

Evaluating the California Community and Faith Based Initiative¹

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Introduction

One of the few points of agreement in the debate over “faith-based” or “charitable choice” policy initiatives is that little rigorous evidence exists to document the efficacy of faith-based programs (Johnson, 2002; Monsma, 2002; Smith and Sosin, 2001). The research project described here—an evaluation of the California Community and Faith Based Initiative (CFBI)—represents an opportunity to address this gap in the literature and contribute to a more informed debate. Through CFBI the California Employment Development Department (EDD) has used a \$9 million state budget allocation to fund 40 faith-related and community-based organizations that are helping hard-to-employ individuals prepare for, find, and retain employment. CFBI program participants include the homeless, previously incarcerated individuals, recovering substance abusers, emancipated foster care youth, refugees and new immigrants, abused women, mental health clients, and autistic youth.

In addition to providing grants to community and faith-based organizations, CFBI includes both technical assistance to funded programs and an evaluation. The technical assistance component is designed to enhance the capacity of these organizations to operate effectively and responsibly in an environment of state and federal oversight and to tap into federal and state funding sources for ongoing support. The evaluation seeks to learn how—and how well—such programs identify, recruit, train, and support employment among unemployed or underemployed persons not typically served by existing government programs.

The evaluation is still in its early phases, and the discussion that follows presents our research design ideas and preliminary evidence rather than definitive findings. This paper will

1) describe the history and parameters of the CFBI, 2) summarize our evaluation methodology and discuss some of the challenges we confronted in designing the evaluation, and 3) share preliminary evidence collected about the nature of the participating organizations, the clients they serve, the types of services they offer, and the direct or indirect role faith plays in their programs.² Data for this paper come from an initial scoping survey of the CFBI sites conducted in November and December 2002,³ and a review of program documents.

Program History and Parameters

CFBI began with a \$5 million appropriation in the 2000-01 state budget and received an additional \$4 million in 2001-02. Funds were included in the state budget by the Governor and approved by the California Legislature. All newly funded programs in both 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 received allocations from the State's General Fund, while Year 1 programs renewed in 2001-2002 were funded using a portion of the state's Workforce Investment Act (WIA) allocation.⁴ The stated purpose of the program is to provide grants to community and faith-based organizations that have had limited opportunities to compete for government funds. EDD accepted applications in two tiers—one for organizations with little experience in serving clients or accessing grant programs, the other for more established organizations.⁵

To publicize the program EDD sent approximately 30,000 letters to California organizations with 501(c)(3) designations, with approximately 5,700 groups making inquiries and 230 submitting proposals to EDD (LAO, 2002). After reviewing the proposals, EDD submitted a ranked list of the top proposals in each tier to the Governor, who made the final funding decisions.

Initial Research Design and Conceptual Challenges

The literature offers several hypotheses about the likely effectiveness of different types of organizations serving hard-to-employ individuals. The hypothesis under-girding faith-based policy initiatives is that the commitments, culture, and/or resources of faith-related organizations have a unique potential to change lives in a manner that promotes employment and related social goals (Cisneros, 1996; Cnaan, Wineburg, and Boodie, 2000; Glenn, 2000; Monsma, 1996). Specific features of faith-related organizations hypothesized to contribute to their success include community connections and legitimacy, holistic and highly personal attention to the material and spiritual needs of clients, attention to changing inner attitudes and motivations, a more inviting and less bureaucratic organizational culture, and—more controversially—the incorporation of specific religious practices (e.g., prayer, Bible study) into work with clients.

Another hypothesis is that larger and more established employment and training organizations (whether faith-related or not) with professional staffs and extensive community networks are better equipped to work with hard-to-employ populations (Kramer, Nightingale, et al., 2002; Smith and Sosin, 2001). For example, one study finds that workforce development organizations with frequent, close, and long-term contact with employers create good community reputations and are thus better at placing any individual in a job (Harrison and Weiss, 1998).

