Interfaith School Turnaround Pilot Project in Orlando, Florida: Assessment and Recommendations for Local and National Enhancement and Replication

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Interfaith School Turnaround Pilot Project (IFSTP; now renamed Together for Tomorrow) was implemented in Orlando, Florida as a first-in-the-nation pilot project in 2011. It is a project that engaged agencies and leaders from across levels of government and sectors of society in planning and enactment. The objective was to tap into the volunteer supplies and civic capacities of faith-based and community-based organizations to help enhance academic achievement, attendance, behavior, and college readiness of students in Title I schools based in low-income communities. The project involved national partners: White House Office for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the U.S. Department of Education's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and the Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorp VISTA). Locally, the project included the City of Orlando, Heart of Florida United Way, Orange County Public Schools, the Center for Public and Nonprofit Management at the University of Central Florida, and area faith-based organizations. The target schools consisted of a middle school and its three feeder elementary schools.

Over the period of approximately one year, the program engaged 392 volunteers, including 21 as mentors or tutors, and 371 as volunteers in special school based events. Fifteen faith-based organizations from multiple denominations and backgrounds made commitments to partner in the initiative, and ten actually engaged. Of those students who were mentored, 67% of middle school students achieved academically a higher score on a standardized assessment test relative to students from the same school who were identified for mentoring but who were not matched with a mentor. For elementary school students, 60% achieved higher. Eighty-three percent of middle school students had a better attendance record compared to students from the same school that were identified for mentoring but who were not matched with a mentor; 40% of elementary school students had a better attendance record. In total, volunteers in the program contributed approximately 900 hours to assist students and teachers at the target schools. The partnerships thus far created as part of the project are on a firm path, given the clear alignment of mission and values between the partnering faith-organizations and the purpose of the project.

The following are recommendations for the future of the program in Orlando, Florida, as well as for replication and enhancement in communities throughout the United States. Recommendations are based on findings detailed in this report, including observed strengths and weaknesses, as well as on extant literature on collaboration and faith-based organizations. Recommendations 1 and 4 are based on successful practice in Orlando.

> **Recommendation 1:** In establishing new partnerships as part of Together for Tomorrow, begin with less intensive commitments such as supply drives, cleanup events, or welcoming teams before launching mentoring initiatives. This will allow trust to develop and interpersonal relationships to form.
>
> **Recommendation 2:** Establish a timeline for program launch that permits sufficient integration with all relevant stakeholders, including faith-based organizations and schools. The sustainable partnership will be one in which the time, treasure, and talent of faith-based organization members is well matched to

the needs of the school. Independently created plans by a school, faith-based organization, or third party are most subject to change.

Recommendation 3: Establish targets for academic achievement, attendance, behavior, and college readiness that are contextually appropriate given the needs of each student. Measure individual student performance longitudinally as well as in comparison with a control group.

Recommendation 4: Target faith-based organizations from multiple faith backgrounds that have a clear "this-wordly" civic or activist mission to be partners in the program, and establish clear ground rules for how volunteers can discuss or show their faith while working with students or on school property.

Recommendation 5: If VISTAs are used in other communities to build capacity of faith- and community-based organization partnerships with schools, it may be worth exploring a VISTA allocation model based on expressed school and/or faith-based organization interest first, rather than a model that recruits schools and faith-based organizations. This can ensure efficient use of resources to match needs with volunteer assets. Ultimately, a combination of each approach is desirable to build capacity for administering and sustaining partnerships, as well as to promote interest in the initiative.

Recommendation 6: Take advantage of diverse partners with access to unique expertise, resources, time, and talent, but ensure alignment of core values and program objectives at the launch of the program and continually throughout.

Recommendation 7: Apply a uniform evaluation framework and data collection process in all on-going and future enactments of Together for Tomorrow in order to systematically capture contextual differences across cases, build more case studies, and assess the differential impact of the "strength of partnership" variables identified in the evaluation framework.

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Introduction

The Interfaith School Turnaround Pilot Project (IFSTP; renamed Together for Tomorrow) was launched in Orlando, Florida in 2011 as a first-in-the-nation pilot with the intent to demonstrate the efficacy of a volunteer-driven model to improve performance of students at Title I schools in low income communities. The initiative was a culmination of discussions involving multiple stakeholder organizations ranging from federal agencies down to local nonprofit organizations. This report presents a formative and summative assessment of aspects of the initiative, focusing specifically on the role of faith-based organizations as volunteer suppliers, and the impact of their volunteer mentoring activity on student outcomes at targeted schools.

The report proceeds as follows: it begins with an outline of the structure of the initiative, focusing on the "extra-state" federalism character of the relationships; second, it identifies theory behind the faith-based partnership components of the initiative; third, it presents the method and evaluation framework used to assess the partnership development focusing on the faith-based organization involvement; fourth, it presents findings; last, it closes with recommendations for enhancing the partnership model moving forward. Overall, there appears to be success that can be built upon with more concentrated effort, the placement of mentors at the start of a school year (or at other logical points in the course of the school year), and more targeted recruitment of faith-based and community organizations as volunteer suppliers. The Together for Tomorrow initiative is now being promoted nationwide by the U.S. Department of Education; lessons from the first in the nation pilot can help later efforts around the nation to be successful.

Structure of the Partnership: Multi-Flavored Wedding Cake Federalism

"Federalism is a device for dividing decisions and functions of government" (Grodzins, 1960, p. 265). In offering this definition of federalism, Grodzins suggested a metaphor that defined a set of inter-mingled relationships and responsibilities across national, state, and local levels of government. The metaphor presented was that of a marble cake with blended colors indicating the blended roles and responsibilities of governmental levels; the metaphor contrasted with that of the layer cake, which depicts three levels of government that are fully distinct in their roles and responsibilities. A third cake metaphor that has been employed in recent decades is the pineapple upside down cake, heavy on top and light on bottom, suggesting a strong centralized national government in relation to state and local governments.

