



Faith in Action: **Using**
Interfaith
Coalitions to
Support
Voluntary
Caregiving
Efforts

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Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

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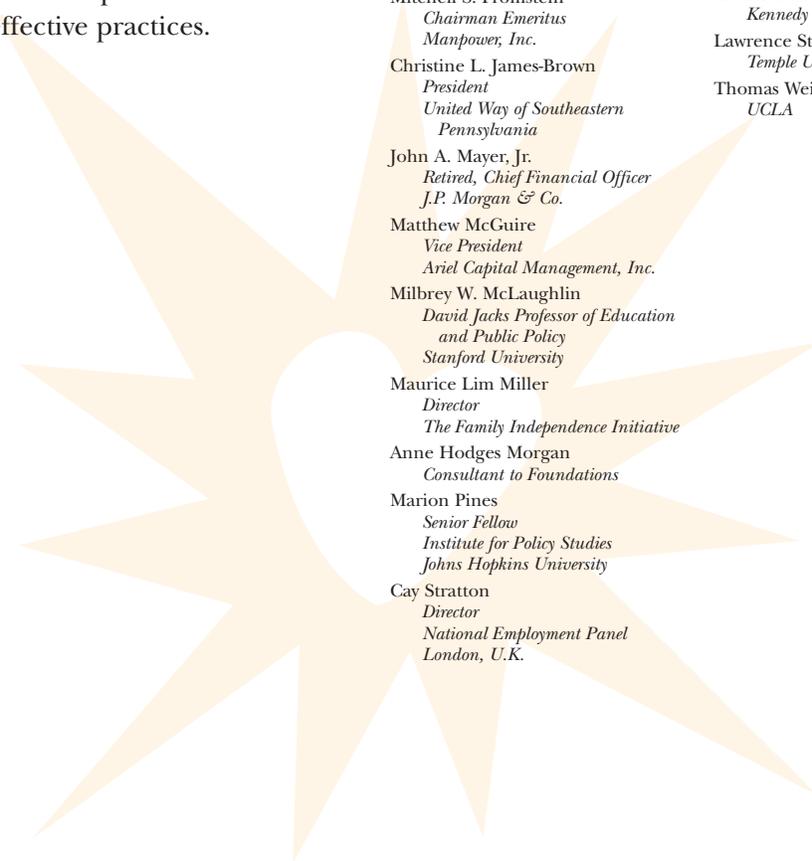
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he Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) created Faith in Action to support efforts to serve people in need of

home-based care. Programs funded through Faith in Action rely on two powerful community resources: volunteers who provide direct care to those in need, and coalitions involving faith-based organizations, which, RWJF believes, can provide the volunteers, community presence and support that the programs need to survive over the long term.

In the early 1980s, RWJF funded 25 programs through three-year grants of up to \$50,000 per year, and their experience suggested that groups of different faiths could successfully work together and enlist volunteers. Subsequently, a different group, the Public Welfare Foundation, tested a variation of the program model by funding approximately 60 interfaith coalitions through one-year grants of \$20,000; most of these seed-grant recipients also attracted sufficient numbers of volunteers.

The success of these two efforts together with recognition of the national need for in-home care and the low likelihood of widespread federal funding in this area, prompted RWJF to

expand its funding of similar programs using a seed-grant strategy. By awarding many smaller grants rather than a few large ones, it hoped to help establish and strengthen many coalitions nationwide.

Between 1993 and 1999, Faith in Action awarded \$25,000 grants to 1,091 volunteer-based programs supported by coalitions of diverse religious congregations and health,

The P/PV Study

P/PV mailed brief organizational surveys to directors of all the 1,091 programs that received Faith in Action grants from 1993 to 1999. Directors returned 787 surveys (72%) reporting that 676 programs (62%) continued to serve clients at the time of the survey, and 111 (10%) were no longer active; 304 programs (28%) did not complete the survey.

The study also used information from the programs' original grant applications and progress reports collected by Faith in Action's National Program Office six months after each program received the grant.

social service and civic organizations.¹ Faith in Action also offered limited technical assistance and an opportunity to apply for a \$10,000 supplemental grant, intended to help coalitions develop stable long-term funding.

