

November 2, 2005



Dear NCFR members, colleagues, and friends:

Over the last year NCFR has engaged in a cooperative agreement with the Administration for Children and Families of the United States Department of Health and Human Services to produce a Website known as the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC). The purposes of this agreement, our partners in the endeavor (Norfolk State University, Syracuse University, Texas Tech University, University of Minnesota, Brigham Young University, and Child Trends), and the debate around this matter have been detailed thoroughly in our newsletter, *REPORT*, and through regular email communication with our members. I write to you today as Acting President of NCFR to tell you that the NCFR Board of Directors has decided to exit from this agreement. This letter provides you with a review of why the Board originally approved NCFR's involvement in this agreement and an explanation for why we believe we should exit the agreement.

NCFR uses the Carver Policy Governance Model, which requires the Board to identify clearly the "ENDS" of the organization, i.e., the organization's goals and purpose for existing. ENDS statements force boards to consider three things: what outcome, for what "consumer(s)," at what costs and benefits. The Board has refined our ENDS statements over the years, resulting in two statements: (1) NCFR members will have the knowledge and skills to study, teach about, and serve families; and (2) Families, professionals, and public decision makers will be better informed about family well-being. The second ENDS statement reflects NCFR's public policy goals. According to the Carver model, the Board, while not abdicating its role, empowers NCFR's Executive Director to pursue any reasonable means for achieving those two ends as long as the method is legal, reasonable and prudent. The Board remains responsible for, among other things, careful monitoring, evaluation, deliberation, and decision-making regarding the long term effectiveness of NCFR in reaching its goals.



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The Executive Director asked the Board in the Spring of 2004 to consider responding to a program announcement to enter into the cooperative agreement that would ultimately create the NHMRC. The Board carefully considered the pros and cons of such a policy activity in accordance with NCFR's second ENDS statement. Once fully informed of the identifiable positive and negative aspects of the project, the Board concluded that entering into the cooperative agreement would help achieve NCFR's policy goals. The Board based its decision solely on whether the NHMRC was a reasonable opportunity to make progress on NCFR's policy goals. The Board believed that it had identified a policy outcome for an identified consumer and therefore authorized the Executive Director to pursue the NHMRC opportunity. The amount of money involved was never a consideration.

Although some good work has been accomplished, some of the elements of the cooperative agreement have negatively affected NCFR and risk jeopardizing other important NCFR tasks and goals. After deliberation, the Board concluded that continuing with the NHMRC project is no longer feasible and instructed the Executive Director to withdraw NCFR from the cooperative agreement and all related activities in an orderly and expedient fashion. Some aspects of the project will require a transition period out of respect for our partners and employees. It remains the Board's intent, however, that NCFR exit the cooperative agreement as soon as is feasible.

Some of you have responded to program announcements for a grant or cooperative agreement or to requests for proposals (RFP) for a contract. You know, therefore, an initial program announcement or RFP usually does not contain much detail about the day-to-day work of a project. Such was the case here: the program announcement contained little specificity about the daily project requirements. Consequently, some of the issues that arose became apparent only after NCFR began to perform under the cooperative agreement.

A significant factor in the Board's decision to exit the cooperative agreement is the lack of broad member consensus and support for this policy activity. NCFR has a long history of engaging in policy activities only when there is broad consensus among our members on policy issues. When the Board members approved entering into the cooperative agreement, we based our decision on the information available at that time and a desire to raise NCFR's profile as a respected source for policy and education information. The NHMRC, when weighed in the balance, originally appeared as a positive means to increase the visibility of NCFR's policy and education expertise. When it became apparent that there was serious opposition to this policy activity the Board concluded that it was no longer appropriate for NCFR. On some level, it does not matter how large or small is the group of members who object to this activity, but that there is a lack of broad consensus and support for NCFR's engagement in this agreement.

A more recent development and a significant factor in the Board's decision to exit the cooperative agreement is the government's request that the NHMRC Website include a statement by President Bush and a picture of President and Mrs. Bush on the home page. The Board concluded that such a requirement has the appearance of overtly politicizing the project and unacceptably risks NCFR's image and posture as a policy and education organization, rather than a political or partisanship organization which, among other things, is inconsistent with NCFR's tax exempt status.

In sum, these factors prompted the Board to reconsider how well the project serves the organization. The lengthy and repeated discussions among the Board and the NCFR staff have made it difficult to devote sufficient time and energy to other important tasks and goals. The decision to withdraw from the cooperative agreement reflects this realization as well as the threat that a polarized membership poses to the long-term stability of NCFR.

The Board hopes that withdrawing from the cooperative agreement will resolve many of the issues that have emerged and proposes using listening sessions and forums at the Annual Meeting for further discussion. As always we encourage member comment and feedback via any method convenient for you, especially if you will not be able to attend the meeting in Phoenix. It is the earnest desire of the Board members and the Executive Director that the warm and open nature that is a cornerstone of NCFR will continue to thrive and that each of us will remain strongly committed to NCFR, to respect for diversity, and to each other. I look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting!

With sincere regards and on behalf of the Board of Directors,

Pam Monroe
Acting NCFR President