

Building Fruitful Collaboration Between Florida's Faith Communities and One Stop Career Centers

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Executive Summary

Throughout the nation, welfare reform is stimulating a variety of new partnerships to serve struggling families, as leaders recognize that the challenge of overcoming poverty in America requires collaboration through which each sector of society contributes its unique resources and strengths. Collaboration between government and the faith community has won increasing attention today with the passage of the “Charitable Choice” guidelines in the 1996 welfare reform law and, more recently, President George W. Bush’s establishment of a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. New government-faith collaborations are in place in 24 states and in development in at least ten more. Through them, thousands of struggling families are being helped to shift from welfare to work, and from poverty to increasing self-sufficiency. With intentionality and creativity, Florida can become a leader in this national trend, to the benefit of the state’s vulnerable residents.

As in much of the rest of the country, Florida’s welfare caseload has declined significantly under welfare reform—according to a recent Workforce Florida report, by 74 percent. This achievement has made Florida the leader in caseload declines among the nation’s eight largest states. Important challenges, however, remain. The average hourly wage of those Floridians who, through the state’s welfare transition program, have moved into employment is \$6.61 per hour. This is 34 percent below the “lower living standard income level” benchmark set by Workforce Florida; an improvement over the income level of former welfare recipients but not a wage enabling financial self-sustainability. Clearly, an important focus in the “unfinished business” of welfare reform is to help these heads of households move up the employment ladder into better-paying positions. This need to help “leavers” (those who exit welfare) is clearly demonstrated by the statewide welfare re-entry rate: among those exiting welfare for new jobs, approximately 15 percent return. Placing poor people into new jobs is just half the battle; helping them to retain those jobs is also crucial. Moreover, the families remaining on the rolls today are those with the most barriers to self-sufficiency. These families require concentrated attention and extra effort.

For public officials and workforce development leaders concerned about these challenges and searching for solutions, the idea of collaborating with the faith community is attractive. Florida’s 9000+ congregations offer a wealth of human and financial resources that can be mobilized to help the working poor. Specifically, faith groups are strategically positioned to recruit low-income neighbors who might otherwise “fall through the cracks” of the welfare/workforce system and to offer entry-level workers the emotional and practical support that aids them in successfully retaining their jobs. Florida’s wide variety of faith-based, community serving non-profits already provide many essential services, and with increased coordination with public sector efforts, the social safety net and continuum of assistance can be enhanced.

Faith groups, too, have several motivations for cooperating with the public welfare and workforce development system. Florida’s primary religious groups (Christians, Jews, and

Muslims) share a common, religiously-motivated concern for society's most vulnerable citizens. Moreover, many religious congregations are themselves located in distressed communities. They clearly see the needs around them, and, in some instances, have experienced increased demands for their services since welfare reform. Leaders of these congregations know that it is in their interest to comprehend Florida's welfare and workforce operations so they can better understand how to care for their neighbors. Additionally, in some cases, religious congregations themselves include low-income parishioners. Leaders of these congregations are especially motivated to seek out ways they can be of assistance to "their own" who are hurting; and if partnering with One Stop Career Centers can make it more likely that their members will receive the help they need, then partnership is attractive. Finally, faith-based nonprofits currently offering social services in their local communities know that their programs are embedded in a larger context of public policies affecting the families they serve. Thus, they are motivated to understand those policies and to have opportunity to influence them. All of these factors can help encourage faith-based organizations to collaborate with the public sector.

Building Fruitful Collaboration Between Florida's Faith Communities and One Stop Career Centers highlights the findings and recommendations of a diverse group of strategists, drawn from the religious sector, business, and the workforce development community, for advancing collaboration to assist Florida's poor. This report notes the benefits of government-faith collaboration, examining several models nationwide through which low-income citizens are being effectively and creatively served. It describes key "lessons learned" from these models in order to specify the kinds of conditions that make fruitful collaboration possible. The strategy group also spent considerable time identifying the potential barriers to such collaboration in Florida. In brief, these include:

- ◆ Lack of awareness—often, religious groups are unfamiliar with the benefits and services offered by local One Stop Career Centers (OSCCs); similarly, OSCC staff are frequently unaware of the host of services offered by congregations and faith-based organizations (FBOs);
- ◆ Difficulties OSCCs face in reaching out to the faith community—OSCCs may lack the personnel to invest in building relationships with faith community leaders. Moreover, given the heterogeneity of the religious sector, it is difficult to navigate. Groups have different leadership structures; additionally, key gatekeepers may not be easily visible (or accessible) to outsiders;
- ◆ Uncertainties over the boundaries of collaboration—there is widespread ignorance, among both public officials and faith community leaders, of the Charitable Choice guidelines (which facilitate fruitful faith-government collaboration in ways that protect the religious character and autonomy of faith-based organizations while guarding the civil liberties of customers);

- ◆ Lack of identified intermediary organizations—some of the best models of public sector-faith community collaboration utilize strategic intermediaries, i.e., administratively sophisticated organizations that bridge the relationship between government and modest-scale FBOs. Organizations that can serve this function need to be identified (or created) in Florida;
- ◆ Cross-cultural communications challenges—members of the workforce development sector and the faith community need an on-going dialog through which they can develop relationships, build trust, and learn to understand one another’s subcultures.

