

matters a great deal. Grassroots private and not-for-profit participation in social-services partnerships can help increase the level of service effectiveness as well as give residents a greater stake in what happens in their communities.

Increasing the Impact of Faith-Based Organizations

Ultimately, as much as one hopes that the market will create opportunity and neighborhoods will be energized by civic engagement, a city is only as strong as the values that animate the habits, opinions, and shared practices of its residents. One of the strongest forces holding the values of individual neighborhoods together are faith-based organizations—churches, synagogues, mosques, and other religious community-based organizations.

Often a lone anchor in their blighted neighborhoods, they measure their work not in terms of the numbers of people they serve or their cost-effectiveness, but in terms of lives transformed. From a faith stance, they help people kick destructive habits and encourage strong families. These outcomes affect the civic order, and for this reason, government has a vested interest in them, too.

But government has traditionally had little to do with religious groups, which has created an odd situation. Talented and energetic faith leaders busily improve their communities, usually without sufficient resources, and they stay away from government because the hassle of regulations usually defeats their purpose. Government, which would like to have the social outcomes that faith-based organizations produce, can navigate regulations and can provide access to resources. However, public officials usually go about trying to improve neighborhoods without coordinating their efforts with religious groups. This entire scenario, which is considered “normal” in most places, made no sense to us in Indianapolis.

We wanted to work with religious organizations to help them do their work more effectively and with greater reach. This was not, of course, a new idea. It just seemed that no one was really trying it out. In 1902, for instance, Teddy Roosevelt had said:

The forces for evil, as our great cities grow, become more concentrated, more menacing to the community, and if the community is to go forward and not back, they must be met and overcome by forces for good that have grown in corresponding degree. More and more in the future, our churches must realize that we have a right to expect that they shall take the lead in shaping those forces for good. . . . [W]e have a right to look to the churches for

setting the highest possible standard of conduct and of service, public and private, for the whole land.⁶

We launched the Front Porch Alliance (FPA) in Indianapolis in 1997 as a way to enhance the role of grassroots, value-shaping organizations. Consistent with our overall approach to empowerment, we were convinced that government was best positioned to take on tough social problems as a *coordinator* of services, *not a deliverer* of them. Faith-based organizations could dream up, organize, and implement programs much more effectively than we could. They could change lives and improve their communities, and we could support them in the effort.

Our faith groups, however, doubted our sincerity. And they had every right to do so. For years, city government and religious groups regarded each other suspiciously at best, downright antagonistically at worst. I have written elsewhere that we took pains to gain their support in three ways.⁷ First, we formed an advisory council and spent time talking with organizations before we announced the initiative, so that there would be no surprises. Second, we looked for immediate and tangible ways to produce results and to demonstrate our sincerity, and we only invited media attention when one of the organizations requested it. And, as the requests for partnership and assistance grew, we tripled the number of staff we had initially dedicated to work on the effort.

Our promise to local religious groups was not primarily financial. We promised to help them accomplish the true community-building work they were doing, whatever it was. This meant helping them navigate city hall's red tape, assisting them in getting funding from sources to which they usually did not have access, and helping them build the partnerships in the community that would give their mission its greatest impact. We did not assist them in proselytization or any directly religious instruction or worship. We did assist them in doing the good in the community that their faith impelled them to do.

FPA forged alliances with more than 500 congregations and other organizations in the Indianapolis area. It created a summer youth program partnership between the city and a variety of organizations that served more than 4,000 Indianapolis youth. It provided assistance to Indianapolis's largest teen abstinence program, which involved more than 3,500 public- and private-school youth in a peer-mentoring approach to abstinence. Altogether, it helped organizations provide programs that benefited more than 10,000 Indianapolis youth.

FPA facilitated partnerships between more than thirty churches and twenty public schools. The partnerships provided tutoring, after-school programming, and mentoring for the students. In an effort to provide grassroots care for the appearance and safety of neighborhoods,

FPA coordinated an “Adopt-a-Block” program in which thirty churches adopted more than sixty city blocks. It created an arrangement in which nearly fifteen churches maintained thirty city parks.

