

Fairfax County Government and Faith Community Youth Partnership Programs

Guidelines for Successful Partnerships

Youth gain a great deal when every part of a community comes together to support their education, safety, health, mental wellness, and strong social development. Local community partnerships, which strengthen assets for youth, include those between Fairfax County government agencies and local faith communities. These partnerships are: a) supporting existing county government services; b) are replicating best practice models in underserved or hard to reach communities; and/ or, c) are initiating new models to strengthen service access. Such partnerships are being implemented either in the partner faith community facility or in the partner government building.

Fairfax County is a religiously diverse community. Therefore, as the faith community and government agencies develop partnership program structure and implementation plans, they should ensure that their efforts neither foster religion nor preclude it; and, allow for religion to be treated with fairness and respect. At all times, such partnerships should be mindful that a youth's religious expression and freedom of conscience must be vigorously protected regardless of the physical location of the program.

To ensure that youth's religious freedom and participation in local government and faith community partner programs are protected, it is important that structures are in place to protect these basic rights. There are four key service principles that partnerships programs should ensure.

Fairfax County government and faith community partnership programs:

1. May not forbid youth, acting on their own, from expressing their personal religious views or beliefs solely because they are of a religious nature.
2. May not discriminate against private religious expression by youth, but must instead give youth the same right to engage in religious activity and discussion as they have to engage in other comparable activity.
3. May not endorse religious activity or doctrine, nor may they coerce participation in religious activity.
4. Recognize that the right of religious expression in a government program does not include the right to have a "captive audience" listen or to compel other youth to participate.

As Fairfax County government and faith communities develop partnership programs, the development of written agreements or memorandums of understanding can clearly establish the program parameters and how they will be implemented. Guidelines to frame the development of county and faith community partnerships are outlined on page two.

Guidelines for the Development of Fairfax County Government and Faith Community Partnership Programs

The following guidelines provide a foundation for the development of a Fairfax County government and faith community partnership program.

Faith community and local government partnerships:

1. Jointly determine and define objectives and goals which are agreed to in writing.
2. Identify, define, and agree to, in writing, program expectations and scope to include timelines, specific activities, and methods employed to conduct activities.
3. Execute measures to ensure staff and volunteers understand and agree to implement program objectives, goals, expectations, and scope as identified and defined.
4. Develop and conduct training, for both the county and faith community staffs and volunteers, on the application of programs and the implementation of activities.
5. Provide programs for which a youth's participation is voluntary. Parental permission must be granted for participation in a partnership program.
6. Allow and make reasonable accommodations for a youth's religious and cultural requirements.
7. Will not require youth to participate in an activity which is restricted by their religion.
8. Will not give a youth religious materials or send religious materials to a youth's home.
9. Will conduct a partnership program in a faith community facility but in a separate space from those where religious programs and activities are being conducted.
10. Will develop and implement a communications process between the county and faith community partnership leadership that will facilitate the effective conduct of activities and application of guidelines and support continued program improvement.