people’s values, customs and beliefs must be understood, appreciated and validated if they are to be successfully organized and involved in civic life,”* explains one staff member.

LAM has grown to be an association of 50 active member churches. Through LAM, congregations of member churches *“address the hopelessness and despair of African Americans”*<sup>2</sup> by organizing around social justice issues related to poverty, education and health. Each church forms a sponsoring committee whose members are selected by the church’s pastor. These committee members serve as organizers within their local churches and communities. They also serve as the link between their own church and the LAM organization. Today LAM has a staff of fourteen as well as strong relationships with state and local policymakers and significant funding from private foundations.

According to LAM staff and board, the organization is at an important juncture as it moves towards taking its model “to scale”—making the transition from a start-up organization with an emphasis on personal relationships and flexibility to a more established and mature organization with evolved and formal processes, policies and systems.

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## REPORT PURPOSE & ORGANIZATION

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BTW Consultants prepared this report based on a careful review of materials, site observations and key informant interviews with staff and board members.

This report presents an organizational profile that can serve as a tool for LAM’s own learning and reflection about the process and progress of its work. A secondary purpose is to serve as a basis for the peer learning of the Lustrous Cluster-Us (MCF Learning Cluster). BTW is preparing an organizational profile (report) of each Cluster member. The Cluster’s collective learning will be based in part on the common themes, challenges and interests that emerge in these reports. Finally, this report is intended to provide the Marguerite Casey Foundation with a better and deeper understanding of the experience of and contributions made by LAM.

This profile is organized as follows:

- Theory of Change
- Strategies in Practice
- Connecting to a Movement
- Inside LAM: A Time of Organizational Change
- Conclusion

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<sup>2</sup> Language taken from the LAM website.

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## **THEORY OF CHANGE<sup>3</sup>**

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At its core, a theory of change is a reasoned description of an organization's intentions. It should be in good alignment with the organization's mission. But unlike the mission, which is aspirational in nature, a theory of change is a more practical rendition of an organization's work and intentions. It answers the following questions:

- Who are we working with?
- What are we doing with them?
- And what change do we expect will happen as a result?

LAM's mission is *“to train and develop the capacity of clergy, lay and community leaders to revitalize communities.”* The short-hand version used by staff is, *“LAM is growing the people power of low-income African American congregations.”*

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### **Constituency: Small African American Church Congregations**

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LAM deliberately works with smaller churches because the congregants are more likely to be in and of the community in which the church is located. The larger “mega” churches tend to attract congregants from a larger geographic area, with people driving from miles away to attend. The larger churches are also more likely to have existing partnerships and infrastructure, which can create a slower and more bureaucratic process for decision-making. Finally, the smaller churches are in greater need of LAM's training and capacity building.

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### **Strategies: Training, Advocacy & Capacity Building**

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LAM employs leadership training, advocacy and capacity building to support the development of people and organizational capacity.

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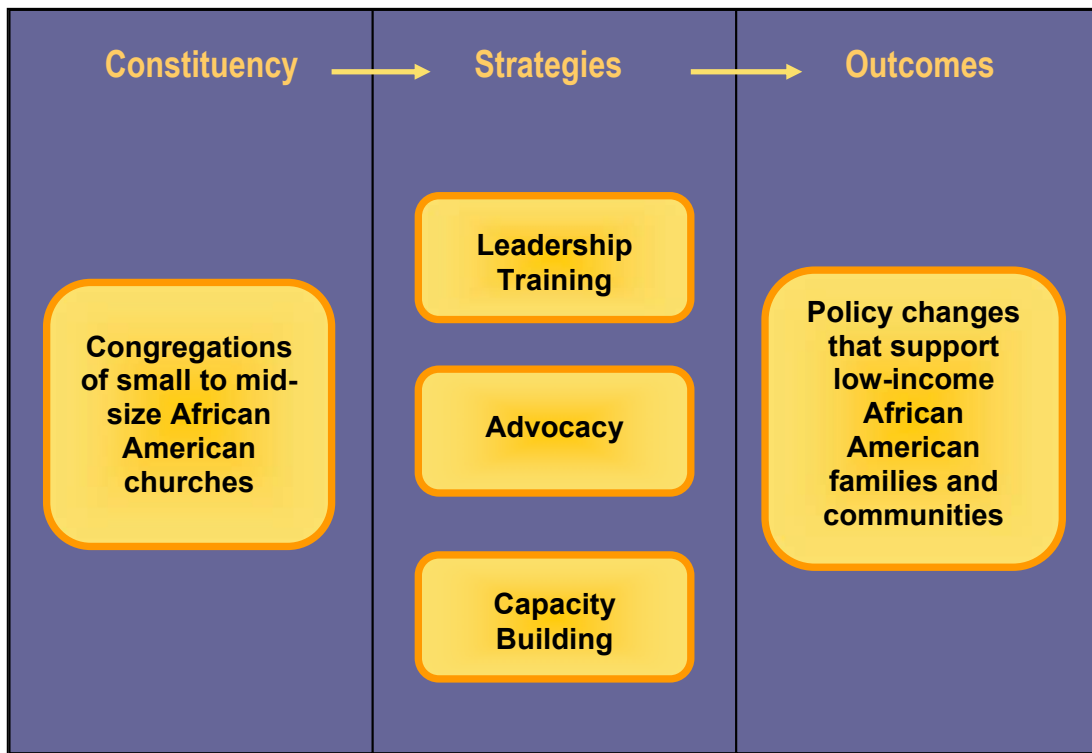
<sup>3</sup> This theory of change is posited by BTW based on our understanding of LAM's intentions.

