



Tracking gender, race would hinder charities

By Sushma Raman Sushma

Article Last Updated: 02/18/2008 11:11:47 PM PST

When the next major earthquake hits California, relief agencies will be asking each client seeking food, shelter and other relief to identify their sexual orientation. A corporate executive serving on the board of a youth mentorship program must fill out paperwork tracking gender, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation. A homeless teen who calls a suicide prevention hotline will be required to answer similar questions.

Sound problematic? It is.

Sound unlikely? We hope so, but a bill moving through the state Legislature would mandate these scenarios - and countless similar ones - in schools, legal-aid organizations, soup kitchens, museums, universities, or other nonprofits near you.

The bill in question, AB 624, would require large philanthropic foundations in the state of California, and the nonprofits they support, to track and disclose data on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation with respect to their boards, staff, foundation contracts, and individuals served through grants.

If you think this won't affect you or someone you know, think again.

Foundation support is playing an increasingly critical role in underwriting a range of much-needed programs and services - from medical research to after-school programs, from museums to health-care clinics, from colleges and universities to parks. In an era of declining government resources and more importantly, a decline in the government's will to meet the needs of our communities, one would think that government would facilitate the work of philanthropy and nonprofits, instead of coming up with legislation of this nature.

Don't get me wrong. Ensuring that diverse and low-income communities are served is critical to the success of the philanthropic and charitable sector. That's why California foundations have focused on increasing diversity in recent years, with tangible results.

But a government mandate that such data be tracked and disclosed is inappropriate, burdensome, and a violation of the privacy rights of all individuals. What's more, in an era when nonprofits are increasingly challenged with growing needs and declining resources, they will have to channel limited staff and volunteer time to completing paperwork.

The bill fails to recognize another major issue. While significant philanthropic resources go to health care and education, there are also many institutions that choose to focus on issues close to their mission - such as climate change, the

Advertisement

TARGET WEB COUPON

EXPIRES 3/8/08

FREE Twenty 4x6" basic prints



Offer available at Target One-hour Photo Labs. Go to Target.com/photo for the location nearest you. One-hour service limited to machine capacity. Limit one item or offer per coupon. Offer not available for prints made on the Kodak Picture Kiosk. Void if copied, transferred, purchased, sold or prohibited by law. No cash value. Maximum retail value \$4.40 for combined free offer.



9856-0113-2647-5849-0376-5806-89

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™



arts, educational reform and affordable housing. While these issues have clear benefits to all communities, it is difficult to track who are the beneficiaries by race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. The implicit assumption that all philanthropic dollars can be neatly divided amongst different groups is erroneous.

Another problem with the bill is the underlying premise that one must be of a particular race, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation in order to care about and effectively serve that particular group. We can reflect upon the seminal role played by Gandhi's vision in the freedom struggle in South Africa and more recently, the inspiration drawn from the U.S. civil rights movement by low-caste communities in India in their struggle for justice.

Closer to home, the farmworkers' movement in California, the rights of migrants fleeing human-rights violations in Central America, and the building of alliances between black-brown communities are all issues that have found resonance among a broader community.

History has demonstrated that successful social movements are often supported by partnerships and coalitions between groups, based upon commonalities of interests and a shared vision for a better future. AB 624 is a step in the wrong direction for all Californians.

Sushma Raman is the president of Southern California Grantmakers.

Advertisement

TARGET WEB COUPON

EXPIRES 3/8/08

FREE Twenty 4x6" basic prints

 photo

Offer available at Target One-hour Photo Labs. Go to Target.com/photo for the location nearest you. One-hour service limited to machine capacity. Limit one item or offer per coupon. Offer not available for prints made on the Kodak Picture Kiosk. Void if copied, transferred, purchased, sold or prohibited by law. No cash value. Maximum retail value \$4.40 for combined free offer.



9856-0113-2647-5849-0376-5806-89

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™