Faith and Organizations Project: Project Outline for Practitioners

The President's Faith Based Initiative has focused attention on religious based non-profits for the first time in many years. Many U.S. social service, health care and community projects started under religious auspices, and some maintain ties to faith communities today. In some faith based organizations, links between faith and action have fostered unique programs that use the philosophy and resources of the faith community to provide service. In other cases, faith related organizations maintain few ties to founding religious communities, resembling secular non-profits.

Policy makers and researchers document the kinds of services provided by congregations and faith related providers. Public discourse is currently focused on questions of constitutional prohibitions on church-state relations, on funding mechanisms, and on the consequences of federal funding of religious institutions. Little attention has been paid to the fundamental relationship between faith communities, the organizations they create, or the people they serve. These are the issues that this project would address, through a combination of research and dissemination of results to organizations. The project focuses on four aspects of the relationship between organizations and communities:

- **The relationship between founding communities and organizations.** The research would concentrate on the connection between non-profit organization mission and faith community or secular culture, dynamic ownership of the organization by its founding community, the ways that faith influences the nature of non-profit activity, and the ways the non-profit activity affects the founding community. As such, the project examines both the impact of founding community civic engagement, spiritual, cultural, and social capital on the non-profit and the ways that service provided by the organization helps build civic engagement, social capital and cultural or religious values for its founding community.

- **The relationship between the non-profit organization and the people that use their services.** Questions on this topic compare services provided to people from the same community versus people from another religion, racial, ethnic, immigrant group or class

background. As such, research looks carefully at church/state questions raised by President Bush's Faith Based initiative. Research also potentially provides new insights for debates among social service academics and practitioners regarding the importance of providing services through organizations from within a particular subset of a locality like ethnic, racial, immigrant founded organizations versus service provision by larger, city-wide social service institutions.

- **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, as well as the common strategies among non-profits providing a particular type of service, on non-profit goals and strategies.**

The Faith and Organizations project plan calls for four and a half years of combined research and practice activity: 1 year of pilot study in two U.S. communities, a start up phase to request and evaluate proposals for four to eight sites across the country, followed by a national action research project consisting of 2 years of research and a year of dissemination. The project is unique in two ways. First, it focuses specifically on ways that religious beliefs, denominational structure, and faith influence non-profit organizational form and practice. Research examines the content of organization mission, governance, staffing procedures and program strategies within the context of its constituent communities. In order to compare faith based and secular organizations, the project also plans to look at similar issues for secular community based non-profit organizations, carefully identifying the various communities that created the organization, sustain it today, and use its services. A comparative component of the project would examine if the relationship between secular non-profits and the communities they serve is different in marginalized communities (immigrant, marginalized racial or ethnic groups) from faith based organizations founded by those same communities, and in what ways.

Second, the project deliberately brings together practitioners and academics to develop research, carry out the project, and disseminate results. This partnership is aimed at providing information easily useful to faith based non-profits. Findings from this project should help organizations 1) develop stronger relationships with founding religious or

secular communities; 2) clarify links between their religion and organization mission, governance structure, staffing systems, and program design 3) meet mandates of government and secular funders while maintaining unique mission driven goals; 4) evaluate the effectiveness of their programs within the context of their faith; and 5) identify best practices to provide service from a particular faith tradition while respecting the beliefs and practices of a diverse participant base.

The Faith and Organizations project started as an initiative of Friends Board Training and Support Project, a program associated with the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) concerned with non-profit organizations that are connected with Friends. Non-profit scholars and practitioners associated with this organization convened a series of meetings regarding formulating a research agenda on this issue starting in November 2001. Since August 2002, the project has been sponsored by Catholic University of America. Participants envisioned a program that would compare the experience of organizations from several religions, as well as agencies founded by different racial and ethnic communities. The current project currently includes a team of scholars and practitioners from across the United States associated with several faiths working on similar issues to develop this proposal (see project board and staffing structure).

The Research

The research would look at a number of questions in the context of different types of faith-based and secular organizations, including senior service and health organizations, social service agencies, and organizations developed as grass roots faith or secular community organizing projects.

It would probe (and seek answers to) an array of questions that are vitally important to religious denominations that have invested in and provided auspices for the development of a vast number of "social ministries" in this country, and to organizations whose mission and identity are those of the founding faith community, even as they serve people beyond the bounds of their religious affiliation.

The research project would compare organizations created by several religions: Catholics, Mainline Protestants, Jews, Peace Churches (Quakers, Mennonite, Brethren), Evangelical Christians, independent Christian churches, and possibly Muslims. It would also contrast ministries founded by African American, Latino, Asian and white communities. Given questions regarding organizations in marginalized

communities, the secular component would compare faith based and secular organizations founded to serve particular marginalized ethnic, racial or immigrant groups.

The Questions
The study would address four key questions:

\# How do the dynamics between organization and founding community impact on the beliefs, behaviors, and resources of both organization and community? Do relationships between organization and community foster social capital, cultural capital and civic engagement in the founding community?

\# What is the relationship between non-profit organizations and the people that use their services? How do these relationships differ when the people served either come from the same community as the organization or from a different background?

\# What is the impact of founding community culture and social capital systems on non-profit mission, organizational structure, staffing, and program design?

\# What is the impact of the larger socio-economic and policy system, as well as the service sector of that organization (social services, health and senior services, community development) on non-profit organizations form, function and resources?

