

**How Are We Doing?
A Toolkit for Organizational
Self-Assessment
by Faith-Based Service
Organizations**

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Pre-requisites	2
The WHAT Analysis	3
Mission tracking	3
What Works Cross-Check	5
The HOW Analysis	8
Philosophy of Ministry Assessment	9
Conclusion	10
Appendix	
Chart 1: Mission Tracking	11
Some Resources for What Works Checklists	12
Chart 2: Philosophy of Ministry Analysis	13

Introduction

This toolkit is designed for directors of faith-based organizations who wish to lead their staff, board, and/or volunteers through an intentional process of internal self-assessment. This evaluation system assists organization leaders and stakeholders in assessing whether their programs and policies are “on track” with their mission and philosophy of ministry. It works especially well for day-long or weekend Board or staff retreats.

I. Pre-Requisites (What You Need to Have in Place to Use This System)

A. Consensus throughout the organization on what the *ultimate objectives* of the organization are.

Some examples of ultimate objectives could include: encouraging the development of community leaders; encouraging spiritual growth among ministry volunteers; facilitating permanent, positive socio-economic transformation in the neighborhood, introducing people to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; fostering racial reconciliation; developing healthy partnerships across denominational lines, etc.

B. A clear, written mission statement (describes *what* the organization does, for whom).

For example, the organization might have a mission of “empowering community residents in school, on the job, and in life through Christ-centered programs” or the mission of “providing mentoring services for teens to prevent school dropout.”

(If your organization does not have a clear written mission statement, or wants to improve its current one, FASTEN recommends the *Wilder Nonprofit Field Guide to Crafting Effective Mission and Vision Statements* by Emil Angelica.

C. A written “philosophy of ministry” document that describes core values (*how* the work should be done).

For example, an organization’s philosophy of ministry could include commitments to: God-centered teaching; a relational approach (emphasizing the development of personal, face-to-face friendships over the giving of material aid/commodities to people); avoidance of dependency-engendering practices; vigorously involving community residents in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the programs, etc.

II. The Evaluation Process

The first step in the self-assessment process is to ask: WHAT should our organization be doing? Are we doing what we’re supposed to be doing? Are we doing the right things? These questions can be answered by walking through the two-part “WHAT Analysis.” This process will help an organization to: (1) determine whether its actual programs are “on track” with its mission and (2) assess how well its programs incorporate “best practices.”

STEP ONE: The WHAT Analysis

1) Mission-tracking

- First, articulate the specific goals your mission statement implies.
- Second, describe the various initiatives/programs your organization is operating.
- Third, have your staff/Board members answer this question: Is our organization conducting the kinds of programs that “connect” with our mission statement? Are our programs aimed at achieving the kinds of outcomes suggested by our overall mission? In other words, are we “on track” with our mission? Or, for whatever reason (funding influences, personality influences, neighborhood influences, “bigger is better” temptations, “urgency of the need” temptations) are we doing things *outside* the scope of our mission statement or even contradictory to our mission statement?
- If you decide you are “off track,” you must analyze why, and then consider either changing your activities to come into line with your mission statement, or re-working your mission statement to more accurately describe the actual life of your ministry.

Let's walk through an example of the mission-tracking exercise.

Imagine you are the executive director of ABC Ministries, and you are leading your staff through a Saturday retreat to self-assess the ministry. Let's suppose that ABC Ministries offers three primary programs: an after-school tutoring program for elementary school students, a weekly evening Teen Life Skills program, and a twice-weekly adult job training class that involves instruction in ESL and computer skills. ABC Ministries is located in a lower-income neighborhood called “Tesoro,” populated mainly by Hispanic families. ABC Ministries is an outgrowth of 1st Baptist Church, a congregation of 750 primarily white, middle-class families located about five minutes away from the Tesoro community. The ministry has been operating for three years.