**Outcomes: Positive Social Justice Policy Change**

LAM’s intention is to achieve positive social change by cultivating the capacity of community residents to be effective spokespersons and advocates on their own behalf.

*“At the LAM Leadership Trainings we learned how to keep public officials accountable—to do our homework about the issues before a meeting or launching a campaign. And now we put those lessons to work in our community meetings.”*  
—LAM Member

**EXHIBIT A  
Theory of Change  
Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches**



**STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE**

What follows are examples of how LAM’s strategies play out in practice.

**Strategy One: Leadership/Empowerment Training**

At the core of its program, LAM uses the RCNO training model. Each year, new member congregations send two to twelve representatives to participate in this training. To date, over 300 pastor and 400 lay leaders have participated in the RCNO training through LAM.

Attending this training is a catalytic event for many of LAM's members. In the words of one pastor, "I didn't know I could make big changes like that or that I was supposed to have an overall vision for my community until I went to the RCNO training."

The RCNO training model is rooted in the values of faith, empowerment and leadership. It is a model that challenges participants to "think, coach and teach," all the while developing skills in the art of asking meaningful questions, developing community relationships and cultivating community leadership.

The training derived from the work of the Highlander Research and Education Training Center, an adult education training center located in Tennessee. Since 1932, Highlander has offered workshops and training under the heading of "Constructing Democracy." Like Highlander, RCNO believes in the value of ordinary people coming together to bring about extra-ordinary change.

LAM fosters this value by continually challenging its member churches to work for change. Most of the congregants themselves are poor and have little experience in advocacy and politics. The comprehensive training prepares participants to assume leadership roles in advocacy efforts. It covers every aspect of meeting preparation and debriefing—rules of practice. The following rules of practice are reflective of the RCNO meeting model:

- **Detailed Agenda Development:** Meetings include an agenda that clearly states the timeframe for each part of the discussion and establishes roles and responsibilities including who will take the lead and who will ask questions.
- **Meet on Your Own Turf:** When possible, LAM hosts meetings with policymakers at member churches, giving the church a "home team advantage."
- **Don't Go Solo:** LAM encourages pastors to have at least one other LAM representative at meetings with policymakers.
- **Make a Strong Argument:** Opinion and passion are not enough. Research, information and statistics are vital for effective organizing.
- **Prepare:** LAM has a planning meeting that includes role-play and practice before attending sessions with public officials.
- **Debrief:** After a community meeting, LAM members discuss what worked well, ideas for improvement and next steps for moving forward.

Many of these practices are illustrated and were observed in the community meeting described in Snapshot #1 on the following page.

**SNAPSHOT #1**  
**LAM Community Meeting**

A dozen LAM members, half of whom are pastors, sit in an upstairs Sunday school classroom on a Thursday night. Seated beside them are their “guests” — two representatives from the Los Angeles School District, plus the police officer responsible for safety in the particular schools of concern. The topics on tonight’s agenda are school suspension and expulsion. The meeting begins with a prayer, and then the guests are asked to leave the room for a few minutes. They politely leave, and LAM members review the meeting purpose and their roles.

