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THE TARGET STATES INITIATIVE 2006-2008

Project Detail

The Center for Education Reform
*Proposal for Funding 2006 to the
Walton Family Foundation*

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PROJECT DETAIL

1. PURPOSE OF THE GRANT, GOALS, ACTIVITIES AND ANTICIPATED RESULTS

1.1a Statement of Need/ Problem to be addressed

It Shouldn't Take a Hurricane.

The disaster left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina revealed more about that area's educational malaise and failure than the public ever dreamed. Within days of the devastation and within weeks of talk of rebuilding, the issue of schools quickly came to the fore. What we learned was not only did New Orleans operate one of the worst school systems in the nation, but also the racial and economic divides were beyond all comprehension.

As people of all stripes united to put a plan into place, the one big idea that emerged with more support than any other was the notion that this system should not be rebuilt, but instead reconstructed with public charter schools, a concept embraced by local leaders, businesses, foundations and national spokespeople. The opportunity was enormous, and continues now. But it took a hurricane to wake America up to the fact that in many Gulf communities, charters were the only working units of education. These innovative public charter schools were the only schools in the region capable and willing to quickly reopen their doors to serve the children affected by Katrina.

The success of public charter schools is not limited to the Big Easy. From coast to coast charters stand out as the only working units of education in most communities. We should be outraged that only 30 percent of our children can read at grade level. We should not stand for the fact that even among college graduates, 31 percent lack basic literacy and of those, a majority are people of color. Public charter schools are a core answer. We must do what it takes to put the best of these new public schools on every corner.

It shouldn't take a hurricane to do so.

The Center for Education Reform has directly written and advocated for more strong charter school laws than any other organization in the nation. Currently high-level legislators from more than 10 states are relying on CER's leadership, guidance, strategy, tactics and influence to help them do exactly what it takes to put a high quality charter school within reach of every needy school child.

In the Hurricane's aftermath, CER's value as an institutional leader became clear. Because of CER's unique relationship with schools and state level groups, we were able within 48 hours to identify schools and institutions to serve children with more than 5,000 seats. We had companies committed to putting up facilities with no guarantee of funding. Business leaders committed to cutting through red tape and federal officials released otherwise restricted funds.

In each state in which we operate, CER utilizes a vast network of local people to help accomplish its goals. CER's name remains under the radar and we work to prop up and develop the parents, community and business leaders and often, if we're lucky, charter school associations themselves to be strong proponents and advocates for quality changes.

Every state varies in how we approach and cultivate support. Every relationship differs. What makes CER unique is that it adds value to every state it touches. We never back away from raising the hard questions, bringing to light the broad base of support, creating tactics sensitive to the landscape, and empowering leaders and parents to own the solution.

As we have reported to the Walton Family Foundation, that task is rarely easy and often the very advocates of public charter schools in a particular state do not recognize the power of a great idea or their ability to get the job done. Just this past summer, CER stepped in to support charter school leaders and their teachers in Massachusetts in a battle to keep their schools union-free when the state's leadership failed to act. By empowering a few teachers with the courage to stand up to the powerful MFT, CER was successful in keeping the MFT infiltration to a minimum, while also taking the opportunity to inform educators that they have options too. Whether by creating knowledge, tension, momentum or something else, we must tackle core states with potential for major change and improvement and act swiftly to get laws enacted that serve our children. They, and they alone, should be our primary concern.

Our goal in this proposal is to make equity for public charter schools the most salient issue of the next three years in public policy. To do so, we will employ strong, well-proven advocacy strategies in key, selected states and communities that will have an impact beyond its borders. We may not be able to tackle New York, but waging battles against inequities in Connecticut and New Jersey will impact New York, and the smaller states south. We may not be able to take on the whole south, but by hitting hard the inequitable treatment of charter schools in Georgia, many of its neighbors will follow suit.

1.1b. Statement of Problem to be addressed

The work done to advance and grow strong charter school laws to yield quality charter schools in the United States has been considerable. Over the last twelve years, CER has played a leading role in this work and in turn has gained valuable experience and insights about how to craft, package and execute programs that get to the heart of our goal to make schools work better for all children.

Thanks in large part to the support provided by the Walton Family Foundation, in the last three years alone CER has led an intensive state-based campaign designed to focus our core activities on target states where the need for a sound infrastructure, more capacity, and better laws was most urgently sought. As discussed in our final report, we engaged in additional states as we discovered important challenges and opportunities elsewhere. Lessons were learned that shaped our conclusions and provide us with a roadmap to advance the development of high quality laws and schools that serve America's children effectively.

For example, we learned that just asking or even expecting collaboration among all "stakeholders" is a recipe for disaster. Many groups are ill equipped to lead or foster widespread support for what is often perceived as radical changes. *The solution is to help grow their competencies while cultivating new support bases that allow the issues to go forward.*

We also learned that not every individual or group perceived by outsiders as the states "leader" or titular head is really in charge. Some welcome support and guidance and are clearly the "best in class." Others have held the title for far too long, making change impossible without a group like CER as intervener.

A recent example is illustrative. CER's work has been valued over the years by Florida leaders. CER president, Jeanne Allen, spearheaded a very hands-on effort to create several opportunities for lawmakers to learn first hand about best practices. From there, Jeanne traveled to Tallahassee to help coalesce the support groups. But once on the ground, it became clear that the community was not united or ambitious in its goals. Had the job been left solely to the locals, there would be no momentum for change even more important today in light of the scholarship program being pulled from the neediest of children.

In addition, state lawmakers face practical realities, such as needing to file for hearings or actual bills within days of sessions opening. In Florida, both deadlines loomed heavily and CER was invited and prepared to make the case for immediate filing of substantive changes to the charter law. So today, rather than delay, CER's initiative created movement. Now there is both information and momentum, and while fractured, the community of public charter school advocates must move forward to have an impact locally.