The importance of follow-up mentoring and counseling in successful job training programs is also well established (Harrison and Weiss, 1998). By making use of volunteers or deeply committed staff, it may be that community and faith-based organizations can excel at follow-up services, whereas mainstream workforce development programs often find them too expensive or of lower priority. Finally, some literature suggests that service delivery approaches

emphasizing faith may work best with particular types of clients, such as parolees (Solomon and Roman, 2001).

The number and variety of organizations funded under CFBI provide an ideal setting for investigating these and related hypotheses. To evaluate program efficacy from a variety of points of view, our evaluation design includes both quantitative and qualitative forms of analysis and is organized in three parts: 1) an initial scoping survey to gain comparative data on all the CFBI sites (as of January 2003 data collection is complete and being analyzed); 2) in-depth study of 14-18 selected sites, including site visits and semi-structured interviews with randomly-selected participants, organizational staff, and other key informants; and 3) archival data analysis using existing administrative databases.

Of the many conceptual challenges encountered in designing the research, three merit special mention: 1) What constitutes a legitimate comparison group or groups? 2) What program outcomes are significant and by what criteria is progress best measured? 3) What counts as being “faith-based”?

1. What constitutes a legitimate comparison group(s)? Great care must be taken in using administrative data to compare the effectiveness of employment programs. The definition of successful organizational performance will necessarily vary depending on client characteristics, organizational capacity, and the local job situation. We have designed three research strategies to address this issue. First, our qualitative analysis will help us to consider CFBI outcomes in light of differences in organizational capacity and in the local institutional and social context. Second, we will use administrative data to compare the employment outcomes of these 40 CFBI organizations with reported outcomes in government-run programs that target

somewhat similar clientele, including Welfare-to-Work programs. Third, we will look for meaningful comparison groups within our sample of 40 organizations.

When we analyzed the scoping surveys, two variables emerged as most significant in distinguishing among the participating organizations: the strength of the faith connection (high-to-moderate vs. low-to-no)⁶ and the longevity of the sponsoring organization (more established vs. newer).⁷ Based on this preliminary analysis, we have constructed a sampling frame for selecting CFBI programs for in-depth study, as follows:

		Strength of Faith Connection	
		High to Moderate	Low to No
Organizational Longevity	Newer	9	9
	More established	7	10

Numbers in cells represent the total cases in the sample, based on initial analysis of 35 of the 40 scoping surveys.

We will conduct in-depth case studies of at least three organizations from each of the four cells. By comparing employment and other outcomes across the cells, we will generate evidence related to questions such as: Does the strength of the faith connection matter? If so, what particular aspects of the faith connection appear to be most important in achieving employment goals? Are the advantages of more established organizations offset by the enthusiasm and innovative approaches of newer organizations? Are faith-based organizations (or their more secular counterparts) particularly well equipped to serve certain categories of clients?

2. What program outcomes are significant and by what criteria is progress best measured? It is already apparent that “success” means something different to different stakeholders, including EDD, participating CFBI organizations, local workforce development leaders, and sponsoring politicians. Our research design draws on traditional EDD outcome

measures while also seeking out the perspectives of stakeholders who may posit alternative ways to measure success.

EDD’s mission is to improve job acquisition, retention, and advancement. Our scoping interviews reveal that these goals matter to CFBI organizations too, but their workforce development efforts are often viewed as complementing their primary organizational mission, such as promoting sober living, providing transitional housing, or offering counseling services. Many CFBI organizations place a high value on giving clients hope, building their self-esteem, and creating a sense of family within the program—outcomes that can make an important difference in the lives of participants but that may or may not be linkable to measurable gains in employment. Given their clientele, the organizations often prefer to measure success in small steps that administrative data do not capture, such as “whether a participant calls us when they can’t make an appointment,” or whether they “keep coming back” even when a job is not immediately forthcoming.

