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The Impact of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations on the Lives of Low Income Families

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**Faith- and Community-Based Services: How Can They Complement the Public Workforce
Investment System?**

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The public workforce investment system—the taxpayer funded system for providing job training and placement assistance to job seekers in the U.S.—aims to serve all job seekers, but many of those most in need of help do not use it. Language barriers, dislike or fear of government agencies, limited awareness of available services, and difficulties using public resources provided in a self-service manner (such as accessing job listings at computer kiosks) are some of the challenges that may limit the accessibility of the system. While not traditionally partners in the public workforce investment system, small, grassroots faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) may be well positioned to serve people who do not currently use these services. Some job seekers may be more likely to access services from FBCOs because they typically have earned the trust of local community members and understand their needs. Moreover, FBCOs often provide personal, flexible, and comprehensive services that are well suited to people who face multiple barriers to employment.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has recognized that by enhancing existing employment services and serving some of the neediest populations, FBCOs have the potential to be valuable partners in the public workforce investment system. Collaborating with FBCOs may also allow the government to leverage its workforce investment funds by taking advantage of the volunteers, donated goods and services, and other resources FBCOs are often able to access. Moreover, an FBCO's knowledge of its community and its needs may help public workforce investment agencies plan and deliver services more effectively.

Collaborations between government agencies and FBCOs may not, however, come easily. In many communities, publicly-funded workforce agencies and grassroots FBCOs have little experience working together. Government agencies may not know about the work of FBCOs, and FBCOs may be unaware of the ways that public agencies could help their clients. Each may perceive the other's mission as different from its own.

Cognizant of the potential barriers to these collaborations, DOL has since 2002 granted over \$30 million to promote and sustain collaborations between FBCOs and the public workforce investment system. These grants have been made to FBCOs, states, intermediaries, and Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). Intermediaries are larger nonprofit faith- or community-based agencies that can facilitate collaboration with smaller, grassroots organizations. WIBs are state or local entities that oversee the local public workforce investment systems.

This paper describes findings from a descriptive evaluation of 12 grants awarded to WIBs in July 2004 to promote collaboration with FBCOs in their communities. Each WIB received roughly \$500,000; half was to be awarded to FBCOs to develop and implement the initiative during an 18-month period. In the sections that follow we describe the policy context for this DOL initiative, the grant program and organizations that participated, the evaluation and methods, and key findings from the evaluation.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

DOL's desire to encourage the participation of FBCOs in the workforce investment system grew out of two policy initiatives. First, the federal government launched an initiative to remove some of the barriers faced by FBCOs—and FBOs in particular—in accessing federal funds to provide social services. This initiative began with the charitable choice provisions in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and continued in the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Second, the reform of the workforce investment system initiated by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) stressed the need for universal access to services and responsiveness to community needs.

Efforts to Level the Playing Field for Faith- and Community-Based Organizations

Concerned that FBCOs were underutilized in providing social services and that they faced unnecessary barriers to partnering with government agencies, the federal government has acted to level the playing field by lowering these barriers. For example, PRWORA includes provisions, commonly known as “charitable choice,” that allow Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program funds to be used for contracts and grants with FBOs, including those that because of their explicitly religious character had been previously barred from receiving government funds. Before the legislation, FBOs receiving government funds were required to “neutralize” their religious nature and provide services in a secular fashion; the charitable choice provisions allowed FBOs not only to make use of religious symbols and scripture while delivering federally funded services but also to retain religious standards for organizational governance and staffing. PRWORA permitted FBOs to discriminate on the basis of religion in their hiring decisions, hiring only co-religionists if they so chose. Similar provisions were included in legislation covering three other federal program areas:

- Welfare to Work, a DOL grants program, in 1997¹
- Community Service Block Grants, a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) program, in 1998
- Certain Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) programs, in 2000

On January 29, 2001, the White House issued the first two of five executive orders designed to further reduce barriers to federal funding of social services through FBCOs. These orders established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and centers for faith-based and community initiatives in five cabinet-level agencies, including DOL. They also

¹ The Welfare to Work grants program has now expired.

directed all federal agencies to audit their rules and internal operations for policies and practices that discouraged or disadvantaged participation by FBCOs. In December 2002, the White House provided additional guidance to federal agencies “to ensure equal protection of the laws for faith-based and community organizations, to further the national effort to expand opportunities for, and strengthen the capacity of, faith-based and other community organizations so that they better meet social needs in America’s communities...” (Executive Order 13279). This guidance echoed many of the themes embodied in the charitable choice provisions.²

Reform of the Workforce Investment System: The Workforce Investment Act

The goal of WIA is to provide universal access to the information, services, training, and other tools Americans need to enter and advance in the workforce. To promote the integration of service delivery, WIA mandated the establishment of One-Stop Career Centers, intended to bring together in one location public and private resources as well as local, state, and federal programs to provide employment-related services and supports. The centers provide some services and are the point of entry and referral for others.

