

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

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*In July 2004, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) granted nearly \$6 million to 12 Workforce Investment Boards to collaborate with grassroots faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs)—nonprofit agencies with social service budgets of \$350,000 or less, or no more than six full-time employees. Each workforce investment board received roughly \$500,000; half was to be awarded to FBCOs to develop and implement the initiative during an 18-month period. The number of awards varied, from 3 to 35 FBCOs across the 12 sites. Grantees' goals included expanding access to the workforce investment system for hard-to-serve populations, providing new or enhanced services not typically available from the One-Stop Career Center system but needed by the target population, and strengthening FBCOs' organizational capacity. Mathematica examined the effectiveness of the grants in promoting sustainable collaborations between FBCOs and the workforce investment system and identifying promising practices. This brief is based on two rounds of site visits to grantees in 2005-2006.*

## **Working Together**

Enhancing communication and fostering partnerships between workforce investment boards and FBCOs may increase opportunities for Americans striving to get back to work, particularly hard-to-serve job seekers with multiple barriers to employment. FBCOs have a long history of reaching out and tailoring services to groups with specialized needs in the community, while One-Stop Career Centers provide a broad range of assistance to job seekers under one roof. DOL's grants were intended to promote collaboration with FBCOs to enhance and extend, rather than duplicate, services already available to job seekers through local workforce investment systems. To achieve this goal, workforce investment boards joined forces with FBCOs to serve hard-to-reach populations that typically face barriers to accessing services and require more intensive and individualized job search assistance and support services than One-Stop Career Centers usually offer.

Grantees in Mathematica's study used three main approaches to integrate FBCOs into the One-Stop Career Center system. In these approaches, the roles of the FBCOs included:

1. Conducting outreach, providing support services, and referring underserved populations to One-Stop Career Centers for employment services.
2. Conducting outreach and providing basic employment and social services tailored to the needs of hard-to-serve populations at an accessible location.
3. Offering specialized job readiness or other training for hard-to-serve populations.

The approaches are not mutually exclusive. For example, FBCOs could incorporate an intensive job readiness course (approach 3) with outreach activities (approach 1) or employment services (approach 2). When selecting an approach, workforce investment boards should decide whether to concentrate on increasing access to One-Stop Career Centers specifically or workforce investment services more generally. The first approach increases access to One-Stop Career Centers through partnerships with FBCOs that identify job seekers and refer them to One-Stop Career Centers. The second approach expands access to workforce investment services through collaborations with FBCOs that deliver comprehensive services in locations accessible to underserved populations.

## **Choosing an Approach**

**Approach 1: Recruit and refer.** Grantees reporting success with this approach established formal processes for referring job seekers identified by FBCOs to One-Stop Career Centers. These processes include designating a liaison at the One-Stop Career Center to handle referrals and assist job seekers, or having FBCOs register job seekers for One-Stop services before their first visit. FBCOs also provided support services to address barriers to employment before making referrals. This approach requires One-Stop Career Centers to have sufficient capacity and expertise to serve the target population, including capacity to serve clients at various levels of intensity and to provide a range of needed support services, such as transportation, to help job seekers access One-Stop services.

**Approach 2: Offer comprehensive services.** Grantees choosing this approach felt that hard-to-reach job seekers would be more likely to use employment services offered in their own communities by familiar service providers. Often, FBCOs' offices were places where the target populations already sought other services or information, and where they felt comfortable doing so. For example, FBCOs in the study included a community center for African immigrants, a Native American tribal office, and a service center for homeless individuals. To make this approach work, FBCOs must have the capacity (or support from a One-Stop Career Center) to provide employment services, including the ability to develop relationships with employers that will hire their clients. One grantee using this approach relied on One-Stop staff to provide job search workshops and placement services to job seekers at the FBCOs' community-based locations. At another site, most services were provided on site at the FBCO, but some job seekers were referred to One-Stop Career Centers for additional training. Three grantees worked with FBCOs to establish offices for providing employment services in new locations, such as a local detention facility and a public housing complex. However, these efforts presented unique challenges related to difficulties identifying space, limited access to offices during evenings and weekends, and security restrictions in detention facilities.

