

Interfaith Training on Dialogue & Service For a Religiously Diverse World

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Amount Requested: \$4,700

Abstract:

With an ever more religiously diverse population, Xavier must articulate new ways of addressing the spiritual needs of its student population while maintaining strong roots in Jesuit values like service and social action. In forming students as “people for others,” Xavier will find ample support from Interfaith Youth Core training sessions. Two Outreach Education and Training associates will facilitate programs over two days, leading presentations, seminars, dialogues, and other programs. These programs will be specifically tailored to address the needs of Xavier’s unique environment, with strong input from multiple offices and departments. This programming and training will support both student groups and university departments as Xavier engages a new aspect of diversity that as of yet has remained an untapped resource.

Project Budget

IFYC Outreach Education & Training	\$4000 (min. \$1250)
IFYC Staff Travel & Accommodation	\$700 (min. \$350)

The two items listed cover the expenses for extensive training sessions, roundtable discussions, service project facilitation and other work by two trainers from the non-profit organization the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) during a two-day trip to Xavier.

The visit by the IFYC trainers will be tailored to fit the needs of Xavier's unique campus community. If the grant is approved, Campus Ministry, Peace & Justice Programs, Interfaith Community Engagement, and other university departments and offices will be involved in choosing and outlining the presentations, seminars, and other programs the IFYC trainers will direct. As such, it is impossible to specifically account for that which the grant will provide. Following are examples of possible programs broken down into three key areas:

Intensive work with student leaders and organizers:

- Trainings on the theory and praxis of interfaith service work and the interfaith movement
- Dialogue facilitation trainings focusing on IFYC's methodology of storytelling, shared values and service-learning
- Guided brainstorming sessions around creative next steps for building sustainable interfaith service work on campus
- Designing and leading student retreats focused on leadership development
- Comprehensive skills-based training for long-term, successful interfaith organizing

Catalyzing involvement and interest beyond student leaders:

- Keynote speeches open to the entire campus and local community
- Guest lectures in classes relevant to interfaith work, social justice and religious pluralism
- Lunch discussions, roundtables and Q&A sessions with relevant student groups including religious groups, interfaith organizations, service learning groups, diversity groups, etc.
- Leading and facilitating interfaith service projects and dialogue

Consulting with key stakeholders to analyze religious diversity on an institutional level:

- In-depth campus assessments to analyze the current strengths and weaknesses regarding religious pluralism at an institutional level
- Meetings to discuss religious pluralism with interested departments including religious life staff, diversity staff, service-learning staff, chaplains, dean of students, etc.
- Problem-solving with faculty and staff around particular campus issues such as: embracing religious diversity while being denominationally affiliated, developing a new policy for observing religious holidays, responding to incidents of religious discrimination or religious hate crimes on campus and resolving tensions or conflict between campus religious groups
- Visioning and planning with faculty and staff around new programming, curricula and opportunities to build religious pluralism on campus

The latter budget item specifically covers the airfare and hotel costs to bring two IFYC training associates to Cincinnati. Due to the varying nature of airfare and hotel prices, this item is only an estimate, and any surplus funds not used will be returned to the WOX Giving Circle.

Ideally, two IFYC training associates would be brought to campus for two days to make the greatest impact. The minimal amount of funding, \$1250 plus \$350 travel, would cover only one training associate for a single day. We are also seeking alternative funds through the Co-Curricular Programming Board, the SGA Financial Affairs Committee, and affected offices, although these sources would not alone be able to supply the full amount.

Project Narrative

As we pass into the 21st century, Xavier seeks to fulfill its mission faced with increasing diversity within its student body. This diversity exists not only in the traditional areas of gender, nationality, and race, but increasingly in the realm of religious affiliation. The call to engage this diversity has come directly from the Superior General of the Jesuits, articulated recently by both the retired Peter-Hans Kolvenbach and the newly appointed Adolfo Nicolas. As the Very Reverend Father Kolvenbach stated in his October 2006 speech at Xavier:

[Y]ou can help students learn about their faith by helping them understand as clearly and as profoundly as possible their own religious tradition and by assisting them to find ways to nurture their commitment to this tradition. As a Jesuit, Catholic university, Xavier has particular responsibility to focus on Christianity, with special attention on Roman Catholicism. However, as Xavier attracts students of other religious traditions, it must explore ways to help them too, not only in academic courses but also in support from student services and campus ministry. As even the most cursory examination of a newspaper reminds us, this topic is essential for the health and safety of our world. (Service of Faith in a Religiously Pluralistic World)

Kolvenbach continues by articulating a plan of cooperative social action in building interfaith relationships, suggesting that when “we engage in serious conversation with people of other faith commitments, and engage in projects of social concern with them, we can often begin to experience our own faith more profoundly and more satisfyingly.” This was echoed and expanded by the Very Reverend Father Nicolas in his address last month at Loyola Marymount entitled “Pluralism in Action.” According to Nicolas, part of the Jesuit mission stems principally from serious conversation, where we pay attention to experience, reflect on that experience and then make good decisions, together, based on what is learned through the process. It always involves sharing our own stories. Common mission becomes real through genuine relationships of trust and through shared actions and practices. Nicolas believes that “such companionship in mission depends crucially on relationships based on mutual trust, nurtured by frequent exchanges, structured in flexible ways and forming a community of service.”