The alternative would be to let the locals figure it all out and not see improvements in a critical year. The obligation the Center feels to its supporters, its constituents and to the cause will ensure that we never stand by and allow that to happen. We are willing to take risks, to make the hard calls, to take the arrows and above all, CER is nimble and can move quickly.

Sometimes state coalitions work like a charm. Missouri charter leaders have twice invited CER leaders to provide services as a consultant or advisor in the process. They are hungry for lessons learned. They want direction and guidance and are willing to work hard to be successful. But every state is different, every political circumstance is unique and we may have the best plan but for want of a nail, it is not enacted. We must be ready to uncover the brutal truth about what works and be judicious and careful in ensuring sound policy decisions are heard and enacted.

1.1c. In sum, the need/problem this proposal seeks to address is two-fold:

Inequity - Charter schools are mis-funded (not just under funded) and schools which serve children most in need are often most likely to fail in states without strong funding mechanisms and strong laws to protect them and ensure quality. Most states do not provide equitable funding streams to public charter schools. Several states are ripe for legislative and legal action on this front.

Inaction - A lack of action, information and strong, well-crafted advocacy is the cause of the inequities. Charter schools are mis-understood. CER sponsored research, supported by the WFF, revealed that only one in five Americans can correctly identify a charter school. However, once informed support significantly grows with knowledge.

We must and will create equity for children, without which we will never address the educational deficiencies that plague too many communities. We will administer forceful, research-based advocacy programs that communicate and instill that goal in policymakers and the public, without whom any progress can be made.

CER is the only national organization capable of succeeding in these two arenas on the scale that they need. The lessons we have learned provide a roadmap for how best to bring about equity because we have proven to be up to the challenge to tackle the

inequities, the lack of information, and the ignorance. We want to build on our core strengths and do what others are not doing. The specific goals of this project to address the two major problems make our focus clear.

1.2 Specific, Measurable Project Goals

There are five core goals to achieve success in developing and sustaining strong state laws, cultures and environments. Legal and legislative efforts are the core method by which laws are achieved; public understanding and support (through advocacy) enables those two to occur; strong capacity for change through statewide networks or associations help sustain growth; and parents and grassroots networks vested in quality change serve as a check and are necessary for survival and balance legislative considerations.

The five major goals of this effort reflect those key priorities and are specifically designed to be intricately tied to make each dependent on the other in the states where we are most likely to focus. Altogether, this project will impact the advancement of high quality public charter school laws and schools in at least eight states, with potential to grow to twelve. For each goal, certain states are under consideration and much will depend on legal and legislative counsel and political analysis. In short:

Goal 1 - Legal: A multi-state lawsuit that will result in equitable funding changes to charter laws in no fewer than five states.

Goal 2 - Communications: A major communications campaign that produces at least 50 percent level of knowledge of public charter schools and the corresponding right of equity.

Goal 3 - Legislative: Multiple authorizers, as a key pillar of strong charter laws, will be enacted in at least five additional states.

Goal 4 - Capacity Building: State level associations in each of the states affected by CER's legal and legislative work will be strengthened and supported by a majority of public charter schools.

Goal 5 - Grassroots: New grassroots groups and parent networks will be developed in each major state of focus for legal and legislative strategies.

These goals will be overlaid on the following core states in the following ways (though other states will likely be added during the primary research phase as the need arises)

| Target States | Levels of Engagement |
|--------------------|---|
| Connecticut | Legal, Legislative |
| Florida* | Legislative, Grassroots |
| Georgia | All |
| Missouri | All |
| New Jersey | All |
| New York (Upstate) | Grassroots, Communications |
| Ohio* | Grassroots, Communications |
| Washington, DC* | Grassroots, Communications |
| Wyoming | Legislative, Grassroots, Communications |

*In the three states where options for children include both public charter schools and private school choice, CER will actively work to help build coalitions because these simpatico networks are necessary for future success.

1.3 Specific Activities/Strategies to Carry Out the Goals of this Project

Goal 1 - Legal: A multi-state lawsuit that will result in equitable funding changes to charter laws in no fewer than five states.

The law firm Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP was founded in 1906 and has earned a worldwide reputation for providing high-quality, innovative legal services while connecting itself to some of the leading civil rights battles of the 21st century. Over the last eight months CER has partnered with Sonnenschein in an unprecedented, largely pro-bono effort to take on legal inequities in public charter school policy – inequities that result in lower funding, isolation and ultimately fewer strong opportunities for children who need them the most. CER's Partner

The Center for Education Reform has designed a plan to attract multiple states at one time – states that are geographically or politically important and that impact others in numerous ways. CER has provided information, strategy and ongoing consultation to assist the law firm in an in-depth study of the issues of due process, fundamental rights and others in each state constitution. Together CER and Sonnenschein will launch what will surely be the major public education challenge of the decade. It is our strong belief that this legal effort will finally cause lawmakers to begin to account for their ill treatment of public charter schools. Currently, attorneys are still identifying specific states where we can win a move to dismiss based on the strength of the case.

