

## **NYSCU GRANT PROGRESS REPORT**

**ORGANIZATION:** Interfaith Impact of NYS

**DATE OF REPORT:** October 15, 2017

**PURPOSE OF GRANT:** To promote Unitarian Universalist moral values in the New York State Legislature and Executive Chamber through support of Internet Communications, a congregation outreach program, and Nation Builder membership that permits statewide outreach to members, e-campaigns, newsletter e-distributions and visits with legislators, and support for the campaigns of allied organizations. This includes a developing media ambassador program. We work in a dynamic environment, keep abreast of the legislative schedule throughout the year, and are responsive to the effect of State-federal interactions on the allocation of resources.

**AMOUNT OF GRANT:** \$4,500

### **1. How was the money actually spent?**

All the money is being spent for the purposes described in the grant application, including the Nation Builder platform, which also provides a CRM database.

### **2. By your best estimate, how many people were/are being reached/served?**

About 15,000 directly as a voice for UU (10,000+), Protestant and Reform Jewish congregations. All our legislative efforts have the potential to impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities across the state.

For example, working with allies from Albany, New York City and elsewhere across the state, we advocated successfully for increasing the age for automatic prosecution as an adult in NY from 16 to 18 for most crimes. This change was included in the 2016-1017 IINYS budget.

The 2018-2019 budget is being negotiated now, and we are developing a fall campaign to get elements of the Climate and Community Protection Act included in final budget. This will affect the quality of life of everyone in NY and adjacent states.

### **3. How well have the *goals* of the program/project been met, and how has this determination been made?**

- **Advocacy Day.** On Monday, May 1, we had an inspiring advocacy day with more than 30 Unitarian Universalists from across the state, along with representatives from other denominations advocating for justice. We met with Senate and Assembly leadership to advocate

and educate on the following issues: 1) a New York Constitutional right to clean air and water and a healthful environment; 2) the New York Health Act—single-payer quality health insurance for New York; and 3) Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement, a Black Lives Matter issue. We also made up teams and visited the office of every State Legislator to give them our information packet. (Each office retains these position papers to help the legislator and their staff consider the bills.)

- **Transgender rights:** IINYS continues to support GENDA (Gender Equality Non-Discrimination Act) and stands ready to offer support as appropriate.
- **Reproductive Justice.** We advocated for the Comprehensive Contraception Coverage Act with Family Planning Advocates and Concerned Clergy for Choice. Comprehensive sexuality education is still on our agenda, but there are no bills to support at this time. (NB: New York City has its own comprehensive program. Some localities, such as Rochester, have good programs. In other districts, programs range from adequate to execrable.)
- **Environmental Activism:** 1) IINYS has signed many environmental letters and petitions during the year, most recently the demand for environmental reviews of the Sheridan Hollow microgrid and more than 80 other proposed power microgrids across the state, many of which located in poor neighborhoods. 2) We advocated for a NY Constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to clean air and water and a healthful environment. 3) We are developing a campaign this fall around environmental needs to be included in the NY budget.
- **Black Lives Matter:** (1) Humane Alternatives to Long Term Solitary Confinement (HALT Solitary) Act: This bill has met considerable opposition in both houses, but the Assembly Correction Committee chair is now a cosponsor. Our members, including Board Member Robert Herman from Rochester and Paula Shaw from Schenectady, are working with the New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement. Our Executive Director joined experts from the Correctional Association, a public-interest lawyer, and the Director of NY Catholic Charities to educate them about this issue. We expect to advocate for HALT again in 2018. (2) We are looking at bills that would overhaul our unfair bail-bond system. Our sibling UU organizations in other states are working on similar bills.
- **Interfaith Moral Justice Work.** We participated in interfaith Moral Monday actions at the Capitol, and spoke at press conferences and on TV.

- **Opposition to Gambling.** We continue to monitor the situation. Despite a clear prohibition in the NY Constitution, on-line betting at NY race tracks was implemented this year. Meanwhile, new casinos are projecting significantly lower earnings than expected as the patrons of brick-and-mortar gambling palaces age out.
- **Campaign Finance Reform:** We continue to support reform efforts as developed by the Moreland Commission and Citizen Action.
- **Universal Access to Quality Health Care Insurance.** We advocated in the spring for the NY Health bill and will continue to actively support it. This is especially relevant as the federal government and the President of the United States continue to dismantle public health insurance.
- **Immigration.** We have plans to meet this fall with the head of the Office for New Americans and other organizations to discuss sanctuary and other issues before formulating our position. These are issues of great concern to the faith community.
- **Aid to congregations.** 1) For IINYS members and friends, we held a monthly Internet conference calls throughout the legislative session. These will begin again this fall. 2) We are reaching out to congregations this fall with a campaign to get the Climate and Community Protection Act provisions included in the 2018-2019 NYS budget. This is in keeping with our emphasis on providing congregations and individuals with tools for UU values-based moral advocacy in the public arena.

#### 4. **What concerns developed in the course of the program/project?**

- The **graying of our leadership** continues to be a major concern as we look to the future. Our IINYS President is 80 and our Executive Director 78. Our Treasurer and Secretary are only slightly younger. At our annual retreat this year, held at the UU Utica congregation, we once again discussed various options for sustainability, including greater visibility, recruitment of new board members, and other measures.
- **Under-staffed.** We continue to have only one, very part-time executive director, a large legislative agenda, and a congregation support mission.
- **Hacked.** An Internet marketing robot hacked our [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org) website. After considerable work, our webmaster Mike Fisher corrected the problem, but we continue to deal with the need to eliminate vulnerabilities and update our site so that it will appeal to younger generations. Our administrative priority this fall is to get our web site up to date and improved before the start of the 2017 legislative session.

**5. Is this program/project complete?**

No. Our legislative priorities change from year to year, as does the advocacy situation in Albany. This reflects the reality within the Legislature and in the public arena, where we act with allies. Throughout the year, we lift up a progressive moral and liberal religious lens through which we view public policies and programs. We help energize UU congregations across the state to fight for just and compassionate NY State legislation, policies and programs while maintaining an effective presence in Albany.

**If no, when will it be completed and evaluated, and by whom?**

This is an on-going effort to maintain a place at the table for Unitarian Universalist values in New York State governance. Evaluation occurs at every board meeting, on every ZOOM Legislative Action Call, by participants on advocacy day, and in frequent email exchanges.

**6. Would you do the program/project again, or recommend it to others? Explain. (Use other side if needed.)**

Absolutely. Interfaith Impact of NYS is recognized by the UUA as the UU legislative ministry for New York State. This is a statewide community ministry. We are the only multi-issue, liberal interfaith religious advocacy organization in New York. We help make a difference every year, because our UU values are fundamental to good government.

Respectfully Submitted by

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