



# Faith in Community: Building Bridges of Trust

A Guide for Impactful Partnership

*Learnings from Faith in the Vaccine  
Ambassadors (FIVA) Carolinas*

*During the COVID-19 pandemic,*

Interfaith America has increased trust in and access to the vaccine through a national Faith in the Vaccine Ambassadors (FIVA) initiative. In the Carolinas, this work has been supported through the generosity of **The Duke Endowment**, based in Charlotte. Both nationally and regionally, the program highlighted the positive role religion and interfaith cooperation could play in a moment of national crisis, as well as the promise of engaging diverse religious identities and communities to foster human wellbeing.

This brochure captures the initiative’s model for effective partnership for those who seek to build trust and bridge gaps in information, resources, and access to strengthen community health.



**By the numbers:**

**18**  
campus teams

More than

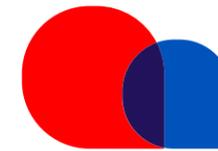
**50**

community partners

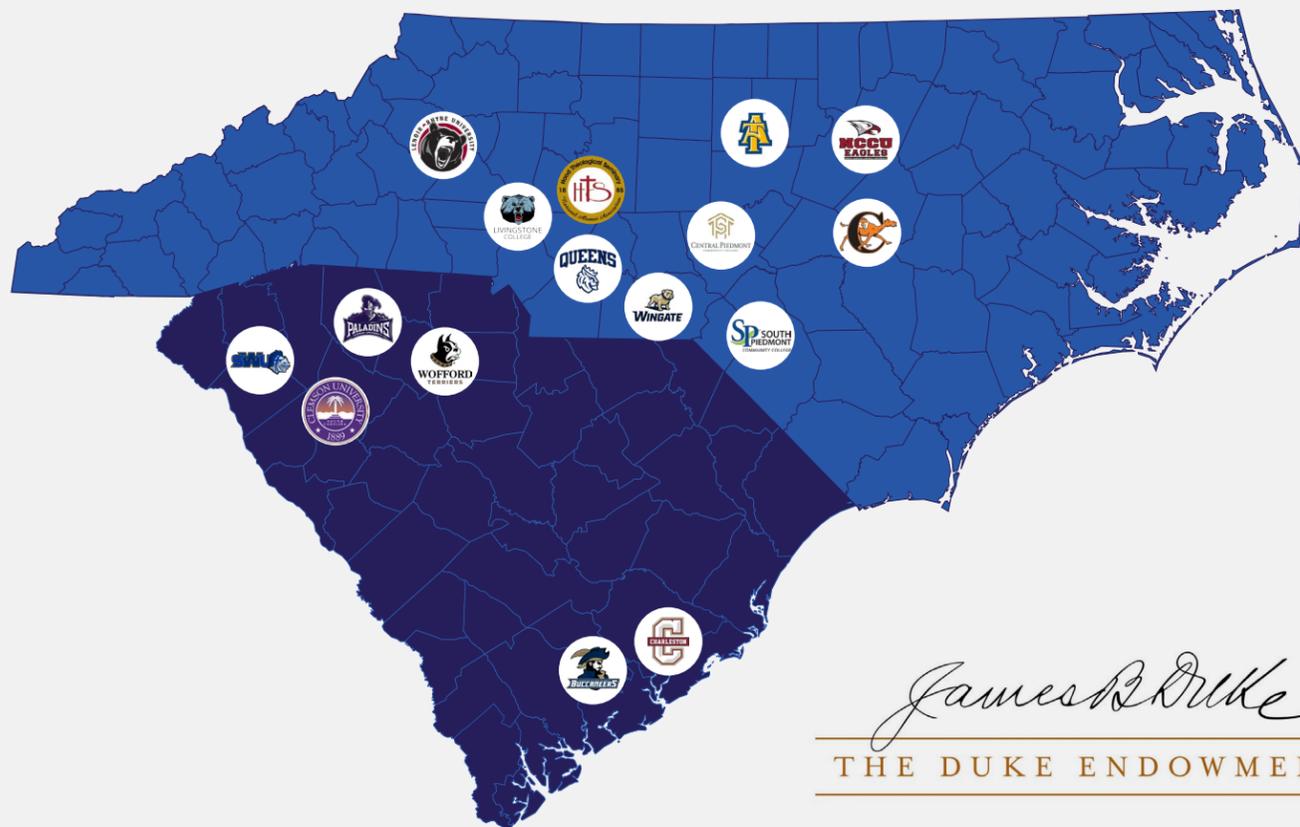
More than

**200 EVENTS**

(information and vaccine clinics)



**THOUSANDS**  
of shots in arms



*James B. Drake*  
**THE DUKE ENDOWMENT**

**Religious Diversity as a Community Asset**

Interfaith cooperation leverages the inspiration and resources of our diverse faith traditions to strengthen our social fabric. By both affirming shared values—such as the sacred worth of all—and honoring distinctive beliefs and practices, interfaith cooperation draws on the richness of our nation’s religious diversity to work toward the flourishing of all people. In this way, we nurture faith in the community, building bridges of trust and human connection along the way.