To overcome these barriers, the strategy group recommends (among others) the following key actions:

- ◆ Championing the concept of collaboration—public officials can use the “bully pulpit” to create a culture of appreciation for the contributions of Florida’s faith-based social service providers, highlighting successful models and encouraging increased private giving to FBOs;
- ◆ Creating the conditions for fruitful collaboration—public officials need to review Florida’s procurement procedures to ensure full compliance with the federal Charitable Choice guidelines. Additionally, state officials could follow the lead of other states that have dramatically increased collaboration with FBOs (e.g., Texas and Indiana) by convening a state task force to uncover unnecessary regulatory policies that hinder “Good Samaritans” and promote public policies that strengthen FBO efforts; by hosting a state-wide “collaboration conference” gathering faith representatives and members of the welfare and workforce development communities; and by establishing a state “faith community liaison” charged with reaching out to Florida’s FBOs to explore collaborative ventures;
- ◆ Creating incentives for collaboration and requiring reporting on progress achieved—public officials can encourage regional Workforce Development Boards to “incentivize” contracting (or subcontracting) with effective FBOs and require Boards to report annually on their progress in developing increased collaboration (both financial and nonfinancial);
- ◆ Developing directories of faith-based community programs and distributing these to OSCCs.

With energetic efforts to implement these recommendations, the strategy group is confident that workforce development professionals, public officials, and faith community leaders can work together to help vulnerable Floridians to overcome poverty.



Introduction: The National Context

Throughout the nation, welfare reform is stimulating a variety of new partnerships to serve struggling families—partnerships between business and the public sector, between non-profits and for-profits, between government and faith-based organizations. Leaders today recognize that the challenge of overcoming poverty in America requires collaboration through which each sector of society contributes its unique resources and strengths.

The concept of collaboration between government and the faith community has won increasing attention at the federal level with the passage of the “Charitable Choice” guidelines in the 1996 welfare reform law and, more recently, President George W. Bush’s establishment of a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. According to the first major study of the implementation of Charitable Choice, it has made government-faith collaboration more plausible for both public officials and religious leaders and has stimulated hundreds of new partnerships, both financial and nonfinancial.¹

Charitable Choice is promoting a greater willingness on the part of many faith-based organizations (FBOs) to partner with government because it offers new protections to FBOs that compete for and secure public funding; protections that alleviate the concerns FBOs sometimes have about working with government. Specifically, these protections afford FBOs the opportunity to underwrite their community serving programs with government money without sacrificing their religious character or autonomy.²

The Charitable Choice rules are also persuading more public officials to look favorably upon government-faith partnerships. The rules provide explicit protections for the civil liberties of service beneficiaries and prohibit FBOs from using government dollars to underwrite sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization. Charitable Choice enjoyed bi-partisan support at its passage, but was then a little-known provision of welfare reform. Today, it has received much attention as part of President Bush’s highly publicized initiative to promote faith-based solutions to community problems. The Bush plan—which argues for expanding the Charitable Choice provision to regulate additional federal social welfare dollars and also includes proposals for a charity tax credit, new rules to allow non-itemizers to deduct their charitable contributions, and a new public-private fund for technical assistance for faith-based and community based organizations—has invigorated efforts by many state officials to reach out to the faith community and to assess whether their state policies are in compliance with Charitable Choice. New government-faith collaborations are in place in 24 states and in development in at least ten more.³

With intentionality and creativity, Florida can become a leader in this national trend, to the benefit of the state’s most vulnerable families. Clearly, the climate is ripe for a flowering of new partnerships between FBOs and public welfare and workforce development agencies.

Background of This Report

Florida's leaders realize the potential of strategic collaborations for effectively serving the state's lower income families. One example of this is the Orlando Regional Chamber's Workforce 20/20 project. This initiative has aggressively and intentionally engaged business leaders in the region's welfare reform efforts and workforce development system. Indeed, the emphasis on employers is so strong that Florida's officials regularly use the phrase "business-driven welfare reform" to describe their efforts. One aspect of the Workforce 20/20 initiative, The Jobs Partnership of Florida, is a unique collaboration between businesses and Orlando's faith community (and, increasingly, the local One Stop Career Centers), that serves un- and underemployed individuals in the community. In January 2001, the state Workforce Development Board, noting the success of the Jobs Partnership in moving low-income Floridians into new jobs and promising futures,⁴ commissioned the organization to offer recommendations for crafting more of these kinds of partnerships between the state's One Stop Career Centers and the faith community. This report, *Building Fruitful Collaboration Between Florida's Faith Communities and One Stop Career Centers*, offers those recommendations. It is the product of a series of face-to-face discussions, convened by The Jobs Partnership of Florida, between leaders of congregations and faith-based nonprofits, businessmen, staff from

General "Best Practices" in Government-Faith Collaboration

Ground-floor-up involvement: *In nonfinancial (and even some financial) partnerships, work proceeds best when government and faith-based organizations (FBOs) work together to design the collaboration as opposed to the state having a pre-designed program to which they invite the faith community's participation.*

Discerning teachability: *The faith partner has to have a respectful and teachable attitude toward the government partner. Religious practitioners ought not to think, "The government has failed and it is good they are finally looking to us for some answers!" Case managers and public officials have wisdom to share from their experience in working with lower-income families. Simultaneously, FBOs should display a discerning teachability, since it may be the case that the worldviews of these public servants may conflict at various points with the worldview of the FBO (e.g., differences in terms of presuppositions or basic values).*

Sympathetic respect: *For their part, government officials must eschew an elitist perspective that only highly educated professionals are equipped to help poor people. They should acknowledge that lay volunteers can provide crucial*

emotional support and moral guidance to needy families—things that government, by its nature, cannot offer.

Connected Autonomy: *In most current faith-government relationships, the congregation or FBO is willing to do a lot, but doesn't want full responsibility for the disadvantaged families they're assisting. Congregations want assurances that the individuals they serve will also be linked to government-sponsored programs that address needs the congregations themselves cannot meet. At the same time, churches want to help poor people without excessive governmental interference that might squelch their unique approach.*

Strategic Internal Organization: *While government is looking to the faith community for help in part because FBOs have flexibility, informality, and a grassroots nature that permits them to work with families in ways that feel personal and non-bureaucratic, faith organizations must still maintain some level of organization and administrative sophistication in order to interface effectively with government. FBOs and congregations must be able to keep accurate records, document their case work, and have in place reliable financial accounting systems and procedures that are well-organized and above reproach.*

Specific Lessons Learned in Government-Faith Collaboration

(1) Utilize confidentiality agreements

Clients' involvement with the FBO/congregation should be voluntary and clients should sign with their social workers formal confidentiality releases giving the case workers permission to share information with the partner FBO.