A LAM staff member is leading the meeting. She is well-prepared and shares her process and findings with the LAM members. The school district officials and police officer wait in the hallway. The LAM staff member has researched the minutes of past school board meetings to find instances where suspension and expulsion were discussed. She also found statistics showing that most of the youth expelled from school are African American boys. In addition, she explains that research has shown a relationship between being out of school and criminal behavior. LAM member congregations are concerned because it is their sons who are often expelled on the basis of so-called “zero tolerance” behavior rules.

In advance of the meeting, LAM staff members prepared questions for their guests. Consistent with their organizing model, there will be no one spokesperson. Instead, various LAM members have volunteered to ask one question. After the questions and roles are reviewed, the school district officials and police officer are invited back to the meeting.

The school district representatives come armed with their own statistics and view of what has been going on in the schools. *“Suspensions have actually declined,”* they explain, *“and there is no such thing as zero tolerance,”* they say that is a “political term” and has never been school policy.

The school district officials are fully engaged. They provide email addresses and direct dial phone numbers so that LAM members can follow up with them directly. They answer the questions politely, but they also stress the constraints under which they operate. They rely on an antiquated database that inhibits their access to current and accurate data, and they are responsible for 70,000 kids. Furthermore, many key decisions are made at either a lower level—left to the discretion of individual school principals—or at a much higher level—in the state legislature or governor’s office.

Towards the end of the meeting, LAM members dispense with the pre-rehearsed questions and start asking questions of their own. Their questions suggest that they are not convinced that they are getting the full story. They ask about their rights as parents and wonder out loud why the schools do not do more to inform them of these rights.

The meeting lasts an hour and a half. Once the guests have left, the LAM staff member conducts a debrief. There is consensus in the room that the school representatives, despite their polished statements, have not been forthcoming—parents must have access to the numbers and the data.

The group discusses their next community meeting, scheduled for later in the month with the school district superintendent. It will require the same careful preparation.

To close the meeting, a woman, the group’s one female pastor, rises to her feet. Heads bow, and she leads them in prayer.

## **Strategy Two: Advocacy**

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Using the principles its members and organizers learn in the training, much of LAM's work centers on advocacy. LAM brings together member congregations with state and local policymakers on issues that affect local communities. Their policy interests include issues related to ex-offenders, health care and education. When asked for an example of a victory in their work, LAM staff and board members all point to their work on the General Educational Development (GED) legislation.

LAM worked for three years on an organizing effort resulting in legislation being adopted in Los Angeles County that created opportunities for ex-offenders to obtain their GED. This issue was important to LAM based on research that 70% of newly released prisoners in California are without a high school diploma.<sup>4</sup> Many of LAM member churches have parishioners with relatives in or recently released from prison. Having a GED not only improves employment opportunities for ex-offenders but it reduces the likelihood of recidivism and increases their chances of fulfilling their responsibilities as parents.

## **Strategy Three: Capacity Building**

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LAM provides fundraising and capacity building support to its member churches to strengthen their ability to serve their congregations and communities. LAM's capacity building work is relatively new and came about as a result of a partnership established in 2002 between Special Service for Groups (SSG) and LAM. SSG provides programmatic, community and capacity building assistance to nonprofits. Cheryl Branch, who serves as a part-time Associate Director of LAM, is also the Director of the Faith in Communities Initiative at SSG.

Examples of capacity building and technical assistance provided by LAM to its members include:

- Fundraising workshops;
- Grant and report writing assistance;
- Program design; and,
- Strategic planning.

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<sup>4</sup> Statistic taken from *The GED Initiative in Los Angeles*, a report submitted to the Stuart Foundation by LAM in July 2003.

## CONNECTING TO A MOVEMENT

### LAM and the RCNO

LAM's work and approach connect to the work of RCNO, of which LAM is an affiliate. As described by one LAM board member, LAM uses a kind of post-Civil Rights movement approach in its work. Consistent with the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, social justice and racial equality are the main focus, but the strategies

*"One of the cultural characteristics of poor African American churchgoers is that they are looking for their pastor as the leader, rather than taking on leadership and speaking out themselves. So we have to be very deliberate about transferring knowledge and providing opportunities for the churchgoers, and not just their pastors, to become advocates for their families and communities."*