The metaphors, particularly the marble and pineapple upside down cakes, are grounded in the premise that government and, more specifically, the work of government, is the sole domain of national, state, and local agents employed by a traditional taxpayer funded agency or agencies. For several decades, it has been clear that the work of government depends on the production of products and services from nonprofit and for-profit entities as well. This reality has in recent years become more apparent, with the increasing use of privatization, public-private partnerships, and inter-government and cross-sector collaboration to accomplish publicly minded objectives. The case of the Interfaith School Turnaround Pilot Project is a demonstration of this new reality.

Thus is proposed an updated metaphor that reflects the more complex dynamics associated with the dividing of decisions and functions of government. An update is needed not just to create a new metaphor but to suggest the need for re-conceptualizing the basis for future thinking about intergovernmental relations. To divorce intergovernmental relations from inter-sectoral relations masks important actors in governance processes. To bind these two types of relations together within a single metaphorical description ensures relational, political, economic, and behavioral modeling is inclusive of a full set of public-serving actors.

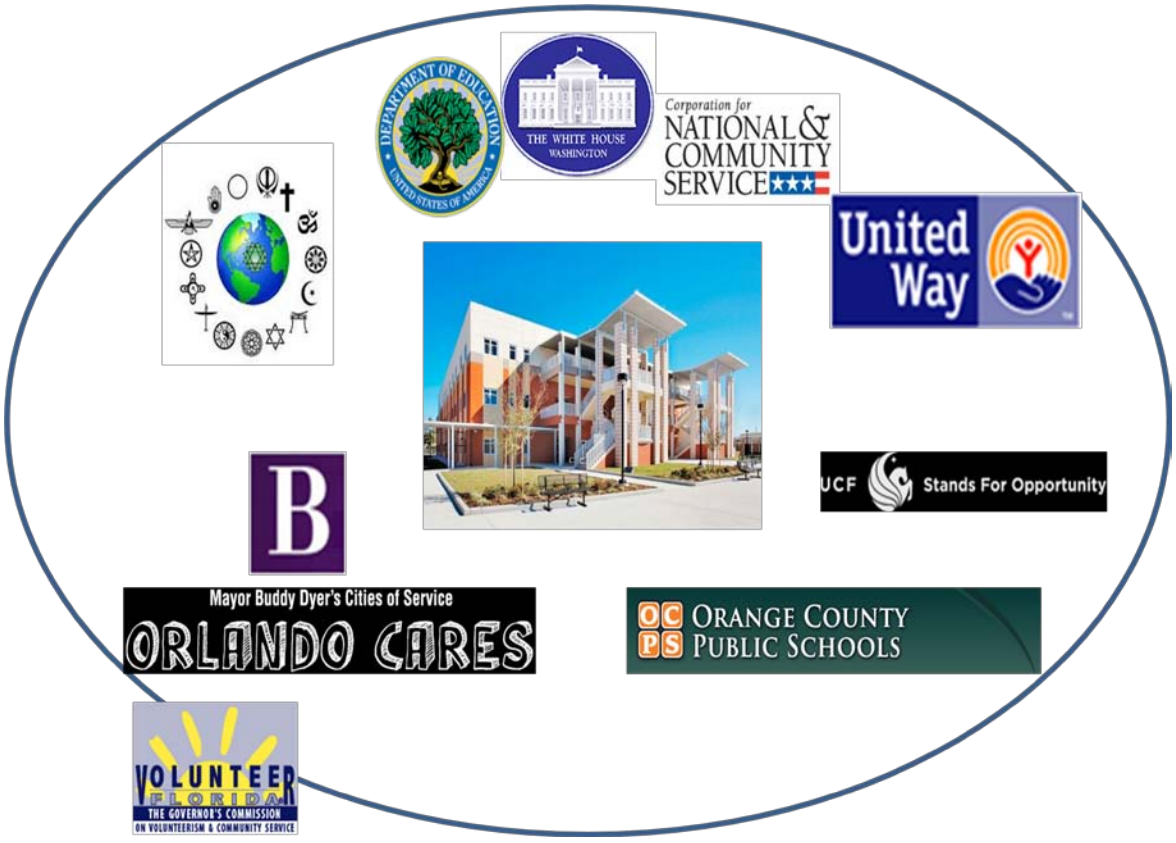
Though Wright (1974) found that metaphor is ultimately a crude means of description, the value of metaphor is its potential visual effect in contrast with other metaphors (Stewart, 1982). For instance, the marble cake metaphor is powerful in its descriptions in that it contrasts well with the layer cake metaphor. Well constructed metaphors that are substantiated through theory development, empirical testing, or descriptive case analysis can have significant benefits for scholars and the popular press. Along these lines, Stewart (1982, p. 11) identified ten potential benefits or advantages of metaphor in describing types of federalism. These consist of:

1. Metaphors contribute to the process of defining and redefining federalism
2. Naming federal phenomena increases prospects for understanding them
3. Metaphors aid in organizing knowledge about federalism
4. Metaphors miniaturize and abridge the actual dimensions of federal systems so they can be grasped as wholes and manipulated by their users
5. Metaphors may promote popular awareness of actual patterns of intergovernmental relations
6. Metaphors facilitate economical description and redescription
7. Metaphors may have a positive influence both on practitioners and theorists of federalism
8. Metaphorical paradigms, even though non mathematical, may be used to categorize "federalisms" and point out new phases in their development
9. Metaphors have a significant amount of heuristic utility
10. Metaphors aid in the generation of hypotheses