Including FBCOs as partners in the One-Stop Career Center system is consistent with several key principles of WIA:

- ***Universal Access to Services.*** An important tenet of WIA is that all job seekers should be able to access the programs and services offered by the One-Stop Career Center system. Including FBCOs as partners in the One-Stop system can improve its accessibility by removing or alleviating some of the barriers to using services available through the One-Stop Career Centers.
- ***Responsiveness to Community Needs.*** WIA sought to empower local leaders and organizations to implement workforce investment systems that respond to the needs of their communities. It gave local WIBs the option to use any service providers—

² The other executive orders established the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and established faith-based and community initiative centers in five additional federal agencies. The CCF builds the capacity of FBCOs by funding intermediary organizations that provide technical assistance to FBCOs and by awarding capacity building grants to FBCOs.

including FBCOs—that meet certain standards. Many communities need intensive and comprehensive services for segments of their populations that are not typically provided at One-Stop Career Centers. Collaborating with FBCOs may be an effective way to fill this service gap.

WIA was largely silent on the issue of service provision by FBOs. It differed, however, from PRWORA in noting that the programs it funded were not exempt from the nondiscrimination clauses of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibiting the use of religion as a criterion for employment.

THE GRANT PROGRAM

The evaluation described in this paper covers 12 grants awarded to WIBs in July 2004 (Figure I). The original period of performance for these WIB grantees was 18 months, but most chose to extend their performance period by 3 to 6 months, through either the first or second quarter of 2006. The overarching objectives of this grant program were (1) to increase the number of FBCOs providing services within local workforce investment systems; (2) to expand access to local workforce investment system services for populations that have not traditionally used them; and (3) to document innovative partnerships between FBCOs and local workforce investment systems.

DOL required WIB grantees to award at least half of the grant funds to grassroots FBCOs.

To be eligible, an FBCO had to meet the following conditions:

- Provide social and human services as a major part of its mission.
- Be headquartered in the community in which it provided services (thus, local affiliates of national social service organizations, such as Catholic Charities, Jewish Family Services, Lutheran Social Services, and the Salvation Army were not eligible for these awards).
- Have a total social service budget of \$350,000 or less, or have six or fewer full-time equivalent employees.

The number of grant awards varied, from 3 to 35 FBCOs across the 12 sites. Over two-thirds of these subawardees were faith-based, with more than half of these affiliated with a church congregation. The rest were secular community-based organizations. FBCOs varied widely in size and experience: some were well established and had long provided employment services, while others were inexperienced, relied entirely on volunteer staff, and had small budgets before receiving the subaward. To implement the grant projects, FBCOs relied on a small number of staff, usually one or two staff or full time equivalents. Most staff that FBCOs hired for the grant projects had previously worked with the target population identified for the grant, but few had experience providing employment services.

EVALUATION AND METHODS

The main goal of the evaluation was to provide information to DOL, the workforce investment system, and local collaboration partners about the extent to which the grants promoted sustainable collaborations between FBCOs and local workforce investment systems. Because the evaluation is descriptive in nature, it has focused on understanding the strategies used to promote collaboration—by documenting implementation strategies and challenges, identifying promising practices, and gleaned lessons that can be useful to other WIBs and workforce investment partners seeking to collaborate with FBCOs. Three main research questions guided the evaluation:

- What strategies did grantees use to promote collaboration?
- To what extent were the strategies effective?
- What implementation lessons did grantees and other collaboration partners learn?

Data for the evaluation were collected primarily during two rounds of site visits. The first round, conducted in spring 2005, consisted of a one-day visit to each WIB grantee. During those

visits, research team members conducted interviews with grantee staff as well as with staff at the WIBs, One-Stop Career Centers, FBCOs, and intermediaries. MPR conducted a second round of visits to the 12 WIB grantees in winter and spring 2005–2006; site visits were timed to occur approximately one to two months before the end of each grantee’s performance period. During those visits, which lasted approximately one and a half days, team members interviewed staff from the grantee and intermediary, if appropriate. Researchers also visited the offices of three FBCOs at each site and interviewed the directors and selected frontline staff. In addition to information collected during site visits, we also analyzed grantee-collected data on levels of enrollment, services provided, and the demographic characteristics and employment outcomes of participants.

