

News

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Roundtable Study Finds Muted Response by States to Faith-Based Push But 50-State Survey Finds Wide Use of Faith Groups for Social Services

The legislative and regulatory changes at the center of debate about faith-based initiatives in Washington are practically unheard of outside the beltway, according to a new 50-state study by the **Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy**.

But -- despite the states' muted response to federal efforts to expand the use of religious groups in the delivery of social services -- the Roundtable study reveals that state and local government partnerships with faith providers are common and longstanding, and include a wide range of religious groups.

The "Faith-Based Initiative" -- one of the top domestic priorities of the Bush Administration -- has been supported by both Executive Orders and revised federal agency regulations. These actions have been designed to help "level the playing field" for religious groups that seek government social service contracts.

Additionally, the 1996 federal welfare overhaul (*Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act*) included "charitable choice" provisions that encouraged states to include Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) in the delivery of services to welfare recipients.

The Roundtable study did find that most "high-profile" state activity has occurred since 2000, suggesting that some states have responded more to the President's Faith-Based Initiative than they did to the original 1996 welfare legislation overhaul. Still, the study revealed that few states have been spurred to make major changes.

Major findings of the Roundtable study include:

- Although some states have taken steps to increase the level of FBO involvement in government-funded services, in only a few states do these activities appear to be part of a major initiative identified with the governor or an agency head.
- Only eight states have enacted legislation to incorporate "charitable choice" language into state law.
- Relatively few states have modified statutes, regulations, or contracting processes to increase the level of FBO service provision.
- Even in those states that have taken the most active steps to increase the level of FBO participation, with few exceptions, there has been little change in FBO participation.
- Most states have not provided FBO contractors with guidance regarding permissible and impermissible religious activities, and states do not monitor compliance.
- Only two states have provided grants to FBOs for assistance in capacity-building or program start-up.



The Roundtable On Religion and Social Welfare Policy

www.religionandsocialpolicy.org

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At the same time, the Roundtable's national study found extensive partnerships between state and local governments, and faith-based organizations. Indeed, its findings revealed that contracts and grants to religious groups for social service delivery appear to be an established tradition in many, if not most states.

- Almost without exception, states contract with, and provide grants to, FBO service providers -- with many states contracting are with a diverse range of faith organizations, including congregation-based FBOs.
- In at least 25 states there are longstanding relationships between state governments and FBOs.
- In some states where relatively little has been done to increase FBO participation, there is nevertheless contracting with a range of religious providers, with substantial levels of government funding support.

"While the spotlight on the Faith-Based Initiative has been very bright in Washington, it tends to get much dimmer once you get outside the Beltway," said Richard P. Nathan, Director of the Rockefeller Institute of Government, which is overseeing the Roundtable's independent, non-partisan research. The Rockefeller Institute is the public policy research arm of the State University of New York.

"In general, it appears that state officials feel there is no urgent need to make major changes," Nathan said. "FBOs are already active players in the delivery of services in many states, and their participation is an accepted way of doing business. Interestingly, our research also found that their involvement is not a subject of controversy - either for program officials or for their clients."

To determine the scope of state activities, the Roundtable supervised a network of researchers in all fifty states. Each determined the extent to which states changed laws, regulations and administrative procedures in reaction to the federal initiatives. The researchers also sought to learn if local governments were increasing their reliance on FBOs for the delivery of services. The study included hundreds of interviews and analyzed all available documentation, including relevant statutes, regulations, policy instructions, administrative records, and other sources.

Researchers noted challenges in completing the study due to a lack of standard terminology, the absence of centralized data on social service contracts, difficulty determining which providers were faith-based, and differing administrative procedures in the programs that were studied. Nevertheless, researchers felt confident that sufficient information was gathered to draw conclusions.

The complete study, "Scanning the Policy Environment for Faith-Based Social Services in the United States" is available at www.religionandsocialpolicy.org

The Roundtable has also just completed work on the first national "comparative case" studies which compare religious and secular providers in a range of social service programs. This study, and the "state activity scan" outlined in this release, will both be discussed in detail at the Roundtable's Fall Research Conference November 12-13 in Washington, D.C. For more information on the conference or the Roundtable's research, please visit our website or call (518) 443-5014.

The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy conducts in-depth nationwide research to fill gaps in knowledge about the effectiveness and capacity of faith-based services, and the constitutional issues involved in public funding. The Roundtable is a project of the Rockefeller Institute of Government/State University of New York, and receives major support from The Pew Charitable Trusts.