To see whether ABC Ministries is “on track” with its mission, we first examine the mission statement and then determine what specific goals are implied by it. ABC Ministries' mission is: to help individuals and families from the Tesoro community, and from 1st Baptist Church and other local churches, to experience and practice love of God and love of neighbor. ABC Ministries envisions a future where members of the Tesoro community and of 1st Baptist Church partner together in caring relationships to empower neighborhood residents to flourish in their family life, in the classroom, on the job, and in life through Christ-centered programs that encourage children and adults to grow intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

The goals indicated in this mission statement include:

- 1) helping 1st Baptist members and members of the Tesoro community to experience and practice love of God and love of neighbor
- 2) building caring relationships between 1st Baptist members and Tesoro community residents
- 3) empowering neighborhood residents

4) helping Tesoro neighborhood residents to “flourish in their family relationships, in school, on the job, and in life through Christ-centered programs”

5) encouraging intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth among Tesoro residents.

Next, we describe in detail the programs currently operated by ABC Ministries:

After-school Tutoring: children in grades 1 through 4 come once per week for 90 minutes after-school to be tutored, one-on-one, at ABC’s Family Care Center, located in the heart of the Tesoro neighborhood. The afternoon begins with a short prayer time between the tutors and students, followed by a snack time. Then students receive help with homework and work on math and reading skills together. Students and tutors also make use of learning games on computers in the Center’s computer lab. The program also involves monthly field trips that serve as incentives for the students toward good behavior and attendance.

Teen Life Skills Program: teens gather Thursday evening for two hours at the Center. They meet for a short teaching time as a large group, then gather in small groups of 2-3 teens each with an assigned small group leader. The program focuses on building character in the teens through teaching on Biblical values. Often guest speakers—typically Hispanic professionals who follow Christ—are brought in to talk about their work, their educational experience, and their family life. The teens help plan monthly fun activities and field trips that are offered as rewards for attending the program the other three weeks of the month.

Adult Job Training Program: The program targets Hispanic women in the community who have some English proficiency but desire to increase their language ability and to gain marketable job skills. The women meet twice weekly at the Center for ESL instruction and classes in word processing. Throughout the course of the 12-month program, they gather periodically for Saturday seminars to hear teaching on such topics as “balancing family and work,” and “effective job interviewing.” In addition, each woman in the program is matched with a Friendship Team, a small group of three or four 1st Baptist Church members. The Friendship Teams meet with the ladies once a week following the Thursday computer classes, to offer encouragement and moral support. The Friendship Teams provide practical help to the program participants, such as transportation to job interviews, help with babysitting, assistance with job searches, and the like.

With the goals and the programs of ABC Ministries now specified, the staff members are ready to tackle the question: Is our organization conducting the kinds of programs that “connect” with our mission statement?

In answering this question, the staff use “Chart 1: Mission Tracking” (see Appendix). Following the format of Chart 1, let’s rate ABC Ministries’ job training program. (You should print out Chart 1 and refer to it as you go through the next section.)

On the first goal, helping Tesoro residents and 1st Baptist church members to practice and experience love of God and neighbor, we could probably rate the program a “5” or a “3.” Certainly practical care or neighborly love is being expressed by the Friendship Teams to the program participants. In addition, the initiative may be promoting neighbor love among the program participants as they go through this training experience together. How much the program participants may feel they are specifically experiencing God’s love through the program staff and volunteers may depend on how overtly Christian the program is and how open the church members are about their faith and their motivations for serving

in the program.

On the second goal, creating caring relationships between residents and church members, the job training program should probably earn a “5.” The mentoring component provided by the Friendship Teams puts relational ministry “front and center” in this program. If the computer instruction and ESL class is provided by church members or neighborhood residents rather than by outsiders, this goal is advanced even further.

On the third goal, empowering neighborhood residents, we should probably again grant ABC Ministries a high mark of “5.” By increasing the women’s language and computer skills, they are getting equipped for better-paying, more “family friendly” (e.g., clerical jobs that offer a predictable daily schedule). The program may also be building the ladies’ sense of self-confidence.

On the fourth goal, helping residents to flourish in family, school, and work, we might mark the job training program a 3 or a 5, depending on the content of the curriculum. Obviously the program is assisting the participants in the employment arena. How much it is contributing to their “flourishing” at home may depend on the content of the monthly seminars—if several focus on family issues, then the mark could be higher.