KEY FINDINGS

In this section, we first describe how the grants were used by WIBs and FBCOs, including models for integrating FBCOs into the public workforce investment system, outreach strategies used by FBCOs, and the services they provided to job seekers. We then discuss lessons learned from the evaluation about the potential benefits to public workforce investment systems of forming partnerships with FBCOs, the barriers to collaboration, and steps that can be taken to build productive collaborations.

Models for Integrating FBCOs

WIB grantees used three main approaches to integrate FBCOs into the public workforce investment system. In these three approaches, the roles of FBCOs included (1) recruiting job seekers and referring them to local workforce investment service providers, (2) providing specialized job readiness training tailored to the needs of targeted populations, and (3) offering comprehensive employment services in a community location.

Recruit and Refer to the Workforce System. In this approach, WIBs collaborated with FBCOs to conduct outreach to hard-to-serve job seekers, provide them with basic supportive services, and refer them to local workforce system service providers for job placement. This model took advantage of the ability of FBCOs to reach out to hard-to-serve populations and then link them to the workforce investment system. WIBs using this approach often made smaller subawards to a larger number of FBCOs, because FBCOs did not have to provide job placement services. This approach is useful for raising awareness of workforce system services among underserved populations and for creating a network of FBCOs that can serve as partners with the workforce investment system. Since FBCOs refer clients to One-Stop Career Centers, this approach requires that One-Stops have sufficient resources and capacity to serve FBCO referrals, who often require intensive, tailored employment services. In addition, an effective referral process is needed to ensure that job seekers referred by FBCOs actually visit the workforce service provider and obtain the services they need.

Provide Specialized Job Readiness Training. Some FBCOs assumed the role of job readiness training provider. In addition to offering a structured course tailored to the needs of the target population, these FBCOs were often responsible for providing job placement services for clients who completed the training. Under this approach, FBCOs either needed training on the curricula or needed to hire an instructor for their course. An alternative version of this approach, used in Ottawa County is for FBCOs to conduct outreach, provide job readiness training, and refer clients to a One-Stop Career Center for job placement services.

Offer Comprehensive Services. Grantees relying on this approach often felt that hard-to-reach job seekers would be more likely to use employment services offered in their own communities by familiar service providers. The offices of FBCOs were often places where the target populations had already sought other services or information, and where they felt

comfortable doing so. WIBs using this approach relied on FBCOs to provide a comprehensive combination of employment and social services for clients. For this approach to be successful, FBCOs must have the capacity to provide job placement services, including the ability to develop relationships with employers that will hire clients. Some FBCOs offered job placements services that were more individualized than services available through the workforce system to meet the specific needs of hard-to-serve populations. For example, FBCOs in Pinellas County tailored employment services for ex-offenders by addressing the challenges of finding a job with a criminal record and finding employers willing to hire ex-offenders. Alternatively, in some sites the One-Stop Career Center staff provided employment services or training at the FBCO site.

Outreach Strategies

Grantees reported that outreach to hard-to-serve populations was a strength of FBCO service provision and a success of the collaboration projects. WIBs relied on FBCOs to reach out to populations that faced barriers to accessing services at the One-Stop Career Centers—such as limited-English speakers who face communication problems, immigrants intimidated by government agencies, or low-income people without access to transportation. FBCOs were uniquely positioned to fill this role, because they already had relationships with the populations targeted by the grant and were often located in the communities they served. Although target populations varied across grant sites, FBCOs reported that grant participants had similar barriers to employment, including the following (see Figure II):

- ***Lack of Education.*** A common barrier to employment reported by FBCOs in 10 of the 12 grant sites was a lack of education. While some FBCOs targeted youth or high school dropouts, the high-need populations served by other subawardees often had low levels of educational attainment as well. Educational barriers included lack of a high school diploma or GED as well as limited basic literacy skills.
- ***Limited English Proficiency.*** Subawardees in two-thirds of grant sites served participants with limited English proficiency, including immigrants from Poland, Ethiopia, the Caribbean, and Mexico, as well as refugees from other Spanish-

speaking countries and from Africa. In addition to limited English skills, some of these groups faced cultural barriers to employment, such as not understanding workplace norms in the United States.