*As Community Ambassadors, we...*

- **Work across our differences** to meet human needs, bridging gaps in information and resources through mutual respect, trust, humility and empathy
- **Grow our awareness** of societal issues locally, nationally, and globally
- **Develop a sense of belonging**, purpose, connection, and support
- **Deepen our self-understanding** as we show compassion and kindness
- **See the world through the lenses of others** while utilizing collective efforts to affect change within the community
- **Learn from community organizations** devoted to advocacy and action promoting a more equitable world
- **Gain key skills for life and work**, such as communication, social and emotional IQ, resilience, collaboration, and time management

# What we've learned from our ambassadors:

## Get Involved:

It starts with saying “yes.” Look for opportunities to get outside your own circles, while serving in ways that connect with your own values, interests, and commitments.

**FIVA note:** Our ambassadors came from a wide range of schools, majors, and worldviews. What they shared was a yearning to be “part of the solution” to the pandemic.

## Listen First (and Check Your Bias):

Ask! Ask! Ask! Begin by listening to the stories and perspectives of those whom you're hoping to engage. Remember that we operate out of assumptions that often need reviewing and revising!

**FIVA note:** Our ambassadors learned that the factors behind an “unvaccinated” status were diverse, complex, and often surprising (e.g., “I’m afraid of shots,” “I can’t afford to miss work,” etc.).

## Be Organized and Ready to Roll Up Your Sleeves:

Effective partnerships take a lot of time and energy. Work with effective community leaders to clarify the purpose and expected outcomes from the initiative.

**FIVA note:** Our ambassadors learned to follow the lead of those who’d already won the trust of community members. They found great success by supporting and amplifying efforts already in place (e.g., offering vaccine clinics at existing community events).

## See Obstacles as Opportunities:

Things NEVER go according to plan. Rather than being demoralized, seek the wisdom of others in understanding what created a roadblock and thinking creatively about a way around it.

**FIVA note:** Almost all of our ambassadors found themselves frustrated at some point in their efforts. Their resilience made all the difference, as they shifted strategies, found new partners, and expanded their view of what was possible.

## Find the Helpers:

This maxim from Mister Rogers is so simple but so true. Your best strategy for making a difference is to work alongside others who are already doing so and who share your aims. That way, you can learn from them and build on the trust they’ve already won.

**FIVA note:** Our community partners ranged from faith communities to interfaith alliances to non-profits, with focuses in health, housing, education, and other areas. But ALL of them had proved records of effectiveness as well as a commitment to bridging gaps in information and access to the vaccine.

## Remember, It’s All About Relationship:

As Maya Angelou said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Perhaps the most important difference you can make has to do with the quality of your interaction. Look neighbors in the eye, ask questions about their lives and what they care most about, and find ways to show that you care about THEM.

**FIVA note:** Across the board, our ambassadors delight most in the stories they tell about conversations with community members. There may have been a vaccination involved, but more importantly, there was authentic human connection.

## Be Culturally Aware:

Interfaith cooperation is all about accepting others on their own terms, not ours. This can be hard work, especially when we encounter cultural differences.

**FIVA note:** When working with faith-based organizations, our ambassadors report they learned how better to tune into oral and body language and grew more attuned to micro-aggressions.



## Reflections from ambassadors:

“

*I celebrate differences and, simultaneously, embrace unity as medicine for the community. I can move forward with confidence in my ability to empower communities with medical knowledge.*



“

*This work has allowed me to see exactly how important my non-medical perspective is in the medical field... There are so many factors outside of [biology] such as socioeconomic, culture, racism, etc. that have a detrimental effect on individual health issues. I hope to continue to offer a new perspective in this field to advance the well-being of Charleston's diverse community.*

“

*While serving, you [must] be open to different perspectives. When trying to spread awareness, you have to meet people where they are. The outcome is not the only thing that matters; it is the journey as well.*

“

*I have been a part of this work because I did not want to see the minority and poor communities overlooked or left out. We are in this together, so we need to ensure everyone gets the help they need.*

“

*I have learned that there are lots of people who face obstacles to basic health care access that I never thought about before.*

“

*I have understood what it means to really serve for God and for the community. I could not be happier that I was able to have an amazing leadership experience. I know that today and [into] the future ... I will look for opportunities to help others.*

## Questions for Reflection:

What was my purpose as a community ambassador?  
What inspires or motivates me?

How did I learn or grow as a community ambassador?

What role did listening and empathy play? How were they activated?

What role did resource-sharing play in my time as community ambassador?

What did I do to stay focused on the dignity and worth of others?

How did I work to align my verbal and non-verbal communication in genuine fashion?

How did others experience me? What will they share about that experience?

What do I value most from this experience?

How did I face the inevitable barriers in this work?  
How did they help me grow?

How can I improve as a community ambassador?



## Quick Tips:

### ***Get Involved*** —

Say “Yes”!

### ***Listen First (and Check Your Bias)*** —

Ask!

### ***Be Organized and Ready to Roll Up Your Sleeves*** —

Commit!

### ***See Obstacles as Opportunities*** —

Persist!

### ***Find the Helpers*** —

Collaborate!

### ***Be Culturally Aware*** —

Pay Attention!

### ***It's All About Relationships*** —

Connect!

## Faith & Health



*Engaging religious diversity to strengthen health across the nation.*