

THE POLICY ADVOCACY ROLE OF HUMAN SERVICE NONPROFITS

Incentives, Involvement, and Impact

JENNIFER E. MOSLEY

As the twin policy shifts of privatization and devolution grow ever more pervasive, human service nonprofits are finding themselves operating in an increasingly complex task environment, with constantly shifting political and financial realities. To maintain stable funding levels and meet the changing needs of their service population, the leaders of these organizations must work to gain some control over that environment, especially as competition for limited resources grows. One tactic that human service organizations (HSOs) use to influence the environment they work in, both to buffer the organization from threats and also to meet their mission more effectively, is participation in policy advocacy.

Participation in policy advocacy, which can be defined as “any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest” (Jenkins, 1987,

p. 297), is a topic of growing interest among both organizational scholars and practitioners. Human service organizations pursue policy advocacy for many reasons. Primarily, policy advocacy holds great promise as a tool that organizations may use to influence their environment in ways that benefit the organization or its constituency. This is partly because the everyday work practices of human service organizations are greatly controlled by policy, particularly for human service organizations that accept government funding in order to provide their services. For example, the basic elements of operation, such as which clients are eligible to be served and what kinds of services must be provided, are codified in many reimbursement contracts. Human service organizations that provide health-related services or that work with vulnerable populations, such as child day care providers and nursing homes, also face regulations regarding

Author's Note: The author would like to thank Zeke Hasenfeld, Joe Galaskiewicz, Scott Allard, and Paul-Brian McInerney for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

licensing and who is eligible to provide certain services. For these reasons, it is clearly in the best interest of human service organizations to promote policies that facilitate new funding and service opportunities rather than constraining them.

Advocacy can also be an important tool for human service organizations that are concerned with systematic inequalities in areas such as education, health care, and housing, which serve to limit the opportunities of individual clients. Advocacy work allows organizations to address some of those structural concerns and thus may help organizations more completely meet their missions. When serving clients who face economic difficulties, lack political influence, or experience stigma of different kinds, advocacy by human service organizations has the potential to promote social and economic justice. Advocacy work of this type reflects the social movement role some human service organizations see as an important component of their service (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2007; Minkoff, 2002). Finally, advocacy by human service nonprofits can also be an important way to highlight the uniqueness of their charitable mission and commitment to the clients they serve in an increasingly competitive service environment. This is important to draw attention to as the numbers of for-profit providers providing human services grows and the focus of competition is drawn further toward economic efficiency concerns (Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000). Advocacy that supports quality services and highlights access to care can be used to gain a competitive advantage in an environment with finite and possibly declining resources.

Unfortunately, we know little about how human service organizations manage their policy advocacy activity. Much of the current knowledge about advocacy comes from the social movement literature or otherwise focuses on organizations that participate only minimally in service provision. Human service nonprofits that advocate are

likely to be unique in both their incentives and constraints when it comes to policy advocacy because of their dual focus on both service provision and advocacy as well as other concerns, such as their funding relationships with government administrators and limitations on how revenue streams may be used. To improve practice and build stronger theory, we need to know more about the role they play in the policy process, the strategies they use when conducting advocacy, and what the impact of their advocacy is.

This chapter critically explores the relevant research on this important activity, pointing out where better knowledge is still needed. It starts by discussing some special definitional concerns for human service nonprofits, such as the difference between case advocacy and policy advocacy, as well as regulations regarding legislative lobbying. It next discusses the variety of tactics that human service nonprofits may use and how their advocacy may differ from that of interest groups and social movement organizations (SMOs). Literature on how organizational factors and challenges stemming from their service environment may affect advocacy involvement is then reviewed. These organizational and environmental factors are then further explored in an empirical analysis that investigates what factors may play a role in guiding advocacy decisions by human service organizations. This analysis specifically focuses on what organizational factors are related to advocacy involvement and how that may differ by field of service. Finally, the degree to which advocacy by human service organizations is effective in changing policy is considered.

