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**STATE OFFICES OF FAITH-BASED AND  
COMMUNITY INITIATIVES:  
A SUMMARY OF SELECTED RESEARCH**

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## INTRODUCTION

Faith-based organizations, of all sizes, have long played an essential role in the provision of social services in the United States, at times in partnership with government. Indeed, some of these organizations are very well-known: Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and United Jewish Communities, to name a few. These large and nationally prominent faith organizations, however, should be differentiated from smaller organizations with faith-affiliation that are based in local communities across the country. The latter organizations can more rightly be called faith-based community organizations (FBCOs).

In January 2001, President George W. Bush established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, by executive order, to “strengthen and expand the role of FBCOs in providing social services.” Since that time, President Bush has also urged state governments to create state offices of faith-based initiatives in order to encourage state and local government partnerships with faith-based community organizations.<sup>1</sup> Many states have heeded the President’s call and begun to engage their state’s FBCOs in new ways around long-standing community problems arising from poverty and other issues. From a “liaison to the faith community” to a full-blown office with several staff members and initiatives underway, states have opted to engage their faith communities in vastly different ways.

This paper is a summary of the efforts by states to engage their FBCOs. Specifically, the paper provides (1) background information on the most active state offices and faith community liaisons; (2) an overview of the best practices employed in the states; (3) a description of one current challenge—engaging sectarian FBCOs; and (4) a brief examination on how one state engages its FBCOs. It is our hope that these findings will be useful to governors and other state officials interested in these types of cross-sector partnerships.

### I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**How do states structure their relationship with the faith community?** States have opted to follow President Bush’s recommendation to engage FBCOs in three different ways. First, some states have explicitly chosen not to create any new structure for engaging FBCOs. In Delaware, for example, state leaders believe that faith-based community organizations are already sufficiently engaged and have no problem letting state officials know if they need anything.<sup>2</sup> Second, several governors have designated a new or existing staff member to serve as both a point person for FBCOs and as advisor to the governor. Colorado and Idaho are examples of states where the governor has appointed a staff member to serve as a faith community liaison. Lastly, some states have

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<sup>1</sup> George W. Bush, “President Highlights Faith-Based Initiative at Leadership Conference,” 1 March 2005, available at: [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/03/20050301-4.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/03/20050301-4.html).

<sup>2</sup> Cari DeSantis, Secretary of the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Families, State of Delaware, “Opening Plenary Session: Federalism and the Faith-Based Initiative,” Proceedings of the 2005 Annual Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy Conference, 8 December 2005.

created actual offices of faith-based initiatives to serve as a resource for the state’s faith community. Alabama and Indiana are states that have established such state offices.

**How are state offices created?** State offices of faith-based initiatives have been created in two ways: by governors and by state legislatures. All but three state offices were created by executive order of the governor. The other three state offices—in Kentucky, Ohio and Virginia—were actually created by state legislatures, usually based on the recommendation of a bipartisan legislative committee.

*Strengths of each method:* When state offices are created by executive order of the governor, the state office knows that it has a “champion” in the governor. Having the authority of the governor behind the office can be important for the office’s capacity to act as a convener, or during legislative budget talks. On the other hand, when state offices are legislatively created, offices may actually have much wider support because legislators had a part in its creation. *Challenges of each method:* For state offices created by governors, the most obvious challenge may be when a governor is no longer in office and a new governor does not share his predecessor’s priorities. State offices created legislatively have a different challenge: often because several lawmakers had a part in its creation, state offices have to regularly keep more people abreast of office happenings.

**Where are state liaisons and offices housed?** Not all state offices are housed within governor’s offices, although some are, such as in Michigan and Alabama. Rather, many state offices are housed within other state-level departments, typically in a department of social services. States that fall under this category include New Jersey and Oklahoma. In other states, governors have opted to house their state office or liaison within an existing independent nonprofit organization. Two states—Texas and Florida—house their state offices within nonprofit organizations, while Iowa refers FBCOs to one main nonprofit organization.