Is another cake metaphor useful? Conlan argued that these metaphors may no longer be helpful for historical or analytic purposes. As Conlan and Posner (2008, p. 6) stated: "We have exhausted our insights from the Betty Crocker school of intergovernmental analysis, with its proliferation of federalism cake metaphors, and recommend turning to paradigms drawn from the natural sciences to help interpret developmental processes in the federal system. In particular, [Conlan] suggests that geology can provide a rich vein of analogies for understanding both periods of change in the federal system and major continuities from one era to the next." Though proceeding with natural science inspired metaphors may be helpful to provide historical perspective, the cake metaphors may be more potent, particularly to allow in descriptive terms all students of government to visualize and understand the nature of relationships in federal and sectoral systems. As Stewart (1982) noted in item five above, metaphor can promote popular awareness. As a means to describe relationships, the cake metaphors are easily understandable to all but the most hardened pastry haters, and it is helpful for describing the IFSTP.

The IFSTP was launched through dialogue involving multiple entities. Specifically, the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, U.S. Department of Education Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and the Corporation for National and Community Service represented federal offices. Locally, the City of Orlando's Orlando Cares: Cities of Service initiative came to the table along with the Heart of Florida United Way, Orange County Public School district, and the Center for Public and Nonprofit Management in the School of Public Administration at the University of Central Florida. Other parties with an interest in the initiative include the Bloomberg Philanthropies, funder of Orlando Cares, and the inter-faith community in Orlando. Volunteer Florida, the statewide volunteer service office, also engaged in early discussions. Figure 1 depicts the array of agencies involved in the initiative, presented as a circle of relationships, rather than a hierarchy, as the initiative emerged in an organic manner with mutual adaptation (to borrow from Lindblom, 1959) in the crafting of final plans and implementation strategies.

Figure 1: Stakeholder Organization Involvement in the IFSTP



Federal government offices provided guidance and the structural framework, but the implementation was flexibly designed and enacted at the local level. The initiative represents a unique partnership across levels of government and sectors of society. As such, it can be

conceptualized as a form of federalism that is distinct from traditional ways of modeling relationships between federal, state, and local governments. It can be conceptualized as a *multi-flavored wedding cake federalism*. Figure 2 shows a compiled visualization of the major cake metaphors, with the multi-flavored wedding cake added. The idea, and represented by the IFSTP case, is that multiple agencies across sectors join together in blended relationships, each depending on the other and on the whole for success.

Figure 2: Federalism Cakes—Towards Inter-Government and Sector Wedding Cake

Layer Cake (clear separation of duties across levels of government)

Marble Cake (blending of duties across levels of government)

Pineapple Upside Down Cake (federal dominance of domestic policy)

Multi-Flavored Wedding Cake (shared responsibilities across levels of government and sectors of society)

The fundamental vision of the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and its associated Center in the U.S. Department of Education, is to cultivate relationships and more active partnerships between faith and community-based organizations and local governments, schools, and each other in order to tap the potentially vast supply of human capital and passion to strengthen our communities. Eleven federal agencies maintain a Center, like the one in the Department of Education, to promote these partnerships within their service area, such as in disaster response, housing, and, in this case, education. The full list of federal Centers is available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp/offices/federal.

The IFSTP model developed for pilot testing was multi-faceted with multiple levels of involvement. The role of each key actor was as follows:

- *White House Office for* and *U.S. Department of Education Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships*: Provided guidance on goal development, process, and structure for the partnership.
- *Corporation for National and Community Service*: Funded six Volunteers in Service to America (VISTAs) to build the capacity of local organizations to

forge partnerships between faith-based and community organizations and targeted Title I schools. VISTAs are paid an annual living allowance (in 2012, equal to approximately $11,000 per year), health care, child care, and an end-of-year education grant or cash stipend. This represented the only external funding provided to the local community dedicated for the IFSTP.

- *Heart of Florida United Way*: Host organization for the VISTAs. Two VISTAs were placed at the United Way office to develop the partnership program, and an additional four VISTAs were placed at one of four target schools: a middle school (pictured at the center of figure 1) and its three feeder elementary schools. VISTAs based at the schools were charged with developing volunteer programs, including mentoring initiatives and a series of one-time projects, such as school welcoming rallies, school cleanup, or adopt-a-classroom projects. The VISTAs based at United Way were tasked with reaching out to local faith-based and community organizations to formalize partnerships in which the faith and community organizations pledged to supply volunteers to the target schools.
- *City of Orlando*: Recipient of a Cities of Service grant from the Bloomberg Philanthropies. The grant pays the salary of the city's Chief Service Officer, charged with developing volunteer programs specifically in the areas of youth education and crime prevention. The IFSTP is an initiative that fell under the umbrella of Orlando Cares.
- *University of Central Florida*: The Center for Public and Nonprofit Management at the university served as a consultant to the City of Orlando in the development of the Orlando Cares: Cities of Service initiative, and the Center operates as the third-party evaluator of the IFSTP, contracted by Heart of Florida United Way.
- *Orange County Public Schools*: Provided access to officials at the target schools and facilitated school involvement in the IFSTP. The district also provided access to student data used for assessing potential impact of the program.
- *Interfaith Community*: Source for volunteers to go into schools as one-time helpers, part-time tutors, or long-term mentors to targeted students within the target schools.

