

Communities of Hope

FAITH-BASED TOOLKIT

Since our country's founding, faith-based congregations and organizations have been engaged in enhancing the lives of children and families. This resource is designed to assist faith-based nonprofits, also called faith-based organizations (FBOs), congregational ministries and religious communities that are creating or intend to create environments that enhance and sustain a high quality of life for children and families in the United States.

Over time, most FBOs have understood their mission is to demonstrate the beliefs of their faith while remaining attuned to the different cultural traditions of the people they serve. Our intention in sharing this toolkit is to offer guidance to leaders committed to helping preserve families and protect the well-being of children. The goal of this toolkit is to offer content in service of ensuring more effective work in the child welfare and family strengthening field. FBOs are uniquely positioned to connect with families

and children through their understanding of faith and community culture and can also achieve deep impact through sound organizational practices.

The toolkit contains guiding principles, along with tools, worksheets and prompts for reflection in each section. It is intended to be aspirational, and also helpful, challenging, possibly uplifting, and practical. We believe these are words you live every day.

Five principles for **effective practice**



Envision a new environment through faith in action

Visionary leaders are able to look at a community whose residents live in trying conditions and imagine an improved, renewed community, with those same residents living in safe, healthy, caring homes.

Faith-based leaders who are committed to serving and supporting children and families hold such a vision of hope while maintaining a realistic view of the current state of families in their community. Gaining an understanding of the challenges children and families face, they draw from the tenets of their faith to believe in the possibility of a new environment at a macro level while simultaneously creating a plan of action at a micro level.



Integrate faith into practice

Effective faith-based organizations (FBOs) integrate their faith into their ministries, outreach or programs in ways that are inclusive and strategic. The members of the faith community know that everyone is a “work in progress” and that expressing faith with love is more powerful than being judgmental. This same attitude of love and compassion is expressed in their community outreach and the services they provide to children and families.

Faith communities integrate their faith by providing services in their ministries and outreach programs regardless of whether the children or families join their church, temple or mosque. They operate with the understanding that their work, love and compassion are impactful because they are living out the tenets of their faith.



Faith informs successful collaboration and partnership

The social and economic challenges families face are complex and vast. We know that one church, temple, mosque, ministry or nonprofit cannot tackle these complexities alone. Therefore, collaboration and partnership are key tools for developing successful, holistic and efficient outreach and ministry.

It is easy to see how the character values found in faith traditions such as respect, integrity and unwavering commitment can translate into a successful partnership

for children and families. Mutual respect between faith-based organizations creates a sense of harmony that leads to efficient services and programs for families. Integrity ensures that each partner or collaborator is doing their part, which helps maintain a high level of positive energy and excitement about the work. Unwavering commitment to mutual goals creates synergy when challenges arise and keeps each organization focused on solutions.



Engage youth authentically

All religious doctrines honor the voices of children and youth and teach them characteristics and morals of faith. In the community work of FBOs and ministries, engaging and incorporating the voices of youth is not only a best practice but very rewarding, offering multiple advantages to both groups. FBOs benefit from the creativity and innovation that the youth voice brings to program planning and community development, while youth receive an opportunity to gain leadership and employment skills, as well as an understanding of civic responsibility.



Consider faith leaders' voices and roles in community

Faith leaders have one of the most unique positions in society because of the inherent trust they hold with those among their congregational community, ministry or nonprofit, as well as with the larger community. Their unique voice can be used inside and outside of the walls of their faith community as powerful impetuses for positive change.

Let us consider some of the ways faith leaders can use their voice for change. One of the easiest ways is to teach, preach or use their voice to highlight their responsibility to be agents of change. Faith leaders can also bring awareness and clarity to the challenges faced by children and families in the community by sharing information in the form of quantitative data on trends affecting families and qualitative data (stories) about families in their community. Inspiring and thoughtful messages from faith leaders can lead to corporate inspiration and innovation to form new ministries or outreach initiatives. Faith leaders can also help change messaging about how family is defined by highlighting and creating ministries that engage and support blended families or “kinship families” (families where grandparents, other relatives or trusted adults take care of children whose parents are unable to care for them).