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NEWS RELEASE

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Independent Sector to Present Community Voices Heard with the 2009 American Express Building Leadership Award

(Washington, D.C., July 15, 2009)—Independent Sector will honor Community Voices Heard with the 2009 American Express Building Leadership Award for empowering low-income people in New York City and State to advocate for public policy changes that improve their lives. CVH will receive its award, which includes a gift of \$10,000, at the Independent Sector Annual Conference in Detroit, November 4-6.

CVH is a membership-led organization that engages low-income people, particularly women of color, in direct action campaigns to improve workforce and welfare systems, save and expand affordable housing, allow greater access to education and training opportunities, and ensure that low-income residents help shape the future of their communities. It trains members to be leaders both within the organization and at other grassroots nonprofits, and harnesses their expertise and experience to inform, challenge, and change public policy. CVH combines education, grassroots organizing, leadership development, and civic engagement to build the advocacy power of its membership and advance causes that its members believe are critical to improving their communities.

“Community Voices Heard is a model for how to integrate leadership development into policy and advocacy work, enabling people who have been historically marginalized to help influence the decisions that directly affect their lives,” said Diana Aviv, president and CEO of Independent Sector. “The training and expertise they provide committed activists and emerging organizers has enabled them to press elected officials to uphold their responsibilities to communities, creating more effective programs that continue to improve the quality of life for so many living in New York and beyond.”

Members of CVH, who are predominantly women of color with experience with public assistance programs, have led efforts to advocate for public policies that benefit the nearly 2.7 million individuals in New York State living in poverty. The organization developed the concept for -- and subsequently got the City of New York to implement -- the Parks Opportunity Program, the largest paid welfare-to-work transitional jobs program in the United States, employing over 25,000 low-income people since its creation. This year, CVH helped secure over \$25 million in new resources for paid jobs programs for public assistance recipients statewide. At the encouragement of CVH members, in 2006 Mayor Bloomberg established a new position of deputy mayor for health and human services and appointed a Commission for Economic Opportunity to recommend solutions

to reduce the number of New York City residents at or below the poverty line. In just three years, CVH has been successful at securing over \$222 million in additional resources for the NYC Housing Authority to help support the public housing stock in the city. Its Voter Power Project, which educates low-income individuals about the importance of voting and uses election cycles to insert issues involving poverty into campaign debates, has contacted and mobilized a total of more than 17,000 New York voters in over 50 election districts -- in the South Bronx, East and Central Harlem, Yonkers, Newburgh, and Poughkeepsie -- since its inception in 2004.

Training modules are a key element of CVH's commitment to cultivating leadership, such as power analysis trainings that brief members and staff about key elected officials' strengths and policy positions; media trainings that prepare members to speak on message about specific government programs; and fundraising trainings that explain the budget process and how to raise resources to sustain its work. To ensure staff is representative of its diverse membership, it operates an organizer training program that educates people from its constituency in the theory and practice of base-building and campaign development and execution. Upon completion of the program, trainees are qualified for paid staff organizing positions at CVH and other grassroots organizations. Its newly developed Gail Aska Policy & Research Fellowship -- named for CVH's late co-founder -- will further its commitment to being a multi-racial and multi-cultural organization by building the presence of women of color in policy and research staff positions.

"Community Voices Heard is honored that the 2009 American Express Building Leadership Award recognizes our work to create an organization led by our members, who are the driving force behind the development and execution of our campaigns and programs," said Ketny Jean-Francois, co-chair of the Community Voices Heard board. "I hope that our example encourages other grassroots organizations to view their constituents as leaders and to maximize their involvement in strengthening their organizations and community."

Formed in 1994 in response to elected officials' efforts to eliminate aid to poor families and children and in reaction to the negative stereotypes about individuals on welfare, Community Voices Heard works to promote the social welfare of low income people living in New York City, New York State, and the nation through grassroots organizing, leadership development, participatory research, public education, and advocacy. To learn more about the organization, visit: www.CVHaction.org.

American Express Building Leadership Award, formally known as the Leadership IS Award, is sponsored by American Express. The award, which was established in 1999, recognizes the importance of investing in leaders of the nonprofit community by celebrating an organization that embodies this principle in spirit and practice.

To learn more about the American Express Building Leadership Award, please visit: www.independentsector.org/programs/leadership/organizationalaward.htm.

To learn more about the Independent Sector Annual Conference, please visit: <http://www.independentsector.org/AnnualConference/2009>.

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Independent Sector is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of approximately 600 charities, foundations, and corporate philanthropy programs, collectively representing tens of thousands of charitable groups in every state across the nation. Its mission is to advance the common good by leading, strengthening, and mobilizing the nonprofit community. To learn more about Independent Sector, please visit: www.independentsector.org.

American Express: Developing New Leaders for Tomorrow

One of American Express' three platforms for its philanthropy is Developing New Leaders for Tomorrow. Under this giving initiative, which recognizes the significance of strong leadership in the nonprofit sector, American Express is making grants focused on training high potential emerging leaders to tackle important issues in the 21st century.