Once identified, the grantee will conduct the following activities to accomplish the goal:

- *Identification of plaintiffs* among affected families. CER will track testimony regarding inequitable funding and link Sonnenschein law firm with potential plaintiffs. In the identification process CER will research the level of support for such litigation and, where necessary, distribute information to local media and laypersons stirring awareness and support for equitable funding.
- *Management* of the lawsuit administratively and from a public relations perspective (see related Goal 2 - Communications).
- *Communication* with *national and state leaders*, local policymakers and coalition members in each state. As part of this objective, CER will solicit education experts to draft statutory language that gives parents the most education choice while maintaining academic quality.
- *Creation of strategies* and support for other groups to be involved, such as filing amicus briefs, holding conferences, writing white papers.
- *Research and analysis*: We will research previous equitable funding lawsuits to identify successful strategies employing these arguments in new suits. CER will analyze the political landscape in targeted states to better identify states that are riper for funding litigation. This information will be tracked over time to show political trends and shifts in public perception of charter school funding.
- *Legislative outreach*: We will ensure the development of legislative interest through public hearings and other important forums. Additionally, we will cultivate charter school administrators in focus states to identify charter school stakeholders that can communicate effectively with state legislators and their staff. We will work to Log

arrange meetings where legislators (or their representatives) can hear direct testimony from charter school stakeholders. We will track these meetings over time to show the percent increase of impact.

Legislative

- Training and support to legal team and stakeholders: CER will provide media training of attorneys, plaintiffs and work to develop spokespeople, create sound messages and market the efforts to media outlets.
- As part of this effort, specific models for additional action by other national or state groups will be created and shared. Namely, we will create legally sound and academically beneficial model charter school legislation in-house and provide this language to policymakers for implementation in their state's education code.
- Creation of templates for letters to legislators regarding changes to charter school statutes. CER will create and distribute toolkits that teach charter school stakeholders how to organize meetings that attract media attention with the goal of showing wide support of proven reform strategies.

Communicability

Grassroots

What Legal Success Looks Like: A success in the legal challenges to inequity will be gauged by several factors: a court's successful consideration of the merits of the case; a response by legislative bodies to amend their laws rather than face continued legal challenges; the visible coverage of the issue in public forums and the media; an attempt by other legislatures to avoid litigation by crafting sound laws up front.

Goal 2 - Communications: Conduct a major communications campaign that produces at least 50 percent level of knowledge of public charter schools and the corresponding right of equity.

A successful legal effort requires that the strategy be promoted and the public engaged. A lawsuit cannot bring outrage if no one knows it is being undertaken. A lawsuit cannot impact laws if no one cares. We have learned much from the work of legal activists throughout the last several decades. Though we don't claim to be able to do what the leaders of the civil rights movement did, we can and will use their strategies and successes to learn and grow these very similar issues.

Communication that sticks is an essential ingredient for success. To understand how to make communication about public charter school stick, The Center for Education Reform has been conducting groundbreaking public opinion research that can help us develop the road map we need to ensure knowledge of and support for public charter schools continues to grow. Last year, CER partnered with *the polling company™ inc.* to test concepts and knowledge of charter schools. Building on a national, in-depth survey taken earlier last year (and continued in several states over the course of the next several months) we wanted to gauge specific knowledge of charter schools and who is most likely to understand the concepts that work.

Our research reveals that the awareness and support necessary to take charter schools to the next level does not currently exist in our communities. CER's survey found that only one in five people even know what a charter school is. When asked to describe a charter school, a full third of respondents could not even venture a guess. There is additional specific data on attitudes in six individual states (CA, MO, GA, NY, NJ and CT), which are primed to make change if awareness grows significantly.

Without public support, charter schools will plateau. Lawmakers will not – cannot – be champions for strong charter school laws without engaged constituents who support the charter concept. Charter schools will never overcome discrimination in funding unless the public begins to perceive them as mainstream, public options. And parents cannot rally around charter schools if they continue to hold the same common misperceptions that plagued charters in the early years.

Working on the ground in fifteen states in the last three years has taught us much about what needs to occur to force changes in the status quo. Communicating simple messages en masse deep in the heart of communities is critical to grassroots action taking place. One motivates the other, and without a perceived groundswell of support and visibility, lawmakers simply will not act to respond. CER intends to use survey research from a particular state and tip the level of knowledge and increase support of charter schools. But in states where a lawsuit looms heavy, communication will take on a whole new meaning. The following are research-based strategies to ensure traction of the efforts undertaken in this proposal:

A. Top level media

- Develop major *60 Minutes* story on inequities in public charter schools air during the high point of legal effort. We have already had discussions with Ann Tisch, the founder herself of a charter high school for women, and advocate and a shareholder at CBS, whose *60 Minutes* still counts her as a key executive. She has offered, along with her cousin, Barnett Helzberg, to serve as the brain trust for

developing and ensuring the coverage of the story we seek to write through this effort.

- A companion strategy in print media will engage directly the editorial boards and lead news reports of each major daily, weekly, radio and television station in each major market. Our plaintiffs will rise to the front of their palm pilots. The stories and the controversy it creates will be hit hard and often from media strategists we will employ in concert with national colleagues and state partners.
- Respected legislators/leaders from both political parties will be recruited to be advocates.

B. On the Ground Communications

An on the ground communications campaign will be employed to ensure community support and longevity. This goal will take a more focused, direct interaction with communities. It is our experience and researched view-point that parents and citizens who lack the knowledge they need of the critical role of public charter schools and the need for equity are persuaded only by local trusted people or institutions. CER's team will turn to traditional and nontraditional ground marketing strategies to further disseminate campaign messages.

Viral Marketing -- Viral marketing techniques are intended to influence that target audience in a way so subtle, that they are not aware they are being targeted. This subtle approach increases the chances that they will continue to pass the message on to family and friends because they have heard it from a peer, not from an advertisement. It is an increasingly popular approach among consumer product companies.

In this case, campaign team members and community partners will conduct activities such as regularly attend basketball and Little League games to talk to people one-on-one, parent-to-parent about charter schools or recruit churchgoers to talk to fellow worshippers over coffee and donuts before church services. T-shirts and bumper stickers showcasing the campaign's Web site and hotline will also contribute to the viral marketing effort.