THE DIVERSE WORLD OF NONPROFIT ADVOCACY

Policy advocacy includes a broad range of activities, including legislative and

administrative lobbying, conducting protests, and engaging in public education. The definitional differences between different kinds of advocacy will be discussed below; but it is important to note here that certain forms of advocacy, particularly legislative lobbying, are regulated differently for public, nonprofit,¹ and for-profit organizations. Legislative lobbying is a specific kind of advocacy that is defined as attempts to influence the passage of specific pieces of legislation. Public organizations are almost entirely prohibited from engaging in policy advocacy of any kind, 501(c)(3) nonprofits can engage in only limited legislative lobbying but unlimited other kinds of advocacy, and for-profit organizations face very few restrictions on either activity.² The fact that these types of organizations are regulated so differently has serious implications for their ability and motivation to participate in policy advocacy. Due to these different sets of regulations, for the purposes of this chapter, the discussion will be limited to the activities of human service *nonprofits*. This is also the organizational form that contains the vast majority of human service organizations (Salamon, 2002).

Another reason to focus on nonprofits is that many scholars have argued that nonprofits have a special role to play when it comes to engaging in policy advocacy, particularly when it comes to addressing the needs of typically underrepresented populations. Advocacy by nonprofits is often thought to be done in the general public good—in support of collective interests rather than to advance special interests—because of their lack of profit motive (Berry, 2003). Most public interest advocates, including citizens groups and SMOs, are organized as nonprofit organizations.

Although the definition given by Jenkins (1987) above is commonly cited by those studying nonprofit advocacy, there is no one clear definition used by scholars across disciplines. There are several important components to Jenkins's

definition, however, that make it a useful starting point when exploring the policy advocacy of human service nonprofits. Many of these have to do with the fact that the definition is as broad and inclusive as possible. First, although many nonprofit advocates see themselves as promoting the public interest, the definition does not require nonprofit advocacy to be representative of the public good, recognizing that what is truly the public good is a subjective point, regardless of whether an advocating organization is considered "charitable" or not. Second, there is no reference to advocating for underrepresented groups. While recognizing that this may be the goal of some nonprofit advocacy due to the official charitable and public benefit reasons for their existence, it is obviously not always the case. Third, the term *institutional elite* rather than *government* is used, recognizing that the focus of advocacy may not always be governmental targets but also occasionally others with influence in the policy system and service environment. Advocacy can target both elected and nonelected elites. Examples of alternative targets include professional associations, accreditation bodies, and funding agencies. Fourth, the definition does not limit advocacy to a specific set of tactics but rather opens up the field of advocacy to "any attempt to influence." This is important for human service nonprofits, which may use an eclectic combination of tactics. Finally, advocacy is limited to efforts made "on behalf of a collective interest," which clarifies that efforts to influence others on behalf of a single individual or organization is substantively a different activity and better termed *case advocacy*. Attempting to change policy to benefit a collective interest means that there is a larger group, outside the individual organization, that will benefit from the decision. For human service organizations, this may mean the population they serve, a larger group of organizations similar to the organization in question, or both.

Special Definitional Concerns for Human Service Nonprofits

Legislative Lobbying Versus Administrative Lobbying

Legislative lobbying, the act of attempting to influence the passage of a specific piece of legislation, is classified into two types: direct lobbying and grassroots lobbying. Direct lobbying is when organizational staff members contact a legislator or their staff, and grassroots lobbying is when an organization asks its membership or the general public to contact the legislator. As noted above, this activity is specifically regulated, though not forbidden, for 501(c)(3) nonprofits. These organizations may participate in lobbying but not as a “substantial part” of their activities. The vagueness of that term is concerning for many nonprofits as the consequences for breaking the rules are severe and can include losing an organization’s charitable status. For this reason, legal experts on nonprofit lobbying recommend that 501(c)(3) organizations that would like to be involved in lobbying file Form 5768 with the IRS, which allows them to be governed under Section 501(h) and provides clear guidelines for how much money can be spent on legislative lobbying (Smucker, 1991). In general, organizations may spend 20% of their first \$500,000 in expenditures on lobbying, 15% of the next \$500,000, and so on, up to a total limit of \$1,000,000. However, only 25% of that can be spent on grassroots lobbying (Raffa, 2000).