- **Limited Work History.** Job seekers from the hard-to-serve populations targeted by FBCOs typically lacked work experience. As a result, many clients had difficulty developing a resume and had limited knowledge of appropriate workplace behavior and employer expectations.
- **Incarceration and Criminal Record.** FBCOs in more than half the grant sites reported serving ex-offenders who had recently been released from prison; in three grant sites, FBCOs targeted incarcerated people before their release. For example, in Lansing, New Way In provided services to inmates of the state prison prior to their release, and Eaglevision served ex-offenders from the county jail. Ex-offenders had difficulty finding employers willing to hire applicants with criminal records. Many also needed help obtaining basic forms of identification needed to apply for jobs.
- **Drug and Alcohol Problems.** According to FBCO staff, drug and alcohol problems were prevalent among the homeless people and ex-offenders targeted by some grant sites. One FBCO served job seekers referred from a drug rehabilitation program in the community.
- **Unstable Housing.** While one subawardee in Pinellas County focused its grant activities in part on the inner-city homeless population, other FBCOs also served participants who lacked stable housing. For example, the Manchester site provided services to transient youth. Incarcerated people served in many sites lacked stable housing options after their release.
- **Lack of Transportation.** Many of the high-poverty neighborhoods targeted by FBCOs lacked access to public transportation. In Anne Arundel, for example, public housing residents served by the grant did not have access to adequate public transportation. Transportation was also a barrier for people in the rural areas surrounding Houma, Louisiana, where subawardees provided services.

Many of the populations served by FBCO subawardees faced more than one of these barriers to employment. For example, two subawardees in Anne Arundel located in a public housing project served single mothers who had no high school diploma or GED, limited work experience, and limited transportation options. In Hartford, one FBCO worked with recent African-Caribbean immigrants who had limited English skills, problems with drugs and alcohol, and low levels of education. In Lansing, an FBCO serving ex-offenders found that many had

mental health problems, struggled with drug and alcohol issues, and had unstable housing situations.

The most common strategies FBCOs used to reach out to populations targeted for the grants were to recruit job seekers from groups the FBCO already served, conduct outreach in the community, solicit referrals from other community organizations, and attract job seekers in new community locations.

Recruiting job seekers from existing client bases. Ten grantees collaborated with FBCOs that already served the target populations. These FBCOs included agencies operating soup kitchens in the target communities, community centers for immigrants, re-entry programs for ex-offenders, and service centers for the homeless, as well as churches that offered supportive services for needy individuals in the community. Other FBCOs did not provide services directly but served instead as sources of information and referrals. These FBCOs included a Native American tribal agency and an Ethiopian immigrant association. FBCOs found it easy to recruit job seekers by informing those who came in for other services about the availability of employment assistance and by co-locating employment-related activities with existing programs. For example, a Native American tribal agency invited members who visited its office to use a computer lab operated under the grant.

Conducting outreach in the community. FBCOs can be useful partners for advertising and raising awareness of workforce investment services for hard-to-serve job seekers. Many FBCOs had experience in the community and knew the appropriate channels for disseminating information. Most FBCOs distributed fliers to businesses and social service agencies in the community. Other outreach methods included discussing grant activities on a local radio show, advertising in community newspapers, and announcing the availability of services in church bulletins. Some FBCOs also approached job seekers directly by speaking with people on the

street or making door-to-door visits in the target community. In addition, FBCOs in over half the sites reported that community members—often those who participated in grant activities—spread information through word of mouth.

Soliciting referrals from other community organizations. FBCOs using this strategy typically employed staff well-connected in the community who had relationships with other social service and education organizations. For example, the director of a small FBCO used her contacts with other organizations—developed over 12 years of working in the community—to cultivate referrals. At one point, the FBCO received about 20 referrals in a single week from a variety of social service organizations. Other FBCOs relied on referrals from women’s shelters, drug and alcohol clinics, YWCAs, and Girls Clubs.

Attracting job seekers in new community locations. Some grantees worked with FBCOs to recruit hard-to-serve job seekers in a new location. This type of outreach typically took place in areas without a nearby One-Stop Career Center—such as a public housing complex, a Mexican immigrant community, and a school for the hard of hearing—or in detention facilities where individuals preparing for release could not leave to visit a One-Stop Career Center. FBCOs that used this approach could not rely on an existing client base or knowledge of the community. Instead, FBCOs that implemented this strategy successfully hired staff from the target population, including ex-offenders, hard-of-hearing individuals, and former public housing residents, to conduct outreach.

Adding New or Enhanced Services to the One-Stop Career Center System

Because One-Stop Career Centers are designed to serve a broad population of job seekers, they might not have the capacity to provide intensive services for people who face multiple barriers to employment. Therefore, some WIBs viewed the role of FBCOs as expanding the nature and type of services offered through the One-Stop Career Center system, with a focus on

addressing the intensive service needs of hard-to-serve populations. WIBs partnered with FBCOs to address job seekers' short- and long-term social service needs, provide specialized job readiness training, offer an individualized service approach, and tailor employment services for targeted populations. Site visit informants reported that these new and enhanced services improved the ability of the One-Stop Career Center system to assist underserved populations.