Here is how I would break down the areas in which FPA has had a noticeable impact in Indianapolis:

Community Asset Building. FPA helped turn liabilities (vacant warehouses and fire stations, crack houses, and the like) into assets such as youth centers, drug-counseling centers, parks, and transitional housing. Five major projects of this sort—and there were others—were carried out in about eighteen months’ time. Chapter One told of the vacated property that Reverend Sanders converted into a drug relapse prevention center and the crack alley that Pastor Jay Height converted into a city park. FPA also worked with Robinson Community African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Indianapolis Black Firefighters Association to secure vacant firehouses for each of them to run youth and family programs. All of these are marvelous examples of turning a liability into a community asset. They drove away the bad and replaced it with the good.

These cases represent FPA’s unique approach. Government can sell its unused assets and reap some economic benefit, or it can invest these assets back into the community to produce increased social capital—and thus a strengthened social fabric built on trust and relationships through which opportunity is created. The former approach is usual and conventional. The latter was central to FPA’s activity.

Crime and Safety. In early 1999, we launched the Indianapolis Ten Point Coalition, based on the successful model in Boston, where Reverend Eugene Rivers led pastors to the streets in an effort to reduce crime and create positive alternatives for young people. The pastors in Indianapolis patrol the streets during high-crime times, usually on weekend nights. Unlike police officers, whose primary job is enforcement, the pastors are charged with offering spiritual intervention and ministry to those in need.

The program arrived on the scene the night we announced it during a snowy blizzard. After the press conference, we walked the streets with the pastors to send a message to the gangs that the ministers had come out from behind their pulpits to reclaim the streets. It worked, because gang leaders called right away to find out if the pastors were “for real.” The pastors proved that they were indeed for real, and immediately began seeking job opportunities for the young people they met on the street.

Elder David Coatie, a leader in the effort, said, “We’re meeting

kids out there that are saying, ‘We don’t want to be out here, but we don’t know what else to do.’ So we started finding them jobs, good jobs that paid some money.” And Reverend Charles Harrison, the Ten Point Coalition chairman, reported that the gangs actually started referring young people to the pastors once the pastors had proved they could get the youth off the streets and into jobs.

The Coalition was a quick success. Just nine months after starting, homicides had fallen by 50 percent in two crime-ridden areas where the Coalition patrolled most heavily. Through a strategic partnership with Jump Start, a program that trains young people for road construction jobs, youth have come off the street and found themselves making more than \$20 per hour working with road crews. One participant who left the streets and went through the program said, “This is not just a job. It’s a career opportunity. Before I got here, you name it, I did it—lots of terrible stuff. But with the churches, the pastors, and Jump Start, my life has turned around. I have a future.”

New Community Relationships. Our work to connect churches to other socially redeeming work paid off in a number of different ways. Partnerships formed between churches and other public and private organizations unlike anything the city had ever seen. In one case, a church collaborated with a shelter for domestic violence victims to provide transportation for the children as their mothers received needed help and recovery services. In another case, churches provided community counselors in a pilot project that targeted child abuse and neglect cases before they grew into emergencies.

I referred earlier to partnerships churches had with public schools. Churches make logical partners for schools, which have an abundance of children needing after-school programming, tutoring, and other forms of support. Lakeview Christian Center, a congregation with more than 1,500 members on the city’s west side, partnered with a school whose students faced all the problems associated with poverty. Church volunteers not only provided tutoring but also worked directly with the school’s social worker to identify students whose families needed food and other supplies, and they would meet the families’ needs. They also worked with advanced students after school to give them continuing opportunities to learn, and they participated in the school’s efforts to keep kids away from drugs by sponsoring events that sent alternative, positive messages.

Churches were creative in their partnerships. Northside New Era Baptist Church purchased school uniforms for the children in

their partner elementary school. The school's principal reported a decrease in conflict between kids and even a rise in academic performance. While churches were engaging the schools, they were also mowing city parks. Together, they mowed nearly fifty acres of parks on contracts totaling more than \$60,000 at any given time. Englewood Christian Church, which mowed fourteen parks and accounted for nearly a third of the contract totals, runs its own Community Development Corporation. It owns several properties and provides transitional housing for members of its congregation and community that are saving to purchase their own homes. It also provides job-placement services. The mowing contract allowed it to employ people to whom it was providing other services. The mowing became an extension of Englewood's already successful ministry.