(2) Consider the benefits of professional bridge-builders

Bridge-builders are professional, experienced social workers who can operate comfortably and effectively in the subculture of both the faith community and the government.

(3) Think creatively about possible incentives

Clients' participation in FBO programs collaborating with public agencies can be encouraged when incentives are in place. One example: giving clients credit for completing courses offered by FBOs that cover the same material as mandated classes provided by the welfare/workforce development agency (e.g., job readiness classes at One Stop Centers).

(4) Utilize Strategic Intermediary Organizations

An administratively sophisticated nonprofit with experience in government contracting (e.g., Goodwill) can play "middleman," securing a government contract and

then subcontracting out specific services in agreements with smaller FBOs or congregations.

(5) Create user-friendly funding applications/ programs

Many of the best FBO programs are modest in scale. It is administratively difficult for them to compete for huge contracts or grants. Public agencies can: offer contracts in smaller denominations (e.g., \$5,000-\$50,000); write their Requests for Proposals (RFPs) with clear explanations for newcomers to the process (i.e., avoid technical jargon); and offer newcomers technical assistance in preparing their proposals.

(6) Offer speedy reimbursements

Government needs to reimburse its contractors on a 4-6 week basis if it is to successfully work with small and mid-sized faith-based organizations, as these often have modest cash flows.

(7) Provide incentives for local service providers to partner with FBOs

When public officials contract with private welfare/workforce development service providers, they can award additional points to proposal-makers that outline their plans for collaborating with faith-based and community based organizations.

One Stop Career Centers (OSCC), and public officials. (For a listing of participants in this "Faith-Based Task Force," see Appendix B.)

We began by educating ourselves about the benefits of government-faith collaboration, examining several models nationwide through which low-income citizens are being effectively and creatively served. We attempted to glean from these examples key "lessons learned" in order to grasp the kinds of conditions that make fruitful collaboration possible (see sidebars). We then identified the barriers to such collaboration in Florida and brain-stormed solutions to those barriers. The results of our deliberations together are described in this report, which culminates in specific recommendations and action steps that public officials and faith leaders can take to craft strategic partnerships that will help vulnerable Floridians to overcome poverty.

Motivations for Collaboration

As in much of the rest of the country, Florida's welfare caseload has declined significantly under welfare reform—according to a recent Workforce Florida report, by 74 percent. This achievement has made Florida the leader in caseload declines among the nation's eight largest states.⁵ Important challenges, however, remain. The average hourly wage of those Floridians who, through the state's welfare transition program, have moved into employment is \$6.61 per hour. This figure is 34 percent below the “lower living standard income level”—a decent start in helping these families begin to move out of poverty but clearly not enough to make them financially self-sustaining.⁶ Clearly, an important focus in the “unfinished business” of welfare reform is to help these heads of households move up the employment ladder into better-paying positions. This need to help “leavers” (those who exit welfare) is clearly demonstrated by the statewide welfare re-entry rate: among those exiting welfare for new jobs, approximately 15 percent return.⁷ Placing poor people into new jobs is just half the battle; helping them to retain those jobs is also crucial. Moreover, the families remaining on the rolls today are those with the most barriers to self-sufficiency. These families require concentrated attention and extra effort.

For public officials concerned about these challenges and searching for solutions, the idea of collaborating with the faith community should be attractive for several reasons. Florida's 9,202 congregations and wide variety of faith-based social service nonprofits offer a wealth of strength, talents, and human and financial resources that can be mobilized to help the working poor. (Backing up this claim that faith communities have much to give are recent national surveys of religious congregations that indicate that over 80 percent offer at least one community serving program, and many offer much more.)⁸ In addition to resources, Florida's faith community can help the state's workforce development system meet the challenges of recruitment and retention. Faith groups are strategically positioned to recruit low-income neighbors who might otherwise “fall through the cracks” of the welfare/workforce system and to offer entry-level workers the emotional and practical support that aids them in successfully retaining their jobs.

Moreover, congregations are often strategically positioned as effective and credible service deliverers because they are located in distressed communities and have relationships of trust with their neighbors in need. Just one example of faith-based success in the state is The Jobs Partnership of Florida. As shown in Appendix C, its graduates are securing jobs with considerably higher wages than the \$6.61/hour average for former welfare recipients noted earlier. Jobs Partnership graduates are obtaining jobs at over \$8.00/hour; Hispanic graduates have achieved even higher wage levels.

Our Task Force is not alone in asserting that the faith community has much to offer the workforce development system. Recently, the National Association of State Workforce Agencies released a “toolkit” for faith leaders that noted several ways religious congregations could partner with local One Stop Career Centers in assisting the un- and under-

employed people in their parishes.⁹ The toolkit asks clergy to suggest these parishioners visit their local OSCCs for help; support job seekers through mentoring and work experience programs; supplement the resources of struggling members through clothing, transportation, and child care ministries; and supervise their local Workforce Investment System by participating in their local Boards and Youth Councils.

In addition to these ways of serving, many congregations and faith-based nonprofits are already operating effective job training, mentoring, literacy, drug rehabilitation, and transportation programs for the poor. (And more congregations and FBOs are in the process of designing such community serving initiatives.) Such organizations are well-positioned for collaboration—whether financial or nonfinancial—with their local OSCCs that complements and enhances the services available to job seekers. In short, public officials interested in overcoming poverty in Florida have many reasons to be enthusiastic about partnering with the faith community.