Administrative lobbying is not the same as legislative lobbying, and unlike legislative advocacy, it is not restricted for 501(c)(3) nonprofits. Administrative lobbying is aimed at government administrators rather than legislators and does not concern the passage of specific legislation. Often administrative lobbying is concerned with issues such as regulations, rules, and government action in a given area of service, such as those governing licensing, grants, contracts, and oversight. For example, when private child welfare agencies communicate with

state-level child welfare agencies about compensation and oversight for foster families, it is administrative lobbying, not legislative lobbying. In this example, the result of such regulatory changes may assist the organization in its efforts to recruit additional foster families. Clearly, for human service nonprofits, many of which operate under significant government regulation and are highly dependent on government funding, administrative lobbying can be critical in helping an organization manage its task environment and help foster favorable environmental conditions.

Understanding the difference between administrative lobbying and legislative lobbying, and the laws governing spending on these activities, is clearly vital for nonprofits; but, unsurprisingly, given their complexity, there is considerable evidence that many nonprofits are confused about the rules and terminology. In a national study, Berry (2003) found that many 501(c)(3) organizations did not have a good understanding of the laws governing advocacy. As an example, for those organizations that did not take the 501(h) election mentioned above (and only about 2.5% do), only about half (54%) knew that they were legally able to support or oppose federal legislation. He concludes that many nonprofits are intimidated by the law, which in turn serves to suppress all advocacy activity, not just lobbying.

Case Advocacy Versus Policy Advocacy

Another special definitional concern for human service nonprofits is the frequency with which policy advocacy may be confused with case advocacy, which is when the interests of a particular individual, family, or organization are being represented. Case advocacy is different because it generally does not include changing policy. There is some evidence that human service professionals participate in case advocacy on behalf of their clients at higher rates than policy advocacy and that many professionals in the

field may not always be clear about the difference between the two when discussing their advocacy work (Ezell, 1994; Gibelman & Kraft, 1996; Herbert & Mould, 1992). This confusion hinders the ability of policymakers, researchers, funders, and other interested parties to know what activities organizations are really referring to when they talk of their advocacy activity. Clearly, for human service nonprofits, policy advocacy is just one form of advocacy that they engage in.

An area in which the line between case advocacy and policy advocacy often becomes blurry for human service nonprofits is when appeals to funders or other stakeholders are undertaken solely for the benefit of an individual organization. An example of this may be efforts to influence the city council to be able to expand a parking lot or for use of a city facility for a specific program. This again is case advocacy, not policy advocacy. A critical part of the definition of policy advocacy is that it is done on behalf of a larger collective interest, rather than for reasons of self-interest or self-defense. Although organizations may benefit from policy advocacy and case advocacy in the self-interest of the organization may benefit communities, it is important to distinguish advocacy that is done purely for reasons of self-interest if we are to understand the motivations for action.

This line between self-interest and collective interest becomes particularly difficult to perceive when human service nonprofits advocate for policies or regulations that would benefit an entire group of organizations of which they are a part, such as lobbying for increased government funding for organizations that provide child care. This is, however, still policy advocacy, and it is very common among human service nonprofits. Although advocacy done on behalf of a class of organizations may seem like self-interest, efforts to improve or expand service in a general service area ultimately benefits service recipients in most cases. It cannot be avoided that at times adding to

the public good also enhances private goods. Additionally, it is often very difficult to distinguish between policy advocacy that benefits categories of organizations and that which is done to benefit specific service populations. This problem will be explored further in the empirical analysis below.

Tactical Repertoires: A Useful Method of Highlighting Difference?