— LAM Staff Member

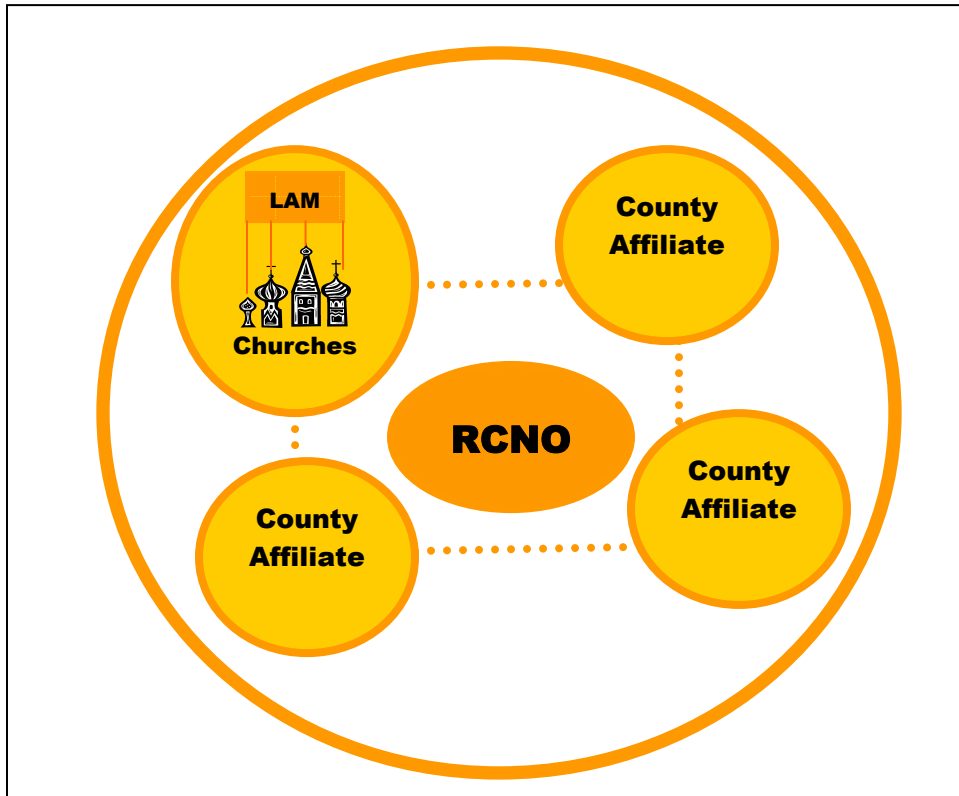
have evolved. Based on interviews with LAM staff and board members, Exhibit B compares the strategies and approaches used by the Civil Rights movement with those employed by RCNO.

#### EXHIBIT B Movement Building: Then and Now

	Civil Rights	RCNO/LAM
<b>Underlying Belief</b>	Institutional racism exists and there is a need for a social justice movement	Institutional racism exists and there is a need for a social justice movement
<b>Organizational Model</b>	Create new organizations as a catalyst to change	Use organizations that already exist (small churches) to catalyze change
<b>Public Policy Model</b>	Advocate for policy change at the national level and mobilize masses to advocate for change (e.g., march on the Capitol)	Work at the local and state level—building small movements one by one
<b>Strategic Partnership Model</b>	Organizations are partners at the movement level—connected on a very large agenda	Regional affiliates are formed to impact state policy
<b>Leadership Model</b>	Nurture leaders with national appeal to be spokespersons and advocates	Train "ordinary" people to advocate for themselves and to meet with policymakers

In addition to serving as the Executive Director of LAM, Reverend Williams serves as the Executive Director of RCNO. These dual roles create a close link between the organizations. Exhibit C on the following page depicts graphically the relationship between RCNO, LAM, county affiliates and the churches.

**EXHIBIT C**  
**Relationship Between the RCNO, LAM, the Affiliates and the Churches**



**Going to Scale**

In addition to LAM, there are four other county-wide RCNO affiliates in California and two in other parts of the country. LAM is described as the most sophisticated of these affiliates and as a result, provides support to the others in terms of staffing, leadership and direction. According to one LAM staff member, *“The interest for more affiliates is growing—some of them start up by coming to us and some of them we encourage to get started.”*

LAM staff and board members speak about taking LAM *“to scale,”* but what they mean is really taking RCNO to scale by generating more LAM-like affiliates in counties across the country. The affiliate model has the benefit of efficiency in that it extends common training and organizing practices across communities. At the same time, the model recognizes the need for local issues and concerns to drive the agenda so each affiliate is able to work independently at state and local levels. When appropriate, however, the affiliates would have the opportunity to collaborate with one another, building a broader base for collective action.