Faith-Based Organizations as Partners

Faith organizations have contributed to and have been studied in two areas related to public governance: contributions to strong democracy and civic responsibility (Smidt, den Dulk, Penning, Monsma & Koopman, 2008), and contributions to social service delivery (Jackson-Elmoore; Hula & Reese, 2011). The former is most relevant in the context of the IFSTP. Before examining the potential partnership opportunities between church and state, it is potentially helpful to review a brief history of faith-organization/government relationship in the United States. Presented here is not a comprehensive history, but the interested reader is encouraged to consult the titles cited for further information and deeper historical analysis.

Debate on the proper relationship between government and faith-organizations was launched before the United States existed as a nation, dating to Puritan settlers of the American colonies, or who Lambert (2003) refers to as the "planting fathers." The planting fathers (contrasted with the better known founding fathers) sought to create a Christian nation, guided by Biblical principles. In political terms, the sovereign was not a monarch, nor were the people sovereign (as designed by the founding fathers); God was the sovereign power, and the people were subservient to God (Smidt et al, 2008). This philosophy is perhaps best captured by John Winthrop's (1630) sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," in which he wrote: "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely without God in this work we have undertaken . . . We shall be made a story and a by-word throughout the world. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us til we be consumed out of the good land whither we are a-going."

The effort to create a Christian nation was not universally supported. Fourteen years after Winthrop shared his vision for a city upon a hill, Roger Williams, who was a compatriot of Winthrop, argued that the State should not be intertwined with religion in order to ensure the corrupting potential of the State would not pervert religious doctrine (Lambert, 2003). The founding fathers who later crafted the U.S. Constitution shared the view presented by Williams, and thus espoused a strategy of separation between church and state. It is the state's purpose, in this context, to ensure religious freedom, to promote a religious marketplace, and to not privilege the specific teachings of one religious order over another. Functionally, this constitutional provision is ambiguous, and some in religion and government have interpreted it to mean a complete separation between the two (expressed most forcefully by John F. Kennedy when he was running for the U.S. presidency to allay fears that he would be unduly influenced by the Catholic church).

Conversely, there are arguments made for an accommodationist policy that permits a comingling of church and state so long as there is no bias in allowable speech or awarding of government funds to faith-based organizations. This approach is perhaps best exemplified by the George W. Bush administration's efforts through the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (the predecessor office to the Obama administration's Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships) to remove barriers to providing federal funds to faith-based organizations that actively produce social services. The Obama administration's office would similarly fall within the accommodation camp, though it has not focused on funding faith-organizations but rather facilitating partnerships.

The Obama administration's Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships follows a tradition of recognizing the potential civic value of faith-organizations, as well as the capacity of faith-organizations to contribute to the delivery of public services. Religious organizations have long been recognized in the United States as potential incubators for civic virtues of civility, empathy, and community action. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* how religious organizations can redirect individual attention away from self and towards "public morality" (Smidt et al, 2008, p. 35), and the opportunity for such community thinking is significant, as Putnam (2000) recognized, with half of civil society associational

memberships being church related, half of charitable giving being religious, and half of volunteer hours occurring within or through faith organizations. Participation in religious organizations can develop civic skill and temperament of individuals who belong to such organizations. Smidt et al (2008, p. 10) nicely summarized this potential:

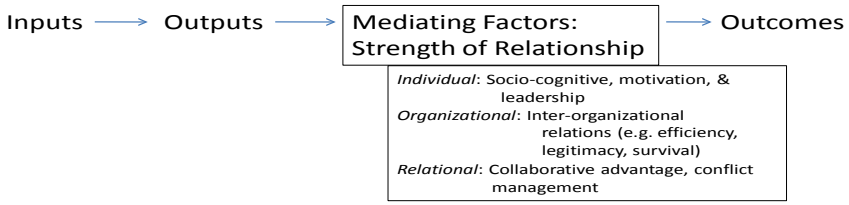
> Those who gather to worship may be reminded in sermons, prayers, and other proclamations of the ethical imperative to minister to those in need. Similarly, they may learn of opportunities to volunteer and serve others in their community through announcements, classes, or informal conversation with fellow worshippers. And regardless of whether such members participate in church governance, lead worship, teach classes, organize liturgies and celebrations, or engage in church-sponsored community service or civic projects, all such endeavors provide opportunities for individuals to learn how to take responsibility, make collective decisions, express their views, acknowledge the contrasting views of others, and compromise

The IFSTP provides examples of each of these types of activities for faith-based organizations that became partners to enhance educational outcomes for students in Title I schools. The method and results are reported next.

Method

The IFSTP is evaluated using a standard logic model with the addition of "strength of relationship" variables that are potentially influential in shaping the conversion of program outputs into outcomes, and are further potentially influential in shaping the sustainability of the partnerships that are formed for program implementation and enactment. Figure 3 shows the core logic framework for assessment, and table 1 shows an example of the evaluation framework. The example is more robust and detailed than the actual measures taken in this particular assessment; a more detailed example if provided to suggest broader application.