On the final goal, growing Tesoro residents intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally, the mark may again depend on the specific contours of the curriculum. Clearly the program is imparting intellectual skills. How much the women are growing emotionally and spiritually may depend on the quality of the relationships within the group of participants and between the participants and the staff and Friendship Teams. Staff would also want to assess the curriculum used for the monthly seminars, to see how explicitly Biblical this material is and whether it could be said to be promoting spiritual growth.

Now the staff of ABC would tally up the score for each goal to determine an overall score for the program. Depending on how close this score is to a perfect total score of 25, the staff could then assess whether modifications need to be made to the program in order to bring it better into line with ABC Ministries’ mission.

2) “What Works” Cross-check

The next phase of the WHAT Analysis involves assessing your organization’s programs against “best practice” principles. Much research on effective youth, family, and adult social service programs has been conducted and much is still underway. These various research projects have helped to identify “what works” in different types of programs. Your organization should educate itself on “what works” checklists that may be available to you and relevant to the types of programs you are operating. In the appendix to this toolkit, you will find a document, “Some Resources for What Works Checklists,” that lists web addresses for various organizations that have collected best practice information. In addition, the “Making the Case” section of the FASTEN website offers information about best practices in specific types of youth programs. Visit www.fastennetwork.org and on the home page, scroll down to the bottom right-hand corner and click the “Making the Case” section.

For the “what works cross-check” exercise, you will:

- First, describe each program (you can start with the same description as the one you used for the mission tracking exercise, but this one should be even more detailed in terms of listing the specific activities that take place

during the program).

- Second, compare these activities against a “What Works” checklist of best practices relevant to this type of program.
- Third, assess whether the kinds of activities you are doing through the program are of the sort that have been shown to “work.” Ask yourselves, “Can we identify *specific* ways that our program is incorporating these best practice principles?”
- Fourth, try to determine the proportion of your resources (time, facility, staff, volunteers, budget, etc.) that is dedicated to demonstrated “best practices” versus the proportion that is being expended on “unproven” activities.

Let's again try this exercise using our hypothetical case of ABC Ministries.

First, we describe in some detail the programs of ABC Ministries. For the purposes of this exercise, we will examine only ABC Ministries' teen life skills program.

The teen program is a once-per-week outreach to approximately 15 neighborhood teens, several of whom are graduates from ABC Ministries' after-school tutoring program. All teens in the program sign a covenant with the staff that outlines the expectations ABC Ministries has of participating youth. The teens gather for a large group teaching, typically offered by either church members from 1st Baptist or by Hispanic, Christian professionals from the community. The teaching centers on character and vocational issues and is Biblically based. Following the short teaching time, the students break into small groups for discussion and activities, led by an assigned small group leader. (The small groups are assigned according to age, and they work with the same small group leader all year long.) The small group activities often involve some kind of computer work in the Family Care Center's computer lab. Teens in the program work with the staff to develop ideas for monthly field trips. Only teens who have faithfully attended the program during the other weeks of the month are allowed to participate in the field trips. Staff believe that this “incentive-based” programming is contributing to the high attendance rates the program is enjoying. In the summer, students who have faithfully participated in the teen program are eligible for the summer youth employment program. ABC Ministries' executive director has developed relationships with several local businesses that commit to offering paid, part-time summer jobs to teens in the program.

Next, we conduct research and identify sources of information that list “best practice” principles for programs working with youth like those in ABC Ministries' teen program. In this instance, the PEPNet (“Promising and Effective Practices Network”) has produced a short list of effective practices for work with at-risk teenagers. (See the article, “Some Resources for What Works Checklists,” in the appendix for contact information for PEPNet.)

Now, we assess the characteristics and approach of ABC Ministries' teen program against the effective practices listed by PEPNet. Staff review each best practice principle and identify whether and how it is being expressed in the program. If the conclusion is that the program is not implementing this principle, then staff can brainstorm about how the program could be modified to better express that best practice principle. Here is a listing of six best practice principles adapted from PEPNet. For each one, we will assess, “How well does the Teen Life Skills Program of ABC Ministries measure up?”