Several factors can also motivate faith-based organizations to consider partnering with public social welfare agencies generally and OSCCs specifically. First, the tenets of the three main religions in Florida—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—all emphasize God’s concern for the disadvantaged and vulnerable of society and call upon adherents to care for the poor. To the extent that these religious communities see collaboration with public agencies/OSCCs as a means for more effectively meeting the needs of the poor, they will be motivated to explore such partnerships. Second, as noted earlier, many congregations are themselves physically located in distressed communities. They clearly see the needs around them, and, in some instances, have experienced increased demands for their services since welfare reform. Leaders of these congregations know that it is in their interest to comprehend Florida’s welfare reform and workforce development systems so they can better understand how to care for their neighbors. Third, in some cases, religious congregations themselves include members who are struggling financially or with the challenge of moving from welfare to work. Leaders of these congregations are especially motivated to seek out ways they can be of assistance to “their own” who are hurting; and if partnering with OSCCs makes it more likely that their members will receive the help they need, then partnership is attractive. Fourth, faith-based nonprofits currently offering social services in their local communities know that their programs are embedded in a larger context of public policies affecting the families they serve. Thus, they are motivated to understand those policies and to have opportunity to influence them. All of these factors can help encourage faith-based organizations to collaborate with the public sector. Additionally, surveys have shown that as faith leaders become more aware of Charitable Choice and the protections it affords to FBOs working with government, their openness to collaboration increases.¹⁰

Barriers to Collaboration

Given that both public officials and religious leaders have reasons to be motivated to work together, why are there not more examples of such fruitful collaboration in Florida? Our Task Force members wrestled with this question at length. We agreed that there were several general issues hindering collaboration:

First, we identified several factors within the faith community that can keep it disconnected. While some congregations and FBOs are highly engaged in community serving ministries, others are not. By extension, these latter groups have little interest in partnering with public agencies aimed at helping the poor. Additionally, among those congregations with the “heart” to help, local leadership may nevertheless be overwhelmed. In minority communities especially, pastors may be bi-vocational, serving their parishes but also working full-time outside the ministry. In other instances, there may be willingness to engage in outreach, but lack of vision or “know how” in doing so effectively. Finally, while in many instances groups within the faith community are able to overcome their various differences and build effective coalitions and partnerships, in other cases they are not. Worse still, there can be problems of “turf wars” among congregations that prevent cooperation within the faith community, much less cooperation between it and other sectors of society.

Second, the Task Force identified factors within the public sector that can hinder collaboration. Despite the growth of government-faith partnerships nationwide since welfare reform, many public officials still are unaware of the possibilities for cooperation. Some mistakenly believe that the notion of the separation of church and state makes such collaboration illegal, or at least implausible. Many are ignorant of Charitable Choice and the new guidelines it offers for facilitating fruitful church-state partnerships. Collaboration is also hindered when public officials are scrambling to keep up with seemingly ever-changing federal or state rules and regulations. Preoccupied by these challenges, they lack energy for investing in new, creative initiatives to partner with community and faith-based organizations. Moreover, in some instances, simple, old-fashioned bureaucratic inertia can inhibit energetic thinking about new partnerships. The Task Force also identified the following specific barriers to collaboration between FBOs and OSCCs:

Lack of awareness. Public officials and OSCC staff often lack knowledge about the variety and scope of faith-based social services in their localities; they especially are ignorant of the efforts of small and mid-sized congregations or FBOs that have never received government funding. Meanwhile, some FBOs and congregations lack understanding of welfare reform—they are unfamiliar with the workforce investment system that relies on OSCCs as key service delivery mechanisms and they know little of the rules by which the OSCCs operate. Since many faith-based providers of social services have never formally worked with government, they are not on the distribution lists for receiving information about Requests for Proposals (RFPs) sent out by government wel-

fare and workforce development agencies. Thus, they remain uninformed of opportunities for government contracting. Simultaneously, faith-based groups have often compiled directories listing various faith-based and community based social services, but they do not always distribute these to public sector social service agencies or OSCCs. Thus, the two communities often lack knowledge of what services each offers. This lack of awareness of what each is doing prevents creative thinking on how to partner; indeed, it prevents individuals from both communities from even knowing one another and having the opportunities to build the relationships from which strategic collaborations could emerge.

Difficulties OSCCs face in reaching out to the faith community. While individual staff members at OSCCs may be people of faith themselves and may informally educate their own congregations about their work, about welfare reform, and/or about ways to collaborate, there is little systematic, intentional outreach to the faith community. This is the result of several factors. OSCC staff may be unaware of Charitable Choice and the new possibilities it offers for partnering with the faith community. They may also be unaware of the vast growth in such partnerships and still laboring under the delusion that the separation of church and state prohibits such collaboration. Or, OSCCs may desire to develop partnerships with community groups but may lack adequate staff to carry out such functions as educating and building relationships with the faith community. Moreover, even where there is interest in building relationships with the faith community, and capacity to do so, such bridge building is challenging due to the heterogeneity of the faith community. Identifying key leaders requires considerable navigational skills, as religious groups have different leadership structures. In some cases, the appropriate point of contact is a local pastor; in others, it may be a bishop or regional denominational leader. In some distressed neighborhoods, it can be difficult to locate very important, but tiny, storefront churches led by highly respected community leaders—because these small congregations are not listed in the phone book’s “yellow pages.” In many religious communities, there are key “gatekeepers” who may or may not be in visible positions of leadership; identifying such gatekeepers and gaining access to them can be difficult.