*Strengths of each method:* When state offices are housed within the governor’s office, the most immediate benefit is their proximity to the governor. Where state offices are housed in a department of social services or an independent nonprofit, the main benefit may be that costs are saved because resources can be shared. *Challenges of each method:* State offices housed within governor’s offices face the risk of not being a priority if a new governor is elected. For state offices housed in nonprofits or state-level departments, it is probable that “turf battles” may ensue over the state office’s responsibilities; for example, if the office is too readily identified with a specific agency rather than as a priority of the governor’s. Moreover, conflict can occur because the work of a state office is sure to be broad, given that FBCOs are often involved in wide-ranging activities that fall under the purview of several state-level departments, including community development, criminal justice and healthcare.

**What does a state office do?** While several states have opted to create offices of faith-based initiatives, the types of programs and initiatives they offer vary widely. This is presumably due most to the amount of resources available to state offices and liaisons. For example, in some states, a governor may simply have designated a staff member to

be a liaison to the faith community, with no accompanying resources for this position. In this case, state liaisons to the faith community may be limited to acting as a convener and advisor. Sometimes, the state office or liaison may also have a website that provides useful information for faith-based community organizations interested in funding or technical assistance opportunities. Still in other states, some offices of faith-based initiatives may actually have their own office space and staff members who work full-time engaging their state's FBCOs.

## II. BEST PRACTICES IN THE STATES

State offices of faith-based initiatives are engaging their state's faith community in interesting and innovative ways. Although the extent of the activities underway by state offices and liaisons are often limited by the amount of financial resources available, most if not all offices and liaisons are showing they can have still have tremendous impact. Listed below are some of the initiatives and programs underway in the states that are designed to engage and help faith-based community organizations in the work they do. These activities are categorized according to the five main roles that state offices and liaisons play: advising; information dissemination; promoting; convening and coordination; and technical assistance. Generally, state office and liaison activities require more resources as they move from "advising" to "technical assistance." Please see Appendix A for a rubric of various activities happening in the states.

- ***Advising.*** Some states, including Arkansas, Florida and New Jersey have advisory councils on faith-based and community initiatives to advise governors and provide direction to state offices and liaisons. Where states have opted to have such advisors, it is likely that these individuals have pre-existing or overlapping roles related to community engagement/ outreach, in general.
- ***Information Dissemination.*** In what has become a common practice, several state offices and liaisons use their websites to create list serves and mailing lists to disseminate information about funding opportunities. Some states, including Arkansas, Michigan, Ohio and Oklahoma, also use their websites to host web calendars that publicize various faith and social service-related events.
- ***Promoting.*** In Arkansas and Ohio, for instance, the state offices use their websites to highlight examples of government-faith community partnerships. In other states, including Oklahoma and Virginia, there are campaigns to encourage FBCO partnership with local governments.
- ***Convening and Coordination.*** In other states, offices and liaisons take a lead role in convening meetings between government officials and faith-based community organizations. For example, the Indiana state office hosts a "Governor's Luncheon for Faith Leaders." In the states of Alabama, Florida, Miami, New Jersey and Virginia, the state offices and liaisons actually host state and regional conferences that provide opportunities for FBCOs to learn best practices from one another, in addition to learning about new and existing funding opportunities.

- **Technical Assistance.** It is probably true that many states would like to provide training and technical assistance to their faith-based and community service providers, but these efforts usually require substantial funding. Different examples still abound, however: one state, Virginia, offers a toll-free number for FBCOs and community organizations that need technical assistance. In Indiana, Ohio, New Jersey and Virginia, state offices provide technical assistance workshops, training, and resources for FBCOs. Lastly, in Ohio and Texas, state offices have been awarded Compassion Capital Fund grants with which they can award out to intermediary organizations that in turn provide funding and training to FBCOs.

