



PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

"We know that faith and values can be a source of strength in our own lives. That's what it's been to me. And that's what it is to so many Americans. But it can also be something more. It can be the foundation of a new project of American renewal. And that's the kind of effort I intend to lead as president of the United States."
[Barack Obama, 07/01/08]

BARACK OBAMA'S PLAN TO ENGAGE FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Barack Obama began his career by moving to the south side of Chicago to direct the Developing Communities Project. Together with a coalition of ministers, Obama set out to improve living conditions in poor neighborhoods plagued by crime and high unemployment. This experience not only solidified his personal faith, but instilled a deep understanding of the good works done by faith-based organizations in communities each and every day.

Americans are a deeply religious people, with more than 71 percent reporting that they believe in God or a higher power.¹ And faith-based organizations provide critical social services to tens of millions of Americans every year.² A recent Pew report noted that a solid majority of Americans (66 percent) favor allowing churches and other faith communities to apply, along with other organizations, for government funding to provide social services.³ Every day these organizations develop innovative solutions to our nation's most intractable problems. For instance, Ready4Work is a faith-based initiative devoted to ensuring that ex-offenders do not return to a life of crime in 11 cities across the country. Catholic Charities is working to ensure that homeless veterans are not sleeping on the streets of Chicago. And a diverse coalition of religious groups have come together for causes ranging from rebuilding New Orleans to fighting for secure wages for all workers.

President Bush came into office with a promise to "rally the armies of compassion," establishing a new Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. But the promise of that office was never fully realized due to a number of factors. First, support for social services to the poor and the needy have been consistently underfunded, including programs that many secular and faith-based non-profits have administered for years. In recent years, for example, the Bush administration has proposed the elimination of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program,¹ which benefits an average of 433,000 low-income seniors every month² and is

¹ Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2008. Appendix 2: Detailed Data Tables. Available online: <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/table-belief-in-god-or-universal-spirit-by-religious-tradition.pdf>

² See for example: Salvation Army of the United States of America 2007 National Annual Report, p.17. Available online: [http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn.nsf/0/8EA40BCD3BF8B453802573310068F709/\\$file/TSA_2007_Annual_AA.pdf](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn.nsf/0/8EA40BCD3BF8B453802573310068F709/$file/TSA_2007_Annual_AA.pdf) and Catholic Charities USA, "Who We Are." Available online: <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=278&srcid=193>

³ See Pew Forum, "Religion and Social Welfare." Available online: <http://pewforum.org/social-welfare/> "Still, a solid majority of Americans (66%) favor allowing churches and other houses of worship to apply, along with other organizations, for government funding to provide social services."

administered in part by local non-profits, including faith-based groups. Second, former key officials in the Office have described how it was often used to promote partisan interests. The former deputy director of the Office wrote that “More than a dozen conferences with more than 20,000 faith and community leaders were held in 2003 and 2004 in every significant battleground state, including two in Florida, one in Miami ten days before the 2004 election. Their political power was incalculable. They were completely off the media's radar screen.”³ Finally, as a result of a lack of funding and robust training and technical assistance, smaller congregations and community groups that were supposed to be empowered by this initiative have been short-changed.

Barack Obama believes that we should do more to promote partnerships between government and faith-based and other nonprofit community groups to provide services to the needy and underserved. Under an Obama Administration, these groups will be viewed as active partners in renewing America.

Barack Obama will establish a new *President's Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships* within the White House. The Council will work to engage faith-based organizations and help them abide by the principles that federal funds cannot be used to proselytize, that they should not discriminate in providing their services, and they should be held to the same standards of accountability as other federal grant recipients. The Council will:

- **Train the Trainers** to enable local faith-based organizations to learn best practices, grant-making procedures and service delivery so that they can better apply for and use federal dollars.
- **Partner with State and Local Offices** so that federal efforts build on successes made at the state and local level.
- **Hold Recipients Responsible** by conducting rigorous performance evaluation, researching what works well and disseminating best practices.
- **Close the Summer Learning Gap** by focusing faith-based and community-based efforts on summer learning programs for 1 million children.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Barack Obama believes that our problems require an “all hands on deck” approach, and that the federal government should enlist effective faith-based and community groups to help solve them. Obama also respects the First Amendment and prudential concerns that have been raised on both sides of the debate over the role and scope of faith-based initiatives.

Obama’s initiative will be governed by a set of core principles for federal grant recipients. In order to receive federal funds to provide social services, faith-based organizations:

- Cannot use federal funds to proselytize or provide religious sectarian instruction.
- Cannot discriminate against nonmembers in providing services. They must remain open to all and cannot practice religious discrimination against the populations they serve.
- Must comply with federal anti-discrimination laws, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Religious organizations that receive federal dollars cannot discriminate with respect to hiring for government-funded social service programs.
- Can only use taxpayer dollars on secular programs and initiatives.

- Must prove their efficacy and be judged based on program effectiveness. They will be expected to demonstrate proven program outcomes to continue to receive funding. Obama will fund programs that work and end funding for programs that do not – whether they are large or small, well-established or new, faith-based or otherwise.

BARACK OBAMA’S PLAN

Barack Obama supports a White House office dedicated to a strong partnership between the White House and grassroots groups, both faith-based and secular. As president, he will establish a new *President's Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships*. The new name will reflect a new commitment to strengthening the partnership between government and neighborhood community programs.