RWJF asked P/PV to assess how well this funding strategy worked and to identify characteris-

¹ Programs funded through the Faith in Action grant are run either by a coalition of faith groups through a 501(c)(3) governed by its own Board of Directors, or through a social service or other type of agency (e.g., hospital, hospice, university) governed by the agency board, or the program's own Advisory Committee.

tics associated with program survival through analysis of data collected from a survey of all 1,091 grantees. The study was not intended to address questions regarding program impacts or quality, and its design does not allow us to address issues of causality in analyses of program survival. Available data do, however, allow us to answer the following eight questions:

- Did the Faith in Action funding strategy succeed in identifying and funding sustainable programs?
- Are volunteers willing to provide the services needed by Faith in Action clients?
- Are Faith in Action services affordable?
- What factors are associated with program survival?
- What strategies do surviving programs use to recruit and retain volunteers?
- What strategies do surviving programs use to raise funds and minimize costs?
- What strategies do surviving programs use to gain community support?
- What characteristics of program directors are associated with program success?

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Did the Faith in Action funding strategy succeed in identifying and funding sustainable programs?

A primary goal of Faith in Action was to select and fund programs that could sustain themselves beyond the grant period. Survey results show that at least 62 percent (and as many as 78 percent)² of the Faith in Action grantees continued to serve clients when surveyed, and had been doing so for an average of four-and-a-half years since receiving the grant. Future survival also seemed likely for a majority of currently active programs, most of which have in place many of the elements that contribute to enduring volunteer-based programs, such as volunteer screening, training and supervision, as well as active and supportive leadership from a Board of Directors, a coalition and a program director.³

There are no existing standards for what level of survival to expect from these types of grantees, and we do not have a group of programs that did not receive a Faith in Action grant with whom we could compare survival rates of funded versus non-funded programs. Nevertheless, given the relatively low financial investment in each site together with the limited investment of time in grantee selection, we believe that a survival rate of at least 62 percent of the original grantees indicates success. At least 676 grantees remained operable when surveyed in 2001, suggesting that RWJF's seed-grant strategy successfully addressed their goal of establishing and strengthening hundreds of coalitions nationwide.

2 Overall, 676 grantees (62%) responded that they were still serving clients. Limited contact between P/PV staff and an additional 176 grantees (16%) who did not complete the survey suggested that they also continued to serve clients.

3 Although surviving programs show some signs of strength, programs also reported facing many significant challenges, and our survey was only administered at one point in time. Surveying the programs at a later date in a more difficult economic environment may yield a lower survival rate.

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Are volunteers willing to provide the services needed by Faith in Action clients?

Counter to concerns that programs might be unable to find volunteers willing to provide the kinds of services needed by clients, the wide range of services provided by the programs suggests otherwise. Over 90 percent of programs involve volunteers in providing such basic services as home visits and telephone calls, transportation, shopping, and household chores; and over 70 percent care for ill and disabled clients through respite care, hospice care and help with activities of daily living. Not only do volunteers fill these needs but they also do so for extended periods, with an average of almost 60 percent of Faith in Action volunteers providing direct services for more than a year. Programs also rely on volunteers for other kinds of help: about 10 percent have volunteers who serve as full-time office staff, while close to two-thirds rely on part-time volunteer staff to fill clerical positions.

Half of the surviving programs had more than 40 volunteers and 60 clients when surveyed, and close to two-thirds served clients for an average of a year or more. Moreover, in line with central Faith in Action goals, both volunteers and clients reflected the racial diversity of the communities in which programs were located.

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Are Faith in Action services affordable?

With their reliance on the efforts of volunteers and non-cash contributions (such as office space) from coalition partners and others, the programs were able to provide services for a relatively modest average cost of \$5.77 in actual cash expenditures per hour of client service provided. From the perspective of clients who incur no personal costs, Faith in Action services are clearly affordable. In Philadelphia, for example, comparable services would cost clients approximately \$16.00 per hour, a prohibitive figure for many on fixed incomes. Reliance on fundraising allows Faith in Action programs to provide these services for free to those who may not otherwise be able to afford them.

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What factors are associated with program survival?