Addressing Short- and Long-Term Social Service Needs. It is not uncommon for One-Stop Career Centers to offer supportive services directly or through referrals, but they may not have the same capacity as FBCOs to provide this assistance consistently or intensively over time. In all 12 sites, FBCOs offered social services and/or referrals to address job seekers' basic short-term needs and prepare them for job search and placement. For example, FBCOs assisted ex-offenders with obtaining identification and housing assistance; provided homeless job seekers with housing referrals and access to food and clothing; and offered immigrants help with translation services, information on citizenships, and referrals for adult education. Other supportive services FBCOs provided included referrals to drug and alcohol counseling, legal aid, and child care, as well as transportation assistance and counseling.

While WIB grantees partnered with some FBCOs already providing social services for the target population, other FBCOs lacked the experience or capacity to provide these services directly and typically relied on referrals. In one site, a church provided meals to clients directly through its soup kitchen and made referrals for housing, literacy tutoring, substance abuse counseling, and legal aid. This strategy requires FBCOs to have or form relationships with other social service agencies in the community.

Providing Specialized Job Readiness and Basic Skills Training. Many of the people targeted by the grant were unprepared to begin a job search and lacked the basic life skills needed to find and retain a job. Five WIBs directed FBCOs to prepare these hard-to-serve

clients for employment by offering a specialized job readiness course. While other WIBs directed FBCOs to provide job readiness assistance, FBCOs in these sites provided well-structured job readiness training that followed a specific curriculum.

WIBs typically partnered with FBCOs that had no experience providing a job readiness course. The only exception was Washington, DC, where the WIB made subawards to FBCOs that already provided job readiness training courses. FBCOs used a variety of job readiness training curricula, including commercially available curricula such as Training Inc. and Phillip Roy, a state TANF curriculum, and a course developed for the grant by a community college professor. Most WIBs trained FBCO staff on the curricula, through sessions ranging from a half-day workshop to a multiweek course provided by the curriculum developer.

Although they used different curricula, the training courses provided by FBCOs covered a similar range of topics, including both job readiness skills, which are focused on how to behave at work, and life skills, which consist of general principles that an independent, responsible adult needs to follow in order to function successfully in society. Topics in the job readiness components of the training included how to dress for work, conflict resolution, honesty, teamwork, organization, and time management. Life skills included money management, parenting, basic hygiene, and assistance with legal issues. One FBCO offered training that also incorporated a session on office skills and a job simulation experience.

Offering Individualized Services. One-Stop Career Center staff can help customers use the workforce investment system, but resource and time constraints often prevent them from providing the intensive, one-on-one assistance needed by job seekers facing multiple personal and family challenges. FBCOs offered hard-to-serve job seekers an individualized approach to employment services, one that allowed them to develop relationships with customers, provide continuous follow-up, and address basic social services needs. Rather than provide new services

for the One-Stop Career Center system, this role encouraged FBCOs to enhance existing services with an individualized approach. Eight of the twelve WIB grantees identified the FBCOs' personalized service approach as a strength of collaborations.

FBCO staff typically spent more time working individually with hard-to-serve job seekers than would be possible for staff at the One-Stop Career Center. WIBs described FBCO staff as offering a "personal touch" or "nurturing approach" to service provision in which they developed close relationships with the individuals they served. WIBs reported that FBCOs offered individual attention and assistance for hard-to-serve job seekers whose needs could not be met in the self-serve environment of the One-Stop Career Center. For example, in Cumberland County an FBCO spent two to three hours with each new client discussing personal issues, assisting in preparation of a resume, and beginning the search for a job. In Ottawa County, FBCO staff assessed clients and familiarized themselves with their lives, skills, work histories, and goals. An FBCO staff member in Anne Arundel reported that she worked hard to earn customers' trust, helping them obtain basic documentation and talking with them individually about their job search. According to WIBs, FBCOs in other sites took the time to identify clients' strengths and understand their learning styles.

Some FBCOs were willing to spend time outside regular working hours to provide workshops or assist clients with personal problems. For example, an FBCO director in Lansing provided her phone number to clients so they could call her on weekends and evenings to discuss personal issues requiring immediate attention, such as evictions or court appearances, or to discuss upcoming job interviews. She reported receiving 10 phone calls from customers in one weekend. In Pinellas and Cumberland counties, FBCO staff met with clients or held support group meetings in the evenings; job readiness classes in Houma were scheduled to meet the needs of the clients.