**Approach 3: Provide job readiness training.** Half the grantees partnered with FBCOs to provide intensive job readiness training for hard-to-serve job seekers. One-Stop Career Centers typically offer training on appropriate work behaviors, but the training is not intensive or tailored for the target population. FBCOs typically offer longer job readiness training, and they adapted to the needs of hard-to-serve job seekers by holding classes in the evenings, offering transportation, and supplementing training with case management. Training covered skills such as communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, and employer expectations, as well as

basic life skills like self-esteem, budgeting, and time management. To implement this approach effectively, FBCOs must have the capacity to provide the training or hire qualified instructors. Training length must also be tailored to the needs of the target population. In one study site serving African immigrant youth, maintaining participation in multiweek training was challenging because participants were primary earners for their families and needed to find work quickly. In addition, financial and other incentives can encourage participation but should be linked to job placement to encourage those who complete training to persist in finding a job.

**TABLE 1**  
**Grantees' Choices of Approaches**

Primary Approach	Number of Grantees
Recruit and Refer	4
Offer Comprehensive Services	10
Provide Job Readiness Training	6

### **Outreach Strategies**

FBCOs can use several strategies to complement workforce investment services and reach out to hard-to-serve populations that do not typically use One-Stop Career Centers. As previously noted, these individuals may face multiple barriers that include language or cultural differences, lack of transportation, distrust of government agencies, or limited awareness of One-Stop services. FBCOs are well-positioned to reach these job seekers because they understand their needs, operate in their communities, and have earned their trust. FBCOs in the study used four main outreach strategies:

**1. Recruit job seekers from existing clients.** 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 support 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.

**2. Conduct 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.

**3. Attract job seekers in a new location.** 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.

**4. Solicit referrals from other community organizations.** FBCOs using this strategy typically employed staff well-connected in the community with 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.

**TABLE 2**  
**Outreach Strategies**

Primary Outreach Strategies	Number of Grantees
Recruit job seekers from existing clients	10
Conduct outreach in the community	8
Attract job seekers in a new location	3
Solicit referrals from other organizations	4

### **Tailoring Services to Individuals**

One-Stop Career Centers provide access to employment and training services for a broad range of job seekers, typically offering help in a self-service setting not easily utilized by hard-to-serve populations with multiple needs and barriers to employment. FBCOs can address the needs of hard-to-serve job seekers by delivering a more comprehensive, personalized approach that combines basic employment assistance with support services.

**TABLE 3**  
**Tailored Services**

Tailored Services	Number of Grantees
Address social service needs	12
Offer personalized assistance and followup	9
Tailor services for the target population	9

FBCOs in the study used three main strategies to provide tailored services:

**1. Address short- and long-term social service needs.** It is not uncommon for One-Stop Career Centers to offer support 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 citizenship, and referrals for adult education. Other support services FBCOs provided included drug and alcohol counseling, legal aid, child care, transportation assistance, and counseling.

While 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, substance abuse counseling, and legal aid. This strategies requires FBCOs to have or form relationships with other social service agencies in the community.

**2. Offer job seekers personalized assistance and continuous followup.** Three-fourths of grantees reported that FBCOs provided more personalized services than One-Stop Career Centers. FBCO staff worked individually with hard-to-serve job seekers and developed supportive relationships with them. This approach included speaking individually with clients about personal or family challenges, seeking to understand clients’ strengths and learning styles, and spending extra time when needed to provide support and make referrals. For example, in one site, clients could call the FBCO director on evenings and weekends to discuss personal issues requiring immediate attention. This FBCO also prepared a weekly list of job openings for each client, based on individual skills and interests. In another site, staff from two FBCOs drove clients to job interviews. This individualized attention included follow-up communication. In four sites, FBCOs contacted clients by phone to remind them about grant activities and encourage their continued participation. According to grantees, FBCOs’ commitment to their communities contributed to the success of their personalized approach.