In addition to participant outcomes, it is important to consider how faith-based policy initiatives such as CFBI affect the overall performance of local workforce development systems (Campbell, 2002; Wineburg, 2001). With respect to these “system outcomes,” some observers express concern that faith-based programs may operate as an “alternative delivery system” that drains money from existing efforts (Chaves, 2001). Others see the possibility that faith-related organizations may become “new partners” that advance local goals and complement pre-existing efforts, particularly if there is careful dialogue about the respective strengths and limits of different organizations (Campbell, 2002; Wineburg, 2001).

3. **What counts as being “faith-based”?** The literature confirms the great variety of faith-related organizations—and the definition of a “faith-based” social service program is open to

competing interpretations (Campbell, 2002; Jeavons, 1998, Monsma and Mounts, 2002, Sider and Unruh, 2002, Smith and Sosin, 2001). For example, Monsma and Mounts (2002) distinguish secular nonprofits, faith-segmented, and faith-integrated organizations. Their distinction between faith-segmented and faith-integrated organizations is similar to the way Smith and Sosin (2001) distinguish the broader class of “faith-related” organizations with some institutional tie to a religious institution or authority from a narrower and much smaller group of “faith-based” organizations that more directly integrate religious practices into their delivery of services.

CFBI has funded community-based organizations with no faith connection, faith-related groups with programs that operate similarly to secular programs, and organizations whose faith connection is stronger and more integral to their work. Among the latter category, the nature of the faith connection is expressed in a variety of ways. One purpose of our in-depth case studies will be to explore the complex variations that exist in the field, taking note of patterns that may or may not conform to previous typologies.

Summary of CFBI Scoping Survey Evidence

Our scoping survey provides some preliminary information about CFBI programs and participants—based solely on the information provided by leaders of funded organizations—in the following areas: types of organizations funded, services provided, and population served.

What types of organizations are being funded? Twenty percent of the organizations surveyed say that the EDD funding was responsible for setting up their entire program, consistent with the initial intention of funding new organizations and/or those without previous government contracting experience. Of the 35 CFBI organizations from whom we currently have evidence, 10 organizations (29%) have little if any relationship to religious institutions, and the remaining organizations vary widely in the degree to which religious perspectives, resources, or

practices are integral to their work with participants. Almost all of the organizations with identified religious connections are Christian. Exceptions include a Jewish agency, one Native American organization, and one group with a core of Muslim staff, but who do not overtly portray their organization as Muslim to the public.

We asked CFBI organizational representatives an open-ended question: “Does faith play any direct or indirect role in your program?” The responses clustered in four categories, as depicted in Table 1. These data give a preliminary indication that CFBI is succeeding in mobilizing tangible resources, organizational commitments, and perspectives that are characteristic of religious institutions and faith communities. At the same time, only 4 of the 35 organizations (11%) mentioned integrating identifiably faith-based practices into their programs, and those were careful to characterize these practices as optional for participants.⁸ Future fieldwork will explore the correspondence between organizational self-characterizations and actual practices.

As Smith and Sosin (2001) have noted, the relationship of faith to organizational culture is complex, and the degree to which faith-related organizations represent a clear alternative to more secular service delivery is an open question. We asked organizational representatives what made their programs unique, and their answers clustered in four categories: program culture, the holistic and integrated nature of the services offered, location/access, and the presence of highly committed staff, many of whom share backgrounds or life experiences similar to those of participants (Table 2). While it appears in many cases that these features are linked to a faith perspective, it is also true that few if any are necessarily unique to faith-related organizations. Our analysis will seek to identify effective/promising practices and to discover whether these practices could reasonably be applied by *any* workforce development organization (government,

secular nonprofit, or faith-related). In addition, we expect to gain evidence about whether faith-related organizations do or do not have unique characteristics that enable them to sustain efforts to serve hardest-to-employ individuals.

What types of services are being provided? Drawing on the categories constructed by Monsma (2002), we asked organizational representatives to tell us what types of services they provided to program participants (Table 3). It is apparent that most CFBI organizations offer multiple services (mean=8.5), and there appears to be an equal emphasis on both “job-oriented” and “life-oriented” services.