The programs undertook a variety of strategies to ensure that their programs continued, but program survival was associated most strongly with the following four factors:

- **The number of volunteers recruited and retained.** Programs that recruited at least 15 volunteers annually and retained at least 20 percent of their volunteers for more than a year were more likely to survive than were programs with fewer volunteers or lower retention rates.
- **Sufficient annual funding from diverse sources.** Programs with total annual budgets of at least \$25,000 (the amount of the original Faith in Action grant) from at least three different funding sources were more likely to survive than were programs not meeting this threshold.
- **The number of services provided.** Offering multiple services was important both in volunteer recruitment and in fundraising.
- **The support of the coalition in fundraising and volunteer recruitment.** Programs that received fundraising and recruitment help from their coalitions were more likely to survive than were those that did not. On average, 80 percent of coalition members are congregations.⁴

Ninety-five percent of programs that recruited at least 15 volunteers annually, retained at least 20 percent of their volunteers for more than a year, relied on their coalition for help in recruitment, and provided two or more services survived. In contrast, only 19 percent of programs that did not meet these goals survived.

In addition, 97 percent of programs that raised \$25,000 or more annually from at least three sources, provided three or more services and enlisted their coalition's help in fundraising survived, compared with only 47 percent of programs that met none of these criteria.

⁴ The religious faiths and denominations most prevalent nationally were most frequently represented in the affiliated coalitions.

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What strategies do surviving programs use to recruit and retain volunteers?

Similar to the experiences of other volunteer-based programs, recruiting and retaining volunteers were among the biggest challenges facing Faith in Action programs: 47 percent of directors of closed programs and 37 percent of current directors reported that they had difficulty recruiting volunteers, and almost 25 percent of directors of open programs noted that retention was challenging.

When faced with these challenges, surviving programs pursued strategies that helped them meet their goals:

- **Programs relied on their coalition members to recruit volunteers.** Grantees whose coalition members helped solicit volunteers identified more new volunteers each year than did programs without such assistance.
- **Programs required pretraining.** Volunteers are more willing to participate in a program that adequately prepares them for serving clients. As a result, programs that required pretraining were able to recruit more volunteers than were programs without this requirement.
- **Programs matched at least some clients with a team of volunteers.** Team matching encourages potential volunteers to participate by giving them the opportunity to serve without having full personal responsibility for client care. Also, volunteers may see social benefits in being part of a team.
- **Programs supervised volunteers at least quarterly.** Supervision not only ensures that volunteers are following good practice but also permits the development of strong relationships between volunteers and program staff. Supervision may foster a sense of satisfaction and loyalty to the program and, as a consequence, a willingness to continue to serve.

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What strategies do surviving programs use to raise funds and minimize costs?

Because the original Faith in Action grant provided funds for just 18 months, and the supplemental grant contributed only \$10,000 more, both fundraising and cost conservation quickly became program concerns. Almost two-thirds of the directors of closed programs cited fundraising difficulties as a key factor in their program's failure.

Successful programs used the following strategies to improve their fundraising capacity or provide services more inexpensively:

- **Program boards met at least quarterly and helped raise funds.** Boards that met at least quarterly were more likely to help their programs raise funds. Members of boards that meet frequently may be more attuned to program needs and more committed to addressing those needs.
- **Programs maintained large coalitions.** Coalitions of 16 members or more were valuable in both raising funds and reducing costs per service hour. Larger coalitions include more congregations that may be able to provide funding either through their operating budgets or special offerings of congregants. Large coalitions may reduce costs per service hour by providing more potential sources of in-kind support.
- **Programs recruited most of their volunteers from congregations.** Recruiting at least 85 percent of volunteers from congregations reduced the programs' costs per service hour. Congregations offer a consistent source of volunteers without the cost and staff effort required for more widespread recruiting strategies.
- **Programs retained at least 20 percent of their volunteers for more than one year.** Volunteer retention results in the most substantial reduction in costs per client service hour. Retention may reduce costs through reduced investments in recruitment, screening, training and early supervision, which is likely more intensive than supervision of more seasoned volunteers.
- **Programs raised funds from at least one of three community resources—congregations, private donations, and such local agencies as the United Way.** Funds from these sources indicate program success at raising community awareness.

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What strategies do surviving programs use to gain community support?

Support from both faith-based organizations and the broader secular community were integral to program success in both creating a strong volunteer pool and raising funds. Directors of about half the closed programs cited a lack of support from faith-based organizations as leading to their closing, and 42 percent credited a lack of community support.