WIB and One-Stop Career Center staff identified a number of characteristics that contributed to the ability of FBCOs to take this personalized approach to service provision. FBCO staff typically had a strong commitment to the people they served and a passion for their work. Job seekers from hard-to-serve populations often trusted FBCOs because they had a history of providing services, a well-known presence in the community, staff who understood them, and sometimes staff who came from the community itself. Importantly, compared with One-Stop Career Centers, the grants offered FBCOs more time and resources to focus on a smaller pool of hard-to-serve clients.

Tailoring Employment Services. Certain hard-to-serve populations face unique challenges in searching for a job and maintaining employment. For example, a criminal record limits the types of jobs available, and people with disabilities need a job that fits their abilities and skills. FBCOs in a third of the grant sites provided employment services, including job search and job placement assistance, tailored to the specific needs of a defined population targeted by the grant. For example, staff discussed with ex-offenders how to handle a criminal background when applying and interviewing for a job. One FBCO developed a directory of employers in the community willing to hire ex-offenders. In Manchester, an FBCO serving deaf and hard-of-hearing youth developed job-shadowing opportunities to increase clients' awareness of the types of jobs that people with hearing impairments can perform. Clients at an FBCO in Pinellas County started their own weekly support group where single mothers could discuss parenting and other life issues. These efforts extended beyond job readiness trainings to assist clients in searching, applying, and preparing for a job.

Other FBCOs tailored workshops or classes to the targeted population. In addition to the specialized job readiness training described above, FBCOs provided other types of trainings

designed to address the needs of a particular population. Examples of these tailored trainings include:

- An FBCO in Washington, DC, serving disabled Hispanic job seekers held a class on social security and workplace rights for disabled people.
- In Houma, an FBCO provided job seekers in rural Louisiana with certification training for employment in the state's offshore oil industry.
- An FBCO in Manchester offered African immigrants a public speaking support group to address language and cultural issues.
- Several FBCOs serving immigrants offered training in English as a second language.

Lessons Learned

There is much to be learned from the experiences of the grantees—including both the successes and the shortcomings of their grant projects—about the potential for future partnerships between FBCOs and the workforce system. We have considered all the information collected about the 12 grant projects to glean a set of lessons that can be useful to other WIBs considering partnerships with FBCOs, either within the context of a specific grant program or simply as part of their ongoing implementation of WIA services. The lessons we have identified focus on three main questions: (1) Why collaborate with FBCOs? (2) What are the main barriers to collaboration? and (3) What steps can be taken to build productive partnerships?

Why Collaborate with FBCOs?

Partnerships with FBCOs can extend the workforce system's reach to underserved populations. In nearly all sites, FBCOs played a unique role in the workforce investment system by reaching out to, enrolling, and serving job seekers from populations typically underserved by local One-Stop Career Centers. Partnering with FBCOs may be a fruitful strategy for WIBs seeking to extend their reach to serve the neediest job seekers in their communities—people

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receiving public assistance, people with limited English skills, homeless people, and ex-offenders recently released from incarceration, as well as others with multiple needs.

FBCOs can provide services tailored to meet the needs of hard-to-serve job seekers. For example, several FBCOs targeted recent immigrants. Because these organizations were rooted in the community, they were able to provide services that were culturally sensitive and addressed the unique barriers to employment faced by these populations. Similarly, FBCOs targeting ex-offenders focused on identifying employers willing to hire them and helping job seekers obtain identification, housing, and other services necessary to prepare them for employment. In some sites, FBCOs arranged for volunteer or staff mentors to work one-on-one with job seekers facing multiple barriers, and they provided supportive services such as food, housing, clothing, and transportation.

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Carefully selected FBCOs can help job seekers with significant barriers to employment find jobs. While job placement rates varied across grantees, the grant projects demonstrated that FBCOs have the potential to help job seekers with significant barriers to employment. One-Stop Career Centers that are struggling to serve even a few job seekers with significant barriers may be able to improve their ability to place such people in jobs through collaboration with FBCOs.

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FBCOs can leverage other community resources. Assisting a job seeker with significant barriers to employment can require investment of more time and resources than One-Stop Career Centers can typically devote to one person. One potential benefit of partnering with FBCOs is that local workforce systems can leverage their limited resources by taking advantage of the volunteers and other donated goods and services that FBCOs often use to provide services.

What Are the Main Barriers to Collaboration?

FBCOs may be reluctant to apply for grants to collaborate with the workforce investment system. Grantees found recruiting FBCOs to be more difficult than expected, and competition

for the subawards was generally not intense. Grantees cited several factors that may have discouraged FBCOs from applying for subawards, including insufficient resources or experience to apply, concerns about federal grant reporting requirements, or a lack of capacity to meet grant requirements. Additionally, DOL's definition of FBCOs made many organizations in the community ineligible to participate because they did not meet the 'grassroots' definition.

