

Analyzing the Practice of Nonprofit Advocacy: Comparing Two Human Service Networks

Jodi Sandfort

Associate Professor &
Chair, Leadership & Management Area

Public and Nonprofit Leadership Center
Humphrey School of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota
sandf002@umn.edu
612-625-3536

Presented on March 21, 2011
Georgetown University, Washington, DC

Revised for Publication October 2011
& October 2012

Funding for this project came from a research grant from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota. Thanks to Issac Wengard, Ipyana Critton, and Kelly Baker for their assistance in this project, Jennifer Mosley, Steven Smith, and Robert Pekkanen for their comments, as well as the nonprofit leaders and managers who shared so generously of their time throughout. Any errors, however, should be fully attributed to the author.

Engaging in public policy is an important and well established role for nonprofit organizations. Yet, as others in this volume explain, initial research about nonprofit advocacy assessed it in relation to abstract frames from social science, considering nonprofit agencies as merely another form of interest groups, vehicles for social movement organizing, or civil society associations enabling democratic participation (Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Boris & Krehely, 2002; Mosley, 2010a; Warren 2004). This volume and other more recent scholarship tries to understand advocacy, itself, to center stage, to consider, as Pekkanen and Smith articulate in this book's introduction "How do nonprofits advocate?"

Significant numbers of nonprofit agencies engage in civic engagement, policy advocacy, and lobbying. Many large and formalized nonprofit organizations deploy a range of tactics to share their knowledge and expertise in the public policy arena. Much of this research grows out of larger consideration of how public funding might influence nonprofit board governance, professionalization, formalization, and organizational effectiveness (Gronbjerg, 1993; Smith & Lipksy, 1993; Sandfort, et al, 2008; Schmid, et al, 2008; Stone 1996). While scholars initially worried that nonprofits' resource dependency on government created disincentives for policy advocacy, empirical research has found little support for this concern. In fact, there is growing evidence that organizations receiving government funding are more likely to engage in public policy engagement (Berry & Arons, 2003; Chaves, et al, 2004; Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; Mosley, 2010b; Salamon & Gellner, 2008).

Beyond this question, scholars have not explored many other essential questions about capacity and result. Certainly, national policy engagement is differentiated from activities at the state and local levels (Berry & Arons, 2003; Child & Gronbjerg, 2007). National nonprofits engaged in policy advocacy are often sizable, able to mobilize their memberships, and pursue sophisticated tactics informed by political practices (Berry 1999; DeVita & Mosher-Williams, 2001; Strolovitch, 2007). In contrast, nonprofits at the state and local activities engage in much more modest activities; researchers document that confusion about basic legal rules and regulations and lack of familiarity with simple tactics decreases policy advocacy engagement among the whole population of nonprofits (Bass, et al, 2007; Berry & Arons, 2003; Reid, 2006).

But more recent descriptive accounts of nonprofits public policy activity by Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies point to new topics for research. Their 2007 survey and subsequent roundtables of nonprofit leaders highlight the significant role of coalitions and networks for many organizations (Belzer, 2011; Geller & Salamon, 2009; Newhouse, 2010). While Mosley's chapter (this volume) also highlight the collaboration with others organization is a common phenomenon, the mechanism of influence and capacity among networks is not well understood. In fact, this issue inspired the analysis I undertook for this chapter. Through investigating nonprofit advocacy in a unique study of nonprofit service delivery organizations in one state, I highlight what is not yet visible in most research about nonprofit advocacy – the way network participation influences how organizations develop, reinforce, and sustain advocacy practices.

In this exploration, I examine the workings of two networks of human service organizations, both of whose members provide safety-net and social service programs to low-income individuals and families. The statewide, Community Action Partnership (CAP) was formalized in 1971 and strengthened in the early 1980s after federal retrenchment and funding consolidation. As such, it emerged in response to government initiated, top-down policy change. The other network, the Alliance for Connected Communities, was founded in 1999 by agencies in the state's metro area with deep community roots as historic settlement houses and community centers. As such, it emerged from a bottom-up movement of agencies directors who wanted to build power in light of growing environmental uncertainty. Each network is held together by a unique history and a similar struggle for stable and flexible revenue to support daily operations within service-based organizations. Important to our purposes here, while agencies in both networks focus on service provision, they also engage in local and state community building and policy advocacy like many other community-based human service organizations (Marwell, 2004; Mosley, 2011).

In this chapter, I draw upon multiple sources of data to better understand how advocacy capacity is built in such direct service organizations. Like other past research (Berry and Arons, 2003; Mosley, et al, 2003; Salamon and Geller, 2008), I capture a point-in-time reports by

surveying organizational leadership about their policy advocacy tactics. While individual organizations in this sample report using a comparable number of advocacy tactics, and the descriptive analysis points to results consistent with previous research, analysis of qualitative data gathered over time suggest that critical capacity resides at the network level. Thus, while surveys offer one picture, a more deep exploration of how advocacy is practiced highlights other dynamics.

While the practices used, capacity they reveal, and results generated differ significantly across the two networks, my interpretation draws upon practice theory to showcase a comparable underlying dynamic. Practice theory starts from the presumption that what people do and how they do it has substantive impact. My application here unpacks how shared experiences and understandings activate or impede the development of critical resources. This lens departs from the convention understanding of resource as financing provided through a foundation grant or government contract. It also is distinct from other scholarship in this area which sees advocacy as a tool to reduce resource dependency on the sources of finances and legitimacy (Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; Mosley, 2010; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Rather, it stresses that critical resources also may be human talent, collective strategy, or organizing tools. They can be activated, squandered or depleted. This interpretative lens emerged from longitudinal, qualitative data and privileges the way each network actually attempts to execute its various advocacy tactics. As we describe what is actually done, how the tactic unfolds and is understood in the network, we can better see the significance of the resourcing process in what subsequently unfolds. This close analysis responds to other scholars' entreaties (Berry & Arons, 2003) that we further explore what is involved in developing nonprofit advocacy capacity so that organizations and networks can deploy a range of tactics effectively.

Research Design & Methodology

This paper uses data from an in-depth study of these two human service networks I conducted from 2007-2010. Unlike some case studies, I did not seek to identify cases with strong reputations for effectiveness, either as networks or organizations, when designing this

study; rather I identified two networks with similar characteristics to allow for systematic comparison. Both the Alliance of Connected Communities (Alliance) and Community Action Partnership (CAP) exist in one state, allowing us to hold constant the policy environment in the comparison. Both are organized by the same overall structure, a formal network with an incorporated nonprofit at the hub. At the time of this study, the Alliance had two full-time staff and a budget of \$450,000, the CAP had four full-time staff and a budget of \$1 million, both supported largely by membership dues and contracts. All local member agencies committed their executive directors to each networks' governing board. Table 1 summarizes the organizational members on some key dimensions. As is shown, while the Alliance member organizations are smaller than the Community Action Agencies with average employment half as large, less revenue, and fewer overall programs, organizations in both networks are large, formalized and professional human service agencies. All receive significant levels of funding from public sources and, are thus, easily recognized as significant in the day to day operations of the American social welfare state.

One source of data comes from an organizational survey of all network members conducted during the spring of 2008. This survey garnered a 75% response rate among the Alliance agencies and 86% among the CAP organizations. The survey captured descriptive information about all agencies regarding programming, size, finances, governance, management capacity, and policy engagement. A comparable survey also was fielded in a state-wide random sample of Minnesota's nonprofit sector to allow for comparison between that population and organizations in these two networks (Sandfort and Rogers-Martin, 2008).¹ Measures about policy engagement activities were adapted from a survey Human Service organizations in Los Angeles (Mosley, Katz, Hasenfeld, and Anheier, 2003).

