



## Equal Opportunity, Religious Liberty and the Workforce Investment System

*What Faith-Based Groups, Community Organizations, and Workforce System Leaders Must Know About U.S. Department of Labor Equal Treatment and Religion-Related Regulations*

### Goals of the Initiative

The work of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative (FBCI) at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) flows from a simple conviction: America can do better for our neighbors in need when we enlist every willing partner. The DOL Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives has three primary goals: (1) ensure the equal treatment of faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) in all DOL programs; (2) build stronger partnership between DOL and FBCOs to better meet the social and employment needs of Americans; and (3) protect the religious liberty of both FBCO providers and individual participants in federally-supported social service programs.

### Regulatory Reform

DOL has enacted policy reforms to ensure that these goals are met. Specific regulatory changes include: 1) requiring equal treatment of organizations and individuals, regardless of religion; 2) clarifying the proper, Constitutional uses of federal support; and 3) lifting unnecessary restrictions on the use of "indirect" assistance for training that allows participants to choose training that contains religious activities or leads to employment in a religious vocation.

### Broad Scope

These reforms apply to all providers that implement DOL-supported social service programs, including for-profit and non-profit organizations, state and local governments, the Workforce Investment system, and Job Corps Center operators and contractors. In addition, the regulations apply equally to DOL funds, funds contributed by recipients of DOL financial assistance under a matching or grant agreement, or any state or local government funds commingled with federal funds.

### Religious Hiring

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) prohibits recipients of WIA assistance from basing hiring decisions related to WIA-funded programs on religion. However, federal contractors (not grantees) retain their right to make employment decisions based on religion under Executive Order 11246 and September 2003 DOL regulations.

### The Ultimate Objective: Compassionate Results

In all, these regulations and other reforms have advanced DOL's efforts to expand partnerships between the One-Stop system, FBCOs, and employers. These partnerships often reach the most in need individuals through

grassroots FBCOs that offer career mentoring, employability and life-skills training, placement into jobs, post-employment support, and other services that complement the One-Stop system. The outcome is a stronger workforce system and real-life impact for the unemployed and underemployed, homeless, ex-offenders, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and other Americans from all walks of life.

### New Training

Given the broad scope and reach of the Department's equal treatment and religion-related regulations, DOL will initiate the new online training course in 2008 for workforce system officials and FBCOs. This ongoing training will contain information on the FBCI in the workforce system, DOL's equal treatment and religion-related regulations, and basic compliance assistance. Information on the CFBCI website and in the online training course may also be used by states to update their policies and guidance to ensure compliance with the DOL regulations. You can access the regulations, existing DOL guidance, and Job Corps policy changes at [www.dol.gov/cfbci/legal-guidance.htm](http://www.dol.gov/cfbci/legal-guidance.htm).



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