One-Stop Career Centers and FBCOs have different organizational cultures. In most of the grant sites, workforce investment systems and grassroots FBCOs had little or no experience working together. Differences in organizational culture, and an initial lack of understanding of these differences, sometimes contributed to unrealistic expectations and frustration on both sides. For partners in the collaboration grant sites, frequent and ongoing communication between workforce and FBCO staff helped to ease this tension over time.

Many FBCOs have extensive capacity-building needs. FBCOs may be fairly new and inexperienced in grant management and direct service provision. Many lack a basic infrastructure for managing grant funds and delivering services. Below we describe the most common capacity-building needs of FBCOs.

- **FBCOs require substantial assistance in managing grants.** Most FBCOs in the study had little to no experience managing government grants before receiving the awards. As a result, a large majority of capacity building activities focused on developing FBCOs' ability to track participant outcomes, maintain financial records, and fulfill reporting requirements. FBCOs' limited capacity contributed to start-up delays, snags with service delivery, and problems with financial and programmatic reporting.
- **FBCOs may face challenges in hiring and managing staff.** Many FBCOs' lacked experience in hiring and managing staff. This led to either inadequate staffing for the projects or high staff turnover. In one site, for example, all four FBCOs experienced turnover in the project coordinator position. A common mistake was hiring staff with the wrong set of skills and experience. Staff turnover resulted in some disruptions in service delivery, but grantees noted progress in this area over time.
- **Many FBCOs lack experience in providing employment services.** FBCOs often had no experience delivering employment services such as job search assistance or job development. This lack of experience presented a challenge for grantees

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implementing the specialized job readiness training or comprehensive services models that required FBCOs to provide employment services.

What Steps Can Be Taken to Build Productive Collaborations?

Partner with organizations that have existing relationships with FBCOs to recruit FBCOs. While grantees used a variety of strategies to inform FBCOs about subaward opportunities, personal contacts by staff at workforce agencies or intermediaries that had already had a relationship with FBCOs appeared to be an effective strategy.

Select FBCOs with sufficient capacity to manage grants and provide services. The WIBs developed requests for proposals and relied on explicit criteria to rate and select FBCOs that applied for subawards. Grantees found that some FBCOs did not have adequate systems in place to meet financial, monitoring, or reporting requirements, and needed to develop these systems early in the grant period. As a result, many FBCOs needed extensive capacity building support in grant management, personnel management, and the delivery of employment services. In hindsight, several grantees felt they should have included additional criteria to assess FBCOs' experience managing grants and their internal capacity to provide services. This could include reference checks or information on payroll systems, staffing, and budget management capacities.

Draw on FBCOs' strengths in conducting outreach. Grantees consistently identified outreach to underserved populations as a strength of FBCOs. FBCOs were able to reach out to job seekers unlikely to access services at a One-Stop Career Center and involve them in activities designed to help them find employment. WIBs seeking to collaborate with FBCOs should consider their community ties to ensure that their strengths and experience are aligned with the needs of the target population.

Clearly define roles and responsibilities. During site visits, WIB, One-Stop Career Center, and FBCO staff talked about the importance of defining partners' roles and responsibilities and

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aligning them with each partner's mission, culture, and strengths. Considering these factors makes the roles and responsibilities of each partner realistic and achievable.

Consider the benefits and challenges of different approaches to collaborating with FBCOs. Grantees generally applied three approaches to collaborating with FBCOs that each have their own advantages and drawbacks. In selecting an approach to collaborating with FBCOs, WIBs should consider the needs of the targeted population, the purpose of the collaboration, and the capacity of FBCOs and One-Stop Career Centers. We discuss each approach along these dimensions below.

- **Recruit and Refer.** WIBs interested in raising awareness of the One-Stop system among underserved populations and creating a network of FBCO partners for the One-Stop system should consider this approach. To implement this model, FBCOs need the capacity to conduct outreach to hard-to-serve populations, and One-Stop Career Centers need the capacity to provide services for the hard-to-serve population targeted for the collaboration.
- **Specialized Job Readiness Training.** This approach may be useful for WIBs interested in targeting hard-to-serve populations that are unprepared to begin a job search and lack the basic life skills needed to find and retain a job. FBCOs need the capacity to provide the job readiness training, and are likely to need training themselves to learn how to implement the curricula.
- **Comprehensive Services.** The comprehensive services approach creates new locations where hard-to-serve populations can access One-Stop Career Center services. WIBs who feel that hard-to-serve populations are more likely to seek services offered in their own community and by a familiar organization may be interested in this model. FBCOs provide a combination of employment and social services for clients. FBCOs need the capacity to provide employment services, including job placement and job development.

