

Interreligious Leaders Dialogue Group

April 29, 2010

D. Andrew Kille

I've made an effort to sketch out some of my thinking in relation to the shape of interfaith activity and cooperation in Silicon Valley. None of this is fully hashed out, but I find often that laying things out graphically helps me to think more clearly about the subject at hand.

Two diagrams follow these comments. One is a representation of the current state of affairs (the "entrepreneurial" model that was noted in the Partner City document and presentation). It is, of course, hugely simplified, but I think conveys some of the complications and overlaps of groups and programs in our area.

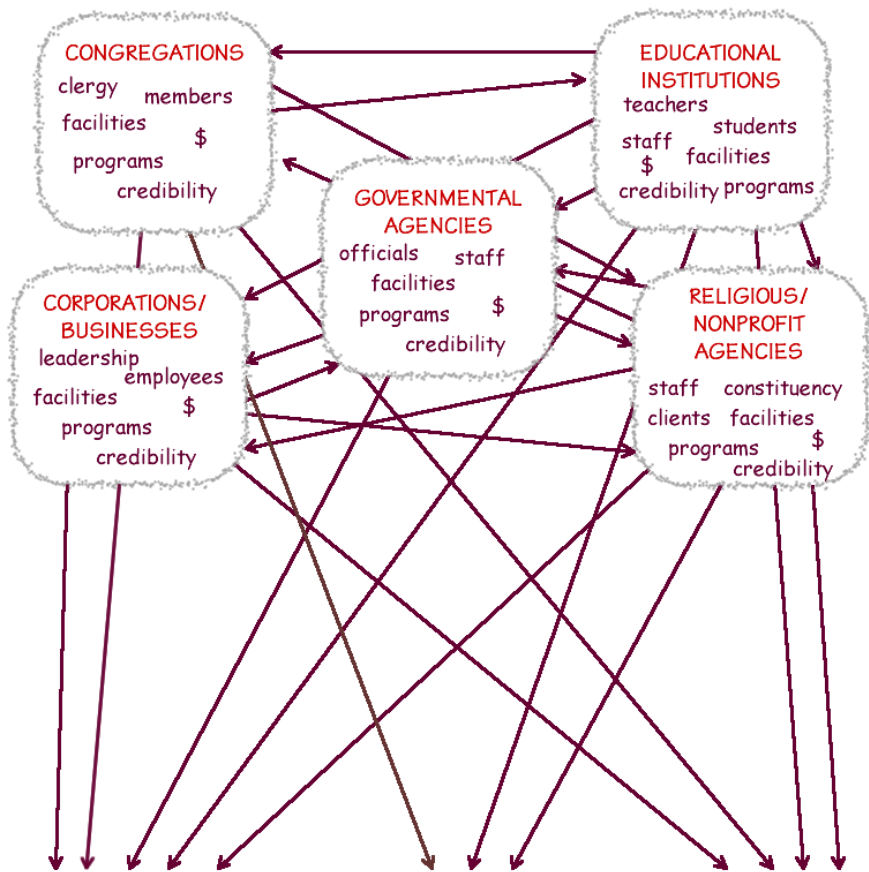
Each of the diagrams can be divided into three general areas: the top portion represents the resources available for interfaith collaboration; the bottom portion represents outcomes—specific activities and manifestations of interfaith cooperation; the middle represents the process of getting the resources together to enable the outcomes. In both diagrams the upper and lower portions are the same.

Resources: these are arranged into institutional designations: congregations, educational institutions, governmental agencies, corporations & businesses and religious/ non-profit groups. All of these institutions have varying levels of leadership, person power, facilities, money, and programs to offer.

Outcomes: these are arranged according to the threefold clusters that we used in our process: Action, Devotion, and Education. Clearly, most outcomes involve a mix of these features, but for the sake of simplicity, I've separated them out somewhat.

Process: this is how we get the resources together to achieve the outcomes. This is where the two charts differ. As you will see, the current process is rather haphazard and chaotic. I'm suggesting that this is where our work needs to unfold.

Take a look at the two diagrams, and then I'll continue with some observations.