We also asked what the EDD funding had enabled the organizations to do that they would not otherwise have been able to accomplish (Table 4). The most frequent responses—the ability to hire staff and to develop new or refine existing programs—were relatively predictable. But the data reveal some less obvious points; for example, a quarter of respondents used EDD funds to purchase computers. Many went out of their way to tell us that providing basic computer literacy is critical to their work since their participants typically have little or no experience with, or access to, computers. Another benefit the EDD grant conferred was greater legitimacy in the eyes of the community—particularly for smaller organizations previously relegated to the fringe of existing service delivery networks and now being given a “seat at the table.” By contrast, some established organizations stated frankly that this is another in a long line of government grants, even while expressing appreciation and enthusiasm for the specific contributions CFBI is making to their organization and its clients.

Are CFBI Organizations Reaching Individuals Not Previously Served? The responses we received to questions on this topic suggest that CFBI is successful in engaging the intended participants, the majority of whom are judged to not have previously participated in

workforce development programs. For example, when asked, “In general, have your participants used other workforce development services and programs?” 77% of organizations responded “almost none,” “a few,” or “some,” while only 23% said “most.” We plan to analyze this question more definitively later using administrative data.

We also asked organizational representatives to characterize the types of participants in their programs (Table 5). These data suggest that, as program founders hoped, CFBI is reaching the hardest-to-employ population. The homeless, parolees, and recovering substance abusers are the most frequently mentioned participants.

Conclusion

Our research will generate rigorous evidence about the variety, nature and comparative effectiveness of faith-related organizations with which we hope to inform the debate over faith-based policy initiatives. We also hope to identify ways of approaching faith-based initiatives with greater sensitivity to the needs of multiple stakeholders. Ideally, this study will also serve as a source of ideas for improving the performance of all workforce development organizations within the local systems in which they must operate. The first full report on the CFBI evaluation will be available later in 2003.

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Table 1. Roles Played by Faith in CFBI Organizations (by category of response; N=35)

Category of Response	Sample Comments (redacted)
<p>No role or very indirect role</p> <p>N=10 29%</p>	<p>We don't do that like some other organizations. We recognize clients' unique characteristics, including faith and spirituality. We respond to faith questions if they come up. We have a (limited) partnership with a faith-related organization.</p>
<p>Source of motivation or approach to work</p> <p>N=18 51%</p>	<p>We are a sanctuary, a place where people feel safe and not judged. Faith is why we are doing this type of (difficult) work. Without our faith we would never have started this kind of work. I feel called to do this work. Our staff has a caring spirit and a sense of hope for participants, who respond to the heartfelt treatment they receive—in contrast to place where staff work for a paycheck or are just pushing numbers. We view ourselves as doing practical religion in the world. We are calling out people's God-given abilities by helping refugees connect to American work culture. We are building community by intensive relationship building with individuals and their communities, slowly developing trust. We are educating mainstream church members about the realities of the poor. When you are dealing with hard to employ folks, and disappointment, faith is a good thing to have.</p>
<p>Source of tangible resources to support the work</p> <p>N=23 66%</p>	<p>Organization is located in or near a church. Organization exists as an outreach ministry of a church. We receive referrals from churches. We refer our clients to church pastors. Being clearly faith-related means that community members are more willing to employ our participants (often taking a perceived risk to do so).</p>
<p>Offer optional faith-based practices</p> <p>N=4 11%</p>	<p>Our participants get pastoral counseling from pastor/program leader. We offer optional Bible studies/prayer on site. We offer (not force) the Christian lifestyle as hope for a brighter future.</p>

Table 2. What CFBI Organizations Say Makes Them Unique (by category of response, N=35)