Suspicious gatekeepers/lack of trust. Fruitful collaboration is also hindered when, for a variety of reasons, key leaders within both communities harbor suspicions of one another. Religious leaders may be critical of welfare reform or hold political opinions differing from those in power at any particular time; such attitudes do not foster an eagerness to collaborate with government. For its part, public officials or OSCC caseworkers may not respect the potential contributions of volunteers from the faith community. They may believe that, lacking formal training in social work, such lay people are amateurs not well-suited to working with public assistance customers. Or they may fear that such volunteers will inappropriately “push their religion” on clients. Public officials may also have concerns about the capacity of faith-based organizations. Perhaps they are aware of small-scale efforts FBOs are conducting, but they doubt such groups can dramatically increase the scale of their efforts and/or manage the administrative responsibilities of financial contracting with government.

Uncertainty about the boundaries of collaboration. When the issue is government-faith partnership, some persons in both communities also raise the question of who can collaborate. Clearly, government needs to be even-handed and not shut out certain faith groups and prefer others. On the other hand, an “idolatry of inclusiveness” on the part of public officials can prevent more modest or limited partnerships from ever getting off the ground. The latter can occur when government insists that any “faith initiative” must include representatives from every religious body—for if some segments of the faith community are interested in collaboration and others disinterested, then such exhaustive involvement is never achievable.

Moreover, even when more modest efforts of collaboration are tried, many questions arise regarding the specific contours of the partnership. As one of our Task Force members noted, “collaboration is good in theory, but the devil is in the details.” Particularly if the relationship involves money, there are important questions of what specific activities are permissible for FBOs under contract with government. The Charitable Choice guidelines offer clarifications (e.g., public funding may not be used for purposes of sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization) but these guidelines only regulate certain federal funding streams (e.g., TANF and Welfare to Work funds) and not others (e.g., HUD funds and WIA).

Lack of strategic intermediary organizations. In the most effective partnerships our Task Force examined, success was often rooted in the presence of an intermediary organization that bridged the relationship between the government entity and individual congregations/FBOs. For example, in California, Goodwill Industries has secured a major financial contract (approximately \$5 million) with the state to provide job training and placement services for welfare recipients. Goodwill has subcontracted with an FBO called The Mobilization for the Human Family, an interfaith alliance of congregations, to provide mentoring services to those program participants desiring volunteer mentors. Goodwill has more administrative capacity and experience with government contracting than does The Mobilization. The Mobilization is able to manage its two-year, \$500,000 contract with Goodwill and meet Goodwill’s reporting/documentation expectations, but probably would have had difficulty attempting to manage the much larger, direct financial contract with California. Thus, Goodwill has stood as a middleman between The Mobilization and the state government, facilitating a partnership that allows the FBO access to public dollars but under an arrangement better suited to its capacity. The arrangement also means that The Mobilization has an arms-length relationship with government (and the individual congregations within The Mobilization an even more distanced relationship), and this has eased concerns about “church-state” issues. Our Task Force was not aware of similar examples of financial contracting via intermediary organizations in Florida. Some organizations may exist that are capable of playing the intermediary role, but apparently are not now doing this. This lack limits the opportunities for indirect financial contracting in Florida.

Complicated rules and procurement processes. FBO representatives on the Task Force noted problems their constituents (or others they had learned of) had encountered in attempting to navigate the eligibility rules and procedures of the One Stop Career Centers. This in turn sometimes led to frustrations as these FBOs tried to work with OSCC staff in serving particular customers.

Relatedly, the Task Force agreed that the best collaborations are those that are crafted “from the ground floor up.” That is, when government and faith community leaders met, talked, and together crafted the design of an initiative, both sides were more likely to have a sense of ownership in the partnership and be committed to its success—more likely than they would be in cases where government designs a program and then invites FBOs to participate. The need for the Regional Workforce Development Boards to engage in even-handed procurement procedures, however, can work against the possibilities for such “ground-floor-up” engagement. If FBOs are invited, for example, to give input into the shaping of Requests for Proposals (RFPs) that the Boards utilize to encourage new partnerships, and then those same FBOs apply for funding under those RFPs, organizations outside the faith community may raise charges of “unfair advantage.”

Cross-cultural communications challenges. To engage storefront churches, minority congregations, and grassroots leaders in a partnership with OSCCs, staff from the Centers must have good skills in cross-cultural communication. This takes many forms. In working with the Hispanic community, for example, a fruitful partnership may be difficult to craft if OSCC staff are unable or unwilling to communicate in Spanish and/or produce Spanish language materials that might be used in a specific partnership program. In addition, both faith leaders and OSCC staff need to learn one another’s “vocabulary;” that is, both must recognize their distinct subcultures and patiently explain them to one another. Finally, OSCC staff must be open to faith organizations critiquing their materials or processes; these faith leaders may be very close to the One Stop customers, understanding how those customers think and learn, and they may be able to identify “red flags” for One Stop staff (e.g., language that alienates or offends or is difficult for customers to understand).

Overcoming the Barriers: Recommendations

Our Task Force was heartened by the many models of successful collaboration we learned about nationwide (see sidebars for examples). In observing these examples, we

saw the public sector and the faith community each bringing to the table unique and complimentary assets. Government offers its abilities to convene (gather together stakeholders); leverage (assist FBOs in accessing additional resources); and highlight (garnering public attention for successful faith-based groups/projects). The faith community offers its unique strengths in stabilizing, mobilizing, and transforming low-income families and communities. The potential “pay off” for collaboration, given this mixing of strategic assets, is large and well-worth the hard work of overcoming the barriers to cooperation. We believe that the barriers we identified, though significant, can be overcome. Indeed, we watched some of those barriers erode even in the course of our four days of dialog, as we grew to better understand one another and learn about each other’s programs, strengths, and needs. This process underscored for us the simple, but critical, truth that the first step toward any fruitful collaboration is building relationships. Our most important general recommendation thus is this: To develop fruitful collaboration in Florida between FBOs and OSCCs, opportunities for getting representatives of the two communities acquainted and then engaged in on-going dialogue must be created.

Our specific recommendations for overcoming the barriers to collaboration follow.