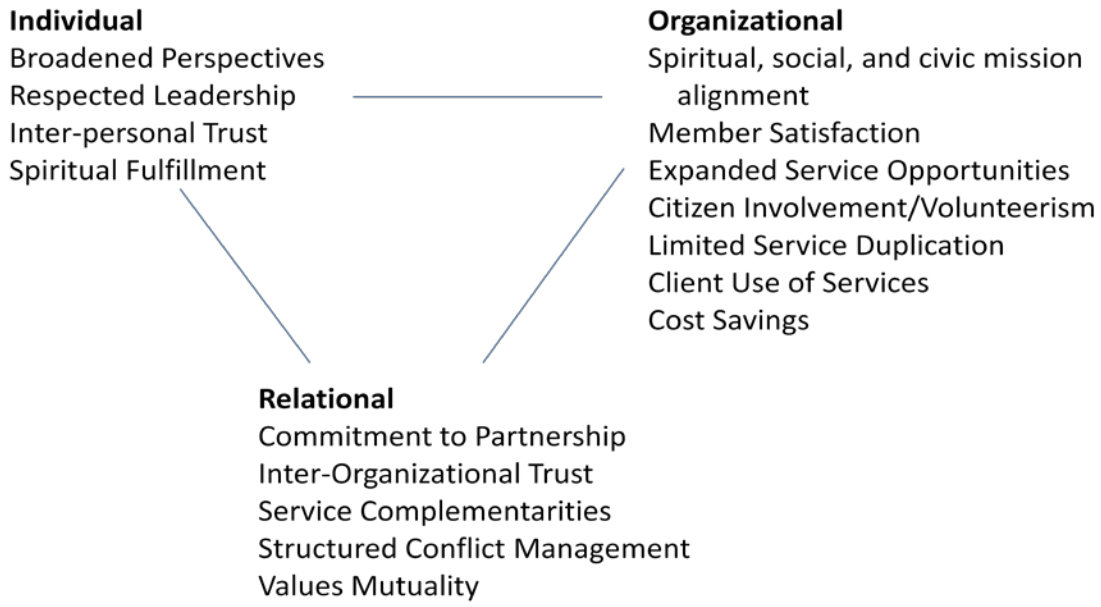
Figure 3: Logic Model Graphically Presented



Inputs include the number of faith-organizations signed up to partner in the IFSP, the number of volunteers each recruited to serve in the schools, and the number of mentors who served. Outputs include the number/percent of children served or mentored, the number of events supported by volunteers, and the number teachers assisted. Outcomes that are identified for the program by the U.S. Department of Education, based on research by Robert Belfanz, are attendance of students directly assisted by the volunteers in the program, behavior of students in terms of disciplinary action, and course or classroom performance (the ABCs). Data on academic achievement and attendance were available for this assessment.

The last component, situated between outputs and outcomes in figure 3 are strength of relationship mediating variables. Three categories are identified as potentially influential in determining or shaping the outcomes achieved through the program and sustainability of the partnerships: individual, organizational, and relational. Figure 4 shows a more detailed view of these categories and data of interest.

Figure 4: Strength of Partnership



The framework is based on several sources, each contributing to the literature on evaluation of collaboration and networks. First, Provan and Milward (2001) proposed an evaluation framework based on three levels of analysis: organizational, network, and community. The organizational level shown in figure 4 is consistent with their organizational level; their network level is aligned closely with what is labeled relational in figure 4. Their community level focuses on outcomes and thus is captured in a more comprehensive logic model and not as part of the formulation of "strength of relationship." The other core dimension—individual—is based on Bryer's (2006) framework on bureaucratic responsiveness, which focuses at the individual level to understand volunteer and employee dimensions of partnership formation. The lack of an individual level seems to be a shortcoming of the Provan and Milward (2001)

framework in that the individuals, ultimately, are charged with enacting the partnerships formally structured at the organizational level, and thus the enactment is subject to the values, biases, and experiences of individuals.

Individual items within each category are drawn from several sources. For instance, inter-personal trust and broadened perspective at the individual level is based on Margerum's (2002) observation that effective collaborative planning efforts should be grounded in shared or consensus understanding of problems, solutions, and courses of action, requiring then not only a certain degree of trust but the ability to clearly see the perspective of others. Commitment to partnership at the relational level is similarly derived from Margerum, and the relational component addressing the existence of a conflict resolution process is based on Innes and Booher's (1999) framework for evaluating collaborative planning initiatives.

The items in this model have not been experimentally tested to determine which are most important for the sustainability of a partnership, but they are all derived from previous theoretical or empirical models. Future research can more systematically determine the efficacy of each. For this analysis, focus is on the organizational and relational dimensions and from the perspective of faith-organization partners only, due to a low response from individual volunteers involved in the program. Separate analysis can apply the framework to the design of the program, thus including the wider array of stakeholder agencies involved. Thus, the findings should be interpreted with some caution, though the lessons learned based on the analysis remain helpful in establishing recommendations particularly for future partner selection as IFSTP/Together for Tomorrow is designed and developed in other communities.

Data Collection

Input and output data were collected and maintained by VISTAs serving at the headquarters for the United Way as part of their duties for establishing and maintaining the program. Strength of relationship data were collected in two phases. First the VISTAs who recruited faith-organization partners were provided a questionnaire by the lead researcher with the university to complete following their initial discussion with each prospective partner. Specifically, they were asked to make notes on seven questions:

1. Did the prospective partner seem to perceive a role for their organization in helping to meet the needs of the larger community?
2. Did the prospective partner seem to perceive a role for their organization in helping to support the mission of schools in the community?
3. Does the organization have any existing volunteer-based relationship with a school or other government agency? If so, can you describe any prior experience?
4. What kinds of ministries or other volunteer service initiatives have been developed within the organization?
5. Is the organization based in the [area around the target schools], or are they located elsewhere in Orlando/Central Florida?
6. What is the faith affiliation of the organization, if any?

7. What other observation do you have that you think will be helpful in future possible communications with this organization?

The questions focused on the organizational and relational aspects of existing or potential partnership, such as focusing on alignment of mission, prior negative or positive experiences to indicate inter-organizational trust, and the geographic proximity which, for all practical purposes, could pose a challenge for volunteers. A total of eleven notes from VISTA engagements with faith-organizations are recorded.

