

## Priorities for a New President

By Ian Wilhelm

As Barack Obama prepares to enter the White House, he comes to power during a turbulent period in American history, with the nation facing a financial meltdown, two wars, and an increasing number of people struggling to meet basic needs.

But nonprofit leaders see opportunities in the crisis. They say the new president should work more closely with charities and foundations to solve the country's big problems — and help philanthropy grow during an economic downturn.

To explore what the incoming Obama administration means for nonprofit groups, *The Chronicle* interviewed numerous charity officials and experts, asking them what the new president can do to strengthen philanthropy, fund raising, and volunteerism during the next four years.

Of utmost importance for many of them is the need for the president to spur economic growth to trigger greater giving. But they also called for a more prominent role for charitable groups in the administration, a White House Office of Civic Engagement, for example, or a National Institute of Philanthropy, which would offer prizes for effective giving and promote collaboration among donors. Others called for new government policies to aid cash-strapped charities, such as making financial assistance available to them from the Small Business Administration or allowing donors to food banks and other social-service charities to receive greater tax benefits for their gifts. Still other nonprofit leaders argued that, despite the problems Americans are experiencing at home, Mr. Obama should not ignore the need in Africa and other impoverished regions of the world, urging him to increase foreign aid and reduce barriers to international giving.

The following are excerpts from the advice nonprofit officials have for the next president. You will find a discussion among *Chronicle* readers about priorities for the next president [online](#).

### Overhaul Policies on Energy

What's needed now is short-term stimulus spending to rev our economic engine, coupled with stable new sources of long-term growth. President Obama can help meet both these needs with an ambitious four-step program of green regulations and investments. The nonprofit world should assist this environmental agenda, through advocacy, grant making, and other means, to:

- Invest heavily in green infrastructure, where it can immediately put people to work while laying the foundation for sustainable long-term growth. We need a smart, integrated national electrical grid; expanded urban and long-distance public transit; and block grants to states to kick-start development projects already in the pipeline.
- Launch an aggressive job-creating effort to weatherize and solarize U.S. homes and buildings, which currently consume almost half of our energy and create the bulk of greenhouse-gas emissions. This demands a careful mix of performance standards, market organization, and public-private financing. But it can be done, and quickly.
- Turbo-charge research, development, and deployment of carbon-free energy sources like solar, wind, geothermal, and cellulosic ethanol, while ramping down subsidies to dirty energy.
- Put a price on carbon pollution through a cap-and-trade system or carbon tax, creating market-based incentives for innovations in clean energy.

— *Chip Giller, founder and chief executive of Grist.org, an online magazine that covers the environmental movement*

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