There are many kinds of organizations besides human service nonprofits that participate in advocacy and take the nonprofit form. The list includes SMOs, professionalized interest groups, think tanks, labor unions, and others. How is the advocacy of human service nonprofits unique? As advocacy by human service nonprofits is currently underconceptualized, it is important to understand how advocacy behavior is defined and understood for these other types of organizations and how research has understood the tactics they engage in. A first step in understanding the field is to look at the two kinds of nonprofit advocates that have been explored substantially in the literature—interest groups and SMOs—and see how their work has been conceptualized and distinguished from each other. Seeing how these two groups have traditionally operated and been understood will help place the advocacy efforts of human service nonprofits in the proper context.

To understand how the work of interest groups and SMOs has traditionally been understood and typologized, it is necessary to look at how advocacy tactics have been defined and conceptualized as well. Advocacy tactics have customarily been broken down into two groups: extrainstitutional, or outsider tactics, and institutional, or insider tactics (Gamson, 1975). Outsider tactics include disruptive activities such as conducting or participating in demonstrations and boycotts, as well as organizing community members to take part in mass protest. A key example of insider tactics is

the use of legislative or administrative lobbying. Other examples of insider tactics include judicial action, participating in government committees or commissions, or providing public testimony—all activities that work with the established system rather than against it. Although there are important exceptions, and many organizations use both, interest groups have traditionally been associated with insider tactics, while SMOs have been associated with outsider tactics.

Interest groups, which can be either for-profit or nonprofit, have been generally defined as politically independent voluntary associations that work to influence the government (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). Laumann and Knoke (1987) elaborate that they are usually organizations that have a vested interest in a specific policy outcome area and that often possess a significant amount of power and resources, although this is not always the case. These groups generally work by attempting to form special relationships with policymakers and other institutional elites, and so, as stated above, their advocacy tactics often focus on lobbying efforts and other insider tactics. For example, research by Hobbs, Ricketts, Dodds, and Milio (2004) showed how through persistent administrative lobbying, a number of interest groups such as the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the American School Food Service Association derailed reform efforts to make meals provided by the National School Lunch and School Breakfast program more nutritionally sound.

SMOs also try to influence the policy process but are generally understood as doing so from an outsider perspective and through less formal means than interest groups (McAdam, 1982; Minkoff, 1994). They are usually associated with populations and causes that are either opposed to or marginalized from the current dominant thrust of politics. Their tactics are generally understood to focus heavily on mass

mobilization, such as protests and boycotts, which are engaged in partially to show the extensivity of the organization's grassroots support, an important source of strength for social movements. A strong social movement will have many affiliated SMOs, each having its own highly engaged membership. SMOs are not limited to outsider tactics though, and there is increasing scholarly interest in what is seen as the growing professionalization of social movements and how that may influence their choice of tactics (Everett, 1992; Tilly, 2004).

Overall then, SMOs and interest groups are both trying to influence the political process but have traditionally been distinguished from each other by the kinds of tactics they engage in and the types of populations they represent. The high levels of diversity found in both groups, however, calls into question whether they can be reliably distinguished in this way. As a result, scholars have recently argued that rather than studying advocacy by interest groups, SMOs, and other kinds of nonprofits separately, we should consider them all as taking place in a larger field of political struggle (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). If the logic behind this concept is to be followed, then human service nonprofits should be seen as just one more type of organization in a field of political actors that represent a variety of different populations and concerns using a diverse range of tactics. This does not mean that human service organizations do not make a unique impact or independent contribution. On the contrary, if we are to understand what that contribution is, then their advocacy needs to be understood within a larger context of advocacy that includes all forms of advocating organizations.