The model of interfaith work articulated by the Interfaith Youth Core is particularly suited to address this growing need. The IFYC model begins by building relationships of equal dignity and mutual loyalty, connecting youth through personal storytelling. By focusing on shared values rather than theological differences, the IFYC methodology strives to find common ground on which to build collaborative efforts of social action. Values such as compassion, hospitality, and caring for the Earth become cooperative service opportunities to engage across the boundaries of religious groups. By working together, people of different faiths are taking common action for the common good. The techniques of the IFYC “build religious pluralism, a form of proactive cooperation that affirms individual identities while emphasizing that the well-being of each depends on the health of the whole” (www.ifyc.org). As this model acutely speaks to the needs expressed by Superior Generals Kolvenbach and Nicolas, direct support from IFYC staff would be a valuable resource as Xavier begins to reach in new directions.

In seeking to give substance to the visions of Kolvenbach and Nicolas, Xavier has already begun taking steps toward creating an environment more welcoming to students of other faiths while remaining rooted in its Jesuit heritage. This past month Campus Ministry issued a new mission statement, defining part of their mission as being “companions with members of the Xavier community on their journey of faith” and seeking to “nurture and support people of all faiths so they may become more grounded in their tradition.” In addition to this, Peace and Justice Programs is trying to shed new light on the relation between faith and service, working to craft ways of acknowledging the diverse religious traditions that bring Xavier students to service work. Most importantly, the establishment of the Office of Interfaith Community Engagement shows the commitment the university is ready to make towards engaging in inter-religious dialogue and action. These small steps mark the beginning of a new direction, a way the IFYC has already charted due to challenges

they have encountered at other universities. As these offices, and others on campus, strive to fulfill the call for a deeper commitment to interfaith action, direction and training from the IFYC would be highly beneficial. Especially as Interfaith Community Engagement is in this formative period, the presence of IFYC trainers, with their knowledge and experience, will help this office and others grow to their best potential.

Acceptance of this proposal gives the Women of Excellence Giving Circle an opportunity to provide guidance and growth for Xavier students and faculty. This is a significant time in the field of interfaith work, with interfaith programming expanding at all levels: local, national, and international. The work of the IFYC is nationally recognized, with IFYC director Eboo Patel recently named to President Obama's Advisory Panel for the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives. As the university adapts to supporting this new facet of diversity, Women of Excellence can lead through their support. In addition to the general need for guidance on interfaith issues, the IFYC Outreach Education and Training (OET) staff can speak to specific issues important to women. Currently the entire OET division at the IFYC is made up of women from diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Their expertise can be tailored to discuss various issues, including women's leadership in religious communities, religiously motivated domestic violence, and other topics. One specific program that could be offered would be a discussion of the documentary *Acting on Faith: Women's New Religious Activism in America*. Available from Harvard University's Pluralism Project, the film "offers an intimate look at the lives and work of three American women – one Buddhist, one Hindu, and one Muslim – for whom faith, activism, and identity are deeply intertwined." Ideally, members of the Women of Excellence Council will participate in planning the schedule for the IFYC staff during their visit in order to best recognize the important role the WOX Giving Circle played in the success of the project. Their involvement, and the support of the WOX Giving Circle, would also be noted on all advertising for the various events the IFYC staff would be leading, as well as mentioning at each event that it was made possible by the WOX Giving Circle.

The direct impact of the project could be measured by the number of students and faculty who participate in IFYC programs over the two day period. This will vary based on the sessions and events that university staff and students wish the IFYC to lead. However, such a direct measurement does not accurately represent the impact the IFYC staff will have on campus. Support given to Campus Ministry, Peace and Justice Programs, and Interfaith Community Engagement will ripple across campus at all levels, directly and indirectly impacting students long after the IFYC staff have left. Any specific numeric estimate would be neglecting the secondary and tertiary impacts as training and information spreads, thus the expected total impact of the project is almost beyond measure. Ultimately, the success of the project would best be judged by Campus Ministry, Peace and Justice Programs, Interfaith Community Engagement, and the other offices participating in IFYC training sessions. Post-training interviews with these staff members will serve as our assessment of the project's success.

The work of the IFYC on campus will undoubtedly engage students on a spiritual level, encouraging their involvement in service with solidarity, thus furthering the mission of Xavier University. The IFYC model of interfaith action undoubtedly transforms students into "people for others," and I would be more than proud to present the resulting impact of this project before the WOX Council and Giving Circle.