Unique Feature	Sample Comments (redacted)
Committed “Bi-cultural” staff N=8 23%	Staff can link the worlds of employers with those of participants. Staff have lives like the participants/are graduates of program. Staff are in touch with the community served. Every staff member here was either homeless or incarcerated at one time.
Program culture N=17 49%	We work with individuals as long as it takes. We have a home-like, family-style atmosphere. We take a personalized, caring approach. We have taken the time to build trust with the community. Our reputation is for really listening to people to find out how we can help.
Holistic, Integrated Services N=18 51%	We deal with the whole person, body, mind, and spirit. We work intensively with a small number of participants. We piggyback on other programs within our organization. We have therapy services in addition to the job coaching. We place people in housing, but also get them jobs so they keep it.
Location/Access N=7 20%	We are located where the target population lives. We see folks everyday rather than episodically. We accept walk-ins rather than by appointment only. We are more than a 9-5 program, people can come all day. We are the only workforce program in this area of county.
Other N=8 23%	People can choose us freely. We are both the trainer <i>and</i> the employer. We work with labor unions. We have a direct connection to jobs in the television production industry.

Table 3. Services offered by CFBI organizations (N=35)

Job Oriented	Number of Orgs	% of Orgs
Job Search	30	86%
Education/literacy	11	31%
Education/ESL	8	23%
Education/GED	13	37%
Education/vocational	26	74%
Job Placement	27	77%
Job Internships	14	40%
Client Assessment	32	91%
Other Job Services	29	83%
Life Oriented		
Work Preparedness	30	86%
Life Skills	28	80%
Mentoring	25	71%
Substance Abuse	19	54%
Other Life-oriented	7	20%
Mean Number of Services	8.5	

Table 4. What CFBI Organizations Did with EDD money (N=35)

<u>Use</u>	<u>Frequency of Mentions</u>
Develop/add programs	14 (40%)
Hire staff	14 (40%)
Purchase computers	9 (26%)
Made whole program possible	7 (20%)
Facility improvement or expansion	5 (14%)
Transportation	4 (11%)

Note: Organizations could mention more than one use.

Table 5. Types of Participants Being Served by CFBI Programs (N=35)

<u>Population</u>	<u>Number of Organizations Serving</u>
Homeless/at risk of homelessness	13 (37%)
Parolees	11 (31%)
Low-income/welfare	10 (29%)
Recovering substance abusers	7 (20%)
Youth/foster care youth	7 (20%)
<i>Others:</i> (mental health, refugees/immigrants Neighborhood residents/place based, domestic Violence survivors, autistic youth, illiterate)	1 mention each

Note: Organizations could mention more than one participant group.

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² At this point these characterizations are based on the self-reports of participating organizations, in response to questions on our initial scoping surveys. Later stages of the evaluation will supplement these reports with site-visits, participant interviews, and interviews with existing workforce development officials.

³ This phone survey consisted of 22 semi-structured questions, covering basic aspects of the organization, its CFBI program, and participants. It was conducted with the CFBI program director/leader at each site. As of the end of December 2002, 35 of the 40 organizations have been surveyed.

⁴ The switch to WIA funds in Year 2 meant that the originally funded organizations had to adjust to WIA regulations, including tighter restrictions on who could be served. One question for the evaluation is to assess the impact this shift has had on the programs.

⁵ The more experienced organizations could apply for individual grants of up to \$600,000 from a \$3 million portion of the original allocation, while the less experienced organizations could submit proposals for up to \$200,000 of the remaining \$2 million.

⁶ In its first year CFBI funds went exclusively to faith-related organizations, but after a court challenge the program subsequently is open to any community based, 501 c (3) organization. The funded programs vary significantly in their more secular and/or more faith-related features.

⁷ Based on the scoping surveys, we are using six years longevity as the dividing line between newer and more established organizations. Our working premise is that organizational longevity brings along a lot of related variables that may influence organizational character and performance, such as size, degree of professionalism, degree of dependence on a charismatic (founding) leader, and the degree to which the organization has well-developed networks in the community.

⁸ In coding responses to the survey we looked for statements indicating that religious practices such as Bible studies, prayer, or pastoral counseling either took place on site or were led by the same staff that run the employment program. All respondents were careful to note the voluntary nature of any such activity.