## INSIDE LAM: A TIME OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

LAM is in the process of transformation—moving from a start-up (toddler) organization to a more mature (adolescent) one. LAM leaders understand that this transformation brings both opportunities and growing pains.

The section below provides a description and overview of LAM in the following areas:

- Organizational Culture
- Leadership, Management and Operations
- Governance
- Finances
- Reflective Practice
- Partnerships

### Organizational Culture

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The LAM culture reflects the nature of its member churches and the lives of their congregants. It is a faith-based culture, congregational and, by staffs' admission, sometimes unpredictable. The LAM offices are in the heart of South Central Los Angeles, close to many of their member churches. When asked for words to describe the organization's culture, staff replied, "*family-based*," "*values-driven*" and "*results-driven*."

One feels a strong sense of mutual respect and support among the staff. There is a buzz. Everyone pitches in to get things done. Staff work on a variety of initiatives while simultaneously remaining responsive to the needs of the pastors and lay leaders they teach in the member churches.

LAM encourages—one could say even requires—continuous learning (self-education) as exemplified in the training, mentorship, reflection, evaluation, coaching and shared development opportunities that are available. The LAM staff read and discuss books together. A palpable sense of the organization's mission permeates the LAM office. Staff speak of a deep commitment and dedication to the organization, to Reverend Williams and to the member churches. Some staff say they had "a calling" that brought them to the organization to begin with. A staff member expressed this sentiment in saying: "*The whole of what we are doing is so much bigger than any one of us.*"

"*I grew up down the street,*" says one LAM staff member—one of many with deep roots in the community. LAM staff are not only professional organizers they belong to LAM member congregations and have family and friends in the neighborhood.

When asked about the challenges of the LAM culture, staff say the "*pace of work and the number of things to keep up with.*" For senior staff, their challenge is in managing the tension between teaching/education and "task addiction." "*I like to be available to help other staff,*"

explains one senior staff member, “*but it can be really tough to be there for everyone and only get to the second thing on my list for the day.*”

## SNAPSHOT #2 LAM Staff Meeting

When Reverend Williams enters the room, the staff fall silent in respect. The chatter and good-natured joking comes to an end as the Reverend takes his place in the room. For this monthly staff meeting the agenda has not been given in advance. Reverend Williams is extremely well-prepared. He hands out packets of information related to the next phase of LAM’s development and the impact this will have on the staff. As he speaks about each concept, he stops and addresses each staff member by name.

“*What do you think?*” Heads look down. Silence.

Finally the staff member responds: an idea, a reaction, or “*I don’t know.*”

Reverend Williams pushes his staff members—pushing them to *think*. LAM’s focus in promoting self-education and helping clergy and lay leaders to become more critical, creative and consistent thinkers.

“*There’s got to be a thought in there...*” he says.

Gradually, the silence gives way to conversation, and then, after an hour, to complete candor. Over and over, Reverend Williams reminds the staff that they need to be constantly “*thinking, coaching, teaching, thinking, coaching, teaching.*” They rely on him too much, he says. As LAM enters the next phase of its development, the staff will have to increase in their individual capacity to think and reflect and evaluate.

“*I need you to stay in your own lanes,*” he says, meaning that roles and responsibilities must now be more clearly defined, given the current status of LAM’s development. “*We are not a mom-and-pop operation anymore. We have a \$2 million budget. Most nonprofits don’t get this far.*”

He shares statistics on the number of nonprofits formed each year and the number that go out of business. He talks about what LAM needs to make it to the next stage of development. He moves smoothly between world of spiritual calling and the nuts-and-bolts of social action, one minute referencing the Bible, the next quoting from Jim Collins’ *Built to Last*.

He is, at once, Reverend and CEO.

“*So if I don’t check in with you everyday, it doesn’t mean that I don’t still love you. The love is always there,*” he says.

### **Leadership, Management, and Operations**

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LAM has a strong, inspirational and catalytic leader in Reverend Eugene Williams. Staff and Board describe Reverend Williams as “*a pastor’s pastor*” and a “*leader’s leader.*” He is given credit for the formation and the growth of LAM—without him, there would be no LAM. Everyone mentions a personal connection with Reverend Williams.

