

ed, “we will account for all funds and simply open our books if you wish”—a response that diffused suspicion. His confidence in their bookkeeping and willingness to disclose any and all information is commendable and becoming more common among religious groups as they understand the nature of public partnerships.

The 2001 release of the White House report, “Unlevel Playing Field,” which documents the wide federal neglect of faith-based organizations as potential service providers, revealed that nonprofit government contractors often have not been held to performance standards. The entrance of faith-based organizations into the picture has suddenly generated an interest in performance standards in human services, but it would be unfair to hold them to standards that are not being applied to other organizations. Instead, because of their understanding of accountability, faith-based organizations are in a good position to help redefine the issue of successful performance at the community level.

Ways of Helping

Government can assist faith organizations in a number of ways. Government and the recipient agency each have choices for how they frame their partnership. At its simplest level government can stop funding policies that run counter to the values that it and the rest of America consider important. Ending Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the old welfare system, and the financial incentives it provided to mothers to have children outside of marriage is an example of this. But there exist other ways that government can improve partnerships with faith-based organizations without large legislative changes. Three in particular warrant mention.

Even and Friendly Playing Field

In the words of Isaac Randolph, the Front Porch Alliance set out to facilitate faith-based interventions simply by convening stakeholders. He aptly describes our outreach model this way:

By convening people, government can bring together those who would not or could not come together on their own. If the mayor calls, people will show up, whether they like him or not, sometimes they just show up to see who else will be there. If preacher A calls a meeting, Preacher B may not come.

When government acts as a convener, it reaches out to all potential partners and stakeholders. We worked hard to make sure that we did not take the conventional approach to solving problems, namely overfunding existing government delivery systems. By convening the right players, problems can often be solved more creatively, at less cost, and with better results.

For example, Jay Height's faith-based community center wanted to expand their facilities but could not get past the real estate division of the local electric company. During a tour, the staff described to me the promising things they could do if they could secure the relatively desolate piece of land, which was an old, nonfunctioning station of the electric company. Height explains the circumstances this way:

Why I believe the Front Porch Alliance was so critical, so positive, has absolutely nothing to do with money. And that's what I believe has gotten lost in the national debate. The money that we got was very little; some people think Goldsmith gave us tons of money, but he didn't. For example, Goldsmith called the CEO of Indianapolis Power and Light, and they had a closed substation right behind our property. And the mayor said, "Why don't you give the property to them." And [the CEO] said, "Sure." Then his attorneys had seizures and said, "You can't do that, we're a public company," and so on. And so what they did was give us a cash donation that was close to the purchase price, and we were able to buy it. It was that ability to have someone say, "This is a group who is doing good work, you should work with them." The legacy which I believe the Front Porch Alliance and the Mayor left with the city, is that he said, "Faith-based groups are OK."

In this case, the electric company and the homeless shelter simply needed to be matched up. They needed someone to convene their interests. The shelter also needed someone to introduce them to an established community entity as a viable solution to a problem—albeit an unconventional solution.

City leaders can also create an even and friendly playing field by clearing away obstacles and solving problems that might otherwise overwhelm a small faith-based organization. Like the peace garden that I described in Chapter One, which required fifty-three separate

approvals, land issues often require lots of obstacle removal. Jireh Sports has had a bit of experience with working through the challenges of getting a ministry in the right kind of property. Streett explains the kind of assistance that helps in instances such as these:

The Front Porch Alliance's job was to remove obstacles. . . . We are a small group which can do good things, but we don't know how to jump through bureaucratic hoops, necessarily. But more than anything, here is the key, if it were just up to our program staff at Jireh, we would never get through those hoops. . . . I don't know how some small grassroots groups survive [without help navigating city bureaucracy]. In our case it wasn't so much fiscal things [which FPA assisted with] but things like someone who helped us walk through the rezoning process for a warehouse we acquired.

Financial Resources

Another important role that government plays, says Isaac Randolph, is to leverage funds—which goes beyond simply giving out funds. He says,

Government is good at putting proper resources on the table. And that sends a couple of messages. One, there is this feeling government always backs a winner. So we had the ability to spread out the risks that are associated with backing very small projects. The Front Porch Alliance leveraged dollars, so that when we put a dollar on the table, three other dollars usually quickly followed—either by virtue of showing people how to secure additional contributions or acting as sort of a stamp of approval for foundations and other donors.

Government can help with money in a variety of ways. The Indianapolis effort did not involve much local money. Some of the funding came from tax abatement fees that we charged businesses. The competitive awards of \$5,000-\$10,000 that we created out of these fees were designed more to celebrate an important neighborhood effort and to give it a bit of help than to be a comprehensive source of funding. Clearly, the money we gave groups constituted a very small amount of the organizations' funding.