Secondly, I conducted 45 semi-structured formal interviews with leaders during 2007-2008, distributed equally across each network, about the network's history, accomplishments, and major activities. A portion of these interviews uses a modal narrative approach (Clark et al. 2007) in which hypothetical situations about three major trends in government and nonprofit relationships are posed systematically. This data collection technique helps capitalize on the

richness of semi-structured interviews, yet enables more systematic comparison about how perception and action are related.

Additionally, I consulted network documents and conducted regular participant observation throughout the four year period. The field notes (Emerson, 1995) captured observations and informal interactions from training programs, board meetings and public events, phone conversations, and other professional interactions. They recorded both notable events and participants' interpretations of events. This source was an important supplement to the more formal interviews and added an ethnographic dimension to the research, probing the ways network participation shaped perceptions and actions among their membership.

Survey results were analyzed with SPSS and descriptive comparisons made between both networks and our state-wide sample of human service organizations. The indices of different types of advocacy tactics were developed using data from the full state-wide survey.¹ I also compare results from network organizations with the 239 human service organizations in the statewide sample in this paper.² All qualitative data were transcribed or audio recorded and introduced into NVivo for systematic analysis, using both inductive and deductive coding. Analytical memos were used to capture emerging themes that inform the development of the grounded theory presented here. Because data collection occurred over a number of years, there was systematic refinement of coding scheme and understanding over the course of the study.

This comprehensive data collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative information about these two cases enables triangulation and improves the validity of the conclusions drawn. Specifically, the analysis provides rich description that allows me to illuminate important dynamics largely obscured in most research based merely upon specifying constructs presumed in existing theory to predict policy advocacy.

Research Context

The organizations in these two networks focus on providing human services for low-income citizens. They are multiservice organizations, offering a range of programming such as emergency food and shelter, early childhood and family services, senior services, supports to vulnerable families and youth. They are not, in any sense of the word, advocacy organizations (Berry & Arons, 2003; Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; Mosley, 2010a). While these two cases are comparable in many ways, there are some distinctions to note. While organizations across each network share similar struggles for stable and flexible funding and espouse values of social justice as central motivations, each is held together by a unique history. Their stories illustrate how developing an orientation to advocacy is often an incremental process within nonprofit service organizations (Berry & Arons, 2003: 164).

The organizations in the Alliance for Connected Communities are traditional social service agencies or community-based organizations (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). Started in the early 20th Century, these settlement houses and mutual aid associations provided language instruction, childhood enrichment, and other family services for those in need. They were originally funded through private donations and community chests, but began receiving increasing amounts of public funding during the 1970s and 1980s (Fabricant & Fisher, 2002; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). Much of these organizations' public funding comes from county and city governments, and school districts; although, Table 1 also shows the large majority of organizations receive at least some funding from federal, state, and local sources. Private philanthropy – from foundation, corporations, and individuals – and the United Way were significant funding streams for these organizations throughout much of their existence. Starting in the 1970s, many Alliance agencies began experimenting with community organizing. As social welfare agencies, they saw the importance of community mobilizing and sought private funding to support it and the accompanying advocacy to promote policy change. Yet, this type of private funding was always in short supply (Salamon & Geller, 2008).

The formal Alliance network grew from informal meetings among agency directors starting in the mid-1990s. While many had known each other for years, they began to come together for a meal more regularly, to trade information about funders and emerging opportunities for influence and service innovation. By 1999, they incorporated as a stand-alone nonprofit. As one of the directors of a large nonprofit explained, “I had tried for ten years to get something together; I realized that, as non-profits, we had to get bigger to command respect. Otherwise, we were going to get nicked to death.” The Alliance affiliated with the national United Neighborhood Centers of America (UNCA) and more members began attending the national meeting which put local service experience in a larger, systemic context.

Unlike the Community Action Agencies which have distinct geographic service areas and designated funds, the Alliance members initially were as much competitors as they were collaborators. But they worked diligently to build trust and collaborative capacity (Huxham, 2003). At first, they focused on joint buying of products, but slowly began to talk about sharing management services, program development, and policy engagement. By 2001, they hired staff and, a few years later, a full-time executive director. By 2007, when this formal study began, they had developed and were executing a shared public policy strategy. Although agencies varied in size, all executive directors on the network board initially agreed that building a policy advocacy strategy was a valuable collective good.

While the Community Action Partnership operates within the same state and provides similar programs and services to low-income citizens, Community Action Agencies (CAAs) have a different history and funding legacy as government-established nonprofits (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). In fact, twenty-five agencies were founded in 1965 across the state to lead local efforts on the war on poverty, as was done throughout the country.³ Today, twenty-seven nonprofits span the state and receive the federal Community Services Block grant and designed state funding, both valuable and unusual public funds because they support general operating costs. Many implement the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (targeted to low-income families to help defray high energy costs during winter), Weatherization Assistance (which helps improve low-income homes), and Head Start (a family support and early childhood

education program). Virtually all agencies also receive state and local public funding, and some garner support from local United Ways.

At the core of the statewide network is the Community Action Partnership. Formally established as a nonprofit in 1971, soon after local community action agencies were founded, its activities initially focused on sharing program knowledge, promoting development of local resources, and coordinating resources across the full network.⁴ In the early years, it was not easy for members to work effectively together. Agency programs and operations varied in quality and the local-constituted entities did not share a common vision. However, many saw themselves as the frontlines of the federal war on poverty focused on organizing low-income Americans. To formalize their network, they hired an executive director for a new nonprofit and, soon thereafter secured the state-level appropriation to support the general operations of the state's CAAs.⁵ When Reagan Administration's 1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act significantly cut federal programs, the network again activated. Working together, the nonprofits encouraged state legislators to pass the first state law designating certain nonprofits as Community Action agencies, just when the federal special designation was rescinded.⁶ They also affiliated with the national Community Action Partnership, a membership organization of direct service and state agencies across the country. Legislative successes and subsequent participation in governor-appointed taskforces built experiences of policy engagement into the foundations of the network.

My study of these organizations and networks occurred over a number of years within which funding for social welfare service was contracting. The Great Recession impacted individual donations, philanthropic endowments and grant-making, and government sources at all levels (Boris, et al, this volume). While the state's foundation association reported consistent funding for human services during this period, there were significant changes in large funders who had been important supporters of these agencies. Leaders in both networks agreed with the sentiment expressed by one Alliance member, "It used to be we would talk about the perfect storm [with each funding source fluctuating]. But things aren't really that any

more. Now we are thinking more like an earthquake....as this hits the county, state, and feds, United Way, foundations and individuals.”

One additional relevant element of the research context is the state’s nonprofit sector. Both networks exist in a state with a vibrant and growing nonprofit sector.⁷ Significant to our purposes here, the state association of nonprofits (one of the largest in the country) is deeply involved in building the sector’s capacity for effective public policy engagement. They regularly offer training on legal responsibilities and regulations, publish newsletter stories about legislative initiatives, and communicate about instances in which nonprofits act as a resource to government officials. They disseminate toolkits to enable direct service organizations to easily carry out get out the vote activities and host forums for candidates. During the period of this study, in fact, the theme of one of the associations’ annual conferences, attracting over three thousand participants, was “Working with Government.” As such, the state association is widely perceived as one of the more general intermediary organizations recognized as building individual organizational capacity for policy advocacy (Belzer, 2011; Newhouse, 2010). This resource should positively influence the deployment of advocacy tactics for all agencies across the two study networks and comparison sample.

