

Charitable Choice: Top 10 Tips for Public Officials

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- 1. Inform Recipients.** When a provider is faith-based, make sure recipients know about its religious character, their freedom not to engage in religious activities, and their right to receive services from an alternative provider.
- 2. Alternatives.** Be prepared to offer an accessible, high quality alternative service to any recipient who objects to a faith-based provider. Make advance arrangements with a different provider in the same location, plan access and transportation to a nearby provider, or maintain a residual government capacity to provide services.
- 3. Religion is Not Toxic.** Ensure the religious liberty of recipients without presuming that faith is toxic. A recipient troubled by a faith-based provider may want another religious provider, not a secular service. Many of the needy are people of faith and desire assistance that acknowledges their convictions.
- 4. Allies.** Collaboration means working together to achieve the common aim of assisting the needy while also respecting the differences between government and faith-based organizations. Allied providers are more than vendors; they retain their freedom, their right to advocate on behalf of clients, and their responsibility to speak to policy.
- 5. Employment Rights.** The biggest barrier to greater cooperation between the faith community and public welfare is not allowing faith-based providers to hire and fire on the basis of religion. Some religious organizations choose to hire without regard to faith, but many insist on religious criteria in order to retain their distinctive missions. Contract language forbidding them to use religion in hiring is illegal under Charitable Choice and must be eliminated.
- 6. Vouchers.** Voucher arrangements are better than contracting for preserving the independence of faith-based organizations and giving recipients choice. Where possible, redesign services and procurement policies so that a range of organizations can provide services and each recipient has the chance to select the most effective and compatible provider.
- 7. Structures for Cooperation.** Many congregations and faith-based nonprofits are too small to handle the service volume of a typical contract. To utilize their strengths and allow them to participate, alternatives are needed: voucherized services, contracting with a nonprofit intermediary that links congregations, a lead agency that subcontracts with smaller groups.
- 8. Training and Assistance.** Government can help prepare faith-based organizations to provide authorized services by offering training in contracting, record-keeping, and regulations, and by assisting them in planning and presenting service proposals. Such assistance should be offered to all small-scale nonprofits and community organizations.
- 9. Affirmative Outreach.** Many faith-based organizations have not been part of the human services system. They don't know the system and their names are unlikely to appear on vendor lists, mailing lists of activist organizations, or in multi-denominational or multi-faith directories. Work through every accessible network to begin to build bridges to them.
- 10. Bill of Rights.** Past practices and assumptions about appropriate church-state relations have left a legacy of distrust between government and faith communities. Government should acknowledge its mistakes and make amends with a statement of the rights of faith-based providers. This would confirm the government's intention to treat them as allies and it would be a valuable guide to both sides if there is dispute about what actions are permissible.