Paper Still Works -- With the sophisticated technologies available today, many organizations have abandoned grassroots' and marketing's most tried and true tool – paper. With paper, the campaign will have the 10 seconds before the target audience gets to the trash can to deliver a message – that's 10 seconds longer than the time it takes to delete an email!

The CER team will turn paper in the following ways:

- Produce creative materials to be left behind on buses, in pediatricians' offices, and car maintenance shops.
- Place flyers on cars in parking lots
- Include "campaign" messages on coffee cup sleeves at local 7-11 locations, on placemats at fast food establishments, and on local, informal community bulletin boards.

Community Outreach -- Identification of community "proof points and people" that have a multiplier effect. For example, the Spanish Catholic Center in the Mount Pleasant area of Washington DC is a well-regarded, local institution through which most immigrants move when they first arrive in the city. Similar groups exist in other states, yet this particular organization was never a part of any strategy to cultivate the Hispanic community.

- Finding key businesses in the community that impact the target population and partnering to advertise the program through their marketing as well as hiring them to provide services to our effort. The events we hold will occur in communities, taking advantage of community businesses such as restaurants, printers, entertainment services and even day care providers.
- Strategic and "guerilla" advertising in non-traditional media, including community newspapers, church bulletins, billboards, bus-signs, and local radio.
- The collection of people and their stories to compel more positive media attention and draw the public into the life of participants and possible participants.
- Promotional efforts with sympathetic community groups and area establishments.

Partnerships -- There are a number of ways partners -- businesses, schools, state associations, grassroots and parent networks -- will enhance the effort to increase the awareness of and support for charter schools in their respective communities. These will ensure co-branding materials at events in communities, hosting speakers at regularly scheduled community forums and inviting partners to participate in media outreach events.

GR

C. General Information development and distribution

Development of solid information will be undertaken with original qualitative, quantitative research to provide new and amended charter school information to the general public.

- Compile and trend charter school information; conduct ongoing surveys, polling and analyses related to education reform.
- Provide accurate and timely education reform research information in both electronic and print mediums.
- Compile all local, state, and national charter school data; cross-tabulate polling data, and compile and distribute summary reports.
- Aggressively provide parents accurate, up to date information regarding charter school options for their children.
- Ensure parents have reliable, accurate access to information about available charter schools in their communities and provide necessary information to aide their selection process.
- Conduct polling activities in target states; aggregate and trend results to support education reform strategies.

- Increase education and training to parents in target states about laws, policies, and choice options; sponsor two significant meetings annually in each target state.
- Increase percent of local and state media coverage support for expansion of school choice programs.

D. Connecting the campaign with policymakers

CER's campaign will seek to educate and engage people "on the ground." This groundswell will not go unnoticed by community leaders, lawmakers, and other key decision-makers in the target states. The campaign will seek to deliberately reinforce the growing community support for charter schools among thought leaders through a number of activities, such as:

- Conducting one-on-one briefings during the launch of the campaign
- Inviting lawmakers to key community events and press events
- Providing regular updates on the campaign, including photographs and reports of well-attended community events and updates on community partner activities
- In the late stages of the campaign, showcasing the measurable increase in support for charter schools

What Success in Communications Looks Like: Success in this goal will be measured by the growth of knowledge in the public's awareness of charter schools as public charter schools, understanding of equity and growth in support. Success will also be measured in media reach and successful development of major news programs, opinion editorials and news articles.

Goal 3 - Legislative: Multiple authorizers, as a key pillar of strong charter laws, will be enacted in at least five additional states.

There exists clear and compelling evidence that states with multiple authorizers have more and higher achieving public charter schools. Those state's charters also disproportionately serve the children represented by the 70 percent lacking proficiency. It is no longer an art, but a science -- laws matter, and strong laws, with lots of flexibility and opportunities to pursue a charter from an independent body, are more likely to produce strong results. As is the case in Washington, DC, Indiana, New York, Michigan, to name only a few (additional evidence is available).

In the last three years, we've convinced reformers and policymakers alike that considering another authorizer is important. We are poised to effect change in states where we take time to educate, draw the map, craft the right language and help build coalitions. Such states need constant care and feeding. Education of legislators is paramount. Studies and expert testimony from people more than 50 miles away play a large role, as does building the political will in policymakers to take action.

The connection of this goal to our legal strategies is clear – states with multiple authorizers are less likely to have equity problems. The existence of an independent advocate for charter schools that is not tied to the existing school system ensures the continued flow of equal monies and reduces obstacles involved in starting schools.

States with no additional authorizer have the lion's share of problems and petty turf-wars. We believe that the number one legislative accomplishment we can have is helping five states adopt real multiple authorizers. To do so, CER's external affairs team will employ the following strategies that have consistently been used to yield improvements in charter laws:

- Personalized briefings will be conducted about the legal challenges and public opinion regarding developing strong public charter schools. If they know about the legal challenges ensuing in other states, their efforts are much more likely to bare fruit.
- CER senior staff members will meet directly with legislators to provide them with research analyses and policy recommendations for strengthening their state's charter school law, especially through the addition of a multiple authorizer provision.
- Creating coalitions of national, state and local leaders in support of model laws that include alternative authorizers, and staging hearings, and conferences and information in print and other media to reinforce support/rationale.
- Developing state-specific and sound rationale and language: CER will track and analyze the correlation between states with multiple charter authorizers and academic achievement. This information will be used in print and electronic publications and will be distributed to lawmakers, especially those on education sub-committees, in target states.
- Bringing national and state groups with experience to conduct legislative briefings.