What Works for Youth: Principles Adapted from PEPNet

→Adult support, structure, and expectations

- Effective youth initiatives connect youth to caring adults who provide nurture, encouragement, discipline, and guidance; and this contact occurs in a program setting that is structured, offers challenging content, and makes clear the rules and expectations

ABC Ministries Teen Program Assessment: The program does make youth-adult connections in a highly structured environment. The same adults work the same kids, thus emphasizing bonding. The program also clearly articulates expectations—the students sign the covenant when they join the program and eligibility for attendance on the monthly field trips, and for the summer jobs program, is clearly connected to faithful attendance at the weekly meetings.

→Creative forms of learning

- Youth educational initiatives should be pervaded by an emphasis on basic skills and the inculcation of an on-going desire to learn

ABC Ministries Teen Program Assessment: The program offers a variety of creative learning experiences. The computer-based learning is highly attractive and engaging to the teens. The curriculum is varied from week to week.

→A combination of guidance and rich connections to the workplace

ABC Ministries Teen Program Assessment: The program emphasizes vocational development issues and offers the participants an opportunity to hold summer jobs.

→Support and follow-up

- For best results, program staff or volunteers must follow-up with students even after they have “graduated” from the specific youth program
- Effective programs refer youth to additional community resources or “hand off” students who graduate from their programs to other initiatives designed for older students

ABC Ministries Teen Program Assessment: This program is a “follow-up” initiative for students who’ve graduated from the tutoring program. But, at present, ABC Ministries offers no specific follow-up program for older teens who complete the teen life skills program. Also, staff are not aware of other programs in the community to which they could refer older teens. This is a “needs improvement” area for the organization.

→Seeing youth as resources

- Young people respond positively when they are regarded by adults as resources, as contributors to their own growth and development (and that of their community), rather than as passive receptacles requiring services

- This principle implies the importance of youth-specific “leadership development” programs that offer youth the chance to serve in positions of responsibility (e.g., “growing into” becoming camp counselors or tutors for younger kids)

ABC Ministries Teen Program Assessment: The program permits the teens to have input into the design of the monthly field trips. Some of the teaching in the large group settings could be considered as focusing on “leadership development” issues. But, the program might better express this best practice principle if it added a community service component. This would help the teens to see themselves as contributors to their community. And, if the youth were assigned the tasks of discovering what the pressing needs in the community were, and designing service programs to address those needs, this would increase their leadership skills.

→Engaging family and peers in organized activities

- It is important that programs develop strong peer relationships among the youth participating in programs (this implies keeping programs relatively small, with a family-like atmosphere)
- Where possible, youth programs should creatively involve parents in some activities

ABC Ministries Teen Program Assessment: The program seems to be following this principle only to a limited degree. On the positive side, since the small groups stay the same all year, they bond. Also, the size of the program (15 teens) has contributed to the development of strong peer relationships. On the negative side, no aspect of the program as currently designed engages parents.

Congratulations! You are now halfway through this self-assessment system. By completing these exercises, you should now have a better sense of how you can intentionally evaluate how well your programs are expressing and conforming to your mission, and to what degree your programs incorporate effective principles of practice.

STEP TWO: The HOW Analysis

After you have reviewed whether your organization is doing the right kinds of things, you next need to ask, “Are we doing these things in the *right way*?” It is possible to do the right things in the wrong way. This assumes, of course, that we have a sense of what “the right way” is. This is where an organization’s “Philosophy of Ministry” document, or core values statement, comes into play. The Philosophy of Ministry document is not the same thing as the organization’s mission statement. The mission statement tells what the ministry does. The philosophy of ministry statement outlines the commitments or convictions or core values that guide how the organization operates its programs. So, after completing the “WHAT” analysis, it is appropriate to do a “HOW” analysis.