It is also important to understand advocacy broadly when researching human service nonprofits, because unlike many interest groups and SMOs, human service organizations that wish to influence public

policy may not have an explicit philosophy about what kinds of tactics they are going to use. The great diversity of expertise and ideology found in human service nonprofits means that for these organizations, advocacy is likely not a single behavior but engagement in any one of a family of behaviors. Advocacy tactics may best be thought of as found on a continuum, with extrainstitutional, outsider activities such as protests found at one end and insider, tactics, such as lobbying, found at the other. In the middle are a variety of activities that fall into neither extreme. These include writing letters to the editor, releasing policy reports, participating in coalitions that aim to influence public policy, and providing public education on policy issues. Many human service nonprofits likely focus most of their efforts in this middle area, but in no way does it capture the full diversity of activities engaged in by these organizations.

Most human service nonprofits that participate in advocacy are still primarily service organizations, participating in advocacy primarily as a peripheral activity (Child & Grønberg, 2007). Additionally, many human service nonprofits have strong ties to government agencies through funding relationships (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). This pattern means that they may not have an explicit identity as either outsiders or insiders in the policy process. Advocacy is an activity that human service organizations can undertake to try to exert control over their environment—but that environment is constantly in flux with shifting needs and demands. Rather than relying on one end or the other on the continuum of tactics, human service nonprofits may find themselves using an eclectic mix or moving around on the continuum to suit their current needs, resources, and skills. These organizations are generally not advocacy specialists and have to conduct their advocacy with minimal expertise and resources. Their efforts should not be discounted

because they do not specialize in a specific predefined set of activities; rather, this eclecticism can be seen as a strength resulting from the diversity of the sector.

Insider tactics may be more appropriate when human service nonprofits wish to change the policy under which they are working so there is a better fit between their service delivery preferences and the policy mandates. This goal is an important one because the resources of these organizations depend on whether their preferred service technology is currently “in favor” among foundations and government officials. Outsider tactics are intended to increase the visibility of a struggle or to coerce elites to take action immediately to avoid future encounters. For example, staging a daily sit-in of homeless veterans in front of a government building to call attention to unsafe conditions in local shelters may convince administrators to take action in order to avoid further negative publicity. The use of these kinds of outsider tactics may be the most effective route when an issue is far off of the formal agenda of policymakers or for organizations with few connections and limited legitimacy in the eyes of decision makers.

Organizations must also think about who the target of their advocacy is. Advocacy can be carried out by contacting government agency administrators as well as legislators, and it includes contacting administrators to give feedback about specific programs or to argue that certain types of funding should be provided or continued. Rather than targeting policymakers directly, targeting the general public may be preferable when organizations wish to change the way their service population is thought of in society at large (including elites) or when they desire to raise consciousness about the particular struggles their service population faces. Two examples of this kind of advocacy campaign are those promoting access and inclusion for people with disabilities and those highlighting

the biological dimensions of mental illness. Both types of campaigns are important steps in achieving policy goals, such as expansion and enforcement of accessibility laws for the disabled and insurance parity for treatment of mental illnesses.

Accepting an inclusive range of tactics and targets should not affect our understanding of what policy advocacy essentially is. The key litmus test for whether an organization is participating in policy advocacy is if through their statements or actions they are attempting to influence the opinions of others about policy issues. In the end, policy advocacy is about both getting others to accept a given definition of the problem and mobilizing them to act on a set of preferred solutions. This definition doesn't change based on the targets or tactics chosen.

MOTIVATION AND CONSTRAINT

Of course, not all human service nonprofits choose to become involved in policy advocacy of any type. This can be for many reasons. Human service nonprofits face unique challenges when they make the decision to participate in advocacy. Some organizations choose to focus solely on service provision, not seeing advocacy as part of their mission, while other organizations may see advocacy as not worth the effort and expense involved. Some may be concerned about alienating funders. Still others may be confused about the IRS rules around legislative lobbying and may curb all advocacy activity as a result.