Enhanced Resources. Although FPA did not focus on money, it did negotiate some assistance for community groups. In less than two years, FPA was responsible for bringing more than \$750,000 to faith-based organizations across the city. Small amounts of city funding and the assistance of FPA's staff helped organizations attract outside funding. Most grassroots organizations of the size that participated in FPA cannot attract foundation grants. But with FPA as a partner, and with other partners which they would find through FPA, these organizations suddenly gained credibility with funders.

Beyond financial support, FPA was an important source of other valuable resources. FPA identified nonprofit organizations across the city that needed computers, and partnered with a church that would repair used computers before turning them over to the organizations. The church's pastor who oversaw the process described it this way: "We never would have thought of this kind of ministry before FPA approached us with the idea. We have even created a program in which we train teens in our community in computer assembly. Not only do they help prepare the computers for our program, we make a deal with them that if they can put together a computer that works by the end of their class, all by themselves, they get to keep it. Most of these kids come from homes where they don't have computers. I couldn't be happier with the way this has worked out." And not only has FPA turned the city's junk into someone else's fully functioning computer, it also began working with the city to take its discarded furniture to community organizations that needed chairs, desks, tables, and lamps.

Of course, one can never estimate the value of a mayor's bully pulpit for small, faith-based groups. We encouraged foundations, business-

es, and individuals to take the faith community seriously and back their work financially. We put pressure on government agencies to stop ignoring faith-based organizations but to consider them as viable partners.

We never pressured congregations, however. FPA was, after all, on their side. And so, when FPA director Isaac Randolph stood behind a pulpit one Sunday morning at the invitation of Lakeview Christian Center, he merely described how he thought the church could actively involve itself in a neighborhood that needed lots of help just down the road from the church. The congregation took up an offering out of its own goodwill, however, and ended up collecting \$112,000 with a commitment to begin community-redeeming work in the needy area.

Only a year after starting, FPA had a 25 percent name recognition among Indianapolis residents—more than most of our other programs. This was not a sign of slick marketing on our part. It was an indicator that the effort mattered to people. FPA continued to have opponents in the community. But frankly, we expected a lot more opposition when we started. This never happened, though, because all involved parties operated according to a high level of purpose and integrity. Religious liberty was protected. No one's rights were infringed. Tax dollars did not pay for any sectarian activity. But most of all, people were empowered to unleash the power of partnership in a way unseen before in our city's history.

Not only did FPA build an important bridge between city hall and religious organizations, it became a laboratory for learning. It revealed a number of valuable lessons about the complex and unique characteristics of public relationships with faith-based organizations. I will treat these lessons at greater length in Chapter Seven.

Endnotes

¹ Theda Skocpol, "How Americans Became Civic," *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, eds. T. Skocpol and M. Fiorina (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press & Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 69.

² Jeffrey M. Berry, "The Rise of Citizen Groups," *Ibid.*, 369.

³ Quoted in Janet Reingold, Jennifer Wootton, and Andrew Hahn, *The Indy Story: Urban Systems Reform and Community Revitalization in Indianapolis During the Stephen Goldsmith Years (1992-1999)* (Washington, D.C.: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2000), 46.

⁴ *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, ed. M. Novak (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1996), 148.

⁵ Daniel T. Oliver, "The National Assembly: Guarding Nonprofits' Government Funds," *Alternatives in Philanthropy* (Washington, D.C.: Capital Research Center, 1999).

⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Roosevelt Policy* (New York: The Current Literature Publishing Company, 1919), 28-29.

⁷ See my essay titled the same as this section, "Having Faith in Our Neighborhoods: The Front Porch Alliance," in *What's God Got to Do with the American Experiment?*, eds. E. J. Dionne and John J. DiIulio (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 72-78.