



Alliance *for*
Shared Values

January 4, 2020

Efforts of Hizmet Movement Participants toward More Transparent, Accountable and Participatory Governance in Non-profit Organizations

Introduction and Background

Hizmet Movement participants have started their first initiatives in North America during the 1990s. Institutional activities have focused on culture, education, interfaith and intercultural dialogue and humanitarian relief while some spiritual and cultural activities have been organized as unincorporated associations.

The Alliance for Shared Values was established in 2012 as a loose umbrella for several institutions founded by Hizmet participants that focused on dialogue among people with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. AFSV's main mission is to counter the false stereotypes, prejudices, fear and enmity and to establish accurate knowledge, empathy and mutual respect in their place. While assisting its partners with a similar vision, AFSV also has become a go-to place for news media reporters, think tank experts and academic researchers exploring the movement. During the last five years, in listening to community input, we added a new area of activity to AFSV's portfolio—to assist Hizmet-affiliated non-profit organizations in their effort to adopt a more transparent and accountable governance that also is more inclusive of women and youth. The relationships of these institutions with their stakeholders within the movement is another area where AFSV provides a consulting service. In this context, AFSV conducted activities such as officer summits, seminars, workshops, and teleconferences. Some of these activities involved a small number of institutional officers while others addressed hundreds of stakeholders including donors, volunteers and officer candidates. The following observations have been made during these activities.

Observations

Meetings of Hizmet participants in North America on the topic of more transparent, accountable and participatory governance of non-profit organizations began in 2015. A process of putting principles and methods identified during these meetings into practice while taking into consideration local contexts has already started, and progress has been made to varying extents in different locations. AFSV published a subset of these [principles](#) on November 27, 2018. There is widespread commitment among Hizmet participants to putting these principles into practice and maintaining stable progress.

The non-profit organizations founded and supported by Hizmet participants will be referred to as “Hizmet NPOs” in this document. Hizmet is a voluntary movement based on spiritual and moral ties among its participants. Therefore, the aforementioned institutions are independent and do not have a legal tie to any other legal entity besides the bilateral agreements they deliberately make. Certain key terms within the non-profit literature will be in quotation marks throughout the rest of the document.

Hizmet participants in North America are conducting their activities to a large extent under non-profit organizations (NPOs, a.k.a. “charities”) in a legal and transparent way. Many of these institutions focus on education, culture, dialogue and humanitarian relief.

In certain localities, some activities, such as weekly spiritual gatherings or volunteer projects are conducted as voluntary non-institutional associations, known legally as “unincorporated associations”.

Hizmet-affiliated NPOs are governed by their “Board of Directors,” the members of which are identified by local Hizmet participants.

These boards take federal laws, state laws and local ordinances, universal human values, the institution’s bylaws and core values of the Hizmet movement as the basis for their decision-making process. They act with the recognition of their legal responsibility to the regulatory institutions of the federal and local governments and their ethical responsibility to Hizmet participants who are the primary stakeholders of the institution.

There is wide-spread consciousness about and commitment to increasing the participation of women and youth in the institutional boards and non-institutional deliberation platforms.

Platforms have been formed in locations where there is more than one Hizmet NPO to facilitate sharing experiences and best practices, to ease collaboration and to discuss issues that concern Hizmet participants locally or generally. In locations where there is a single NPO or no NPO at all, such platforms were formed to discuss and plan voluntary activities and to discuss both local and general matters that concern Hizmet participants.

Platform where representatives from NPOs participate are based on “Memoranda of Understanding” among the NPOs.

NPOs are represented (not necessarily officially) in the platforms by one or more board members and their chief executive officer. In addition to institutional representatives, local stakeholders who have distinguished themselves as opinion leaders, financial or human resource providers or area experts also participate in the platforms. Non-institutional participants in the platform are identified locally based on nominations and preferences of local stakeholders.

Participants are currently discussing incorporating some of these platforms, ranging from small towns to states and larger areas in terms of their scope, as non-profit institutions

Participants from the North America platform consult the views and recommendations of Fethullah Gülen from time to time.

Participants who assume spiritual and social guidance roles within the core values of the movement help maintain harmony between participants in a locality and the broader movement, inspire local participants and nurture their spirits. These individuals also assume institutional roles or as chairs of platforms. Those who assume institutional roles are accountable to institutional boards. Those who assume platform roles are accountable to the platforms.

In the area of legal compliance, Hizmet NPOs conduct internal audits and receive help from the platforms or professional consultants. They hire professionals for an independent audit of their governance and finances. Some are adopting voluntary transparency standards (such as “GuideStar”) to help with improving their transparency and accountability. Platforms also provide educational programs and encouragement to local NPOs in these areas.

Human resources committees formed within platforms provide an advisory role and assistance in identifying candidates for staff positions within Hizmet NPOs, effective and efficient utilization of human resources, professional development and career planning.

Financial resources committees formed within the platforms provide an advisory role and assistance to local NPOs in identifying, cultivating and diversifying financial resources and in their effective, efficient and transparent use.

Mini internal town hall meetings and larger-scale conventions are held periodically to share activities and best practices of NPOs, collect ideas and feedback of stakeholders, evaluate financial situation of NPOs and address challenges faced by NPOs or UIAs with the help of consultation among institutional representatives and stakeholders.

Conclusion

Hizmet participants in North America have been striving toward more transparent and accountable NPO governance that includes higher participation of women and youth in the decision-making bodies. These efforts have begun to bear fruit. As a result of these activities, principles and NPO operational best practices have been identified and are being put into practice. These developments allow Hizmet NPOs to be places where young participants who grow up in North America can see themselves taking roles and also satisfying the expectations of their respective societies with regard to transparency, accountability and diversity.