Within these overarching questions, the advisory committee and organizations participating in the pilot have developed a series of subsidiary questions designed to meet project goals. While each individual site may develop additional questions to address local concerns, the various studies would address the following questions:

\# What is the relationship between the religious denomination or founding secular community and the non-profit organizations founded by that organization? (Governance, financial, control, volunteer participation, staffing, program content, mission). How do bridging, bonding and linking social capital ties impact on organization behavior?

\# For marginalized populations such as immigrant, ethnic, and racial groups, are there fundamental differences between faith based and secular organizations in regards to their relationships with the

wider community and the way that organization mission plays out in agency programs, staffing, and other decisions?

\# How does the personal religious faith of key staff reflect that of the sponsoring community and influence organizational behavior? Do the leaders of secular organizations also adhere to a set of values that reflect their founding communities, and does that influence organization behavior in similar ways? How is this similar and different between faith based and secular organizations?

\# How do congregations and their members relate to faith-based organizations that function under their name, and vis-a-versa? For secular organizations, is there a constituent group that serves the same role as the faith community?

\# How do faith communities assure that the faith-based organizations have a future as faith-based institutions? That their founding values and perspectives are maintained?

\# What is the impact of the organizations' work on the faith community? On its understandings of the issues the organizations address? On its understandings of those the organizations serve? On its understandings of their faith? On its sense of identity?

\# What is the relationship between the organization, the faith community, and those served who are not part of the same religion? Does the work of the organization lead new people to the faith community? Under what terms? How does the organization ensure that the beliefs and rights of program participants from different faith traditions or who adhere to no religion are respected? How is the relationship between those served and the founding community differ for secular organizations, particularly in organizations founded by a particular ethnic or racial group now serving others different from themselves?

\# Under what conditions do faith-based organizations move beyond the ethos and control of the denomination and what connection, if any, does the religious body have with an organization when this occurs?

These questions may be amended, narrowed, or broadened as new partners and funding sources are identified and as exploratory work takes place. They embody a number of issues raised by many faith based

organizations regarding desirable governance structures; board recruitment and structure; staff selection, training and orientation; connecting program design to faith based mission; program evaluation; relationships between founding faith communities and mature organizations; and creating a more dynamic relationship between organizations and religious communities.

Approach

The project envisions an umbrella organization (likely based in an academic institution) with inter-connected projects analyzing various aspects of this topic in different settings. The project structure reflects its simultaneous orientation toward practitioners and academics (see Project Staff/Committee Structure). A central project team consisting of the principal investigator and PI's focused on social service, health, community organizing and the survey is responsible for maintaining consistency across project sites and translating research into practice. The project envisions six to eight quasi-independent research sites across the country, each with its own PI and project team that will perform research and disseminate findings at the local level. An advisory committee including both academics and practitioners provides overall guidance for the project. Researchers and practitioners would be connected through a series of meetings, email discussions, and publications.

The project would include qualitative research on faith-based organizational activity in communities across the United States accompanied by a national quantitative survey. It would utilize case studies and interviews. Research would be conducted in six to eight locations across the country. These would include both urban and rural sites in various regions of the United States. A selected group of organizations would be asked to participate in each site by hosting researchers conducting organizational case studies and interviews. A larger number of organizations in all of the sites across the country would be asked to respond to a survey.

Products

Products would be addressed to the academic world and to the world of faith-based communities and institutions. They could include:

\#   Case studies, evaluation tools, and lists of issue questions for discussion designed to help organizations and faith communities monitor and shape their relationships.

\#   Best practices models, case studies, and practical suggestions to

help denominations improve connections to organizations they founded in the past and present. Criteria and best practices models to help denominations develop strategies to clarify connections to organizations originally associated with that religion that no longer maintain the values, practices, and social network connections of the founding faith community.

\#   Concrete suggestions for improvements to policy and programs based on individual or collective findings. For example, the project may develop best practices models based on comparisons across several faith traditions for board composition and governance, program design, and staff training that integrates faith tradition with organization practice. In order to help faith based providers serve diverse clientele, the project could develop evaluation criteria that address this issue as well as training tools for staff and volunteers. Policy suggestions could focus on developing government regulations that respect religious diversity while ensuring equity in service and staffing.

\#   Round table discussions to share findings among organizational participants.

\#   Presentations of findings on various topics by project researchers to participating organizations, local communities and in national forums.

\#   Publication of findings on various topics in academic forums and in short issue briefs for practitioners.

Timeline and Current Status

A projected timeline suggests a one to one and a half year planning period, two years of research activity, and one year devoted to reporting. The project is currently finishing its initial pilot research and planning phase. Pilot research in Philadelphia and the Washington DC metropolitan area, funded by the Louisville Institute and the Bradley foundation, has been completed, analysis of pilot findings is underway, and the project team has begun to develop plans for the national project. By the end of the planning period, sites for the research projects and partner organizations would be identified, some pilot case studies and survey development would be completed, and funding would be secured for the larger project. The

national project would simultaneously begin research and development of relationships to the practitioner and policy constituencies at the beginning for year two. Research would continue for two years. The final year of the project would involve analysis, sharing project findings with practitioners, policy makers and academics, and developing products for use by organizations and their constituent communities based on project findings.

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