Take steps to ensure that partners have the capacity to carry out their roles. In addition to specifying roles for each partner, local workforce investment systems must ensure that both FBCOs and One-Stop Career Centers have the ability to carry out their roles. For example, FBCOs with strong community connections but limited capacity to provide employment services might focus on outreach. WIBs must consider whether One-Stop Career Centers have adequate

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capacity and resources to serve the target population after referral; they should also consider ways in which FBCOs might support them.

Provide training and assistance to FBCOs responsible for job development. Several WIBs expected FBCOs to develop jobs for the grant despite the FBCOs' lack of existing employer relationships or experience in this area. The WIB grantees consistently cited FBCOs' lack of experience and training as a barrier to developing jobs. Many FBCOs did not form strong relationships with employers or develop jobs for the grant. WIBs should be prepared to provide training for FBCOs that lack the necessary background or experience to fulfill an assigned role or responsibility.

Cultivate strong partnerships between FBCOs and One-Stop Career Centers. WIBs that decide to use FBCOs to recruit job seekers and then refer them to One-Stop Career Centers must ensure that all partners are invested in the referral process and understand their roles. Below we list strategies used by grantees to build collaborative relationships.

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- **Designate a liaison from the One-Stop Career Center.** Establishing a liaison at the One-Stop Career Center offered two benefits. First, it facilitated communication and coordination between FBCOs and One-Stop Career Centers. Second, it provided job seekers referred by FBCOs with a point of contact at the One-Stop Career Center who could enroll them and assist them in using One-Stop services.
- **Co-locate FBCO staff at the One-Stop Career Center.** Co-locating FBCO staff within One-Stop Career Centers fostered efficient referral systems and communication between partners. In one site co-location helped to integrate FBCOs into the One-Stop system, allowing FBCOs to become One-Stop partners and access the resources of the center.
- **Create an efficient and supportive process for referring clients to the One-Stop Career Centers.** The referral process should place minimal burden on the person being referred and make One-Stop Career Center staff aware of their referral. A lengthy referral process or insufficient support from One-Stop Career Center staff can discourage clients from accessing One-Stop services.

Take steps to actively engage One-Stop Career Centers in collaborations. Assigning specific roles and responsibilities to One-Stop Career Centers encouraged their participation and

increased their involvement in collaborations with FBCOs. Some grantees strengthened One-Stop Career Centers' investment in the collaboration by awarding them grant funds to hire dedicated staff to manage referrals or offer workshops for grant participants.

Keep reporting requirements simple. In nearly all sites, at least some of the FBCOs struggled with reporting requirements, and most reported a general feeling that there was “too much paperwork.” Although most FBCOs understood that documenting services and outcomes and maintaining adequate financial records was essential, staff often expressed frustration that these duties took time away from service provision and at times overwhelmed them.

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Recognize that FBCOs with relatively small budgets may need assistance to cover upfront costs. The cost reimbursement awards used by nearly all the WIBs made it difficult for some FBCOs to cover upfront costs, especially those with small operating budgets. To address this, some grantees disbursed a portion of the funds upfront to help FBCOs with initial expenses. Smaller, grassroots FBCOs, such as those targeted by the DOL grants, may need upfront funding to cover the startup costs of collaborations.

Establish realistic expectations for how long it might take to implement partnerships. At 18 months, the grant period for the collaboration projects was relatively short. In hindsight, grantees said they needed more time to design their initiative, recruit and establish contracts with FBCOs, develop the capacity of FBCOs to provide services and manage funds, and build strong relationships between partners. WIBs considering partnering with FBCOs should take into account the time needed to identify FBCOs, put systems in place, and assist the FBCOs in building their skills to deliver employment services.

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FIGURE I
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD GRANTEES IN THE STUDY

Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation	Anne Arundel County, MD
Metro North Regional Employment Board, Inc.	Cambridge, MA
Cumberland County Workforce Investment Board	Cumberland County, NJ
City and County of Denver	Denver, CO
Capital Workforce Partners	Hartford, CT
LaFourche, Assumption, and Terrebone Parish Workforce Investment Board	Houma, LA
Capital Area Michigan Works!	Lansing, MI
New Hampshire Workforce Opportunity Council	Manchester, NH
Ottawa County Michigan Works!	Ottawa County, MI
WorkNet Pinnellas Inc.	Pinellas County, FL
San Diego Workforce Partnership	San Diego County, CA
DC Workforce Investment Council and DC Department of Employment Services	Washington, DC

Figure II. Barriers to Work Among Grant Clients