Champion the concept of collaboration. Overarching all the specific action steps noted below is the basic need to create within Florida’s public policies an enthusiasm for government-faith partnership and a “culture of appreciation” for such collaboration. The concept needs

to be championed by the state’s top leaders (e.g., the Governor, the head of Workforce Florida, leaders of Regional Workforce Development Boards); their bully pulpits need to be used to highlight the contributions Florida’s faith community makes to the state’s safety net and to efforts to lift the poor out of poverty. State leaders can also emphasize the importance of FBOs by promoting increased private charitable giving (e.g., encouraging Florida’s corporate community to increase its charitable and in-kind donations to poverty-fighting FBOs). Public officials can also identify specific, highly successful

A North Carolina Success Story of Government-Faith Partnership

In North Carolina, the Faith Empowerment Community Consortium, representing over 70 faith-based ministries, has received a \$50,000 contract from Charlotte-Mecklenburg County to underwrite a creative job training program for TANF and former TANF recipients. The participants enroll in a twelve-week training initiative involving computer literacy classes, faith-based life skills classes, and hands-on apprenticeships in warehouse distribution. Through its partnership with Gifts in Kind, International, the Consortium receives large shipments of supplies and equipment that are organized, packed, and distributed to member faith-based organizations by the trainees. Each trainee is also linked with a personal mentor from the faith community. Local businesses in the warehouse distribution field visit the program with information on their companies and accept job applications on-site. Of the first 16 participants in this pilot program, 14 graduated. Participants learn about the training program through flyers distributed at the VESTIBULE—a faith community-sponsored information desk stationed right in the lobby of the county social services department.

examples of faith-based work and highlight/showcase those efforts. Rhetoric alone is insufficient, but rhetoric that consistently demonstrates the state's desire to forge strategic collaboration with the faith community is absolutely necessary in creating a hospitable climate for partnership.

Create the conditions for fruitful collaboration. States that have crafted fruitful collaboration have taken several common steps that Florida could imitate. In Texas, for example, then-Governor Bush convened a blue-ribbon Task Force to identify both the ways that state policies hindered Good Samaritans on the front lines (e.g., through unnecessary or burdensome regulations) and the ways policies could be changed to facilitate greater public-private ventures in serving the needy. This kind of overall assessment that commits government to knock down barriers to cooperation sends a loud signal to FBOs that their work is valued.

Several states have also hosted high-profile state-wide conferences on building partnerships with the faith community. For example, Colorado, Virginia, Oklahoma, New Jersey and Texas have hosted such conferences. These conferences have provided both public officials and faith leaders with basic education about Charitable Choice; have highlighted successful models of partnership from other places, as well as lessons learned from those collaborations; and have offered opportunities for networking between FBO leaders and specific public officials and workforce development staff.

Also to advance fruitful collaboration with the faith community, public officials in Florida must bring the state's procurement procedures and policies into compliance with Charitable Choice. It is insufficient for public officials to wax enthusiastic about partnerships or evidence a lot of goodwill. Public officials must assess the state's manner of doing business with FBOs, and ensure that these practices comply with the new regulations of Charitable Choice. That means ending discrimination against pervasively sectarian providers; it means reforming the language of formal contracts written with FBOs to include the specific protections granted to both FBOs and clients; and it means making strong efforts to distribute information about opportunities for government contracts to all FBOs, not just the traditional network of nonprofits that have a long history of receiving public funding. Moreover, as Texas did, Florida could take further steps, attaching the Charitable Choice guidelines into additional funding streams beyond those it currently regulates (TANF, CSBG, WtW, SAMHSA). Specifically to advance

San Diego's "All Congregations Together" Help Desk

Through a creative, non-financial partnership between ACT (All Congregations Together, a coalition of congregations from San Diego's low and moderate income neighborhoods) and the San Diego Department of Human Services, church volunteers are providing an "oasis of help and hope" to clients utilizing the services of One Stop Centers. In this partnership, ACT recruits and trains volunteers from the faith community to serve as staff at special "help desks" located right in the lobby of various One Stop Centers in the city. These volunteers provide customers utilizing the One Stop Centers with whatever helpful, friendly service they can—assisting the single mom with her four kids as she completes various applications, helping her to navigate the different services personnel at the One Stops, and informing her of resources within the faith community to meet needs that perhaps the One Stop staff are unable to meet.

Minneapolis' Hopemakers Jobs Partnership

Hopemakers is a faith-based job readiness program for low-income Hennepin County residents who are unemployed or underemployed. Participants engage in twelve weeks of intensive job and life skills classes and are mentored by church volunteers. After they have graduated and secured employment, the participants return for monthly reunions with their mentors and fellow classmates. So far, 82 individuals have successfully completed the program. Graduates have a 65% job placement rate, and the average wage is \$9.50/hour.

The Hennepin County Department of Children and Family Services secunds two part-time caseworkers to the program and provides modest financial assistance (for staff incidentals, printing, photocopying). These caseworkers have discovered that clients who were reluctant to receive services from Minneapolis' One Stop Centers were willing to join the Hopemakers program—sometimes because the program was offered in a local congregation within walking distance of them and other times because they had heard through word of mouth of the benefits and caring atmosphere of the program. Because these caseworkers meet such clients in the trusting environment of the Hopemakers program, they have been able to form solid relationships with these individuals and connect them to One Stop services. Thus, the partnership has helped Hennepin County workforce development officials with one aspect of the recruitment problem: customers who simply won't go to One Stops.

FBO-OSCC collaboration, state officials should adopt the Charitable Choice guidelines in all their Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs.