- Model states will host legislators from exploratory states. CER's staff will organize instructional seminars for state legislators in target states. CER will identify and invite legislators who are likely to be open to support multiple authorizers. CER will also track attendees and supply attendees with printed material regarding multiple authorizers and a CER contact person should they need additional information or direct testimony.
- Talking points, community forums and parent visits will be organized to boost legislator support.
- Media strategy involving generating interest and securing interviews on this topic will yield additional coverage.
- Charter associations in each targeted state -- where they are amenable -- will be employed as leaders in each effort.
- Charter operators and parents will communicate with lawmakers and write letters, make repeated visits throughout the year at home and in capitol offices, and amplify the policy leader's voices.

What Success for Strong Charter Laws Looks Like: Increased communication with lawmakers, well-attended briefings, bills introduced and laws passed in at least five states concerning multiple authorizers.

Goal 4 – Capacity Building: Establish and increase growth of self-sustaining charter school associations and leadership within target states. State level associations in each of the states affected by CER legal and legislative work will be strengthened and supported by a majority of schools.

CER cut its teeth in 2003 helping to create strong state based associations for charter schools. The record is mixed, as we discovered some were more willing than others (MI vs. AZ) and some were not prepared for challenges they faced even after they staffed up (DC). Our work with state groups dates back to CER's inception in 1993 -- we have always enjoyed great working relationships with our state partners, many of whom credit us with helping them identify everything from sources of support to model programs. In the last three years, however, the more specific capacity building work, which was supported by WFF, uncovered several challenges from which we have learned. The most critical is that in order to effect change in a state there must be a strong organization somewhere willing to develop strong schools, be an advocate, provide technical assistance, support to lawmakers and generally be a strong leader and well-recognized by influencers in a state.

Without a state group, CER has stepped in. But we recognize the importance of strong groups and to make our work successful, we must ensure the development of strong groups in the states we seek to influence with Goals 1 (Legal) and 3 (Legislation). We will confirm the specific state association targets once the final legal and legislative state targets are determined. For each state, CER will follow our three stages of engagement we developed with WFF's support over the last three years:

Assessment Phase – this includes surveying, focus groups, frequent site visits to the state, and meetings with key stakeholders. During this phase, CER will:

- Conduct a complete review, top to bottom of all programs and offerings charter associations,
- Evaluation of business plans and help with execution, including coaching on fundraising, media work, legislative support.
- Assess with charter school operators core competencies and needs. Undertake focus groups of charter leaders to develop interest and support.

Strategic Planning Phase – this includes the definition of the organization's mission and goals, the development and implementation of the business plan. CER will employ consultants as needed or serve as a direct facilitator of the process over a period of months.

New Program Activation – involves the implementation of key programs as defined by the business plan. Under this stage of engagement with each state partner, we will offer:

- Organizational development and media training seminars for charter school leaders and work to increase percentage of attendees trained.
- Provide support for plans to develop relationships with identified potential funding sources for fledgling charter associations.
- Co-develop of marketing materials and membership marketing.

- Specialized toolkits for advocacy and communications efforts.

Other tools and services for state association partners include:

- Uniting these groups with major policy battles, establishing them as leaders in their states and turning over to them to lead a major state effort underway with which CER is involved. (Example – helping create a strategy effort to push a policy goal is currently underway with allies in Tennessee).
- Providing support and expertise for conferences.
- Transferring media relationships.
- Cultivating state and national networks, including introductions to federal policy makers.

What Success in Capacity Building Looks Like: Strong groups will have a well-defined mission and goals, membership support which includes a financial commitment, a seasoned executive director, and an ambitious advocacy strategy that involves pushing a strong law and developing strong parent networks.

Goal 5 - Grassroots: Development of grassroots action and new parent networks supporting charter schools in each major state of focus for legal and legislative strategies.

Parents are the best and biggest hope for charter school progress, for their defense and for their expansion. Many charter school leaders are unaware of the potential parents have to protect and improve their schools. But even the most savvy charter school parent in an urban area is not well versed or tied in closely to what makes her charter school a reality. There is little knowledge of the link between charter schools and the state capitals. With the advances of charter schools being compromised weekly by the establishment all across the states, it is time to unleash the energy of needy, but passionate parents on the public and policymakers. This effort will galvanize parents to be that needed force.

In addition to parents, some non-connected citizens have a major impact on quality public charter schools coming into existence. But coalescing them requires skill and an in-depth understanding of how citizens can best engage in the process. Grassroots are messy but necessary. In every major policy or legal battle that has ever been successful, it is often an organic group of citizens that develops and pushes forward the demand. These groups are rarely expected or needed to last beyond an immediate need. For education reform and particular charter schools, they typically begin with parents frustrated by their schools, who seek information and find others with common interests. CER has a history of knitting together individuals who share common interests in communities. They may live a mile apart but they may not have known each other until we made the introduction. From state to state, informal alliances of these "kitchen-table" groups have influenced the creation of state laws (Wisconsin, Missouri, to name two), started schools (too numerous to mention but names and context are available separately) and toppled school boards.

At a meeting this summer of the Broad Foundation with a strategy group advising them on long-term goals, the discussion turned to how important parent and grassroots networks are to policy changes. Stephanie Sanford of the Gates Foundation acknowledged that grassroots are messy but important. She said that foundations often have a hard time of making sense of these groups, they are not professional, nor do they necessarily know how to write a plan or proposal to get them a small amount of funds to get the job done. But they do exist and need to be supported. Andy Rotherham, whose leadership in progressive Democratic circles has earned him enormous respect in the charter community, seconded this point.

The work of groups like CER to develop and nurture the grassroots in support of state and national policy battles is well known. But to be strategic, it's necessary to target those efforts in carefully selected states where the development of more organized grassroots and parent networks will have a better likelihood of impacting a policy goal.

