

# Preparing for Outreach



Faith communities and faith-based organizations can be powerful allies in preventing and responding to sexual violence. However, it is important to remember that forming meaningful collaborative relationships is an on going effort that requires time, patience, understanding, and commitment.

Every faith community is different, and it is essential to prepare for any initial meetings or outreach efforts to ensure future success.

## 1. Are we ready?

*Does your organization have the capacity to conduct outreach to a new group?*

Strong relationships are built upon mutual respect. Before making new connections, make sure that your organization can deliver the support and resources that are being offered.

*Is there a particular staff person who will be charged with making connections with faith communities?*

Consider identifying a particular staff person who has shown the ability to be open to and respectful of various religious traditions to be the point person for these efforts.

*What is our intent?*

Identify and be able to articulate your reasons for reaching out. For example, your goal may be to offer support with a specific situation or to partner to provide prevention education. Remember to enter the relationship with a spirit of cooperation and openness. Your intentions may not line up with the community's needs as they perceive them; be flexible.



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## 2. What do we need to know?

### *What is known about this faith community?*

While every community of faith is different, research to learn about the teachings, ways to address faith leaders (for example: priest, minister, imam, rabbi, brother/sister), and religious practices (for example: manner of dress, diet, language). Be mindful of religious holidays and seasons when it might be inappropriate or unproductive to initiate your outreach. Ask questions and be open to learning.

### *Where do our missions overlap? Where might there be tension?*

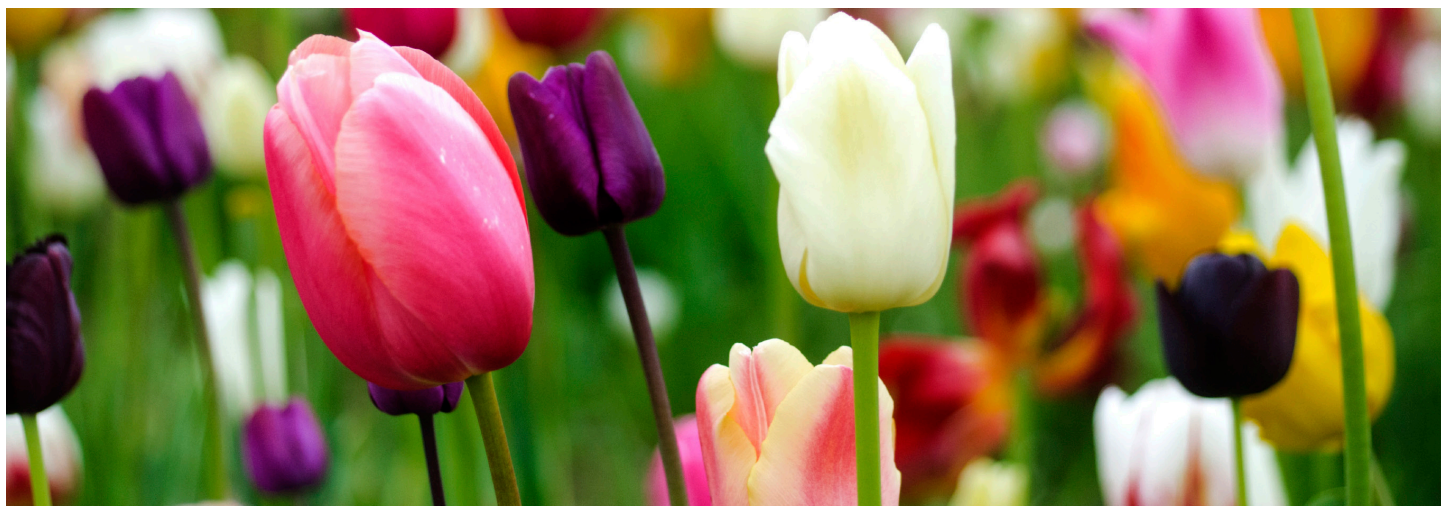
Most faith communities seek to help people who are in need of support, as do sexual assault programs. However, within this common mission, there may be variations in approaches and scope. Determine whether or not these differences are barriers to a partnership or how these differences may be respectfully addressed in your partnership.

Be creative; pinpoint areas where the work your agency is doing may intersect with work the community of faith is already engaged in. For example, a faith-based organization may have a strong connection of outreach with the local prison. They may be interested in learning more about correlations between sexual abuse, trauma, and incarceration.

### *Are there existing allies within the community?*

Identify people who can help you get your foot in the door. You may have staff, volunteers, or board members who are trusted members of faith-based communities who can make introductions on your organization's behalf. Community-wide religious councils or ministeriums may provide an opportunity for general introductions, paving the way for future one-on-one outreach. There may be existing groups within the community of faith where natural connections can be made. For example, a sexual assault program may provide training for religious education staff or volunteers on mandated reporting requirements or may partner with a youth group on a service project.





### 3. What are the boundaries of the partnership?

*How can I separate religion from my professional role?*

Sexual assault programs are not religious organizations. Staff members who are interfacing with faith communities must be clear in their role as a secular information-provider and consultant on issues related to sexual violence. Leave the theological discussions to the faith leaders.

*What resources on sexual violence already exist for this faith-based community?*

Many communities of faith already have statements, policies, and procedures for addressing sexual violence. These can exist within a specific house of worship or within a broader denomination, synod, branch, or group. Familiarize yourself with these documents; they can help to inform your efforts and can provide you with relevant resources to share with members of that faith group.

*How do we know what they need?*

In a nutshell: you don't. While it is essential to be clear about your organization's intentions and bounds of capacity for the partnership prior to

making contact, remain open and allow the faith-based group you are working with to identify areas of focus and action. The process of determining a collaborative plan of action will build trust and investment in your joint efforts.

## RESOURCES

Faith and Service Technical Education Network  
[www.fastennetwork.org](http://www.fastennetwork.org)

Faith Trust Institute  
[www.faitrustinstitute.org](http://www.faitrustinstitute.org)

Jewish Women International  
[www.jwi.org](http://www.jwi.org)

National Sexual Violence Resource Center  
[www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape  
1-888-772-PCAR (7227)  
[www.pcar.org](http://www.pcar.org)

The Pluralism Project of Harvard University  
[www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs  
[www.wcsap.org](http://www.wcsap.org)



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