Collaboration will also be made much more achievable if Florida designates a state “faith-based liaison.” Fourteen states have already done this. This creates a known point of contact in the government for faith leaders interested in learning about opportunities for financial and nonfinancial collaboration (an extremely helpful innovation since, otherwise, FBOs have to wander endlessly through the bureaucracy to locate the appropriate staff with whom to speak). Florida could also adopt the model being used by President Bush at the federal level; namely, an office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives in the White House, coupled with faith-based offices within each of the major cabinet departments (Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Justice). This could be replicated in Florida by establishing a faith-based initiatives office within Governor Bush's office and appointing faith-based liaisons within the secretary's offices of each of the major state agencies (juvenile justice, human services, health department, etc.).

Florida could also imitate an innovation from Indiana. There, under Governor O'Bannon's leadership, the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) launched Faithworks Indiana. This office, housed at the FSSA, provides technical assistance and information to FBOs interested in collaborating with government. Faithworks Indiana gathers information on available government contracting opportunities, maintains an informative website, and hosts regional training workshops teaching FBOs and community groups the basics of writing grant proposals and administering government contracts.

Offer incentives for collaboration and require reporting on progress achieved. If collaboration with the faith community is to be significantly expanded, Florida officials need also to create incentives for developing such partnerships and to require reporting on progress in building these relationships. In Wisconsin,

state officials have made collaboration with the faith community a “best practice” that they look for in the proposals submitted by the entities desiring contracts as operators of One Stop Centers. Florida could do the same, awarding extra points to those bidders that outline specific plans for partnering with FBOs (whether that be through formal subcontracts with FBOs or through creative plans for nonfinancial partnerships with congregations). Florida can also underscore its desire to see fruitful partnership by requiring Regional Workforce Development Boards to report formally on their progress in building these relationships. Texas has adopted a reporting system by which each region’s workforce commission and human service department chiefs identify and describe their work with FBOs (financial and nonfinancial). A similar system could be adopted in Florida.

Recommended Actions for Regional WDBs

With these general activities in place at the state level, specific Florida entities at the local level could then move ahead with several steps to advance collaboration. First, Regional Workforce Development Boards should be encouraged to include faith community representatives on their Boards (or on their specific working committees if Board membership has expanded to a degree where additional participation makes the structure unwieldy).

Second, Regional Boards should actively encourage local OSCC operators to partner with FBOs and give OSCC operators whatever flexibility they need to craft effective relationships. OSCC could pursue nonfinancial collaborations, formalized through Memorandums of Understanding with local FBOs providing services. Under such MOUs, for example, clients who have graduated from job readiness programs offered by FBOs could receive “credit” for such from the OSCC and not be required to participate in its own job readiness programs. Or, faith groups and One Stop staff could sign agreements that formalize the FBOs’ willingness to accept referrals from the One Stops of customers needing specific helps that the One Stops do not have the resources to provide. Or, congregations and FBOs could agree to serve as work experience placement sites for customers engaged in the OSCCs. The possibilities for nonfinancial collaboration abound.

There are also possibilities for financial collaboration. For example, the OSCCs currently utilize Individual Training Accounts (ITA) with some customers. These ITAs (which are essentially vouchers) enable customers to procure vocational training services from various One Stop partners. To the extent that FBOs are offering these kinds of training, they should be welcomed as partners eligible to receive ITAs. In addition, OSCCs could encourage their current ITA partners, such as local community colleges, to design their own collaborations with FBOs. For example, suppose a community college offers a training program to which many OSCC customers are referred (and these customers “pay for” that training program with their ITAs). Since ITAs are typically used by those

customers with the greatest barriers to self-sufficiency, their drop-out rates in such training programs may be substantial. But if congregations and FBOs were invited by the community colleges to provide mentoring services to these customers, the customers' participation and graduation rates might improve. This hypothetical faith-based mentoring program could involve matching the customers with tutors, providing emergency babysitting and transportation to ensure class attendance, and offering crucial (though hard to measure) emotional support to the customers, cheering them through the training program.

Actions for FBOs

Leaders in the faith community can also take several steps to advance collaboration. Religious leaders should develop comprehensive directories of FBO services and distribute such directories to OSCCs, so that staff at the One Stops can become familiar with the community services available to their customers. Religious leaders can also work with outreach personnel from the OSCCs in identifying the key "points of entry" to various segments of the faith community. This would greatly assist One Stop staff in navigating the heterogeneous faith community. Or, faith groups themselves could recruit and train volunteers from the faith community to serve as OSCC outreach workers. These volunteers would be oriented to the services and procedures of the One Stops and then unleashed to spread the word about those services among various congregations. (Our Task Force thought that congregations might set up internship programs for college and graduate students to serve in this way.) Importantly, any such specific outreach programs should be viewed as part of an on-going dialog between the two communities, rather than as a point-in-time exercise. FBO-OSCC committees could be established to host regular, scheduled meetings in which personnel from both communities assess what's working and what's not and brainstorm together on ways to strengthen the partnerships.

Finally, leaders in the faith community should also explore ways of enhancing the capacity of FBOs. This can be accomplished in various ways. "Veteran" organizations with years of experience in implementing effective community services should offer training programs for congregations/FBOs new to this arena. Faith groups may also want to explore possibilities for collaborating with local colleges and universities that offer non-profit management courses. In Minneapolis, an FBO called TURN (The Urban Reconciliation Network) is working with the nonprofit management center of St. Thomas University to provide a short, affordable course in the basics of nonprofit administration for grassroots faith leaders. Training faith leaders in this way better positions FBOs for effective collaboration with government; after all, FBOs that compete for and secure public dollars to underwrite their community serving ministries need to be able to adequately document their work and account for the funds. Public officials from the Regional Workforce Boards rightfully insist that FBOs have these administrative skills before they entertain the idea of funding them. (Relatedly, though, workforce development boards could offer funding for technical assistance to FBOs, to strengthen those FBOs' administrative capabilities.)