One advantage of small funding amounts is that they encourage

other sources of funding and prevent government from being too dominant an influence or source of pressure. We found it important to draw attention to the grants so that other funding sources would step up to the plate. In this case, we handed out the financial awards on a quarterly basis in a public ceremony that recognized a neighborhood garden, or a new playground or some other tangible accomplishment of a community group. The celebratory nature of the event invariably attracted the interest of others in the community. Every community has people that want to bet on a winner, and thus it is important to showcase the winners in a regular fashion.

Other forms of government participation also seem broadly acceptable. Few would quarrel that the government can use its tax policy to encourage charitable giving. It obviously is more efficient for me to contribute directly to my synagogue and have it help those left behind, than for government to tax me and then run a process that grants the dollars back to the synagogue. This is the logic involved in the White House's effort in 2001 to encourage charitable giving by granting a credit to people who give, and especially those who do not itemize their tax returns.

On a continuum from least to most controversial, the next best way for a faith-based organization to benefit from government money occurs when the benefits follow the recipient—that is, in the form of a voucher. A voucher for child care allows the parent to pick from a variety of providers. As a total percentage, faith-based organizations deliver a lot of child care. The advantage to a voucher, other than the choice it gives the parent, is simply that government is little involved in the operations of the provider.

The issue that generates the most heated debate centers on the direct provision of public money to the faith provider. No one really argues that public money should be used for specifically religious purposes, but should it be used by a religious organization to carry out a public responsibility such as providing shelter to the homeless or job training to former welfare recipients? I have always taken the position that religious organizations should also have the right to apply for government money like anyone else. Thus, the Front Porch Alliance helped groups apply for government grants.

"If there is something city hall can help me with," one community leader said of our work, "it is telling me, who I can call—someone who can say, 'in HUD this money is available, this is money you can go after, here's how you do it, here's how you apply for it.'" A Catholic-schools program received abstinence education dollars with the help from the Front Porch Alliance. The Alliance acted as an advocate, explaining to state officials why they should not discriminate against a faith-based provider. Some of the evangelical church leaders who generally sup-

ported my efforts as mayor preferred not to participate in any program with government dollars, which was fine. However, this principled position should be available to a religious organization as a choice, not imposed on it by a bureaucrat administering a biased system.

Similarly, some of the advocates for a very high wall between church and state believe that no money should go to faith organizations. This position argues essentially that any organization, except those that are religious, should be able to compete for the money that pays for food and shelter or a similar public good. I have never been able to see this view as anything other than discriminatory.

The possibility of government money altering the mission of the faith group certainly exists, but as Olgen Williams points out, the church, mosque, or synagogue should be able to decide whether applying for the funds is worth the risk. The idea that religious groups should not receive government money for fear of being corrupted essentially legitimizes the discrimination, suggesting that these organizations do not know what is in their best interest and do not have the wherewithal to say no.

Government money, no doubt, carries risks. On a day-to-day basis, though, these risks have less to do with secularizing forces than with the strain they place on the practical operations of small organizations. The risks that come with government funding are the same for all community-based organizations, not just faith-based groups. The human capital and administrative infrastructure required to comply with many government stipulations is a form of discrimination in itself: government favors large organizations for no reason other than its inability, or unwillingness, to simplify its requirements and do away with unnecessary regulations. Pastor Bonds puts a human face on this predicament for small organizations:

The government is sometimes slow in processing our paperwork, and we have to wait longer than a month to get paid. We are still waiting on moneys that we submitted over six weeks ago, for example. Large nonprofit agencies that have the same contracts that we do are multimillion-dollar agencies. They can borrow from Peter to pay Paul, where we don't have that luxury. The type of staff I have, most of them work here from 9:00 to 3:00, part time, and many of them have to rely on other income. So if you are here to get rich, you are in the wrong place. You are going to get your money, but it isn't going to be in a timely fashion. That's why a lot of

churches don't want government grants. . . . A lot of churches are saying, "How am I going to get someone to work for thirty days before they get paid? I don't want no part of that, all the paperwork, and if they don't like my paperwork I won't get paid. Thanks, but no thanks."

Of course, we cannot expect government contracting processes to change overnight, and thus faith-based organizations must have their eyes wide open when considering public funding. Government funding can create a great opportunity for a faith-based provider to leverage the money to attract additional funding, and it can stretch the organization's influence. But faith-based organizations should avoid participation when their goals and government's goals do not match.

Some organizations, especially those that are hard-pressed financially, may try to alter their mission to match the goals that the government lays out in contract application guidelines. I once gave a talk in Augusta, Georgia, after which a pastor told a reporter that he would give up his Bibles if necessary to get more resources into his neighborhood. One has to wonder if the trade-off would help in the long run. While no pastor should ever have to sacrifice sacred texts for resources in the first place, this pastor was showing very clearly that a tough choice may be involved.