One View of Advocacy Tactics

Within existing research, a common method used to document nonprofits’ policy advocacy tactics is cross-sectional organizational surveys (Berry & Arons, 2003; Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; Mosley, et al 2003; Schmid, et al 2008) and I also draw upon that source of data here. My survey results illustrate that few human service organizations in the state-wide sample (7%) and even fewer in both of the case study networks (less than 5%) report hiring lobbying consultants or filing 501(h) election with the IRS to report lobbying expenses. However, like other scholars (Bass, et al 2007; Berry & Arons, 2003; Mosley 2010a), my survey also explores other advocacy activities beyond formal lobbying. I conceptualize public policy engagement in three additional dimensions, ranging on a continuum, from insider to indirect tactics (Mosley, 2011). The first, *acting as a resource to public officials*, documents insider

activities in which staff or board members bring their expertise formally to those with authority: participating in the development or revision of regulations; having meetings with policy officials; serving on a commission or task force; providing formal testimony at a public hearing; or signing a letter to express their opinion to public officials. Table Two provides details about the index developed from these measures in our survey and illustrates that both the Alliance and Community Action Partnership agencies acted as such a resource more than typical human service agencies (statistically significant). On the 5-point scale, Alliance members reported an average of 2.88 such activities over the previous two-years, Community Action members reported 3.27 incidences, compared to 1.83 in the general population of human service agencies in Minnesota. Mosley (2011) suggests that while these insider tactics require more expertise and are more resource intensive, they offer potentially more benefit because nonprofits develop closer ties to decision makers through using them.

The second dimension of public policy engagement focuses on more general activities to *educate the general public about policy-relevant issues*. This include: writing editorials or letters to the editor; issuing reports related to public policy issues; purchasing advertising to influence public policy; or hosting nonpartisan candidate forums. They are less direct than being a resource to a public official but still require substantive expertise. Again, the organizations in both the Alliance and Community Action networks were statistically more likely to be involved in these types of activities than other organizations. On the 4-point scale, Alliance members reported an average of 2.30 incidences, Community Action organization 2.75, compared to 1.0 in the other human service agencies in the state. Comparatively, these organizations use the direct means (resource to public officials) in similar amounts to this more general approach.

The final dimension of public policy engagement focuses on activities related to *organizing constituencies about systems-level issues*. Among these indices, this is the least direct and includes: participating in nonpartisan voter registration efforts. participating in get out the vote activities; working to pass or defeat ballot measures; organizing citizens to influence policy making. While these tactics might influence the general civic environment,

they are less focused on particular organizational or client objectives. Once again, organizations in both the Alliance and Community Action networks were statistically more likely to demonstrate these activities than the state-wide sample of other human service agencies. On the 4-point scale, Alliance members reported an average of 1.5 activities, Community Action agencies reported 1.67 activities, compared to .65 in the larger human service agency comparison group. Comparatively, though, the survey suggests less use of these indirect methods than the other two approaches.

The survey also asks about levels of government the agencies sought to influence with these tactics. As Table 3 reflects, the descriptive results suggest organizations direct advocacy tactics towards levels of government most relevant to their own agency survival. Alliance organizations are more heavily dependent upon state and local resources to support their range service programs. They respond to state- and county-issued requests for proposals to secure funding for their food pantries, early childhood programs, and employment services. The CAAs secure financial resources from the state government, for energy assistance, food programs, employment, and enjoy a designative fund that supports general operations. Yet, they also receive significant federal resources as the main implementers of some federal programs. As a result of their particular financial dependencies, the leaders in these organizations report focusing their policy advocacy activities on the relevant levels of government. The organizations in both of these networks report statistically more attention to these levels of government than human service organizations in the state-wide survey.

To this point, these results paint a picture consistent with previous research. In this sample, few organizations report direct lobbying but many are involved in a range of advocacy activities, from resource-intensive insider tactics to more indirect tactics such as public education about issues or organizing constituents. The organizations involved in both the Alliance and Community Action networks are more engaged in public policy advocacy efforts than other human service agencies. We would expect this because they are larger, more formalized organizations (Bass, et al, 2007; Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; Mosley, 2010a; 2011; Salamon and Gellner, 2008; Schmid, et al, 2008). They also operate at the state and local level

where it is easier to use such tactics to gain access to public officials (Berry & Arons, 2003). The survey results are also consistent with a resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) account in which advocacy targets and tactics are chosen to maximize influence on the environment. Managers act strategically to minimize environmental uncertainty, targeting entities which allocate financial and other resources, and engaging citizens to increase perceived influence. However, as we will see, this explanation is incomplete when we delve more deeply into the qualitative data collected in this comparative case study. The similarity between these organizations and networks – their size, formalization, dependence on public revenue – would predict similar advocacy tactics and results. Yet, significant differences exist in how these organizations and networks actually carry out their advocacy practice. .

Another, More Complete View of Advocacy Tactics

Over a number of years, my research team and I gathered qualitative data which align with the constructs in the quantitative analysis: lobbying, serving as resources to public officials, supporting public education about policy issues, and organizing citizens around policy issues. We also observed and documented events that unfolded as both networks vied to participate in the implementation of federal stimulus funding. What emerges from this careful attention is a deeper understanding of the actual practice of policy advocacy within service organizations and networks.

Lobbying. As would be expected by low reports in the survey, organizational leaders are not strong supporters of formal lobbying. One way they isolate risk for their individual agency is to focus formal lobbying activity in the central agency at the center of each network. Yet, the social dynamics among network members shapes their understanding of the tactic and how it is implemented.

At board meetings, Alliance members talk more abstractly about lobbying, speaking frequently about the need to engage in “systems change” or build new “power bases.” Often, when this value is expressed, other agency directors challenge the presumption, evoking

various experiences or rumors that lend an air of uncertainty about the legitimacy of lobbying activities. When I followed up with one vocal critic, he explained, “[My organization] does not have the capacity to do [lobbying]. And it is not who I am. I was hired to run the organization the best way I can, provide the best services I can to the community. My board is not that type of board.” He – and others consulted subsequently – estimate that 40 to 50 percent of the Alliance members have deep ambivalence about lobbying. This belief goes unchallenged by experience because few Alliance organizations actually are familiar with lobbying practice. One notable exception is an agency that for years used philanthropic grants to support community organizing and lobbying. This expertise was one of the resources the executive director eagerly offered to the network when her organization joined. As she explained, “We are we are really known for our public policy, even though we only have two people on staff [doing it]. I believed we needed to come together with the others to help build the power.” The Alliance executive committee initially embraced this idea and contracted with her registered lobbyist for twenty hours a month to lobby on behalf of the network. But this effort was short-lived. The deep ambivalence felt by large numbers of Alliance members caused them to back away from this tactic when private philanthropic funding became uncertain. While they could have used board meetings to assemble funding or plan alternative lobbying activities, Alliance members merely resumed their ongoing discussion about the lack of policy maker’s interests in low-income people and despair that this would ever change. This shared belief – plus individual director’s ambivalence about the value – created little impetus to sustain lobbying capacity within the network.

In contrast, the Community Action Partnership annually develops a public policy statement, articulating particular legislative objectives. At the network level, they contract with a part-time lobbyist, and the executive director and up to two additional staff also register as lobbyists. However, like the Alliance, there is not uniform support for lobbying within this network. Thinking about the board table, one director reflected, “...[H]alf the table doesn’t care about the lobbying. [They]...get money and do good things and don’t care where it comes from. Part of it is geographic, related to the sophistication of agencies and philosophy. But it also depends on the background of the executive director.” However, lobbying is recognized as

legitimate activity for advancing the shared objectives of the network. Membership dues support the associated expenses and updates are a regular segment in board meetings. The ambivalence of individual leaders manifests in unequal engagement in the network's legislative committee rather than a decision for the network not to engage at all.