Directors who demonstrated success in this area recommended the following strategies for garnering this invaluable support:

- **Educating community members about the program’s work.** Successful programs publicized their services through networking and such public relations efforts as news articles, radio announcements, presentations and fundraising events. Directors also worked to educate the community about the needs of the program’s clients.
- **Maintaining contact with congregational leaders.** Frequent contact with congregational liaisons helped them establish and sustain ownership of the Faith in Action program. This investment of time most likely paid off in increasing sources of volunteers, clients, funds and in-kind support.
- **Monitoring community needs.** Programs mentioned the importance of assessing community needs by holding community forums, attending community events and networking. Directors also stressed the importance of adapting to changing community needs; programs that provided overly focused services and lacked flexibility experienced difficulty surviving.

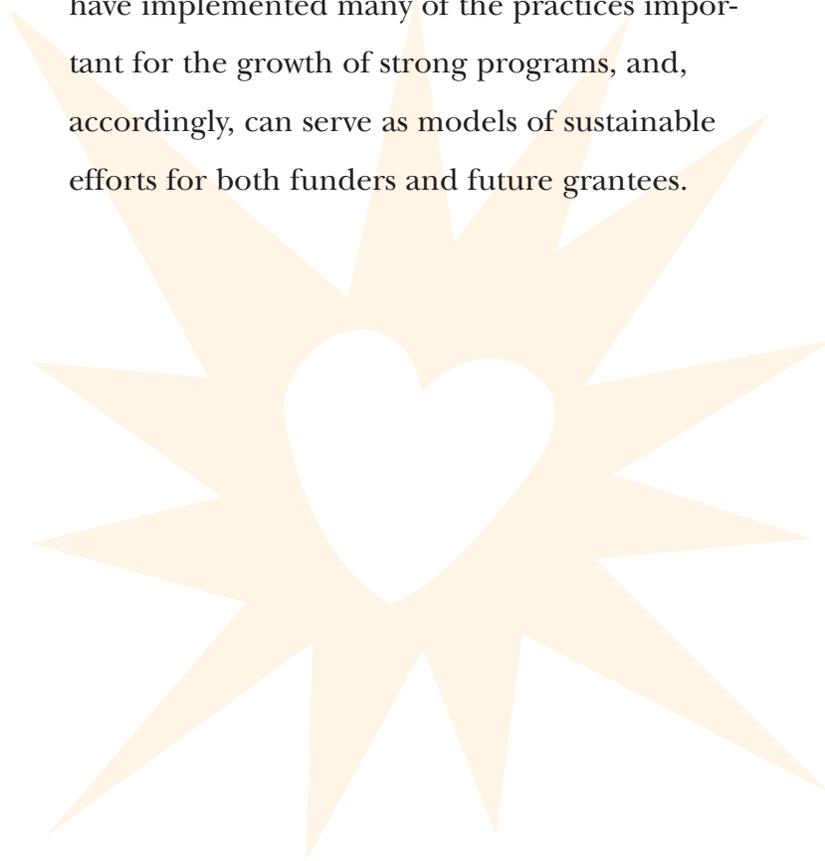
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What characteristics of program directors are associated with program success?

Directors' prior experiences in the following areas were associated with programs' success:

- **Directors experienced at working with faith communities contributed to successful fundraising through their ability to build larger coalitions.** Leaders with prior experience may be more adept in persuading groups from different traditions to work together, and in recruiting groups without a history of helping others outside their congregation.
- **Prior experience with voluntary caregiving reduced the cost per hour of service provided.** Directors with such experience may be familiar with strategies for encouraging volunteers to contribute more hours, and may know how to train, manage or recruit volunteers with less staff effort.
- **Prior experience with voluntary caregiving and training and supervising volunteers is associated with program practices.** Directors with voluntary caregiving experience may recognize the need for creative strategies to interest volunteers in their programs and, therefore, are more likely to match clients with teams of volunteers. Similarly, directors with prior experience in training and supervising volunteers are more likely to recognize the importance of these practices and, as a result, to implement them in their new position.

In conclusion, the Faith in Action grantees are providing needed services to their communities' residents; and affiliated interfaith coalitions are helping to keep operating costs low, and to identify volunteers whose efforts fill critical service gaps nationwide. Overall, these grantees have implemented many of the practices important for the growth of strong programs, and, accordingly, can serve as models of sustainable efforts for both funders and future grantees.





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