Secondly, the lead researcher with the university conducted a set of semi-structured interviews with faith-organization liaisons after a period of time passed in the implementation of the program, and once volunteers with the organization actually started working, particularly in a mentoring role. Of the eleven faith organizations that were initially recorded, three ultimately supplied volunteers and were interviewed in the post-interviews. Additional faith-organizations also provided volunteers, but missing data from the initiation of the contact from the VISTAs prevents a full analysis of their commitment to and work within the project. Complete statistics on organizational participation are reported next.

Findings

Inputs include the number of faith-organizations signed up to partner in the IFSTP, the number of volunteers each recruited to serve in the schools, and the number of mentors who served. Outputs include the number/percent of children served or mentored, the number of events supported by volunteers, and the number teachers assisted. Outcomes that are identified by the U.S. Department of Education for the program are attendance of students directly assisted by the volunteers in the program, behavior of students in terms of disciplinary action, and course or classroom performance (the ABCs). Data on academic achievement and attendance were available for this assessment. Strength of partnership data (or collaborative *process* data) are included in this discussion of findings, ultimately suggesting a slightly revised formulation to the ABCs as means to understand the efficacy and sustainability of the IFSTP: ABCPs, with the last "P" for process. Table 1 presents a summary of the data.

Inputs

Overall, we saw a high level of activity, with fifteen faith-based organizations expressing interest in partnership, and ten actually engaging at some level. Those that did engage utilized some of the techniques identified by Smidt et al (2008) as tools of faith-organizations for cultivating active volunteers and citizens. Namely, the used the space to make announcements about the volunteer opportunity, encourage participation, and some even appointed lay leaders to guide the initiative on behalf of the organization. Mixes of faiths were represented, including different branches of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. A total of 392 volunteers were engaged, with 21 serving as mentors or tutors. Most of the engaged faith-organizations came from outside the geographic area of the target schools.

Table 1: Summary of Data

Inputs	Outputs	Strength of Relationship	Outcomes
Number of Volunteers Engaged: 392 (21 mentors and tutors; 371 special events) **Number of Faith Organization Commitments:** 15 **Number of Faith Organization Engagements:** 10	**Percent of Middle School Students Identified for Mentoring Actually Mentored (not tutored):** 23% (6/26) **Percent of Elementary School Students Identified for Mentoring Actually Mentored (not tutored):** 20% (5/25) **Number of Volunteer Hours at School Special Events:** 878	• Committed faith organizations focus on, as one partner labeled it, "renewing the community" and not operating in a vacuum. • Committed faith organizations shared a belief that providing support for education and youth, more generally, is part of their mission, but for several that expressed initial interest there was uncertainty about how to "sell" the idea, suggesting unclear alignment. • None of the committed or interested faith-organizations had prior experience working directly with schools, thus no opportunity for trust development prior to the program. • As volunteer supplying organizations, committed and interested faith-based organizations demonstrated a great deal of community action, particularly in areas of food, peer and family support, and youth programming. • Once enacted, partnering faith-based organizations showed a high level of enthusiasm but expressed the challenge of recruiting long-term mentors; they recognized the opportunity for more engagement by their members and expressed commitment to continuing as partners to the schools.	**Percent of Middle School Mentored Students who Score above FCAT Reading Average of Non-Participants Identified for Mentoring:** 67% **Percent of Elementary School Mentored Students who Score above FCAT Reading Average of Non-Participants Identified for Mentoring:** 60% **Percent Middle School Mentored Students who had Better Attendance than the Average of Non-Participants Identified for Mentoring:** 83% **Percent of Elementary School Mentored Students who had Better Attendance than the Average of Non-Participants Identified for Mentoring:** 40%

Outputs

Participating schools were asked to identify targeted students who could benefit from the devoted attention of a mentor. Not all identified students received parental assent, nor were they all matched with a mentor. Overall, 23% of middle school and 20% of elementary students identified for mentoring were actually mentored. In other, non-mentoring activity, a total of 878 volunteer hours were committed and performed by volunteers through the program, targeting approximately 2,000 disadvantaged youth in the target schools. Non-mentoring activities included special events, such as First Day of school welcoming, Day of Action, Day of Caring, Thanksgiving Basket Distribution, Career Fair, and Book Drives.

Outcomes

The U.S. Department of Education is concerned with the ABCs (Attendance, Behavior, and Course Performance). Data are available for analysis on achievement and attendance, specifically achievement in the area of reading, as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Attendance is calculated based on the number of unexcused absences, thus excluding "legitimate" absences due to, for instance, illness. Given the population of students identified for mentoring exceeds the number of students actually mentored, we effectively have conditions for a quasi-experiment in which we can compare the performance of those students mentored against the performance of those students who would have been mentored if given parental assent and matched with a mentor. This comparison is more meaningful than comparing mentored students against the full student population. The question asked is: What percent of mentored students perform better (achievement and attendance) than the average of students identified for mentoring but who were not mentored?

Middle school students performed better than their elementary peers. Sixty-seven percent of mentored middle school students achieved higher than the average of non-participating students identified for mentoring; sixty percent of elementary school students achieved higher. Eighty-three percent of middle school students had a better attendance record than the average of non-participating students identified for mentoring; forty percent of elementary school students had a better attendance record. The data give strong indication that the program is beneficial based on these measures, though less so for elementary school students who were mentored.