ACTION

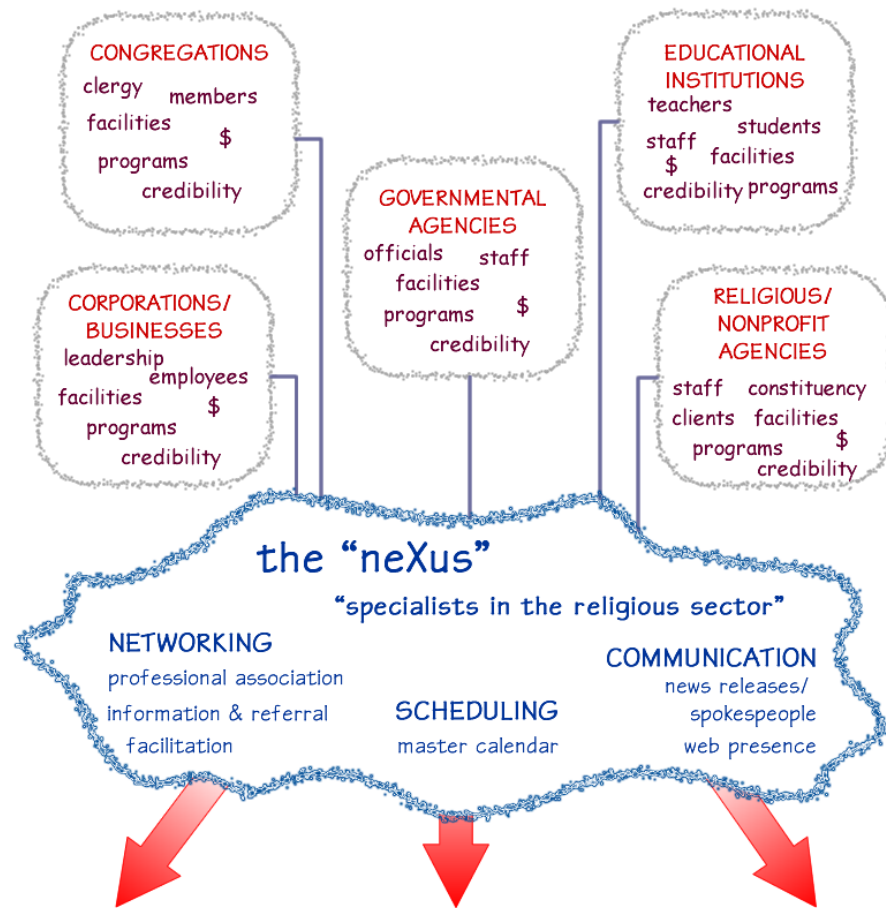
community service
global issues

DEVOTION

interfaith gatherings

EDUCATION

speakers bureau
statements of concern
interfaith dialogue
interfaith conferences



ACTION

community service
global issues

DEVOTION

interfaith gatherings

EDUCATION

speakers bureau
statements of concern
interfaith dialogue
interfaith conferences

Observations:

- What I haven't shown on these charts is how the outcomes provide benefit to the resource providers—how the bottom circles back to the top. We need to keep asking the question “what benefit do I, as an organization or institution, receive that will make me willing to invest my resources in this project?”
- It might be an interesting exercise to take any given program, activity, or interfaith linkage in the past and see how it fits into the chart—*e.g.* the Circle of Palms events, the *Carry the Vision* conference, a demonstration on behalf of hotel workers, the Jain interfaith conferences. What resources were used, what process brought them together, and what were the outcomes?
- The activities that fall into the “neXus” are not flashy or exciting; they are structures of facilitation, scheduling, and information-keeping. However, if they were in place, getting resources together for useful outcomes could become more efficient and sustainable.
- In order to be able to function effectively, the “neXus” would need to be able to provide certain functions on behalf of *all* its constituents. Questions to ask are:
 - How should it be guided/governed? What kind of representation do the various religious (and other) communities need to have to trust the process?
 - Does it have any functions beyond coordination and facilitation?
 - What kind of staffing/ resources would be needed to ensure its functions?
- The SVFACES Interfaith Leaders Dialogue has operated both as an outcome *and* as a process. This may be part of the confusion about the purpose of the group.
- Occasionally, I've mentioned the fourth “way” of interfaith cooperation—the one that doesn't much care what you do as long as you do it. It strikes me that the Nexus incorporates this dimension.

Who are “we”?

I observed at the meeting that it isn't always clear what we mean when we talk about “we” in relation to the overall shape of interfaith cooperation in the Valley. I think it is useful as much as possible to stay clear about what level of organization/commitment we are describing. For example:

- **Partner City Group.** “We” are the group that worked on the report, went to Melbourne, and are the identified planning group for the Partner City status. I'd consider us a small, non-institutionalized “religious/ non-profit” agency. We have credibility, and some volunteers, but no facilities, programs, or money.
- **Organizational Identities.** All of us have some kind of institutional association—to religious/ non-profit agencies, educational institutions, governmental agencies, and/or congregations. Depending on our personal roles in those organizations, we may have access to leadership, facilities, programs, and maybe even money, but these are not directly available to “us.”
- **The Wider Interfaith Community.** Most of us have been participants at some level in interfaith activities, such as the SVFACES dialogue group, South Bay Interfaith, Carry the Vision, the Jain interfaith gatherings, *etc.* We have a web of relationships that we can use in gathering people and inviting participation in a broader vision.
- **Our personal commitments.** These are allied to, but not necessarily identical to, the above identities.