In fact, the Community Action network regularly engages in heated debates about particular legislative issues and tactics. As Mosley (2010a) points out, both lobbying and advocacy tactics can be directed either toward organizational or client concerns. Chuck Atwood, the network's director, characterizes it as oriented towards "business" or "mission" and recounts many experiences in the network history where one or the other focused network lobbying efforts. For the network, *business* lobbying focuses on assuring the state and federal funding streams important to the network are protected from attacks. For some, network lobbying effectiveness is assessed on this dimension. As one leader reflected, "Our lobbying receives a B+ or A- because we've weathered some pretty rough storms. When the times come we need to do something, we do it. The minus comes because we are not as good at shaping policy as we should be." *Mission* lobbying in these cases focuses on policy issues related to the well-being of low-income citizens –minimum wage legislation, health care access, changes to food stamp eligibility, establishing a legislative commission to end poverty. Assessing network effectiveness along these lines, another network member came to less favorable conclusions, "We aren't on the foreground of changing social justice issues. I would give us a C. We're passing, but not doing great. We aren't rabble rousing like [other low-income policy advocates] but we offer services to those in need." Yet, differing perspectives are live within the network, shaping heated debates around the board table about the relative costs and benefits of 'business' and 'mission' oriented lobbying strategies.

Because of their general similarities, a resource dependency lens does not explain the variation across these two networks. It would lead one to assume that lobbying is most strategic when focused on "business" issues, overlooking the nuanced ways that individuals debate, compromise, and ultimately integrate their perspectives to enable actual practice. While executive directors' attitudes about lobbying are significant, these attitudes were

deterministic for individual organizations and, ultimately, the whole network. In the Alliance case, there were not enough experiences to overpower the predominant belief that policy makers have little commitment to low-income people. In the Community Action network, individual directors' attitudes were merely mediating forces in determining the scope and direction of the overall advocacy strategy.

Resource to Public Officials. As the survey results suggest, the organizations in both networks engage in a range of advocacy tactics beyond lobbying. The most common advocacy activities focus on proactively engaging in both legislative and administrative advocacy and developing relationships with public officials (Mosley 2010a; Berry & Arons, 2003). Again, while organizations in both these networks carry out these tactics statistically more often than other, human service agencies, how this ambition is carried out varies in important ways.

In early 2007, the Alliance board decided it would develop a full strategy to improve its standing with state and local officials. They formed a policy working group. This group deliberated and decided to invite legislators to a meeting at the state capital. A few elected officials showed up and the agency directors talked about their programming. But, as network members reflected on it later, it seemed difficult for the officials to fully comprehend the core mission of the network or understand the constituencies they represented. As a result, the network decided to catalogue their own assets; mimicking the success of a health membership organization, they hired a firm to develop a staff survey across their members to document latent talents and skills. While such information helped increase internal information and was shared with member agencies, it wasn't effectively leveraged like the health membership agency's experience into work with state officials. Instead of exploring the cause of the mismatch, members resorted to stories of other missed opportunities in building credibility with legislative officials: state representatives who showed up at their organization at Thanksgiving or for flu shots; moments they weren't asked to testify at the legislature; conversations where their knowledge of community issues wasn't appreciated.

More progress occurred at the local level. Through another survey of their members, the director, Juanita Larson, discovered one metro county contracted with the network for a total of \$8 million in various services, requiring 40 different staff members to manage all the contracts. She used this information to access the county's administrator who was interested in increasing administrative efficiencies. They met over a number of months and, as a result, a county staff member was asked to join the network's monthly meetings. The county began to regularly consult with network members about community concerns. While this positive development allowed county officials better appreciate the breadth and scope of the Alliance's work, a relationship with one county didn't translate to relationships with others. In interviews, leaders repeatedly referenced the myriad of state, county, city, and school district that influenced their work. Assessing the overall progress, one network member said, "There are just so many municipalities. We can't establish this type of relationship with all of them." The task of positioning the network as a true resource to public officials, to invest the time in building the trusting relationships, felt overwhelming because of its scope.

In contrast, proactive development of public officials is carried out by the Community Action network. Unlike the contested value of lobbying, network members uniformly believe it is important to offer policy leaders their expertise. "We must be able to show working poor people who are in danger of becoming undefined families on the political radar. We need to always remind decision-makers that working poverty is important—and not to be replaced by the homeless or methadone addicts -- especially in rural areas." When a Legislative Commission to End Poverty was constituted, members opened local offices for visits, and hosted community meetings. This type of investment yield results. Many members recount being called by state legislators for opinions about policy issues or anti-poverty program details. These relationships made them comfortable asking administrators for technical modifications in state legislation or county process when modest tweaks could improve service options. In recounting one such story, one director explained, "If I didn't have a trusting relationship with a legislator he wouldn't have done this for me at all. Also, knowing the funding agency folks, developing a trusting relationship with them, that's also important. When you...do what you say you're going to do, then they trust you."

Like the Alliance, the Community Action Partnership enjoys trusting relationships with administrative officials at the state and county levels, but it has a broader scope. Although local agencies receive significant resources from various state departments, the state's Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), so named because its War on Poverty era origins, has a unique relationship with the entire network. They invest federal funds in the network which assist with general operations, research, and data analysis, regularly communicate the network staff and agency directors, and conduct monitoring visits in ways emphasizing mutual partnership. When creating a training program for the networks' emerging leaders, program designers all assumed the office's director, Linda Miller, would be a featured speaker. In that session, she told a story of implementing total quality management within state government and her realization that low-income people were not technically her office's customers. Nonprofits were. As she explained, "We are the voice for the poor in state government. [But], someone needs to make sure that you get the resources you need. If we take care of you, you are able to care of the poor people." In this way, Linda conveyed the shared mission between her office and the network, subtly communicating the special relationship existing between them.

Agencies in the network also enjoy a unique relationship with local public officials. By federal law, Community Action agency boards reflect a 'tripartite board structure'; one-third of the members are local elected officials, one-third community members, and one-third low-income citizens. While this takes different forms in each locality, this helps assure these nonprofits have unique access to county officials. Conservative board members appreciate how these agencies leverage local volunteers and help assure federal funding reaches rural areas. Policy briefs from the state Community Action network also provide timely information about state policy changes to local officials. One consequence of this unique board arrangement – and its difference from the Alliance whose board members are more typical nonprofit volunteers -- was documented in our survey; 85% of Community Action agencies report their boards are somewhat or very active in influencing public policy, compared to only 45% of Alliance agencies.⁸

Applying resource dependency theory suggests that nonprofit leaders interested in acting as a resource to public officials should go through a rational, strategic planning process to identify and target their activities to minimize main dependencies. Yet, examination of these comparable networks shows that relationships often evolve in ways more haphazard and opportunistic. All of these organizations have very complex revenue portfolios, making it difficult to identify or act upon all dependencies. For the Alliance, that reality immobilized further action. For the Community Action Partnership, the historical relationships with the state's OEO took precedence over other, more significant state-level financial dependencies. Relationships are shaped through experiences of success and failure, from repeated contact over time or stories of past embarrassments. External mandates, such as the metro county's sudden interest in the Alliance or the law dictating Community Action board composition, creates opportunities that can be capitalized upon with sufficient attention.

Public Education about Policy Issues. Educating others is a less direct and less common approach to advocacy in these organizations. For the Alliance, mobilizing the resources to do public education about policy issues is challenging. Members operate different programs – youth development, child care, preschool, mental health groups, food shelves, and employment programs – each with distinct funding sources. The network does not have much research capacity to document the scope of these programs or their collective impact. The active working group on youth development draws staff from all agencies, but its activities focus on sharing program information and establishing common program outcomes. When asked about the potential of working through the network to educate citizens about the policy issues driving their work, staff and leaders found it difficult to imagine. In service-oriented organizations, resources to proactively engage in this way are scarce.

However, as part of the networks' intentional public policy strategy developed in 2007, a number of organizations hosted candidate forums. They developed a subcommittee of member organizations and worked through logistics. While there was good turnout at some agencies, it was not uniformed. And, as a result, the next year fewer organizations hosted. After a few years, this tactic faded from collective discussion. While individual agencies might

occasionally write letters to the editor of neighborhood papers or use food shelf statistics when trying to raise funds from individuals, leaders never discuss proactively engaging the media around the networks' board table. When asked about this, many were surprised by the question, itself. It never occurred to them that public education would be a viable tactic if they collectively pursued it. They also never considered that this constrained viewpoint likely contributed to public officials lack of understanding of their value to communities.