Findings regarding the overall prevalence rates for policy advocacy involvement among human service nonprofits are inconsistent due to differences in study design and the definition of advocacy used. Two recent national studies demonstrate this with Salamon (1995) finding that only 18% of human service nonprofits are involved in advocacy, but Berry (2003) finding that 28% meet "frequently" with government

officials. Other studies report prevalence rates for nonprofits as a whole but not for human service nonprofits specifically (Child & Grønberg, 2007). Recent research carried out by this author and others was designed specifically to assess what percentage of human service nonprofits participate in policy advocacy. A broad definition of advocacy was used, and a representative sample of human service nonprofits in Los Angeles County were surveyed. More details on the methodology can be found in the empirical analysis below. Results indicate that overall, about 50% of human service nonprofits participate in policy advocacy at some level; but this percentage is greatly stratified by size, with 83% of the largest organizations (expenditures more than \$5 million) participating in policy advocacy but only 39% of the smallest (expenditures less than \$100,000) doing the same (Mosley, Katz, Hasenfeld, & Anheier, 2003).

One reason why there is so much diversity among human service nonprofits when it comes to policy advocacy is that the motivations and challenges they face are very different from those of other advocating organizations, such as SMOs. For example, SMOs and interest groups do not have to worry about the definitional considerations outlined above, as they provide case advocacy only rarely and are often incorporated as 501(c)(4)s or other tax statuses that have fewer restrictions when it comes to advocacy. Human service nonprofits that are involved in advocacy must balance two very different activities: service and advocacy. This can cause tension as the two activities compete for resources and require different skills. Thus, although some human service nonprofits find that advocacy complements their service work by keeping them up-to-date on the issues and providing an outlet for staff and clients to share their experiences (Hayes & Mickelson, 2000), others find that it brings conflict. This may happen when staff or stakeholders feel that advocacy is not a core part of the organization's

mission or that the organization should “stick to their knitting.” Schneider and Lester (2001) have argued that social workers and other human service professionals don’t always support getting involved in advocacy because of a preoccupation with their service role, lack of professional norms and standards, lack of training, and concerns about professionalism.

Conflicts may also arise over where to allocate scarce financial and staff resources. For human service nonprofits that have a difficult time financing their core services, advocacy may seem like an impossible luxury. Few human service organizations can afford to hire advocacy specialists. Having a staff that is primarily trained to provide services, not perform advocacy, is a challenge. Research has shown that many social workers do not have adequate exposure to advocacy skills training in their graduate education (Mor Barak, Travis, & Bess, 2004; Wolk, Pray, Weismiller, & Dempsey, 1996). As mentioned above, research has also found that the managers of many human service nonprofits are not well-informed about the basic definitions or rules regarding participation in advocacy (Berry, 2003). This is not the case for other advocating nonprofits, such as SMOs and interest groups, where many if not all staff members have extensive training in advocacy and managers do not have to split their time between service and advocacy concerns.

Beyond these conflicts having to do with balancing service and advocacy, human service nonprofits also face environmental and organizational factors that make advocacy easier or more difficult. These include challenges having to do with professionalization, government funding, and capacity. These issues will be discussed more below.

Changing Environmental Conditions

A major factor influencing the advocacy activity of human service nonprofits is the unique environment they encounter in

their role as service providers. That environment has been greatly changed by the policy trends of privatization and devolution and subsequent related changes in how many human service nonprofits finance their operations. These changes in regulatory oversight and funding streams have created both opportunities and constraints for human service nonprofits when it comes to policy advocacy.

Devolution is the practice of turning over to state and local government responsibility for planning and managing programs previously conducted on a national level. State and local governments have typically responded to this new responsibility by privatizing many services, including human services, resulting in government agencies contracting with nonprofits to provide services that the government used to provide directly. This privatization trend has resulted in government funding of human service nonprofits growing steadily since the 1960s, with over half of human service nonprofits now in some sort of funding relationship with the government (Mosley et al., 2003; Smith, this volume).