This goal aims to harness the energy of organic grassroots leadership and move them deliberately to amplify the goals outlined in the rest of this project proposal. When, for example, the multi-state lawsuit is launched, grassroots groups will need to be developed and educated how to amplify the messages that the lawsuit seeks to make in the pursuit of equity. In the legislative arena, legislators repeatedly complain to us that they "see all the same faces." They want to know they are supporting people that matter, not professional spokespeople whose job it is to talk to them. When a state legislature is considering multiple authorizer language, grassroots groups will be ready to communicate their appreciation or concern.

We will focus on creating strong grassroots with two distinct strands of activity: mobilize and educate parents of children already in charter schools or on their waiting lists and the identification of new groups and provide one-time grants to sustain and carry out programs that influence the development of strong laws and legal challenges. These will require the following activities:

- Identification and management of local coordinators. These administrators will organize meetings of residents in the target school zones, identify leaders for the effort from these gatherings and provide the parent training tools not only to support their proposal but also to increase support for charter schools in the area. The coordinator will be integrated in the work of other groups throughout the state. This value-added approach-bringing national expertise to the local needs of the state-will help achieve the goals we share with our state partners.
- Parent training sessions conducted at charter schools in cooperation with state and community charter school groups. Because parent lists are and should be guarded by each school, this program requires some work on the part of the participating schools. CER works with its partnering organizations to ensure that invitations are properly advanced.

For parents of children in charter schools, we will contact designated school administrators to distribute the parent information session invitation to each parent, both via backpack with their kids as well as through snail mail, during parent meetings and through email. We also ask on the ground Partners to recommend several different "drops", especially a few days before the event.

(Note: CER has conducted such efforts several communities including Los Angeles and Oakland, CA, Washington, DC and Baltimore, MD. Based on these efforts CER has a researched set of activities and program guidelines it utilizes for success).

- For the parents of children on waiting lists, we work with schools to mail a separate letter to these parents, which explain the importance of helping to advocate for more choices for their children.
- With non-charter citizens, we will identify the people in the community who have already been engaged in challenging the status quo. Sometimes these people already exist and know the people who have been working, unaided, to make change. Other times it requires some development. (For Example: Sandy Mayer is a Hispanic woman in Kansas City who first started challenging her school when her children were babies. A successful run for school board followed briefly and since then she has been uniting concerned people whenever policy efforts ensue. We would seek out the "Sandys" of the world first to develop around).
- Other Strategies include: Small group parent training, Community-based dinners/workshops designed around pre-existing, well-respected groups that have influence on parents (day cares, churches, other social venues to be determined; School-based forums; letter writing.
- For states with strong charter associations, the development of a functional, formal parent network will be the end goal. "United Parents" groups all over states like New York, Connecticut, Washington, DC will be seen and heard regularly in the press, at public meetings and in state halls.

- **Sustaining partnerships:** It's important that valuable parent education outreach does not cease with the end of the formal one-year campaign. CER will provide branded train-the-trainer materials that community partners can put to work for their parent constituents over the long run. These tool kits will include the following:

- Instructional video
- Parent handouts for duplication
- Step-by-step guide to hosting a training session
- Important online resources
- Sample recruitment materials and templates

What Grassroots Success Looks Like: Most notably the program will yield a better-educated state or region, demonstrated support, increased pressure on policy makers to respond, and the ability for state based groups to stay focused on their own goals and objectives throughout the year. We will create baseline measurements and post-program evaluations for all grassroots activity; conduct annual state and national survey research. The grassroots component of our five goals will result in an increase in the percent of parental satisfaction from enhanced use of and exposure to education options and leveraged partnerships with community leaders and outreach programs.

1.4 How these Activities/Strategies Match the WFF Stated Focus Area

Systemic Reform in Education/Focus Goal - School Improvement

The Center for Education Reform creates opportunities for and eliminates obstacles to better education for America's communities. CER advocates reforms that result in high standards, freedom and accountability; such as school choice for parents and strong charter school laws.

CER's work influences the creation, advancement and growth of school choice generally, with more specificity and focus in the public charter arena. Geographically, this proposal has in impact on key states and communities that the WFF has in its portfolio. CER-focus states overlap with the Walton Family Foundation's considerably. Three states where we share common goals are, DC, FL, and OH, states that are all part of one or more of our major strands of effort. In addition, The WFF has been supportive of efforts in GA, and NY, two other CER-focus states. There are additional areas for opportunity that we will explore once the plan is operational.

At the same time, we'd like to retain a level of flexibility that allows us to remain broad in our overall geographic mission so that we may react quickly to sudden challenges or opportunities. Such focus was the reason we were able to lead in responding to crises in the last three years, such as activities to support children affected by Hurricane Katrina rescue or even the response to the flawed AFT study profiled in *The New York Times* in 2004.

In the case of Katrina, CER's influence resulted in action by the United States Congress and the United States Department of Education to support public charter school changes. On the ground, CER was on the phone with reformers ensuring space for children in charter schools throughout the country. In subsequent weeks we have introduced Louisiana leaders to the media, philanthropists and friends and worked with them on a plan to support the development of new schools throughout New Orleans. Our work has been noted by *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, not to mention the New Orleans based *Times-Picayune*.

In the weeks and months following Katrina, The Center for Education Reform's message of reform for Louisiana's schools reached over 6 million viewers and 14 news outlets nationwide.

1.5 Anticipated Results

Major results: Equitable funding changes to charter laws in five states; stronger charter legislation with multiple authorizers in five states; 50 percent knowledge of charters as public schools in those same states combined with demonstrated advocacy and strong associations that contributed to both.