In contrast, the Community Action network has many tactics focused on educating the public about policy issues related to both their work and their clients' needs. The network publishes a comprehensive, 80-page report every two years documenting current policy or program issue and profiling individual organizational successes. It lists each network members, contact information, and key program areas and results. It presents comparable data about clients served and longer-term results assessed through a self reliance scale implemented throughout the network. Lobbyists use this report and data when working with legislators and county officials; leaders share copies with important stakeholders from state agencies, universities, private foundations, and local business leaders.

Other tactics are used to carry out public education. As a network of service-based organizations, the Partnership is regarded as an important venue which state-level advocacy groups use to disseminate research, solicit volunteers for pilot programs or research, or implement outreach efforts to low-income citizens. Niche advocacy organizations focused on employment, public assistance benefits, free-tax preparation regularly attend network meetings to discuss policy challenges and potential solutions, asking the network to get the word out. These direct service organizations are essential In other nonprofits' strategies to educate others about policy issues. Moreover, the network also proactively cultivates media attention in areas like asset development or home weatherization where they have particular expertise. Even when time and resources are limited, the Partnership can showcase local organizations' expertise. They have developed many different tactics for educating the public about policy issues.

Organizing Constituencies about Systems-Level Issues. This dimension of advocacy is less common among all human services organizations, in Alliance and Community Action Partnership members and human service agencies in general. Yet, examining these practices illuminates a few additional factors important in better understanding advocacy capacity.

One commitment holding the Alliance organizations together is a formal goal: “to create assets and tools to amplify community voice.” Members claim it is a distinguishing characteristic of the network, differentiating members from other human service agencies. Some shared petitions about local economic or social justice issues. Others hosted brown-bag presentations about new programs that listened to citizen concerns and responded with staff support for community leadership. However, their iconic illustration of this ambition was a “get out the vote” tool-kit developed and branded as Community Power Vote. With promotional materials, voter guides, and contact tracking for staff and volunteers, it was uniformly recognized among members as a significant experiment consistent with their values embracing community organizing. In 2007, they contacted training across the agencies and registered 1000 voters using the tool-kit. Juanita Larson then tried to take their model to the state’s nonprofit association and was shocked to discover they had developed their own voter initiative. Rather than partnering with the association, she decided to distribute the kits nationally in their national association of settlement houses and community centers. But the next year, the network registered far fewer voters and discovered few were using the Community Power vote materials. In fact, rather than building more capacity within their own network for this activity by 2009, the Alliance decided to join a larger coalition – ironically spear-headed by the state’s nonprofit association – to participate in get out the vote activities.

The Community Action network also evokes the tradition of community mobilization, as part of the War on Poverty legacy when they discuss their work. However, like the Alliance, it is difficult to sustain this tradition in the current environment. One federal funding source, the Community Services Block grant, mandates ‘community needs assessments’ on a regular basis and agencies comply. Some organizations use the results of these assessments to inform planning, but none use it to inform a policy agenda. When agencies’ programs are threatened,

the network has the ability to mobilize staff and clients through email that creates constituent pressure or legislative testimony. The network also aligns with the state's nonprofit association and many other organizations in the get out the vote efforts.

In fact, the networks' previous executive director hired a consulting firm to develop a state-wide grassroots organizing plan for particular legislative districts. During that period, the network employed a full-time organizer who tried to build a deeper base of constituent support for anti-poverty policy. Yet this approach was not sustained by the current network director. Members were ambivalent. In discussing it later, network leaders recounted that campaign-style organizing just felt too risky. They remembered the fights during the early years of the national network, when local agencies received significant scrutiny if they pushed too dramatically to mobilize the poor around electoral change. Targeting particular districts felt quite differently than the network's conventional responsive activity when threats are made to a specific program.

Assessing Network Advocacy Capacity. Members own assessment of policy advocacy effectiveness align with the picture painted in this analysis. Conventional wisdom encourages nonprofits to be modest in their aspirations of effectiveness, be prudent in their activities, and educate funders and board members that long time horizons are often necessary. Such sentiments are heard often within the Alliance. While many members speak frequently about the need to engage in "systems change" work and board meetings focus on desires to share expertise and influence public officials, little progress is made. Survey results confirmed that members did not value the advocacy activities attempted by the Alliance. Among the nine different network activities, they rated policy advocacy activities near the bottom of the list. Although the Alliance pursued many different tactics during this study period -- hiring a part-time lobbyist; convening a policy work group; hosting annual briefing meetings at the capital; commissioning research to gather data; developing a get out the vote initiative -- members could point to no real achievements.

In contrast, Community Action’s advocacy tactics create significant benefits in the minds of members. Their advocacy successfully curtailed challenges to their state appropriation, a significant accomplishment given growing state budget deficits, and secured federal funds to expand programs and develop a network-wide performance management system and leadership development initiative. Beyond these narrow “business” interests, their efforts also helped to pass an increase in the minimum wage, stabilize a state-funded asset development program, and increase general awareness through the a legislative commission. In our survey, when asked about a comparable list to Alliance members of nine network activities, Community Action leaders rated business and mission policy advocacy as the first and third most important. In open-ended responses, members drew particular attention to the consequence that access to the legislature, rapid response, and general understanding of lobbying had on building their capacity during critical times.

Although these data about member assessment of network capacity were gathered through our 2008 survey, an unprecedented opportunity emerged during the economic crisis of the Great Recession to demonstrate the advocacy capacity of both networks. By early 2009, the community circumstances seemed dire. As lay-offs grew, low-income working families were losing their homes to foreclosure, struggling to make ends meet and pay for food and energy bills. While all nonprofits serving low-income working people could have benefited from the passes of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the implementation took a different turn. As a moment experienced by both human service networks in this study, the events provide an opportunity to better understand how advocacy capacity functioned in both networks.

With the new Democratic leadership in the White House and stimulus funding flowing, Alliance members tried to garner the attention of public officials. For the third year in a row, they held a board meeting at the state Capital and invited their own legislators to join them. Few showed up. They then asked one member’s lobbyist to try and insert the whole network into an employment bill, an emergency assistance bill, or any legislation that might be able to tap federal stimulus funding. All attempts to engage as a full network went nowhere. While

they could read the legislative summaries showing that increases in funding for the very services they provided for needy families, children's care, and unemployed workers, there was no way for them to leverage their collective expertise.

So Alliance leaders tried to another strategy and focused on the local level. Juanita Larson met multiple times with the same county executive she had developed a relationship with earlier and asked him to convene a meeting with historic foundation partners. At that meeting, the Alliance described the needs of communities, the potential of a significant public-private partnership, and their unique ability to respond as a network. Yet, nothing resulted. While the county continued to imagine there would be a way to contract with the network as a whole and save administrative dollars, the internal barriers to making this change impeded progress. Foundations merely acknowledged that financial resources were short all around.

The network changed course, yet again. The Alliance policy work group recommended and members voted to join a statewide coalition, HIRE, of over 70 nonprofit members initially focused on "advocating for the fair allocation of federal stimulus dollars." They believed this coalition would create more contact points with the legislators than Alliance-only efforts. They mobilized staff and board members to attend a rally at the state capital in April where the coalition argued that public investments should lifting people out poverty. Reflecting immediately afterwards, Juanita felt it was one of their most successful efforts to engage in public policy process because it was visible, tangible, out in the open. Yet in reality, like many indirect advocacy tactics, it did little to change the allocation of stimulus funding.

At this unique moment when public funds actually were available to meet clients' needs, the Alliance's inability to influence the policy process was glaring apparent and it caused dissention among them. Many board meetings during the spring and summer focused on diagnosing the challenge and possible solutions. After all the dust settled, one organization did secure a new group of AmeriCorps volunteers and shared them with other network agencies. But this rather modest benefit also carried costs (a required agency financial match and

supervision). It was a small consolation. As one member said, “We were on the outside looking in, all the while we knew that others were benefiting disproportionately.”