Strength of Partnership

The focus in strength of partnership is on the organizational and relational dimensions. Insufficient data were available to adequately assess individual dimensions, which would have required interviews conducted with volunteers, parents of students at the target schools, other faith-organization members, and school personnel. Continued assessment of the project can rectify this gap; for now, the focus is specifically on the perceptions of the participating faith-organizations, who are key partners in this initiative; if organizationally and relationally they are not aligned with the program and are not benefitting from the program, the future success and sustainability of the program may be threatened.

Organizational

Participating faith-based organizations observed a clear alignment between their mission and the IFSTP objectives. Not all faith-based organizations are the same, as Musso, Kitsuse, and Cooper (2002) discuss, some are more likely to promote volunteerism in the community with their members and others less so. Those that are more likely are labeled "this-worldly" as opposed to "other-worldly," meaning they see their mission not only as spiritual salvation but as spiritual fulfillment based on actions taken in this life. This-worldly faith-based organizations can further be subdivided as being civic-oriented or they can be more activist, with the activist organizations more directly mobilizing their members for civic action, and the civic-oriented preferring to encourage, through spoken word, certain civic behaviors but not directly mobilizing for the purpose.

The organizations that signed up with the IFSTP represent both the civic- and activist-orientations of this-worldly faith-based organizations. In signing up, they universally expressed that the work of improving opportunity for youth in the community is part of their mission to "renew the community" and to live out the message being preached or taught in religious services and scripture. That said, the specific educational focus proved challenges for some faith-based organizations, as they pondered how to "sell" the opportunity to their members. Thus, the organization leaders implicitly saw a connection, but some seemed challenged by clearly explaining it in order to generate volunteers for the project. Most, however, saw a clear connection with their other social ministries, such as providing food for the needy, peer and family support for the struggling, and recreational opportunities for the youth outside of school time. Participating organizations also recognized the expanded opportunities the initiative would allow to tap into the time, treasure, and talent of their members, thus allowing for a more engaged membership with service opportunities that may be more appealing than other service opportunity options. Though there is more opportunity, some faith-based organizations expressed a challenge that "not enough" members were stepping up, but respondents were confident that with time, those numbers would improve, particularly for the harder-to-fill role of mentor.

Three factors listed under the organizational heading in figure 4 are not directly measured here, but they would be applicable in viewing the IFSTP from the school perspective. For instance, providing increased number of volunteers could potentially reduce costs of delivering educational services, such as by ensuring targeted classrooms have all the supplies they need without putting an undue burden on the individual teacher.

Overall, from the faith organization perspective, the IFSTP has facilitated partnerships that meet the needs and align with the missions of organizations that have a potentially deep bench of volunteers. This is pivotal for the future success and sustainability of the program.

Relational

None of the participating faith-based organizations had prior working relationship with any specific school or government agency. Thus, the partnerships to be formed were based on a blank slate, or, worse, on a lack of trust potentially associated with more general lack of trust

between citizens and government. As one faith-organization suggested, if a government agency comes knocking and asks for volunteers, a first reaction might be to be skeptical of motive. Thus, for some at least, a suspension of judgment to move the process forward was required. For those that stuck with the program, they reported that trust indeed did develop over time, as regular interactions occurred. There were some concerns regarding timeliness of getting background checks completed, thus allowing volunteers to work with students. This, however, was generally understood as a step needed to protect the children. As suggested in the organizational discussion, there ultimately did prove to be an affirmation of mission, values, and service objectives in the work the faith-organizations were asked to perform for the IFSTP. No respondent reported any conflicts to test the commitment of the partners, but all who responded for the second interview expressed a strong commitment to continue their involvement.

Discussion and Recommendations

The IFSTP, as implemented in Orlando, demonstrates the potential power of tapping the civic-building and volunteer-supplying capacities of faith-based organizations to benefit members of our community who are most in need or who can otherwise benefit from extra support and resources volunteers can provide. The program established some ambitious goals in terms of volunteer recruitment and impact on students. Not all of these goals were met. For instance, a goal was established early in the project to supply thirty mentors to each of the four target schools. Fewer than thirty mentors in aggregate were recruited. For those who were recruited, their success in enhancing student academic achievement and school attendance was mixed in that 100% of mentored students did not surpass their peers who were not mentored in performance and attendance. There are several possible explanations for this.

First, on the mentor recruitment, none of the partnering faith-based organizations had prior working relationship with the schools, particularly in this more intensive format. It very well may take time to build trust between the faith-organization leaders, school leaders, and other stakeholders before a firm commitment to increase long-term volunteers, as mentors is made. Multi-organization collaborations often need time to develop trust, and it has been suggested that they start slowly with cooperation (e.g. sharing information), move on to coordination (e.g. co-sponsoring events, or in the case of IFSTP, providing volunteers for larger one-time volunteer events), and then finally moving to more intensive collaboration that requires a longer-term commitment (Cigler, 1999; Thomson, Perry & Miller, 2007). As the program continues, we should expect to see increased mentor commitments, particularly if there continues to be shared perceived alignment between the mission of the faith-based organizations and the schools. These less intensive commitments were made in Orlando to begin.

> **Recommendation 1: In establishing new partnerships as part of Together for Tomorrow, begin with less intensive commitments such as supply drives, cleanup events, or welcoming teams before launching mentoring initiatives. This will allow trust to develop and interpersonal relationships to form.**

Second, also on the mentor recruitment, the thirty/school goal was established at the time United Way was making formal application to the Corporation for National and Community

Service to receive VISTAs. At that point in time, the individual schools were not fully integrated in planning discussions, and thus the goal was established in a bit of a vacuum. Once the VISTAs were in place and began the process of identifying specific projects with schools for which volunteers would be helpful, it became clear that alternative programs, such as adopt-a-classroom to ensure supplies are fully available, for instance, or less volunteer intensive tutoring, would be more helpful at that particular time. That said, the schools generated a lengthy list of students who could benefit from mentors, but insufficient supply was generated. This, then, is an area for continued work, and, we can speculate, will become more achievable as the relationships deepen between the faith-based organizations and schools.