To conduct the “how” analysis, organizational leaders:

- First, specify the individual values or principles articulated in the organization’s philosophy of ministry document.
- Second, identify the values that are expressed in each of the organization’s programs.

- Third, make an assessment of how well each program is expressing or implementing the values specified in the philosophy of ministry.

Let's use ABC Ministries again as an example. Some of the elements of ABC Ministries' philosophy of ministry include:

1. The ministry should be relational (it should emphasize the development of face-to-face, personal, relationships among the community members served).
2. The ministry should be holistic (it should seek to minister to the needs of the whole person — physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual).
3. The ministry should demonstrate "responsible caring/"expectant giving" (help should be a hand-up; aid ought not to encourage dependency; the program should expect participants to give back to the community).
4. The ministry should seek to involve the community residents in the design, implementation, and evaluation of our programs (the nature and extent of this will vary depending on the mission/scope of the program).
5. The ministry should promote and facilitate racial reconciliation.

Having now specified the key core values, staff members from ABC Ministries would next assess how well each of the organization's three programs express, incorporate, or display each of these principles or convictions.

Let's suppose we are the staff. To facilitate this exercise, we will use "Chart 2: Philosophy of Ministry Analysis" (see the appendix). For the purpose of this exercise, we will assess ABC Ministries' tutoring program against the philosophy of ministry principles. Our objective is to determine whether the program does a *good* job of incorporating each philosophy of ministry principle, a *fair* job of doing so, or a *poor* job (needs improvement).

Let's review the nature of the tutoring program. It occurs once per week and involves one-on-one tutoring in which church members are paired with Tesoro neighborhood students. ABC Ministries recruits tutors who evidence a love of children and have some degree of Spanish language ability. The tutoring sessions begin with a prayer time, followed by a snack time. Tutors are encouraged to ask the students questions about their day during the snack time, learning more about the students' interests, family life, likes and dislikes, and so forth. At each tutoring session, the children can earn points for good behavior, remembering to bring their homework, cooperating well with other students, etc. Staff plan a monthly field trip for the students, but only those who have accumulated sufficient points that month earn the right to attend the trip. Parents of students involved in the tutoring program are required to provide two hours of "sweat equity" labor each semester in return for their children's enrollment in the tutoring program (there is no financial fee for being in the program).

How well does the tutoring program incorporate ABC Ministries' philosophy of ministry principles? Below are listed short summaries of each philosophy of ministry principle and a possible assessment (print out Chart 2 and refer to it as you go through this section):

Relational ministry (emphasize the development of face-to-face, personal, relationships): Clearly the tutoring program incorporates this value, with its emphasis on

one-on-one tutoring once a week. We would probably mark a "G" for good on this principle.

Holistic ministry (addressing the needs of the whole person—physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual): The tutoring program clearly addresses intellectual needs and probably, in the cases where strong, positive relationships thrive between tutors and their assigned students, is meeting emotional needs as well. The prayer time and the "friendship evangelism" of the Christian tutors helps to address spiritual needs. The mark here? Perhaps a "G" for good or an "F" for fair.

Responsible caring (help should be a hand-up not a hand-out): The tutoring program is incentive-based (kids have to earn the right to attend the field trips) and it requires the parents to give something back in return for the privilege of having their children in the program. Grade: "G."

Involving community residents in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the program: The grade here should probably be an "NI" for needs improvement. ABC Ministries might want to consider the possibility to forming a Parents Advisory Council that could help to provide direction to the tutoring program. Or, parents could be asked to serve as chaperones at the monthly field trips. And perhaps the staff should conduct an annual evaluation survey, asking parents to offer their comments on what impact they have seen the program make on their children's lives.

Facilitating racial reconciliation: The tutoring program expresses this value since most of the tutors are white and most of the kids are Hispanic. But racial reconciliation with kids is much easier than racial reconciliation among adults. To the extent that the tutoring program could help to foster relationships between the tutors and the parents of the students, this value could be promoted better. Perhaps the appropriate grade here is "F" for fair.