2. SUSTAINABILITY

2.1 Plan for Sustaining this Project After the Grant Period

The Walton Family Foundation's support over the last three years seeded our effectiveness and reach. The Target States Initiative enables us to evolve our vision for the future and scale mission-based programs and services to advance education reform across the nation.

The Center for Education Reforms' *2006 through 2008 Strategic Plan* clearly defines our mission, vision and long-term commitment to the Target States Initiative program goals and measures. Our successes and lessons-learned over the last twelve years provide us unique opportunities and advantages to seek sustainability and growth now, rather than after the grant period.

Our plan for sustaining the Target States Initiative program goals is based on our identification and expansion of critical grassroots, service and infrastructure measures. CER's Board is strong and able to assist in shoring our strategic plan, advancing fundraising activities and leveraging community ties. Our technological systems and processes, marketing and public relations programs, and financial management infrastructure are poised to support expansion opportunities – in short, CER is ready to rock the vote.

In order to achieve and exceed our short and long-term monetary objectives, CER identified three major areas of growth: programs, products & services.

Programs to secure carryon funding for legal defense initiatives, seminar and conference outreach, and membership activities to expand and grow parent and legislative reach and influence.

- Develop and promote new CER membership program; collect annual membership dues to provide localized information, announcements and services to parents and legislators.
- Conduct fee-based organizational development and media training seminars for charter school leaders.
- Co-sponsor fee-based national roundtable discussions on the topic of education reform with panelists from other like-minded organizations.

Products to expand publishing venues both in print and electronically, monetize proprietary database information, and sell through ecommerce unique trending reports, pole summaries and legislative forecasts.

- Develop new or enhanced products in print and electronically to evangelize and sell in CER's E-Commerce store.
- Compile all local, state, and national charter school data; conduct ongoing
- Surveys, polling and analyses related to education reform. Aggregate and trend results into salable reports, summaries and briefs.

- Publish salable essays and testimonies on lessons learned from top charter school leaders.
- Create cross-marketing and revenue share opportunities with strategic partners and third-party vendors to increase breadth and depth of products in CER's E-Commerce Store.
- Monetize proprietary database information and license data to like-minded, strategic partners.

Services

- Leverage our intellectual property and knowledge to external clients; develop new retainer-based consulting services.
- Provide fee-based leadership and consul to concerned groups and activists; assist in the writing and enforcement of applications and contracts.
- Develop war chest of monies and pro-bono legal resources to combat multi-state lawsuit initiatives. Position CER as expert witness in education reform efforts,
- Leverage partners, networks and local leaders to connect charter school applicants with facilities.
- Initiate activities with the executive committee to develop relationships with potential external funders.
- Create new business opportunities to support CER operational components, such as e-commerce, and fee-for-service efforts.

2.2 Evidence that this Project has Organizational Support

Several CER Board and executive staff members assisted in the creation of this plan. The program goals, strategies, and measures in this proposal are integral components within our *2006 through 2008 Strategic Plan*. All CER employees own specific measures in both this program and our five-year Strategic Plan in the form of performance objectives and annual goals.

Executive management provides oral performance appraisal feedback and mentoring to all employees' quarterly and formalized written feedback annually. We conduct monthly Executive Board meetings delivering oral and written development reports, major millstones and accomplishments, and discuss pertinent risks and issues on major programs. Our entire board meets twice a year where in-depth financial, metric performance, fundraising activities, and estimate verses accruals are discussed.

All executive staff meet weekly to review and problem solve program progress, issues and risks. Program obstacles that cannot be resolved by the executive staff are escalated to the President before impacting budget, schedule, and or performance benchmarks. Special program meetings are called when alternative program measures, issues and or risks need to be communicated to the extended program team. The President makes the decision whether or not the proposed alternative program solution requires Executive Board review and feedback.

3. ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND BACKGROUND

3.1 Staff Key to this Project and their Responsibilities

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Kevin Chavous <i>Distinguished Fellow</i></p> | <p>Provides expertise and influence in states and communities; communicates through print, broadcast and in person speeches messages that articulate Center's work and vision. Coalesces state partners.</p> |
| <p><i>Vice President, Communications & Marketing</i> <i>(Contract)</i></p> | <p>Directs all outreach of CER programs and service and develops and sustains public awareness program and all collateral materials that communicate CER data, information, messages and programs. Trains and cultivates media contacts nationally and in states. Writes and places opinion pieces that fit with mission.</p> |
| <p>Cindy Boyd <i>Deputy Director of External Affairs</i></p> | <p>Ensures that programs put into place in states are accurately implemented in a timely way. Maintains coordination with state and local partners; solicits new grassroots affiliates.</p> |
| <p>Shaka L.A. Mitchell, Esq. <i>Associate Director of Policy</i></p> | <p>Conducts and collects data and research, responds to research requests, analyzes all incoming information, maintains research library, provides talking points, writing and recommendations for better policy practices.</p> |
| <p>Kara Hornung <i>Associate Director of Communications, Outreach</i></p> | <p>Manages grassroots, school-based and parent outreach programs, and develops forums and tools to support these programs.</p> |
| <p>Jon Hussey <i>Associate Director, Media Relations</i></p> | <p>Advises and responds to media inquiries, drafts newsletters, identify local stories and needs. Supports web information and outreach.</p> |
| <p>Angela Dale <i>Webmaster</i></p> | <p>Supervising website development, content loading and writing and editing of public information materials for web and print, charter/choice publication development.</p> |
| <p>(TBA) <i>Contract State Liaisons</i></p> | <p>CER intends to hire at least two state based directors who will sustain CER work on site and help carry out specific tactics.</p> |