**3. Tailor employment services and training for the target population.** The collaborations provided opportunities to offer job search and job readiness activities designed for specific types of hard-to-serve job seekers. For example, FBCOs serving ex-offenders provided information on how to deal with a criminal background during the job search process; they also developed a directory of employers willing to hire ex-offenders. Another FBCO provided job-shadowing opportunities for positions accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing youth. Yet another FBCO offered African immigrants a public speaking support group to address language and cultural issues. Other FBCOs tailored training to target populations. For example, an FBCO serving people with disabilities provided training on workplace and social security rights. Several FBCOs serving immigrants or refugees with limited-English proficiency offered English as a second language training. Hard-to-serve job seekers in rural Louisiana were offered certification training for employment with the offshore oil industry.

### **Lessons from the Field**

Local workforce investment boards that are interested in developing partnerships with FBCOs to complement the services they offer through One-Stop Career Centers may be interested in the following lessons from the study:

- **Develop partnerships with FBCOs to fill unmet needs.** FBCO and One-Stop services can be complementary. Defining an appropriate role for FBCOs requires identifying unmet needs and strategies for addressing them. Specifying a role for FBCOs, rather than directing them to carry out all prescribed aspects of service delivery—from outreach to job placement and retention—is more likely to result in a productive collaboration and reduce potential for duplication of services.
- **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 boards 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. Workforce investment boards must consider whether One-Stop Career Centers have adequate capacity and resources to serve the target population after referral; they should also consider ways in which FBCOs might support them. For example, one grantee recognized that One-Stop Career Centers did not have the capacity to provide the intensive employment services an ex-offender population needed. The grantee decided to partner with FBCOs that had experience serving ex-offenders and adequate capacity to provide employment and social services tailored to their needs. Rather than taking the lead on providing employment services, the One-Stop Career Center assisted FBCOs with resources and support. Likewise, for FBCOs that can provide employment services in accessible locations, the local workforce investment board should think about the support they may need to carry out this function effectively. In several sites, One-Stop Career Centers provided some services at FBCO offices. At FBCOs providing basic employment services, staff referred job

seekers to the One-Stop Career Center for training and in some cases received help with job development.

- Draw on FBCOs’ strengths.** Grantees consistently identified outreach to underserved populations as a strength of FBCOs. FBCOs were able to reach out to job seekers who were unlikely to access services at a One-Stop Career Center and get them involved. They recruited a broad range of hard-to-serve populations, including ex-offenders, disadvantaged youth, legal immigrants and refugees, individuals with limited English proficiency, and people with disabilities. FBCOs that were most successful in recruiting job seekers had strong connections with their community, were located in the community they served, and had experience serving the target population. FBCOs that had difficulty recruiting were inexperienced in working with the target population, focused on an overly restrictive population or service area, or competed with too many FBCOs working in the same area.

**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

- **Cultivate FBCO and One-Stop Career Center investment in the process.**  
Workforce investment boards 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. Successful referral systems are built on buy-in and active communication from both parties. Grantees secured One-Stop Career Centers' investment by including them in planning and providing funds for hiring dedicated staff to manage referrals. They engaged FBCOs by familiarizing them with the One-Stop Career Center system, funding transportation assistance to help job seekers get to centers, and facilitating staff communication through formal meetings and consultations.

Grantees had difficulty implementing referral systems when there was insufficient information about how the other partner functioned and communication was infrequent. For example, FBCOs became reluctant to refer clients to One-Stop Career Centers without sufficient assurance that staff could adequately address clients' intensive needs or tailor services. One-Stop Career Centers discouraged referrals when they felt that FBCOs were duplicating services they provided or did not fully understand the purpose of the collaborations.

Grantees' experiences demonstrate that viable models exist for incorporating FBCOs into local workforce investment systems in productive ways that complement, rather than duplicate, One-Stop services. In particular, FBCOs can effectively reach out to and tailor services for hard-to-serve job seekers from special populations. Local workforce investment systems can use the grantees' experiences to design future collaborations addressing needs in their own communities.

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