III. Conclusion

This self-assessment exercise is not highly sophisticated. It does not require huge investments of time, money, or technology. What it offers is a commonsense approach to considering, in a structured, intentional manner, how well your organization's mission and values are truly being expressed in what you do day by day. Often staff at faith-based organizations are so busy delivering their programs that they do not stop to reflect on "how things are going." Evaluation is haphazard at best—perhaps prompted by failure or crisis. "Mission drift" can occur if some kind of regular "check-up" is not practiced by the organization's leaders. This self-assessment system can be adopted by any size organization and used constructively even just one time each year. Doing so will engender greater confidence on the part of board members, staff members, and volunteers that the organization to which they are dedicating their time, talent, and energy is actually carrying out the mission, vision, and values that attracted them to the ministry in the first place.

Keep in mind, though, that this exercise is aimed at helping your organization to assess itself, to evaluate whether it is staying on track with its mission and values. This is different than evaluating the impact or results of what you do. That form of assessment is known as "outcome based evaluation." It is also a critical form of evaluation for FBOs. FASTEN offers a [toolkit](#) on this topic as well that you might find useful.

CHART 1: MISSION TRACKING

	Tutoring Program	Teen Program	Jobs Program
Goal #1 Residents & church members practice/experience love of God & neighbor			
Goal #2 Developing caring relationships between church members & residents			
Goal #3 Empowering neighborhood residents			
Goal #4 Helping residents to flourish in family, school, work			
Goal #5 Encouraging intellectual, Emotional & spiritual growth			
TOTAL SCORE:			

DIRECTIONS: For each program, assess how well that program is designed to advance each goal. Mark "5" if the program is clearly designed to advance the goal. Mark "3" if the program needs to be modified somewhat in order to advance the goal. Mark "1" if the program does not seem to "connect" well to the goal. Then, add up each column to get the total score for each program.

Some Resources for "What Works" Checklists

(Note that some are specifically faith-based, others secular but faith-friendly)

(1) The Center for Religion and Civic Culture at USC
www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/religion_online/index.html

Has a "Promising Practices" section with info on models they have found and why they rate those models as "promising practices."

(2) Search Institute
<http://www.search-institute.org/assets/>

They have a list of 40 "development assets" considered vital in healthy youth development. Various Christian inner-city urban youth ministries have found this information very helpful.

(3) Public/Private Ventures
www.ppv.org

A little more academic, but they have produced many reports of the "lessons learned" variety. One example you'll see on their home page: "Ten Lessons From the CCYD Initiative"

(4) National Network of Youth Ministries
<http://youthworkers.net/index.cfm>

Offers a quarterly magazine and a variety of training events...no specific what works checklist, but if you poke around long enough on the site, and visit the archived issue of the magazine, there's some good info here.

(5) The National Crime Prevention Council
www.ncpc.org

Many publications available, of the "10 Ways to Reduce Crime" and "50 Strategies for Preventing Domestic Violence" variety.

(6) National Youth Employment Coalition-PEPNet
www.nyec.org/pepnet

Lists of effective practices in youth work and workforce development

(7) The Center for What Works
www.whatworks.org

(8) National Mentoring Partnership
www.mentoring.org/index.adp

Click 'run a program.' Then click "Effective Practices"

CHART 2: Philosophy of Ministry Analysis

	Tutoring Program	Teen Program	Jobs Program
Principle #1 Relational approach	G F NI	G F NI	G F NI
Principle #2 Holistic approach	G F NI	G F NI	G F NI
Principle #3 Responsible caring/ expectant giving – no hand outs	G F NI	G F NI	G F NI
Principle #4 Residents involved in design, implementation, and evaluation of programs	G F NI	G F NI	G F NI
Principle #5 Promote racial reconciliation	G F NI	G F NI	G F NI
Total "NI"			

DIRECTIONS: Review the program activities and approach for each of the organization's program. Assess each program for how well it incorporates the elements of the organization's philosophy of ministry statement. Circle G for "good," F for "fair" and NI for "needs improvement." Then add up the total number of cells in each program column that you marked "NI" for needs improvement and put that number in the bottom row of the chart.