3.2 Management Staff and Tenure in their Positions

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|---|--|
| Jeanne Allen <i>President, 12 years</i> | Establishes and manages tone, vision, relationships, networks and contacts; serves as primary spokesperson to media and lawmakers, and develops relationships with funders and influencers on local, state and national levels. Writes and edits personalized communication, manages board and senior staff. |
| Terry Rauh <i>Chief Operating Officer, 3 months</i> <i>(202) 822-9000</i> <i>terry@edreform.com</i> | Manages all operations, financial and record keeping, staff oversight, project management, new business development and strategic planning. Provides CEO with necessary operational support and directs all administrative functions. |
| Michael Musante <i>Acting Vice President of External Affairs, 5 months</i> | Supervision of CER partners and specific state activities relating to charter laws and regulations. |

3.3 Board of Directors

Jeanne Allen

President, *The Center for Education Reform*
Washington, DC

Leslye A. Arsht

President and Co-Founder, *StandardsWork*
Washington, DC

John Chubb

Founding Partner and Chief Education Officer, *Edison Schools, Inc.*
New York, NY

John Danielson

CEO, *Chartwell Education Group*
Darien, CT

Donald Hense

Chairman, *Friendship Edison Public Charter School*
Washington, DC

Gisele Huff

Executive Director, *Jaquelin Hume Foundation*
San Francisco, CA

William J. Hume (Chairman Emeritus)

Chairman, *Basic American, Inc.*
San Francisco, CA

Robert Johnston

Founder and President, *Johnston Associates, Inc.*
Princeton, NJ

Lewis C. Solmon

Senior Advisor, *Milken Family Foundation*
Santa Monica, CA

William R. Steinbrook, Jr.

President, *The Challenge Foundation*
Plano, TX

Alex Troy

Founder, *Troy Capital, LLC*
Greenwich, CT

Judith West

President, *WESTCO*
New York, NY

3.4 Organizational Background/History, Including any Past Grants from the Walton Family Foundation.

Founded in 1993 to translate ideas into action, CER combines education policy with grassroots advocacy to work deep within the nation's communities to foster positive and bold education reforms. Today, this premiere national group serves as a full-service reform engine working in over 40 states.

CER advocates reforms that produce high standards, accountability, and freedom, such as strong charter school laws, school choice programs for children most in need, common sense teacher initiatives, and proven instructional programs. Its Washington, D.C. based team and state and local partners advance the mission by:

- Making parents better advocates for their children
- Building and strengthening education reform leadership in states
- Giving lawmakers knowledge they need to make smart decisions
- Providing school-based reformers the tools to promote positive change

CER received its first grant from WFF in 1994 for \$75,000 to be awarded each year for three years. In 1998, CER was awarded a three-year grant of \$100,000 for each year. In 2001 WFF supported a strategic planning process which resulted in a new plan and a subsequent project-based funding commitment for approximately \$3.1 million over the three year period that ended December 31, 2005.

4. EVALUATION

4.1 Plans for Evaluation, including Measurable Outcomes

Each goal has clearly enumerated quantitative and qualitative objectives, which will be benchmarked at the program's inception in several ways:

- Data on the characteristics of the laws, the legal situation and environment of each state. This would include a complete up front report on whom at the beginning of the effort was "on the ground" and the assets of each support group. We will develop a matrix that covers legislators, private assets, public assets, and media coverage. It is against these metrics that we will evaluate our success in carrying out both the activities and the result of each major goal.
- In addition, individual staff accountability will be documented in employee performance appraisals, and follow standardized quarterly and annual reviews.
- Executive Staff will develop periodic evaluations and end of the year reports.
- Pre-and post- survey data will be collected and measured, and presented in raw data spreadsheets, and various charts and graphs that include baseline against measures to date.

4.2 How Evaluation Information will be Gathered

The Chief Operating Officer is ultimately responsible to ensure monthly aggregation of program raw data, including security, authenticity, and ongoing viability of program information. Depending on each individual program metric, information will be gathered by individual stakeholders either in real-time or manually entered into a relational database. Stakeholders are responsible for their assigned metrics and subsequent raw data gathering including pre and post integrity analysis.

Incremental backups will be conducted on the program database information daily and encrypted backup media will be archived offsite. All raw metric data will be exported monthly to Microsoft excel for inclusion and formatting into monthly, quarterly and annual status reports.

4.3 How Evaluation Results will be Used and/or Disseminated

CER Executive Staff members will review and problem-solve evaluation data on a monthly basis. Raw data will be reviewed against milestone benchmarks to identify anomalies. Under-achieving metrics or anomalies will be identified and problem-solved in monthly program review meetings. Evaluation anomalies that cannot be resolved by the executive staff are escalated to the President before impacting quarterly and or annual Board and WFF reporting. Failure or obstacles to achieving goals will be the subject of review by either CER's Executive Staff or Board of Directors.

CER conducts monthly Executive Board meetings; delivering oral and written development reports, major milestones and accomplishments, and to discuss pertinent risks and issues on major programs. Our entire board meets twice a year where in-depth financial, metric performance, fundraising activities, and estimate verses accruals are discussed.

CER will provide detailed analysis of results on a yearly basis to our Board, select funders and to partners involved in each state activity. Our program successes and lessons learned may also be shared with new prospective donors and leaders in various target states. Twelve-month composite reports will be developed and distributed to the Walton Family Foundation annually.

4.4 Person(s) Involved in the Evaluation Process

CER President, Jeanne Allen, and Chief Operating Officer, Terry Rauh, will be involved in ongoing management and evaluation of the program throughout its tenure. We will also involve state partners in independent reviews submitted each year. Executive Committee and Board will evaluate program objectives on a bi-annual basis.

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