While the Charitable Choice clause in several federal programs helps preserve the integrity of religious organizations, these groups have to decide for themselves whether or not they are suited to the stated aims and stipulations of a government program. Once a contract is signed, government officials forget all the anecdotes and good things they heard about the contractor: from then on, they expect the organization to fulfill the terms of the contract.

Authority

Along with convening and leveraging resources, Isaac Randolph likes to point out that government has the ability to shine a light on successful programs. This has a way of attracting attention and resources to effective community builders, and it also helps shape the public debate about the best ways to solve community problems. Isaac says,

Highlighting the work of successful groups is probably one of the most underrated things that government can accomplish. It means getting to know a program and talking about them to the media, talking about them to

the community. Typically some of the best programs are the best because the people running them don't have time to blow their own horn. They are too busy making children into good citizens, feeding the hungry, teaching the illiterate, all those things, which take a lot of time and labor.

When it highlights success, government elevates standards and makes previously marginalized organizations visible to the public. It grants legitimacy to groups that do not have the ability or desire to market themselves. Tim Streett sums up his experience with the Front Porch Alliance this way:

More than anything, what mattered most was just the attitude of the Mayor's office to recognize the legitimacy of our mission. And to be able to say to others, here is someone who is doing something legitimate. I would have to say that that was the most helpful thing about the Front Porch Alliance, more than anything tangible. I know this kind of help is intangible, but it's very important. And it takes place at no cost to the city, other than having someone who knew what was going on who could introduce us to others.

This form of intangible help does not really remain intangible for long. Once a community gets to know faith-based organizations and other grassroots groups as potential partners, they attract the attention of additional public agencies, foundations, and corporations. People and organizations that formerly would never consider joining up forces with them begin to call them up, invite them to meetings, and introduce them to their networks.

Not long after we helped launch the Indianapolis Ten Point Coalition, the pastors involved in the coalition began getting calls from other agencies and organizations. I remember a meeting that we had organized in my conference room to deal with a security issue that had arisen at our downtown mall during the weekends. Youth were becoming reckless after mall hours on the streets around the mall and had even begun damaging property. We invited the Ten Point Coalition's chairman, Reverend Charles Harrison, to the meeting to see if perhaps any of the pastors would be willing to help provide some monitoring on the streets.

A variety of law enforcement and justice system officials were pres-

ent, and as they heard Reverend Harrison describe how he thought the pastors could help, they began bringing up other “opportunities” for the coalition. Would the pastors be willing to mentor probationers? Would they be willing to help out with juvenile offender mediations? Could they help get community policing implemented in *x* neighborhood? And so on. One of my assistants smiled at Reverend Harrison and asked, “Are you still happy you guys have been so successful?” Reverend Harrison simply sighed. The Ten Point Coalition had quickly become a partner of choice in Indianapolis, and they began accessing funding sources traditionally unavailable to grassroots, community-based organizations.

Government can also use its authority to connect citizens to faith-based organizations. Judge James Payne began referring young offenders to a faith-based character education organization whose constituency was generally middle-class and suburban. He did so because he knew the program was solid, not because it had a tradition of serving urban juvenile offenders. Most people never would have thought that the program was well suited to serving Indianapolis youth who had run into trouble with the law. Judge Payne used his authority to make the organization a legitimate referral place for youth in need of help. The youth would never have chosen or known about the program otherwise.

The judge had presided over tens of thousands of delinquency and neglect cases, often noting with frustration the failures from traditional social service placements. In order to find more options for interventions he reached out to faith-based organizations diverse in both ethnicity and religion. If the faith option was appropriate and preferred by the parents, limited government funding would flow from the court to pay for the placement. These were additional options, and of course did not displace more traditional secular placements.

Authority, of course, is a tricky thing. Public officials must take care never to use their position to direct people to faith-based programs against their will. They also have to take care not to tip the playing field in the other direction by favoring only faith-based groups or by giving preference to just a few of their favorites when a contracting opportunity presents itself. There are always opportunities for government to abuse its authority, no matter what the issue is. The best safeguard against abuse is to have clearly stated objectives for a program and a transparent process for identifying and working with community partners.

Faith-based solutions certainly will not solve all our problems, but they need to be considered an option far more frequently and consistently than they are at present. We are at a point in history where we need to consider their contribution to society honestly and dispassion-

ately. The recent public debate on this issue, at times, has grown divisive and too ideological. There are practical realities about faith solutions that are not at all divisive—in fact, they are unifying and healing in their impact. Working through these practical issues is now our first priority.

Endnotes

¹ *Giving USA*, AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy (2000).

² *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, Independent Sector (1999).

³ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 22 ff.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *On Human Work (trans. of Laborum Exercens)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference), II, 9.

⁵ Philip K. Howard, *The Death of Common Sense: How Law Is Suffocating America* (New York: Random House, 1994).

⁶ Rebecca Blank, *It Takes a Nation: A New Agenda for Fighting Poverty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).