One consequence of this expansion of government funding of nonprofit social services is an increased bifurcation of the human services field. Organizations vary significantly in their capacity to solicit, maintain, and administer this funding, which results in larger organizations with greater technical capacity receiving government grants at much higher rates than smaller organizations. The strict accountability mandates that most government contracts require means that organizations must monitor and report on outcomes in sophisticated ways that require specialized expertise and copious amounts of staff time. This has led to an increase in formalization, bureaucracy, and professionalization in the field, as well as resources being concentrated in fewer, larger agencies (De Vita & Twombly, 2006; Froelich, 1999).

There has been much debate in the literature about how a growing dependence on

government funds and the changed regulatory environment associated with that will affect advocacy participation among human service nonprofits. Currently, there is disagreement about whether it will facilitate advocacy involvement or suppress it. Resource dependency theory has long led scholars to assume that nonprofits that were more dependent on government funds would advocate less because they would be fearful of offending this powerful benefactor. Put another way, by funding nonprofit human services, government may coopt their political voice, leading to silence or acquiescence in times of controversial policy change. Alexander, Nank, and Stivers (1999) found this to be true in their qualitative study of human service nonprofits. Their study also revealed another way in which government funding may diminish advocacy, in that increased reporting requirements and accountability mandates led to time constraints and an increased focus on the bottom line.

This generally accepted wisdom was strongly challenged, however, when Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz (2004) tested this assumption using data from two different large-scale surveys—one consisting of a nationally representative sample of religious congregations and the other consisting of a stratified systematic sample of nonprofits in the Minneapolis–St. Paul region. They found that that in both cases, government funding had either no effect on advocacy participation or had a slight positive effect. More recently, Child and Gronbjerg (2007) found similar results in their statewide survey of nonprofits in Indiana. They found that overall, levels of government funding and advocacy were not significantly related. They also found that organizations that received more than 50% of their revenue from government were less likely to participate in advocacy as a “core” activity (*core* meaning that they devote most of at least one type of resource—volunteer time, staff time, or financial resources—to the activity).

This finding is difficult to interpret, however. Since government does not fund advocacy work, organizations that spend large amounts of their resources on advocacy are unlikely to be able to receive such high levels of government funding in the first place.

One possibility is that instead of suppressing advocacy activity, a closer relationship with government agencies may simply change the way that advocacy by human service nonprofits is done. This closer relationship puts human service nonprofits in a place of greater power as government-level administrators need them to provide the services government is required by law to fund and often also depend on them for expertise and practical advice (Berry, 2003). It may also incentivize human service nonprofits to use advocacy to influence regulations and funding as it pertains to their government contracts. As a result, one type of advocacy that may be growing is administrative lobbying. As stated above, this is lobbying that is done to influence government administrators, who are often responsible for outlining regulations, setting reimbursement levels, and releasing grant application guidelines. Administrative lobbying may be particularly effective for organizations that are advocating on issues related to the regulatory environment, such as mandated staffing levels and eligibility cutoffs, as this is where many of those decisions are made. Additionally, devolution means that many of those decisions are now being made at the state and local levels, providing new opportunities for human service nonprofits to weigh in. Of course, this increasingly cozy relationship with government funders may have its drawbacks in terms of the independence of the sector. Strong arguments have been made that when advocates lose their “outsider” perspective, they also lose their potential to spark meaningful change (Piven & Cloward, 1977). Whether or not human service nonprofits should be considered outsiders in the first place is, of course, a matter of some debate (Hasenfeld, 1992).

The Impact of Diverse Organizational Settings

Participation in policy advocacy is also an area in which organizational factors play an important role. In looking into advocacy done by these organizations, it is important to pay careful attention to the fact that there is great diversity reflected in the organizations we label “human service nonprofits.” Human service nonprofits have different goals and structures, depending on their mission, size, and type of clients served, among other things. Although they all provide services to clients in need, they operate in very different organizational fields and policy environments, facing different types of regulations, rules, and norms as well as pressures from different funders (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). They also serve different populations and have different practice ideologies, resulting in employment of diverse service technologies—all of which mediate an organization’s relationship with their environment (Hasenfeld, 1983). Thus, not all organizations will be able to, or desire to, participate in the same amount or types of advocacy. Five organizational factors that may be particularly important in guiding advocacy choices are field of service, size of organization, degree of collaboration, level of professionalization, and level of formalization.