The experience of the Community Action partnership was a strikingly different. From the beginning, the network had its eyes focused on the ARRA funding. In fact, lobbying of the National Community Action Foundation helped assure specific expansions in Community Action program staples -- Community Services Block Grant, Weatherization, Head Start -- and enabled specific information about other programs, such as energy-efficiency tax credits, increased food and shelter assistance, and expanded federal housing programs to be shared early within the network. From the local and state vantage point, it was relatively easy to activate the network’s advocacy practices. Staff and paid lobbyists tracked relevant committees at the state legislature and communicated about federal legislative development to members. In testimony before the state’s House Finance and Policy Committee, one network member stressed the network’s unique ability to provide a nimble and effective infrastructure for state implementation. He emphasized, “The stimulus package for someone in my line of work is like a kid in the candy store. There are so many things, so many programs funded it in.” Local agency staff mobilized for supportive phone calls or emails at critical moments. As the HIRE coalition which the Alliance joined mobilized, the networks’ director, Chuck Atwood, decided to lay low even though proposed cuts to their state funding was on the table; he wanted to proceed with caution, lest the networks’ own advocacy capacity become a liability.

As the potential for significant federal investment in the weatherization program began to crystallize, the network hired as an additional lobbyist. The state’s Office of Economic Opportunity also stepped into the action. While the Office technically had oversight of funding sources with relatively modest increases, Linda Miller believed they should share information with the network. She convened a special session of the network’s board and, after that initial information sharing, helped assure future network meetings focused on sharing implementation plans, management experiences, and problem solving strategies. From Linda’s perspective, this was mutually beneficial. Her participation allowed state officials to learn more quickly implementation challenges and document modifications that could prove helpful to the

Congressional delegation. In the end, the 28 Community Action Agencies accessed over of \$118 million federal ARRA funds from various funding streams over a fifteen month period.

There certainly are many potential causal factors behind each network's experiences during implementation of ARRA. The institutional embeddness of the Community Action Partnership was a significant factor but its significance was not inevitable. Chuck Atwood's care around the HIRE coalition reflects his awareness that, even though advocacy capacity might exist, it is not always prudent to deploy it. The Alliance's own repeated attempts to influence unfolding events reveal their own understanding of the possibility of being strategic agents. These actions, and many others described with our qualitative data, are unpredictable and perplexing through a lens of resource dependency theory. To understand them, and place them in a more accurate interpretative lens, we must consider other options. This analytical turn has both theoretical and practical importance. The management directive stemming from resource dependency theory – to target advocacy activities to reduce dependency – may overlook other practices important to understanding the development and deployment of policy advocacy capacity among service organizations.

Interpreting Variation in Policy Advocacy Capacity

This study provides a unique window into the more nuanced process used by nonprofit organizations who engage in policy advocacy. In these comparative cases, service organizations depend on a collective to help build out their own advocacy capacity. From a management perspective, this strategic choice makes sense. The knowledge and skills necessary for effective advocacy are distinct from what people managing a service organization, supervising staff, or delivering programs possess. Within the collective, more potential resources existed; they could hire staff with knowledge of legislative processes, utilize and cultivate relationships with other policy-advocates and officials, use effective planning and prioritizing processes. They could also build concrete tools, such as list serves, reports with program facts, and organizing tool kits. These tactics were attempted by actors within both cases. Yet, as the comparison reveals, such collective resources are not always directed effectively, not always further

developed, or sustained. Not all network activity yields resources-for-use in advocacy, in spite of clear intent.

Interpreting this evidence requires we turn to a body of theory concerned with the consequentiality of every day action. This theory, called practice theory, enables us to better understand the core logic of how practices are produced, reinforced, and changed, and the results of that activity (Orlikowski, 2002; Nicolini, et al 2003; Feldman, 2004; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). In the contexts within which they find themselves, people both develop understandings and use artifacts, such as research reports, formal data, marketing materials, to inspire certain actions. Thus, practices both come out of a particular context and help to constitute that context going forward. As Feldman and Orlikowski (2011:1240) explain, there is an empirical approach to practices that focuses on how people act in organizational or network contexts, a theoretical focus probing the relationship between actions and social structures, and a philosophical focus exploring the way practices constitute and produce organizational reality. The first approach is relevant here, as a means for understanding the different views of advocacy practice gleaned from the survey and qualitative data in these cases.

The cross-section survey accounts, and resulting attention to variables easy to measure, such as size and receipt of government funding (Bass, 2007; Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; Mosley 2010a, 2011; Salamon and Gellner, 2008), overlook the significance of shared, historical experiences in creating and reinforcing share values and underlying assumptions about advocacy. However, my detailed examination of these two cases highlights its significance. While the Alliance members shared a tradition of responding to community needs through services, their experiences with public policy lobbying and other tactics, such as community organizing, reinforced ineffective timing and unstable financial support. Similarly, when their major federal funding was slashed in the 1980s, Community Action leaders learned graphically the consequences of being unprepared to engage in policy advocacy. Yet, that period also yielded important successes, creating a state funding appropriation and governor appointed taskforces. These successes convinced them, in ways that eluded many leaders of Alliance organizations, that advocacy tactics could yield significant changes. This mind-set is

communicated through stories and rituals. The socialization transmits underlying assumptions about the practical importance of policy advocacy (Schein, 2004). The shared understandings of historical experiences create a background within which the legitimacy of policy-level work is rarely questioned, even though these direct service agencies face many competing demands.

This practice-oriented account is consistent with other research stressing that resources are important in advocacy. However, unlike resource dependency theory which assumes external-situated and constrained resources, this theory posits that resources are not static, not constituted by the objective presence of a budget-line item, hired lobbyist, or get out the vote campaign. The data analysis of these cases highlights that resources have to be activated. It is consistent with a stream of practice theory by Feldman (2004; Feldman & Quick, 2009) highlighting a *process of resourcing*, rather than attending to static definitions of resources.

The Alliance kept busy executing a number of advocacy tactics but their activities depleted, rather than built, the network's resources. The policy work group developed a proactive strategy. A lobbyist worked part-time. Yet, board meetings focused on topics understood to be important – management and program collaborations, financial uncertainty, changes at historic funding partners – rather than discussing advocacy efforts. Their network acted together on these other topics but didn't focus much attention on how they could sustain their lobbying work. From the beginning, network leadership assumed the only way to do so was to raise external dollars from foundation grants. Yet this is a difficult path because of changeable philanthropic priorities (Belzer, 2011; Newhouse 2010). Because their ambivalence and belief in an external locus of control, the network did think through alternative revenue strategies. They also did not activate other potential resources: the policy committee had unstable membership; the annual process of establishing a network-level policy agenda happened only sporadically; the staff professional development trainings did not discuss policy advocacy or dispel myths about government relations. While a few members received national legislative updates or funding from national advocacy organizations, they only rarely shared it within the network. There seemed many more important things on the Alliance's collective

agenda. This reality quelled the potential resources of time, strategic thinking, and program insight from being unleashed for policy-level change.

The Community Action network similarly uses a number of tactics for public policy advocacy. Yet, as we have seen, they were deployed quite differently. For this network, public policy engagement was a means for using and enhancing resources, building the network's overall strength. Built upon historical experience, network practices focused on sharing information about federal, state and local policy successes and failures, enhancing the overall knowledge base. They developed common performance measures to share with decision makers and regularly invited other nonprofit advocacy groups to board meetings. Interpreted through a practice theory lens, all such actions help activate multiple types of resources within the network, including funding, time, strategic thinking, and program expertise.

