

Working Effectively With Faith Based Organizations

Rev. Dr. J. Elisha Burke
Director of Health Ministries
Baptist General Convention of Virginia

Why Faith Based Organizations Need to Be at the Table

- **Access, Knowledge, Trust**

- Faith-based communities are a part of every community – not apart from them.
- They have significant competence and knowledge to contribute, born of a history of providing services and supports.

Why Faith Based Organizations Need to Be at the Table

- They provide access to their communities – entrée for outsiders to the many cultures that make up our nation – because they are trusted.
- Many faith-based communities nurture core values of active citizenship, community self-reliance, and public spiritedness that are vital to building effective partnerships.

WHAT ARE FAITH COMMUNITIES?

- Researchers have many ways of defining faith-based organizations. The following are generally accepted parameters:
- They are directly connected to a faith community (a group of people organized around a religious or spiritual belief system).

WHAT ARE FAITH COMMUNITIES?

- They have a religiously oriented mission statement.
- They receive significant support from religious organizations.
- They are initiated by a religious institution.

Developing Connections to Faith Based Organizations

1. **Articulate intention:** Begin with belief that the involvement of this sector of the community is essential to your effort. Clearly articulate how a partnership with this sector would work, including specific possibilities for faith-based participation.
2. **Gather information:** Identify faith-based organizations in your community by making personal connections and establishing relationships.

Developing Connections to Faith Based Organizations

- 3. Conduct a search:

Begin your search with people you know; ask them whether they know of faith-based communities or leaders who might be interested in forming a partnership addressing the issues you want help with.

Developing Connections to Faith Based Organizations

4. Initiate contact: Personal outreach is vital in initiating and maintaining relationships with faith-based organizations. When possible, begin with already-established relationships and contacts within the target community; relying on mutual acquaintances can make establishing new relationships easier.

Developing Connections to Faith Based Organizations

5. Finally, because people of power and influence can often help to convene diverse groups of people, make use of elected officials who can help you establish productive partnerships with faith-based organizations. Like leaders of religious communities, political leaders have a pulpit from which to preach; your mayor, state legislator, or governor can bring his or her leadership and authority to support your collaborative effort.

ENGAGING THE FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY

- The best way to engage partners is to craft a collaborative partnership together from the ground up.
- Consider asking a leader within the target faith-based community to sponsor a special gathering of his or her peers for you to speak to.

ENGAGING THE FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY

Building Trust

- In the most effective collaborative, partners take time to develop a base of common knowledge. This requires learning about each other's services, resources, organizational cultures, and working constraints. Without this common knowledge, partners often rely on stereotypes and misconceptions.
- The most important thing to keep in mind when building trust among partners: Do not make promises you can't keep. If you make a promise, deliver. Integrity and trust are essential to a successful partnership. They also reflect key values echoed in the spiritual literature of all denominations.