



Building *the* Global Sisterhood

Measurement, Evaluation and Learning Report
for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's
Catholic Sisters Initiative Strategy

Executive Summary

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The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation Catholic Sisters Initiative launched a five-year strategy in February 2013 to enhance the vitality of Catholic sisters, who in turn advance human development around the globe. It aims to support efforts to attract, form and retain **members**, develop their **leadership** skills and help them take advantage of the financial and social **resources** available to them. The Sisters Initiative makes strategic investments in partner organizations working across congregations of women religious in both the global north and south. From January 2012 through June 2015, the Sisters Initiative awarded 48 grants to 38 partner organizations, totaling more than \$55 million, and its portfolio continues to expand. The growth of the Sisters Initiative in recent years reflects the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's commitment to "give aid to...the sisters," as Conrad Hilton requested in his last will and testament.

The Foundation awarded the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC) a grant in April 2014 to evaluate the Catholic Sisters Initiative strategy over four years. As the Sisters Initiative's Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) partner, CRCC seeks to answer the question, *Does the strategy effectively increase the vitality of women religious across the globe as they advance human development?*

Indicators of Success

The Sisters Initiative's investments are guided by indicators of success for its goals on membership, leadership and resources in the global north and south.

Indicators of success

	<i>Global South</i>	<i>Global North</i>
MEMBERSHIP	Increase number of sisters with postsecondary credentials	Increase number of women who enter religious life
LEADERSHIP	High percentage of sisters with leadership training assume leadership positions	Increase number of qualified leaders under 60
RESOURCES	More congregations engage in effective financial planning	Higher percentage of congregations are more than 60 percent funded in retirement liability

During the first year of the MEL, CRCC established data benchmarks to track whether Sisters Initiative grants are making progress towards these indicators over the 4-year period of the MEL. These baseline numbers reflect work by different Sisters Initiative grantees. The African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) has already reported success in training and credentialing sisters through the Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) and Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) programs. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) provided initial numbers for the global north indicators. As other grants mature, their outcomes will help inform strategy indicators.

2015 Report Card: Indicators of Success

	<i>Global South</i>	<i>Global North</i>
MEMBERSHIP	Excellent SLDI: Phases 1–3: 1805 sisters received certificates SLDI: Phase 4: 1360 sisters projected to receive certificates HESA: Phase 1: 186 sisters enrolled in universities, 11 sisters received diplomas, 1 received a certificate	In Progress 114 women religious professed final vows in 2014 (CARA)
LEADERSHIP	Good 274 SLDI alumni completed survey: 41.6 percent received a promotion 50.4 percent were asked to participate in other leadership activities outside of their ministries	In Progress Data to come from ongoing grants
RESOURCES	In Progress Secondary impact from SLDI measured through leadership promotion and new grants awarded through acquired grant proposal skills	In Progress Participating congregations that have adequately funded retirement assets 2009: 218/455 (48 percent) 2014: 169/419 (40 percent) (NRRO)

It is still too early to determine the overall success of the Sisters Initiative strategy based on the current metrics. Early pre-strategy investment into the African Sisters Education Collaborative, which started in 2007, has paid dividends in building the membership and leadership capacities of sisters in Africa. The relationship with ASEC also attests to the Sister Initiative’s commitment to capacity-building.

Global Context

As a research center at the University of Southern California, CRCC draws upon its networks in religious, civic and scholarly communities to understand developments in religious life in a broader context. The full report outlines trends in religious demographics and the unique challenges and opportunities they present to the Sisters Initiative. The shift in the Catholic population to the global south in the last century justifies putting substantial resources into Africa and Asia. In the United States and Europe, where religious affiliation is declining, it is very important to target young women who are idealistic and are motivated by their spiritual quest for purpose and meaning.

Recommendations

The data from the Catholic Sisters Initiative suggest that the strategy, which is only two years old, is on target in meeting the needs of sisters around the globe and supporting their work in advancing human development. Based on CRCC’s knowledge of trends within religious institutions and global religion, analysis of the Sisters Initiative’s current activities and interviews with more than 244 sisters, novices, aspirants and area experts, CRCC recommends the Catholic Sisters Initiative respond to the following gaps and opportunities:

<i>Gap</i>	<i>Opportunity</i>
GAP 1: If people do not see sisters, they are less likely to become or support a sister.	OPPORTUNITY: Elevate awareness as a central part of the Sisters Initiative strategy.
GAP 2: If the Catholic Church hierarchy does not demonstrate that it values the work of sisters, then sisters will not flourish.	OPPORTUNITY: Leverage the Sisters Initiative’s influence within the church hierarchy to create more visible and tangible support for sisters.
GAP 3: If sisters do not have networks of support for themselves, they may face burnout, dropout.	OPPORTUNITY: Adapt a “lifetime formation” approach and foster supportive networks of sisters.
GAP 4: If Catholic sisters do not listen to the cultural sensibilities of different generations and populations, the global sisterhood suffers.	OPPORTUNITY: Incorporate a more nuanced view of geographic and cultural similarities and differences into the Sisters Initiative strategy.

CRCC also evaluated the Sisters Initiative’s operations. The report includes specific recommendations for best practices in grant management, which will allow the Sisters Initiative to create a culture of learning and documentation. CRCC also recommends that the Sisters Initiative better communicate its vision and accomplishments both within the Foundation and to key external audiences.

Going Forward

CRCC views the first annual convening of grantees for the Sisters Initiative as the beginning of a process around developing communities of learning and practice among grantees and their beneficiaries. CRCC’s team will continue data collection, interviews and field site visits, with the goal of building case studies around best practices in grant development, management and evaluation. CRCC will serve as a resource center for technical expertise and connections for the Foundation and its partners.

CRCC deeply appreciates the work that sisters do to support human development in some of the most marginalized and impoverished communities from East Los Angeles to Port au Prince. Understanding the best ways to nurture a vital and growing global sisterhood through the MEL process will assist the Foundation in leveraging its resources and influence to continue to “give aid to... the sisters, who devote their love and life’s work for the good of mankind.”

“Give aid to... the sisters, who devote their love and life’s work for the good of mankind, for they appeal especially to me as deserving help from the Foundation.... It is my wish... to have the largest part of your benefactions dedicated to the sisters in all parts of the world.”

— Last will and testament of Conrad N. Hilton

USCDornsife
*Center for Religion
and Civic Culture*

Center for Religion and Civic Culture
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0520

PHONE (213) 743-1624

FAX (213) 743-1644

EMAIL crcc@usc.edu