LAM has apparently developed a strong “second” in Cheryl A. Branch, Associate Director, who is responsible for the capacity building strategy. Ms. Branch works in partnership with Reverend Williams on all organizational issues. Both Reverend Williams and Ms. Branch divide their time between LAM and RCNO. Given the multiple number of sites and statewide projects, neither are able to be in the LAM office every day; both travel all over the state and check-in by phone

frequently. Felicia Jones, Director of Grants and Administration, assumes day-to-day management and is responsible for running the office as well as staff supervision and teaching/coaching. Felicia is also an experienced organizer and a member of one of LAM's founding churches.

Reverend Williams is very aware of the dangers of "founder's syndrome." He is vocal in wanting other staff to "step up" and deliberate in not always serving as the organizational spokesperson for LAM. He encourages other staff to assume a leadership role. BTW observed this during the community meeting with school officials where Felicia Jones served as the LAM spokesperson working with church member leaders. The organization is trying to address great needs and is still struggling to balance the demand for needs with its capacity and available resources, as expressed by the following LAM member's comment: *"Sometimes things tend to snowball. I don't think LAM staff have enough resources and time to do everything we are involved in."*

## **Governance**

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LAM's board has seven members—all pastors—who have been with LAM since it's inception. They are each affiliated with member churches and have participated in LAM's leadership training program. Some of the board members were involved in bringing Reverend Williams to Los Angeles from Philadelphia: *"When we met Reverend Williams in Philadelphia, we knew he could be a catalyst to change here in Los Angeles."*

Several board members *acknowledge the support and leadership development he has given them personally over time. "He helped me to think more strategically about what was going on in our communities and how I could give those in my congregation a voice,"* asserted one board member.

The LAM board meets quarterly, and each LAM member has a strong personal relationship with Reverend Williams. In the words of one board member, *"There is lots of trust between Eugene and the board. We really rely on him as a leader, but he also relies on us as a sounding board because there are so many great ideas he is passionate about."* The board is responsible not only for fiscal oversight but also serve as thought partners. Board members bring forward the concerns and priorities from their congregations that they then factor into LAM's organizational priorities and work.

*"There are different, healthy perspectives on the board,"* says one board member, referring to the philosophical differences between "salvation" and "social justice" pastors. *"We work as a board on finding a common language and framework that works for all of us, no matter our preaching style."*

Reverend Williams notes that as part of the organization's continued development, the board will have to evolve as well. The board may need to expand, bringing on *"new voices and perspectives that will help hold the founding board members accountable."*

## Finances

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**LAM leaders are proud of the organization's financial stability and its success in fundraising from private philanthropy.** Staff delight in recounting the story of how LAM started out with no money. *"There was Reverend Williams and one filing cabinet,"* one staff member recalls. LAM has grown into a significant organization with a \$1.2 million budget and a staff of fourteen.

LAM does not seek or receive public funds. LAM also tries to maintain a broad and diverse funding base to avoid becoming reliant on one funding source. No single funder can provide more than a third of the annual budget. The four lead funders for the 2004-05 fiscal year are the California Endowment, the Marguerite Casey Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

*"Even though I didn't set out to be a fundraiser, it turns out I'm very good at it,"* says one LAM staff member. *"We have stuck to our values and haven't chased the dollars for anything that didn't align with our process and principles,"* he adds.

*"We are financially stable,"* says one board member. Our observation suggests, however, that LAM is likely to need an infusion of resources to support its growth and development. The office is crowded, and the technology will need to be updated.

*"Grant writing and reporting is a challenge to us because we really don't have enough people with writing skills."* LAM staff speak of the challenges of keeping up with the multiple requests from multiple funders on different timelines.

## Reflective Practice

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LAM values information and time for reflection. Meetings at LAM include agendas and provide time for questions and answers. If a meeting includes outside guest speakers, time is set aside to debrief the discussion. Organizers consider reflection to be an integral aspect of self reflection. LAM developed an evaluation culture and specific data collection instruments including an "organizing matrix" a "pastoral interview form" and a "leaders survey" to learn about the effectiveness of its work and to guide the policy formation process. As one staff member explains, *"the goal of evaluation at LAM is to have evaluation and research ever present, non-obtrusive and integrated into the day-to-day activities of the work to ensure we remain competitive as an organization. This goal is distinctly different from our core mission of teaching and self-education."*

LAM also relies on secondary data sources to inform its work, including census data, culturally specific publications, journals, periodicals, web-sites and other information related to issues of concern. LAM encourages staff and members to find and use information as part of their "armor" in defining their problems and solutions to public officials and policymakers. LAM offers its members training on using internet search technology, community needs assessments and strategic planning.

