

White House initiative aims to increase faith groups' presence in government

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by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [June 6, 2018](#) issue

President Trump signed an executive order on May 3, the National Day of Prayer, aiming to give faith groups a stronger voice within the federal government and serve as a watchdog for government overreach on religious liberty.

The White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative's goal is "to ensure that the faith-based and community organizations that form the bedrock of our society have strong advocates in the White House and throughout the Federal Government," a White House document reads.

The White House said those working on the initiative will provide policy recommendations from faith-based and community programs on "more effective solutions to poverty" and inform the administration of "any failures of the executive branch to comply with religious liberty protections under law."

The initiative follows those of previous administrations that created similarly named offices to foster partnerships between the government and religious organizations.

President Obama launched the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, whose work ranged from fighting the Ebola and Zika viruses to feeding schoolchildren nutritious meals in the summertime.

That office, along with similar ones in 13 federal agencies, followed President George W. Bush's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

The White House said agencies and executive departments that do not have a faith-based office will have a designated liaison to the new initiative. The new initiative will be led by an adviser who will work with faith leaders and experts outside the federal government. Obama's initiative also had an office director with a council of outside experts.

Johnnie Moore, part of a group of evangelicals that often advises Trump, praised the new initiative.

"Ordering every department of the federal government to work on faith-based partnerships—not just those with faith offices—represents a widespread expansion of a program that has historically done very effective work and now can do even greater work," he said. —Religion News Service