

# A code of conduct

Feature in the [July 5, 2000](#) issue

*Developed in light of “Charitable Choice,” the following guidelines reflect an effort by some religious groups to regulate their dealings with government funding agencies. Religious organizations that wish to comment on the draft should contact Amy Sherman at <ShermanA[at]Cstone.net>.*

- **Compliance:** Signatories to the Code agree faithfully to abide by the regulations of Charitable Choice. Signatories openly agree that government legitimately asserts certain requirements, and that, having agreed to accept the funds, the organizations accept the duties attached (unless a gross injustice or issue of conscience would compel dissent). Signatories commit to use only private funds, and never government contract funds, to underwrite inherently religious activities, worship and sectarian instruction.
- **Truthfulness and transparency:** Signatories commit themselves to public, straightforward, clear, consistent communication about their religious identity among their volunteers, service beneficiaries, donors, and government partners. This means that program descriptions will clearly depict the expectations the FBO has of program participants, and which components of its program are optional and which mandatory. The aim is to allow potential staff, volunteers, participants, and government partners to make their choices about involvement with the FBO on the basis of full and accurate information about its program content, ethos, goals and methodology.
- **Autonomy and preservation of religious character:** Signatories celebrate their identity as faith-based organizations and affirm Charitable Choice’s intent to protect their religious character. They agree to refrain from using government funds to underwrite instruction that seeks to teach about, and inculcate people into, their particular religious faith—e.g., confessional activities such as study of sacred texts or classes in religious doctrine. But they maintain their right to identify their faith perspective in their educational endeavors.

- **Witness:** FBOs commit themselves to a gentle and winsome public witness and to the creation of an environment in which staff, volunteers and program participants are free to speak about their own lives of faith. Staff and volunteers are instructed to welcome and lovingly respond to spiritual inquiry and discussion initiated by program participants, while avoiding aggressive evangelism.

- **Love of neighbor:** FBOs commit themselves to respond to their neighbors' diverse educational, vocational, financial, spiritual, emotional and physical needs, treating each individual with dignity. They affirm "relational ministry" that helps poor families connect to personal support networks—e.g., mentoring relationships with church members or support groups affiliated with the family's religious tradition—equipped to offer them emotional and practical help. Participation in such groups, however, will never be a prerequisite for receiving services. The goal is to inform program participants of the options available to them for cultivating a personal network of support; they themselves must be free to determine whether or not to pursue those opportunities.

- **Freedom from religious coercion:** FBOs reject all forms of coercion and will not make the receipt of services contingent on the service beneficiary's participation in religious activities they sponsor. In programs underwritten with government funds, they pledge to refrain from making attendance at religious activities mandatory. For FBOs operating rehabilitation programs in which participation in religious exercises is considered inherently vital to the participant's transformation (and in which participants freely agree to commit to the whole program), government contracts ought not to be sought, since these would require compartmentalizing program components. Rather, such programs should be funded fully by private means or by government vouchers.

- **Nondiscrimination:** FBOs will offer their services to all persons in need, regardless of their religious affiliation (or lack of affiliation).

- **Mission focus:** Signatories agree to pursue financial collaboration with government only for those ventures that clearly fit within their sense of mission and calling, rather than adding on program elements simply because there is government money available to fund them.

- **Evaluation:** Signatories commit themselves to credible and objective evaluation procedures and to maintaining clear and documented records so as to facilitate

proper assessment of program performance.

- **Golden Rule:** Signatories commit themselves to avoiding “turf wars,” gossip and negative posturing in their competition with fellow FBOs in bidding for government contracts; they will treat their fellow FBOs and secular competitors as they themselves want to be treated.

- **Financial accountability:** FBO signatories affirm that, as recipients of public funding, they are accountable to God and to taxpayers. They agree to a standard of financial accountability and precision that is above reproach—including fully separate accounting of public and private dollars; transparency in all financial practices; and willingness to make the financial reports and audits related to their government contracts available publicly upon request.