### III. A CURRENT CHALLENGE: ENGAGING SECTARIAN FBCOs

It would appear evident that, in recent years particularly, there is much more attention being paid to how government, at all levels, can collaborate with faith-based organizations around common objectives. Moreover, what also seems clear is that states are emulating the best practices of fellow states. This is seen with such offerings as the “Faith-Based Loop”—an email service offered by several states to disseminate important information—to the proliferation of state websites that provide a “one-stop shop” for faith-based community organizations.

However, a significant challenge remains even among the states that have actively engaged their FBCOs—and the challenge is two-fold: should the state collaborate with pervasively-sectarian, or faith-saturated, FBCOs, and if so, how does the state do so in an effective and legal way? These questions are important, namely, because many faith-saturated FBCOs are showing they can effectively turn lives around that were once scarred by drugs, prison-time and other tragic and difficult experiences.

To begin, it is worth taking a moment to describe what a “faith-saturated” FBCO is. Faith-based community organizations can generally be described as approaching service delivery along a “continuum of religiosity” that ranges from secular-oriented to faith-saturated. Secular-oriented FBCOs may be “faith-based” in name only, and may have changed their religious mission over time to provide the same services as other secular nonprofit groups. Incidentally, some scholars believe that the acceptance of public money may cause a homogenizing effect, in which FBCOs that accept public funds begin to look and act more like secular nonprofits as they compete for the same pool of funding over time.

On the other end of the spectrum, faith-saturated FBCOs hold that religion is central to their organizational mission. This type of FBCO provides services with the goal of attaching a person in need to a higher power in order to overcome destructive behaviors. In Ohio, for instance, a very effective prisoner reentry program for women, that has substantially reduced recidivism among its participants, is the Church of the Nazarene-

affiliated Rachel’s House program. This program explicitly aims to help women become “contributors to their communities and the Kingdom of God.”<sup>3</sup>

Taken altogether, the reality is that pervasively-sectarian faith-based community organizations *are* involved in social service delivery, and many of them appear to be very effective in their work. Open collaboration between government and this type of FBCO is controversial, however. By law, no public funds can be used on “inherently religious activities like sectarian worship or proselytizing.”<sup>4</sup> In order to stay within the law, states generally may have three options if they want to help their state’s faith-saturated FBCOs in the work they do:

- 1) **Providing direction.** States can opt to enact legislation that makes clear how state agencies and local governments can interface with faith-saturated FBCOs. Following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina, for instance, many sectarian FBCOs helped meet the immediate and spiritual needs of storm victims. Thus, in crises large and small, there is certainly a need for sectarian FBCOs to be involved, particularly in communities where they may be the only social service providers around. Accordingly, state direction on the limits of collaboration may be useful.
- 2) **Publicizing.** States can highlight the work of faith-saturated FBCOs, which in turn can hopefully produce other beneficial outcomes. For instance, when a governor acknowledges or publicizes the work of a faith-saturated FBCO, the effects may be two-fold: a wider number of people may choose to volunteer with the FBCO, and the FBCO may be able to leverage the increased attention to attain more funding from donations and other sources.
- 3) **Indirect funding.** This refers to the practice of awarding public dollars to faith-based intermediary organizations. These intermediary organizations may then use these funds to provide technical assistance or capacity-building to smaller sectarian faith-based groups. After all, whether an FBCO is faith-saturated or not, if the organization is small and wants to grow, the same skills must be acquired, including grant writing and money management skills.

#### IV. HOW ONE STATE OFFICE ENGAGES ITS FBCOs Ohio’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

The Ohio Governor’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (GOFBCI) was created in July 2003 by the Ohio General Assembly, based on the recommendations of the bipartisan Task Force on Nonprofit, Faith-Based and Other Nonprofit Organizations.

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<sup>3</sup> Rachel’s House exists to prevent adult women from re-entering prison following their incarceration through education, character and life skill development, and mentoring. The program is run by Lower Lights Ministries, a faith-based nonprofit organization in Columbus, Ohio that is affiliated with the Church of the Nazarenes. Please see: <http://www.lower-lights.org/rachelshouse.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Forward by President George W. Bush. Please see: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/reports/faithbased.html>.