> **Recommendation 2: Establish a timeline for program launch that permits sufficient integration with all relevant stakeholders, including faith-based organizations and schools. The sustainable partnership will be one in which the time, treasure, and talent of faith-based organization members is well matched to the needs of the school. Independently created plans by a school, faith-based organization, or third party are most subject to change.**

Third, the outcomes achieved in cases where a mentor was secured and successfully matched with a student, were strong but not across the board. Needless to say, every child is different, and we can expect that not all children will respond to the effort of a mentor as well or as quickly as other children. In the case of the IFSTP in Orlando, the first mentor did not begin service until November 2011, serving through the end of the school year. Thus, only a few months passed in the best case, and less time passed for other students. Though the outcomes data are overall strong but not across 100% of the mentored students, as with mentor recruitment, if the mentors remain with the students for a longer period, we should expect to see improvement relative to their peers who do not receive the benefit of mentors.

> **Recommendation 3: Establish targets for academic achievement, attendance, behavior, and college readiness that are contextually appropriate given the needs of each student. Measure individual student performance longitudinally as well as in comparison with a control group.**

As noted, the IFSTP as implemented in Orlando, Florida has demonstrated the potential efficacy of faith-based organizations as partners in civic capacity development. Confirming Smidt et al's (2008) observation, the IFSTP faith-based organizations seem to be natural meeting places for people of similar passion and values to congregate, discuss, debate, mobilize, and act. As a model for strengthening communities, this seems intuitive and is thus, on the surface at least, appealing. By focusing on partnership development rather than grant or contract agreements, this approach seems both more palatable and feasible than that advanced by the Bush administration. However, concerns may still exist that need to be monitored in program implementation. For instance, faith-based volunteers cannot actively try to proselytize through words or symbols. This ground was addressed in the IFSTP; further, and importantly, the IFSTP recruited faith-based organizations from a number of different denominations and religious backgrounds. Thus, adherence to the accommodationist interpretation of the separation of church and state clause is secure; faith organizations were protected from an overbearing state, and the

state was given the benefit of volunteer labor from people of a range of faiths. These steps were taken in Orlando, thus:

> **Recommendation 4: Target faith-based organizations from multiple faith backgrounds that have a clear "this-wordly" civic or activist mission to be partners in the program, and establish clear ground rules for how volunteers can discuss or show their faith while working with students or on school property.**

The use of AmeriCorp VISTAs was a key component of this project. Not all communities will secure VISTAs to design and implement their Together for Tomorrow initiative. This is perhaps both a blessing and a drawback. On the latter point first, VISTAs provide low-cost full time personnel to build the capacity of local schools, faith-based organizations, and other community partners to enter into partnerships like Together for Tomorrow/IFSTP. With this resource, local agencies and stakeholders can be deliberate in designing and executing a plan for action. However, the VISTAs, and more specifically, including a third party as host of the VISTAs, may have created delays. Where two organizations (a faith-based and a school) operating independently might have been able to stand up a project within a month or two, it took a few months for the IFSTP in Orlando to become fully operational.

> **Recommendation 5: If VISTAs are used in other communities to build capacity of faith- and community-based organization partnerships with schools, it may be worth exploring a VISTA allocation model based on expressed school and/or faith-based organization interest first, rather than a model that recruits schools and faith-based organizations. This can ensure efficient use of resources to match needs with volunteer assets. Ultimately, a combination of each approach is desirable to build capacity for administering and sustaining partnerships, as well as to promote interest in the initiative.**

An inter-governmental and inter-sectoral model for meeting complex needs at a localized level is innovative and unique. Whether the dynamic is metaphorically labeled "multi-flavored wedding cake federalism" or simply multi-stakeholder collaboration, the approach taps into potentially vast social, human, and political capital, without burdening any one sector or level of government with financial or other risk in the event of program failure. The drawback calls to mind the saying about "too many cooks." Where it was beneficial to have regular meetings with officials from the Department of Education, Corporation for National and Community Service, City of Orlando, and United Way, in addition to regular advisory board meetings convened by the United Way that engaged the participating school and faith-based organization partners, there seemed to be a lack of coherence to the messaging. For instance, the City of Orlando operated under grant, time, and performance expectations from the Bloomberg Philanthropies, which did not always align with the time and performance expectations dictated by the terms of the VISTA program, which were not always aligned with the desires of the Department of Education.

Recommendation 6: Take advantage of diverse partners with access to unique expertise, resources, time, and talent, but ensure alignment of core values and program objectives at the launch of the program and continually throughout.

Last, the evaluation framework employed in this assessment is based on an assortment of theoretically and empirically derived models. It has intuitive appeal but has, in its full form, to be systematically and quasi-experimentally or experimentally tested. As Together for Tomorrow is expanded and enacted in communities around the United States, opportunity ought to be taken to apply a uniform standard for evaluation in order to specifically capture contextual differences across cases, build more case studies, and assess the differential impact of the "strength of partnership" variables identified in the evaluation framework.

Recommendation 7: Apply a uniform evaluation framework and data collection process in all on-going and future enactments of Together for Tomorrow in order to systematically capture contextual differences across cases, build more case studies, and assess the differential impact of the "strength of partnership" variables identified in the evaluation framework.

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