LAM’s website and materials are consistent in aligning their activities and strategies to desired outcomes. For instance, staff use a matrix for planning and evaluation which captures the following information about each initiative in terms of both “social justice issues” and “capacity building:”

- Problem Being Addressed
- Goals/Desired Results
- Assumptions about the Problem
- Internal Factors (such as resources, staff time, materials, etc.)
- External Factors (such as legislation, public opinion, etc.)

Many staff attribute the organization’s focus on evaluation to Cheryl Branch. *“Cheryl is ALWAYS asking us to think about evaluation, and I’m starting to see the value in it,”* says one staff member half-jokingly. Another staff member notes, *“It seems like the evaluation part always falls to the bottom of my list because there is so much to do, but I’m working on making it a bigger piece of my work.”*

LAM’s use of reflective practice incorporates the principles expressed Exhibit D.

**EXHIBIT D**  
**Reflective Practice**

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IS THE SUM OF		
<b>OPENNESS</b> <i>to re-evaluate and change</i>  +	<b>INFORMATION</b> <i>systematic collection of feedback / data</i>  +	<b>TIME</b> <i>to analyze and reflect</i>  +

**Partnerships**

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LAM maintains strong partnerships with the RCNO and its affiliate organizations. It also supports time-limited, issue-specific partnerships with other organizations. In the words of one LAM member, *“We don’t have permanent friends, only permanent issues.”*

With their issue-driven initiatives, LAM forges collaborations on an as needed basis with other organizations. Partnerships on policy initiatives have included Public Private Ventures, UCLA and the City of Los Angeles.

When it comes to organizing, LAM stays committed to its approach. *“We don’t hire people with organizing backgrounds or have other groups do the organizing for us,”* says one staff member. *“We have a model we know works and want people to learn it organically rather than having to un-learn a different approach.”*

*“Sometimes a foundation has suggested that we partner or collaborate with another group, such as a Latino group. We are happy to work with them in some way, but we know our base and are very specific about who we are teaching and how.”* This quote from a LAM staff member, indicates the commitment to the organization’s mission.

**SNAPSHOT #3**  
**The Future of LAM**

Nineteen year old Gregg is a spunky, smiling young man who wears the traces of his earlier life lightly.

Gregg came to LAM by either accident or divine intervention. Sentenced to a juvenile “alternative” program in the same building that houses LAM’s offices, every day Gregg says he would “watch black men with nice cars and big books coming out.” He was curious what they were reading, so one day he asked. Pretty soon the LAM staff were giving him reading assignments, serving as mentors, even attending court hearings to vouch for his progress.

When he arrived, Gregg had little hope and direction. But since, LAM has taught, coached and embraced him. Today he is responsible for a LAM partnership with Walden House—tasked with running a training program and managing a grant. At night he attends college.

According to Gregg, LAM is these three things: *“Real. Love of Community. Love of People.”*

Gregg credits LAM for changing his life, for giving him a future. When LAM leaders talk about their organization’s future, they lay it squarely on the shoulders of people like Gregg.

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## CONCLUSION

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LAM has strong roots in the past—a deep historical perspective that connects its work to the lives and struggles of generations of African Americans. At one time or another, people in these communities may have felt connected to a certain minister or a congregation. LAM now connects them to a bigger and stronger community, one that reaches beyond the walls of the church, well into the community. While understanding the past, LAM keeps its eye on the future—borrowing from the best of business and nonprofit practices while adhering to the faith-based values that are central to its existence.

Many of the challenges LAM faces are typical of any growing nonprofit—organizational capacity, evolution of leadership and governance and balancing the tension between a mission-driven, “family” culture with a culture of professionalism and systems. LAM’s challenges relate in part to the complexity of the problems its members and congregations aim to address. In the words of one LAM member, *“Many people in our churches have been down so long that down don’t bother them anymore.”* LAM is simultaneously working with individuals and with larger public systems in order to raise people out of poverty and despair.

LAM is poised to share and spread its work and lessons with similar organizations across the country. Its greatest current challenge is a result of its success. LAM is growing quickly, and an organization, like an individual, must go through a growth process that at times is uncomfortable. But along with the challenges of growth and development come great opportunities as well.