I. A Reinvigorated President's Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

Training the Trainers – Strengthening Intermediaries. It is widely acknowledged that perhaps the biggest hurdle to the effective participation of community and faith-based groups in applying for federal grants is lack of capacity and knowledge about how to apply for federal grants and how to negotiate a web of federal laws and regulations. This is especially true for smaller congregations, minority religions and other less politically connected churches. For example in 2000, only one urban congregation in Philadelphia applied for and received funding.⁴

Obama’s President's Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships will launch a program to “Train the Trainers” by empowering hundreds of intermediary nonprofits and larger faith-based organizations to train thousands of local faith-based and community-based organizations on best practices, grant-making procedures, service delivery and limitations. The Office will host regular training sessions for selected community training partners. These partners – for example, a statewide Islamic umbrella organization, Catholic Charities office, or Lutheran Services branch, or even a secular nonprofit like Public/Private Ventures – would be supported to travel to Washington and learn how to train local faith-based and community organizations on accessing federal service delivery dollars, remaining in compliance, avoiding proselytizing, understanding hiring rules, and reporting outcomes. These organizations would return to their communities as certified providers of advice and support to local organizations.

Partnering with State and Local Offices. Thirty-five governors and 70 mayors across the country have launched their own version of the Office of Faith and Community-Based Initiatives. The President's Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships will work closely with state and local governments and implement a robust communications and technical assistance program to ensure that governors and mayors have the resources they need to support local organizations.

Maintaining the Federal Agency Faith-Based Offices. There are currently 11 faith-based offices in existence at executive agencies throughout the federal government – from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Justice. Barack Obama will maintain these agency offices and strengthen their effectiveness by increasing their coordination with the White House Council.

Performing Evaluation, Research, and Disseminating Best Practices. Barack Obama will ensure that all community-based programs – whether faith-based or secular community-serving nonprofits – are evaluated for effectiveness. The President's Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships will work with intermediary organizations to conduct unbiased evaluation of programs and report results. The Council will also work with the existing Corporation for National and Community Service and Obama’s proposed Social Investment Fund Network to develop best practices that can be scaled and used across the country. This will help identify programs that work and expand them to be scalable in other markets, which will increase the efficiency and impact of the nonprofit sector as a whole.

II. A New Partnership to Close the Summer Learning Gap for 1 Million Children

Differences in summer learning opportunities contribute to the achievement gaps that separate struggling minority and poor students from their middle-class peers. Studies show that the achievement gap widens during the summer for far too many children, with most losing about two months worth of grade level math skills. And while middle-class students make small gains in their reading skills over the summer, low-income students lose more than two months.⁵ Over the years, this summer learning loss accumulates to the point where poor and minority students frequently are 2.5 grade levels in reading behind their peers.

Faith-based groups can play an important role – often in partnership with schools and secular nonprofits – in helping to close the summer learning gap. For example, the Children’s Defense Fund’s Freedom Schools partners with community groups including churches and other houses of worship to provide summer and after-school enrichment in sites across the country. The Schools provided summer programs to 8,300 children in 2007 and studies have demonstrated boosts on standardized reading tests for program participants.⁶ A third of the CDF’s Freedom Schools are held in churches. Other non-profit groups have also enjoyed success. Studies show that the BELL summer programs in Boston, New York and Washington, D.C. for instance have improved the reading skills of participating children.⁷

Youth Education for Tomorrow offers a compelling example of the power of faith-based groups to mobilize volunteers to tackle problems like literacy. In 2000, a group of faith-based schools, churches and community organizations was trained to operate an innovative literacy program developed by Public/Private Ventures (PPV), a national nonprofit organization that works with faith-based and other community-serving groups. A qualified teacher and core of volunteers were placed in each YET Center to work with students in faith-based settings – four days a week after school and during the summer. The YET Centers worked. According to PPV, children who went through the program for six months made up nearly two years of reading deficit.⁸

As president, Barack Obama will support partnerships between schools, community groups, and faith-based organizations to provide summer opportunities to an additional 1 million children. The President’s Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships will assist local organizations apply for funding to operate evidence-based summer learning programs and to design effective programs that conform to best practices. Whether these services are provided by community nonprofits like the Bell Summer program, coalitions of faith-based groups like the YET Centers, or mixed partnerships like the CDF Freedom Schools, Obama believes that we should support these myriad arrangements tackle problems such as achievement gaps in literacy and math. Together, Obama believes that these organizations can help us close the achievement gap that affects far too many children.

A COMMITMENT TO FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Barack Obama’s new summer learning program will cost about \$500 million per year. He will finance this program without increasing the deficit by cutting wasteful spending in government procurement and management. By better managing surplus property owned by the federal government, reducing growth in the federal travel budget and implementing the GAO’s recommendations on streamlining the federal procurement process, Barack Obama’s plan will cut several billion dollars in wasteful spending from the federal budget each year.

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. See press releases for multiple years, reacting to release of President’s FY07 and FY08 budget: “President’s Budget Would Cut Food For Over 420,000 Low Income Seniors.” 2/14/2006 [<http://www.cbpp.org/2-6-06fa.htm>] and “President’s Budget Would Cut Food For 440,000 Low-Income Seniors.” Revised 2/8/2007. [<http://www.cbpp.org/2-6-07fa.htm>]

² US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. *Nutrition Program Fact Sheet* (updated April 2008). p.1. Available online: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/csfp/pfs-csfp.pdf>. “An average of more than 466,000 people each month participated in the program in fiscal year (FY) 2007, including just under 433,000 elderly people and more than 33,000 women, infants, and children.”

³ David Kuo, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (New York: Free Press, 2006): p. 212

⁴ John DiIulio, *Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America's Faith-Based Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): p. 176.

⁵ Afterschool Alliance, Issue Brief No. 33 (June 2008).

⁶ http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Freedom_Schools_impact

⁷ <http://www.bellnational.org/program/summer.htm>

⁸ http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/25_publication.pdf