

Faith and Organizations Project: Activity Summary and Future Goals

The President's Faith Based Initiative has focused attention on religious based non-profits for the first time in many years. Policy makers turn to congregations and faith based organizations to provide services currently offered by established non-profits and government. Established non-profits founded by faith communities like Catholic Charities, Lutheran Family and Children's Service, and the various Jewish agencies find changed expectations after many years of ensuring that their services appeared secular to meet the constitutional mandate separating church and state. Both new and established faith based and community based non-profits express concern about the relationship between founding communities and organizations offering services to their community members and others.

Clarifying specifically religious aspects of the relationship between founding communities and their organizations and effective best practices are key concerns for faith based organizations and the religions that created them. The Faith and Organization project was created to provide communities, organizations and policy makers with concrete information and targeted materials to address this issue. The project was founded in 2001 as a joint effort by faith communities, leaders of religious based non-profit organizations, and researchers to understand the dynamic relationship between faith communities and the organizations they create, as well as differences in the nature of services provided by organizations founded by different religions. The project plans a four and a half year research/practice program aimed at two goals:

- # **Helping policy makers and researchers clarify the meaning of faith based service as well as its role in social service and health provision in the United States.**
- # **Assisting faith communities and non-profits founded under religious auspices to:**
 - # Understand the unique differences among organizations founded by different religions;
 - # Clarify the culturally and religiously appropriate relationship between non-profits and their founding communities;
 - # Understand ways that religious beliefs and practices are reflected in the organization. Determine ways to share founding values with staff and board members who do not come from the founding religion or culture;
 - # Determine ways to best safeguard the civil rights of all program participants;
 - # Clarify the meaning of separation of church and state within organizations founded by faith communities.

Participants envision a program that compares the experience of organizations from several religions: Catholics, Mainline Protestants, Jews, Peace Churches (Quakers, Mennonite, Brethren), Evangelical Christians, and Muslims. It would also contrast faith based and secular agencies founded by African Americans, Latinos, and Asian communities. The project compares organizations providing services in three sectors with different funding mechanisms and systems: social services; health and senior services; and community based and developed services evolving from faith community organizing efforts.

The project includes an interdisciplinary team of scholars and practitioners from across the United States associated with several faiths working on similar issues. The project plans to partner with umbrella organizations for participating communities and social service agencies in order to create useful products and disseminate results. (See list of interested participants, partners, staff and advisory committee at home.gwu.edu/~jschneid/).

The project focuses on four aspects of the relationship between organizations and communities:

- # **The relationship between founding communities and organizations** (Governance, funding, volunteers and other supports provided by founding communities. The role of organizations as representing that community and its approach to social support and social justice to the wider world).
- # **The relationship between the non-profit organization and the people that use their services.**
- # **The impact of founding community culture and social capital systems on non-profit mission, organizational structure, staffing, and program design.**
- # **The impact of the larger socio-economic and policy systems on agencies, as well as the common strategies among non-profits providing a particular type of service, on non-profit goals and strategies.**

Current Progress. As a first step, the project engaged in a year and a half of planning and pilot research in Philadelphia and the greater Metropolitan Washington DC area funded by the Louisville Institute and the Bradley foundation. The final report for the pilot project is available at home.gwu.edu/~jschneid/. Major findings include:

- # **The major religions have developed two very different, but equally valid, support systems for their members and others. Productive policy strategies should accommodate both approaches.** *Institutional* systems (Catholics, Jews, perhaps Muslims) focus on service provision through centralized entities like an archdiocese or Jewish Federation while *Congregational* systems (Mainline Protestant, African American Christians, Evangelicals, Peace Churches) see congregations as central for fostering and maintaining religious based non-profits.
- # **Mission, management, staffing structures and program styles reflected the founding community's religious culture and identity for most organizations, even when the organization emphasized secular, professional services.**
- # **Resources stemming from relationships with both founding communities and associations providing similar services proved important for all organizations.** Social capital - trust based networks that provide access to resources - appeared essential for organizations to thrive. Social capital connections to the founding religious community was closely linked to organizations' ability to follow the cultural expectations of that community. Organizations that strayed from those connections and values, or became the target of disputes within the community about "appropriate" strategies, received less support.
- # **While most faith based organizations embedded elements of their founding religion in programming, Evangelicals are more likely than other religions to include faith elements in their programming and provide outreach materials on their religion to program participants.**

Products: The project uses research to create suggestions for policy makers and concrete products targeted toward different religions, racial, ethnic and immigrants groups, and organizations providing different kinds of service. The research team and participating organizations anticipate working closely together to develop products. The planning project identified two product categories that could be useful to policy makers and practitioners: 1) providing interpretation of the research and 2) offering tools for program improvement. Potential interpretive products include:

- # Produce and place articles in key publications for practitioners, including journals of association management, human services management, and religion.
- # Produce a video and discussion guide on findings, particularly historical and present day connections between organizations and parent bodies, geared toward denominations and congregations.
- # Events for policy makers and practitioners to share findings and suggest implications for policy and practice.

The project would also develop concrete tools for organizations and founding communities. While participating organizations may suggest additional products current ideas include:

- # A training DVD of vignettes and clips geared toward boards and staff groups, with trainers guide and handouts.
- # Several evaluative tools (surveys, queries) focused on board governance, staffing structure, role of the executive director, program practices, and the activation and preservation of the organizational mission (particularly in the presence of government mandates and/or secular funders).
- # A brochure of positive practices which help organizations integrate faith traditions and organizational practice.
- # A booklet with descriptions of positive (best) practices and discussion questions for organizations and their parent bodies, highlighting the challenges facing both sides.
- # An electronic and possibly print listing of useful resources from other projects, conferences, and organizations.

Next Steps: We are currently seeking between three and seven million dollars for a national project that would include four to eight sites across the country, plus a national survey and dissemination effort. The number of sites will depend on the level of funding obtained. We hope to spend three years working in United States communities in an action research project that combines qualitative and quantitative methods to understand these dynamics and develop concrete educational materials and tools that policy makers, faith communities, and non-profits can use. Given questions regarding organizations in marginalized communities, a secular component would compare faith based and secular organizations founded to serve particular marginalized ethnic, racial or immigrant groups.

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