Finally, while these different practices emerge from the historical context and shared understanding, the process also helps define what is possible in the future. When tactics such as working with legislators are successful, then training programs with emerging network leaders include day-long modules focused on legislative processes. When lobbyists use network reports about performance and results, a just-in-time performance system is deemed to be important to the network in the future. Once email lists are built or cross-agency working groups assembled, they can be tapped again in the future because operational details are worked out. With this capacity, advocacy practices can focus on execution rather than trying to build competency. The practices reinforce a feeling of agency rather than disillusionment, sustainable even when success is not immediate.

Practice theory helps us to differentiate between potential resources and resources in use. In assessing the ways networks may build the capacity of organizations to effectively carry out policy advocacy practices, the theory emphasizes the recursive way that shared understanding and resources operate. Resources don't just exist because they are given by a philanthropic gift or brilliant leader. Rather they are activated and can be further developed

when a network is willing to work through ambiguity and road blocks. Resources can also be squandered and depleted, when found in a network unwilling to overcome past challenges.

Concluding Thoughts

With this unique comparative case study, I have tried to move the emerging research focused on nonprofit advocacy beyond categorizing or predicting particular advocacy tactics. It has yielded some interesting insights.

First of all, this approach highlights the potential significance of the contexts within which nonprofit organizations operate. If we merely see advocacy tactics as bounded by organization, we will miss many elements important in how advocacy is practiced. As Salamon & Gellner (2008:16) conclude, “Squeezed by an increasing need to interact with the policy process but limited resources with which to do so, organizations have turned to intermediary organizations and advocacy coalitions to help, gaining in the process expertise and focused attention that they cannot easily provide internally.” Networks provide significant platforms for creating pools of potential resources to support advocacy, some which can be mobilized quickly. They help reduce the confusion which surrounds the word for many nonprofit managers (Bass, Abramson, and Dewey, this volume) and allow a collection of activities to be understood as the way “we do” advocacy.

Second, policy advocacy capacity is not merely focused on proactively developing and winning legislative agendas. As these cases illuminate, it can be evoked to assist in policy implementation or deployed reactively to stave off legislative assaults. It can be an essential competency of effective service organizations (Bass et al, this volume; Crutchfield and Grant, 2007) but, because there are so many potential sites of advocacy activity, capacity involves being able to frame collective understanding of the issue at hand and use resources to enable effective action. While using various advocacy tactics, the Alliance did not actually build capacity. Instead, they reacted haphazardly to events, never quite gaining traction on systems-

level change. While carrying out a similar number of tactics, the Community Action partnership deployed them in ways that built collective will, knowledge and insider relationships.

Third, this paper highlights that research merely reporting frequency of advocacy tactics might reveal little about the capacity involved or the effectiveness of those efforts. The notion of capacity suggested here is inherently dynamic; it is not attained but rather created and demonstrated through its execution. It requires activity, insight, reflection, and adjustments, capacity is enacted to respond to events. The Alliance's collective ambivalence surrounding policy advocacy was visible in what they did and what they did not do. It also quelled the potential resources of time, strategic thinking, and program insight from being unleashed. The positive collective experience in Community Action enabled their practices to form a whole repertoire, activated when unexpected events like stimulus funding occurred. These comparative cases suggest how networks can build and sustain advocacy capacity through their practices. Both small and large events and experiences contain potential for change because people choose how to interpret events, and create, use, or enhance the resources collectively available. Fundamentally, understanding advocacy capacity as practice shifts our analytical attention to how capacity is experienced (Mosley, this volume).

These result has implications for how management support organizations or private funders conceptualize "capacity building" efforts in the field. Certainly, my informants and those interviewed by Mosley (this volume) experience the real funding constraints for advocacy activities. Engaging in policy advocacy is resource intensive for nonprofits; it requires time to develop strategies, knowledge about policy systems, programs, communications, and relationships which is often in short supply in service organizations like those examined here. One answer would be to support networks. But, this analysis suggests that networks may or may not effectively resource policy advocacy. While financial support is necessary, it is not sufficient. This analysis showcases that advocacy capacity is more iterative. Organizations gain capacity through a process of engaging ideas and using tools. While financial resources are always in short supply, some nonprofit leaders act to build shared experiences and collective understanding which can actually generate or deplete available resources. Using this insight,

we can hopefully move closer to appreciating what it takes to build the capacity of nonprofit to engage more fully in policy processes on behalf of citizens for whom too few institutions speak.

Table 1: Comparison of two Human Service Networks, 2008

	Alliance of Connected Communities	Community Action Partnership
Legal Status	501(c) 3 Established in 1999	501(c)3 and 501(c)4 Established in 1971
Members	24 Nonprofit organizations Half founded in early 20 th century, half in 1970s	27 Nonprofit organizations All founded in mid-1960s to early 1970s as a result of federal initiative
Geographic Reach	7 county metro-area	State-wide
Board	Full representation of all members	Full representation of all members
Member Clients	Low-income individuals & families	Low-income individuals & families
Network Services / Resources	Executive & staff development Program development Access to administrative services	Executive & staff development Legislative advocacy Federal & state funding
Average Total Employment of Member Organizations	45	83
Median Revenue	\$2,281,767	\$6,558,509
Source of Revenue (percent of members receiving)	76% federal 89% state 89% local	100 % federal 100% state 81% local
Programs	Average = 19, Range 5 to 90	Average = 23, Range 5 to 100
Four Most Common Programs of Member Organizations	Youth Services Family Stabilization Services Senior Services Juvenile Supervision	Head Start Weatherization & Energy Assistance Family Financial Services Senior Services

Table 2; Survey of Advocacy Activities, Comparison between two service networks with Human Service Organizations from state-wide nonprofit survey.

Resource to Public Officials (Index mean =1.75 (2.78), Cronbach alpha = .784)~	Average Response		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participated in development or revision of public regulation Met in person with a public official Served on government commission, committee or task force Provided testimony to elected officials at a public hearing Signed on to a letter expressing an opinion to public officials 	Alliance	CAP	Other Human Service agencies
	2.88 (.96)	3.27 (1.16)	1.83* (1.51)
Public Education about Policy Issues (Index mean =.70 (1.04), Cronbach alpha = .683)~	Average Response		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issued a report on public policy issue Wrote editorial or letter to editor of a newspaper or magazine Purchased advertising to influence public policy Hosted or co-hosted a nonpartisan candidate forum 	Alliance	CAP	Other Human Service agencies
	2.30 (1.06)	2.75 (1.19)	1.0** (1.27)
Organizing Constituencies about Systems-level Issues (Index mean =.51 (.844), Cronbach alpha = .689)~	Average Response		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participated in nonpartisan voter registration efforts Participated in nonpartisan “get out the vote” efforts Participated in an effort to pass or defeat a ballot measure within the past two years Organized members of your community to influence public policy 	Alliance	CAP	Other Human Service agencies
	1.50 (.96)	1.67 (.91)	.65** (.90)
	n=18	n=22	n=239

* p<.05, **p<.01

~ Index measures calculated from the full-random sample of the state’s nonprofit organizations.

Table 3: Locus of Focus for Organization’s Public Policy Advocacy Activities~

	Federal	State	Local
Alliance for Connected Communities organizations	39%***	89%	72%
Community Action partnership organization	73%	96%	50%***
Other Human Service Organizations	18%***	43%***	32%***

***statistically different at $p < .001$

~ In response to question: what level(s) of government has your organization sought to influence through these activities.

¹ To create an accurate sampling frame that defines the entire population of nonprofit organizations in the state, we defined four strata according to the following revenues (during 2005 or 2006): under \$100,000; \$100,000 to \$1 million; over \$1million; and no financial data. In total, the stratified random sample included 3,113 organizations across these strata. The distribution by field reflected that of the population. 622 organizations completed the survey for a 20% response rate. This response rate is similar to other mailed surveys of nonprofit organizations (Durst & Newell, 2001; Zimmermann & Stevens, 2006). Analysis comparing survey respondents with the complete random sample showed no statistical differences on either total revenue (criteria of sampling) or National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) (denoting substantive field expertise), suggesting no response bias.