Ohio's state office works with an advisory council composed of four state legislators, ten statewide community appointees, and liaisons from eleven state agencies. As of today, only two other states (Virginia and Kentucky) have offices of faith-based and community initiatives that were created legislatively, whereas the remaining state offices were established by executive order of the governor. The Ohio office, when it was created, was charged with three main tasks:

- Make it easier for faith-based and community organizations to compete for public funding;
- Encourage partnerships among and between public agencies, faith-based organizations, and community-based organizations who share a common mission; and
- Measure the impact of these partnerships to reduce the suffering of citizens in need.

Since its inception, the Ohio Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) has sought innovative ways to engage the state's faith-based and community organizations. The state office, led by Krista Sisterhen who serves as director, boasts an informative website that highlights the work of selected faith-based and community organizations. Furthermore, these organizations can find other useful information, such as available services and funding opportunities. Interested volunteers can even apply for a position in the office's AmeriCorps\*VISTA program, to help support the state's Compassion Capital Project.

Possibly the most innovative initiative underway by the Ohio state office is its work as a Compassion Capital Fund grantee. The Compassion Capital Fund, administered by the Administration for Children and Families under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides grants to faith-based and community organizations and other intermediary organizations that provide training and assistance to FBCOs. The Ohio office was the first state office to be awarded a Compassion Capital Fund demonstration grant for its capacity to act as an intermediary organization; the Texas Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives also has since been named a grantee.

The Ohio state office has in-turn awarded a significant portion (one-half to two-thirds) of its Compassion Capital Fund grant to four other intermediary organizations, or partners, based in different parts of the state. These grants are then used to underwrite numerous initiatives to build the capacity of faith-based and community organizations. The remaining funds of the grant are awarded by the state office directly to selected faith-based and community-based service providers—40 percent of its Compassion Capital mini-grants went to secular organizations in 2005. Perhaps not surprisingly, the state office has opted to focus on areas where FBCOs are known to be involved and likely making a difference, including prisons, prisoner re-entry, youth and gangs, and strengthening families.

More recently, in January 2006, the office launched the Ohio Strengthening Families Initiative—with three requests for proposals (RFPs)—to support the work of FBCOs involved in three key areas: vulnerable youth, ex-offenders and their families, and healthy marriage. This joint funding effort will provide \$12.5 million to approximately 23 faith- and community-based service providers to fund direct services; an additional 75 FBCOs are expected to also be engaged as partners in these efforts. In all, there are three categories of grants: demonstration project grants, collaboration project grants, and mentoring scholarships—the latter of which has an indirect service model. A fourth RFP for intensive family case management services has also been put out to bid; this grant will go to five or six lead agencies that provide services for ex-offenders and their families.

Ohio's strategic use of its funding to FBCOs working with ex-offenders, families and youth, specifically, is important for two reasons. First, the beneficial outcomes hoped for may not occur unless there are profound behavioral changes on the part of program participants. Accordingly, faith-based providers, and to a lesser extent secular community groups, may be more receptive to the holistic approaches needed to promote a sustained change in behavior. Second, when it comes to working with people with serious problems, such as those of ex-prisoners, faith- and community-based service providers are often the only organizations involved, thus engendering a unique trust between participant and provider. It is for these reasons that FBCOs might be in a better position to help meet certain kinds of needs better than, or at least as good as, their strictly secular counterparts.

Having said that, the contributions of FBCOs in meeting current policy challenges arising from poverty and lack of opportunities—such as prisoner recidivism, juvenile crime and teen pregnancy—still requires further study. However, Ohio's commitment to its FBCOs will hopefully advance this research and shed new light on the impact that faith-based and community organizations are making on the long-standing problems facing communities in Ohio and around the country.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Please note: Ohio's state office has contracted an independent consulting firm to evaluate the impact of the Compassion Capital Fund in Ohio.