Conclusion

Helping Florida’s families to overcome poverty is an ambitious mission requiring the contributions of all of Florida’s assets—including its resource-rich faith community. Many congregations and faith-based nonprofits are already investing their resources—people, supplies, money, facilities—in charitable endeavors to serve their neighbors in need. Many more are willing to increase their involvement. Such groups should be enthusiastically welcomed by Florida’s public policies. That means bringing the state into full compliance with the Charitable Choice provisions of the 1996 federal welfare reforms; appreciating the community services offered by religious groups; and reaching out to the faith community in new, creative, nonfinancial and financial collaborations. With energetic efforts to implement the recommendations and action steps contained in this report, Florida can become a national leader in fostering new partnerships that effectively answer the challenges of the “unfinished business” of welfare reform and assist low-income Floridians in achieving greater self-sufficiency and prosperity.

APPENDIX A

Suggested Process for Advancing Fruitful Collaboration in Florida

Steps For Public Officials, Workforce Development Boards, and One Stop Career Centers

Step 1

Create a state-level Faith-Based Collaboration Task Force (with representation from the Governor's office, Workforce Florida, Regional Workforce Development Boards, and faith leaders) with the mandate to:

- ◆ Champion the idea of faith-based partnerships from the bully pulpit (highlight/showcase successful programs; encourage increased private giving to FBOs)
- ◆ Review state policies and procedures and bring them into full compliance with Charitable Choice
- ◆ Identify regulatory barriers hindering the efforts of faith-based social service organizations
- ◆ Host a state-wide conference on “Partnering with the Faith Community to Serve Low-Income Families” that would gather faith leaders and workforce development professionals
- ◆ Design incentives in the procurement/contracting process for expanding faith-based collaboration
- ◆ Require Regional Workforce Development Boards to report annually on progress they have made in developing faith-based partnerships

Step 2

Create Roundtables for each Regional Workforce Development Board that would provide opportunities for on-going dialogue between Board (and staff) members and faith community leaders.

Step 3

Expand the Charitable Choice guidelines into additional funding streams (e.g., WIA).

Step 4

Establish a “faith community liaison” for each of the 24 Regional Workforce Development Boards. This individual would reach out to the faith community, building relationships, sharing information about partnership opportunities (financial contracting as well as nonfinancial collaboration), educating the faith community about the services of the OSCCs (and the OSCCs of the social service resources/programs of the faith community) and providing technical assistance to FBOs new to the process of government contracting.

Steps For the Faith Community

Step 1

Develop and distribute to OSCCs comprehensive directories of faith-based social services in given localities.

Step 2

Help OSCC staff to navigate the faith community by:

- ◆ identifying the key “points of entry” into various segments of the faith community
- ◆ recruiting and training volunteers to serve as outreach workers for the OSCC, spreading information about OSCC services and programs among many congregations.

Step 3

Design programs for building the administrative capacity of FBOs.

APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX C

Fast Facts about The Jobs Partnership of Florida



Recruitment			
	Students	Graduates	Dropped
Three (3) English Classes	74	39	35*
Two (2) Hispanic Classes	37	25	12
Totals	111	64	47

**Twenty-one (21) of the drops occurred after the first night of the first pilot class due to an overwhelming response and inadequate participant screening*

Placements		
	Graduates	Average Wage
Three (3) English Classes: EntryLevel	31	\$8.06
Two (2) Hispanic Classes: Entry Level Professional	18 5	\$9.23 per hour \$33,400 per year
Total Placements	54	

Job Skills Training	
	Enrolled
Three (3) English Classes	5
Two (2) Hispanic Classes	1
Total Students Enrolled	6

Demographics			
	Female	Male	F:M Ratio
Three (3) English Classes	30	10	3:1
Two (2) Hispanic Classes	16	9	2:1

Endnotes

- 1 See Amy L. Sherman, *The Growing Impact of Charitable Choice: A Catalogue of New Collaborations Between Government and Faith-Based Organizations in Nine States* (Washington, DC: The Center for Public Justice, March 2000).
- 2 Under Charitable Choice, FBOs receiving government funds maintain the right to control their governing board and mission; maintain a religious atmosphere in their facilities; and select staff on the basis of religious criteria. For more information, see *A Guide to Charitable Choice* (Co-published, The Center for Public Justice and the Christian Legal Society, 1997).
- 3 Amy L. Sherman, Presentation for “Next Steps in Welfare Reform” conference sponsored by the Center for Civic Innovation of the Manhattan Institute, Washington, D.C. (April 13, 1999).
- 4 See Appendix C for “Fast Facts” about The Jobs Partnership of Florida’s achievements.
- 5 Workforce Florida.com, “Fast Facts and Stats,” <http://www.Workforce Florida.com> (May 23, 2001).
- 6 Workforce Florida, Inc., “The Regional Indicator Report — “The Red/Green Report for Program Year 2000-2001, Third Quarter” (Tallahassee, FL: May 4, 2001), p. 1.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Carl Dudley and David Roozen, *Faith Communities Today*, “Executive Summary,” http://fact.hartsem.edu/executive_summary.htm (March 13, 2001) and Independent Sector, “More Than a Place to Worship: America’s Religious Congregations,” <http://www.independentsector.org/media/religiousPR.html> (January 29, 2001).
- 9 “Not Everyone Has a Burning Bush to Tell Them Their Life’s Calling,” a toolkit produced by the Center for Employment Security Education and Research (CESER) and the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor (Washington, D.C.: CESER, 2001).
- 10 The Office of the Faith-based Liaison in the Oklahoma’s Governor’s office, for example, conducted a poll of 400 congregations across the state and learned that 73 percent were open to nonfinancial collaboration with government and over 66 percent were willing to collaborate financially with government if protections for the religious character and mission of their organizations were in place. For details, contact Brad Yarbrough, Director, Office of the Faith-based Liaison, Oklahoma City, 405-271-1742.