² In the statewide survey, we used the conventional way of classifying NTEE codes to define human service agencies: Education NEC (B99), Crime & Legal related (I), Employment (J), Food Agriculture & Nutrition (K), Housing and Shelter (L), Public Safety, Disaster & Relief (M), Youth Development (O), Human Services (P), and Community & Neighborhood Development (s20).

³ By 1968, there were more than 1,000 in the national network, covering more than 65% of the nation’s counties (Clark 2000).

⁴ Material in this section drawn upon an unpublished document, “History of Community Action,” c. 1999 written for the Office of Economic Opportunity by Sirius Communications.

⁵ This approach is also maintained in other states. As of 2007, eight other states made state-level appropriations totally more than \$13 million to supplement the federal Community Services Block Grant. “Sources of all CSBG Funds expended in FY 2007,” retrieved on March 26, 2009 from <http://www.nascsp.org/documents/FY07APPENDIXTABLES2-25-09.pdf>.

⁶ This state law became the model for eleven other states, including New Jersey, Florida, Virginia, and Missouri, that developed similar designation in state law.

⁷ From 1995 to 2005, the state’s nonprofit sector grew 67% to 7,339 organizations in IRS data.

⁸ In the state-wide survey of human service organizations, only 21% of agency report boards active at this level.

References

Alexander, Jennifer, R. Nank and Camilla Stivers. 1999. "Implications of welfare reform: Do nonprofit survival strategies threaten civil society?" *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 28(4):452-475.

Andrews, Kenneth T. and Bob Edwards. 2004. "Advocacy Organizations in the U.S. Political Process." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30(1):479-506.

-
- Bass, Gary D., David R. Arons, Kay Guinane and Matthew Carter. 2007. *Seen by not Heard: Strengthening Nonprofit Advocacy*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.
- Belzer, Hillary. 2011. "Building Advocacy from Within: Report on the West Coast Listening Post Project Roundtable on Nonprofit Advocacy and Lobbying." Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society.
- Berry, Jeffrey M. 1999. *The New Liberalism: the Rising Power of Interest Groups*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Berry, Jeffrey M. and David F. Arons. 2003. *A Voice for Nonprofits*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Boris, Elizabeth and J. Krehely. 2002. "Civic Participation and Advocacy." *The State of Nonprofit America*, edited by L. Salamon. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 299-330.
- Boris, Elizabeth, et al (this volume).
- Child, Curtis D. and Kirsten A. Grønbjerg. 2007. "Nonprofit Advocacy Organizations: Their Characteristics and Activities." *Social Science Quarterly (Blackwell Publishing Limited)* 88(1):259-281.
- Clark, Peter, Charles Booth, Michael Rowlinson, Stephen Procter and Agnes Delahaye. 2007. "Project Hindsight: Exploring Necessity and Possibility in Cycles of Structuration and Co-Evolution." *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management* 19:83-97.
- Clark, Robert F. 2000. *Maximum Feasible Success: A History of the Community Action Program*. Washington, DC: National Association of Community Action Agencies.
- Crutchfield, Leslie and Heather McLeod Grant. 2007. *Forces for Good: The Six Practice of High-Impact Nonprofits*. Jossey-Bass: New York.
- DeVita, Carol J. and Rachel Mosher-Williams, editors (2001). *Who Speaks for America's Children? The Role of Child Advocates in Public Policy*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- Emerson, Robert, Robert Fretz and L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fabricant, Michael and Robert Fisher. 2002. *Settlement Houses Under Siege: The Struggle to Sustain Communication Organizations*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Feldman, Martha S. 2004. "Resources in Emerging Structures and Processes of Change." *Organization Science* 15(3):295-309.
- Feldman, Martha S. and Kathryn S. Quick. 2009. "Generating Resources and Energizing Frameworks through Inclusive Public Management." *International Public Management Journal* 12(2):137-171.

-
- Geller, Stephanie L. and Lester Salamon. 2009. "Listening Post Project Roundtable on Nonprofit Advocacy and Lobbying: Washington, DC." Communique No. 13. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society.
- Gronbjerg, Kirsten. 1993. *Understanding Nonprofit Funding: Managing revenue in social service and community development organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Huxham, Chris. 2003. "Theorizing collaboration practice." *Public Management Review* 5(3):401-423.
- Marwell, Nicole P. 2004. "Privatizing the Welfare State: Nonprofit Community-Based Organizations as Political Actors." *American Sociological Review*, 2004, 69, 2, Apr 69(2):265-291.
- Mosley, Jennifer. 2010a. "The Policy Advocacy Role of Human Service Nonprofits: Incentives, Involvement, and Impact." *Human Services as Complex Organizations*, edited by Y. Hasenfeld. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, pg. 505-531.
- Mosley, Jennifer E. 2010b. "Organizational Resources and Environmental Incentives: Understanding the Policy Advocacy Involvement of Human Service Nonprofits." *The Social Service Review* 84(1):pp. 57-76.
- Mosley, Jennifer E. 2011. "Institutionalization, Privatization, and Political Opportunity: What Tactical Choices Reveal about the Policy Advocacy of Human Service Nonprofits." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. 40(3): 435– 457.
- Mosley, Jennifer, H. Katz, Yeheskel Hasenfeld and Helmut Anheier. 2003. *The Challenge of Meeting Social Needs in Los Angeles: Nonprofit Human Service Organizations in a Diverse Community*" Los Angeles; UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research.
- Newhouse, Chelsea. 2010. "Report on the Listening Post Project Roundtable on Nonprofit Advocacy and Lobbying." Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society.
- Nicolini, Davide, Silvia Gherardi and Dvora Yanow, eds. 2003. *Knowing in Organizations: A Practice-Based Approach*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Orlikowski, Wanda J. 2002. "Knowing in Practice: Enacting a Collective Capacity in Distributed Organizing." *Organization Science* 13:249-73.
- Pfeffer, Jeff. and G. Salancik. 1978. *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Reid, Elizabeth. 2006. "Advocacy and the Challenges it Presents for Nonprofits." *Nonprofits & Government: Collaboration and Conflict*, edited by E. Boris and C.E. Steuerle. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 343-372.
- Salamon, Lester and Stephanie L. Geller. 2008. "Nonprofit America: A Force for Democracy?" Communique No. 9 Listening Post Project. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society.

-
- Sandfort, Jodi R. and Nicole RogerMartins. (2008) "Exploring the Nature and Consequences of Nonprofit Management Capacity." Paper presented at the Association for Research on Nonprofit and Voluntary Associations, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- Sandfort, Jodi, Sally C. Selden and Jessica Sowa. 2008. "Do the Tools Used by Government Influence Organizational Performance?: An Examination of Early Childhood Education Policy Implementation." *American Review of Public Administration* 38(4):412-438.
- Schein, Edgar (2004). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3rd edition. Jossey-Bass.
- Schmid, H., Bar, M., and Nirel, R. 2008. "Advocacy Activities in Nonprofit Human Service Organizations: Implications for Policy." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 37, no. 4:581-602.
- Smith, Steven R. and Michael Lipsky. 1993. *Non-Profits for Hire: The Welfare State in the Age of Contracting*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Stone, Melissa. M. 1996. "Competing Context: The Evolution of a Nonprofit Organization's Governance System in Multiple Environments." *Administration and Society* 28(1):61-89.
- Strolovitch, Dara. 2007. *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class and Gender in Interest Group Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Warren, M. 2004. "What is the Political Role of Nonprofits in a Democracy?" *In Search of the Nonprofit Sector*. eds. P. Frumkin and J. Imber. New Brunswick, New Jersey, Transaction Publishers: 37-50.