Field of Service

One important organizational difference that may have a strong impact on advocacy activity is what field of service the organization is practicing in. Organizations in different areas of service face different environmental pressures and operate in different policy environments. As it relates to advocacy, Laumann and Knoke (1987, pp. 9–10) refer to these environments as *policy domains*, defined as “the substantive focus of concern of policy initiatives and debate.” Health care is a policy domain, as is mental health, education, and transportation.

Different policy domains are more or less active at different points in time. The agenda-setting literature teaches us that in the policy-making process, windows of opportunity occasionally form within policy domains that make agenda success more likely and thus create incentives for advocacy (Kingdon, 1995). Political opportunity theory, found in the social movement literature, supports the idea that political action is encouraged when the institutional political structure is receptive or at least willing to entertain the claims of advocates and activists (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). Thus, depending on what policy domain is relevant to a given area of service, there may be greater or lesser incentives for organizations in that area of service to advocate at any given point in time. A current example is the popular policy trend in support of universal preschool. As support for these kinds of programs grows and they are implemented by more states, child care providers and other human service nonprofits that serve young children and vulnerable families have a unique opportunity to share their expertise, encourage policy expansion, and shape new policies (Kirp, 2007).

The area of service an organization operates in is also partially a reflection of the mission of the organization and the type of client it serves. For example, an organization that provides shelter for homeless families may define public policy advocacy in support of poverty relief as a central part of its mission, crucial in its efforts to effectively serve its clients. On the other hand, an organization that provides after-school recreation programs for children in a middle-class suburb may find that public policy involvement is less relevant for their organization. Institutional isomorphism—meaning, the tendency of organizations in a given field to come to resemble one another over time—also comes into play here (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For some areas of service, advocacy may be the norm and engaged in by many organizations in the field, thus

conferring legitimacy on the organizations that participate. In other areas of service where very few organizations participate in advocacy, the situation may be the opposite. Participation in advocacy may be seen as aberrant behavior and may call into question the legitimacy and professionalism of the advocating organization.

Another way to think about area of service is as a niche. Organizations can be said to share a niche if they compete for clients, funding, staff, and other needed resources (Baum & Oliver, 1996). Organizations that share a niche also share the same policy domain, service technology, institutional norms, and service population. They will also often have similar-sized budgets, be financed in similar ways (i.e., primarily by public or private sources), and have similar staffing patterns and similar levels of professionalization. These and other characteristics of each niche, such as its dependence on government funding, the typical needs of clients, and interorganizational ties can serve to either promote or discourage advocacy (Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998).

The fact that these important predictors of advocacy tend to cluster together by area of service has important implications for clients. For example, clients in an area of service that faces serious constraints with regard to advocacy because its organizations tend to be underfinanced, lacking policy skill, or working in a politically unpopular area will not be able to benefit from advocacy in the same way that clients do who depend more on an area of service where organizations tend to have more political power and savvy.

Size

Another organizational factor that often has an impact on advocacy activity is the size of the organization. Previous studies of nonprofit advocacy participation have indicated that organizational size, as reflected in either financial capacity (expenditures) or staff

resources (number of FTEs [full time employees]), is a strong predictor of advocacy participation (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Nicholson-Crotty, 2007). Size may be important for several reasons. First, larger organizations have more capacity to participate in activities outside their core mission (such as advocacy) and may have more flexibility in their budgets. Also, larger organizations with more capacity may be better able to deal with the new demands that are arising as a result of increased competition for government funding (Alexander et al., 1999). In human service nonprofits, size is positively correlated with increased government funding, professionalization, and formalization, which can confer stability and legitimacy on an organization. As a result of their lack of capacity and connections, small organizations may be quite constrained in their ability to do much advocacy.

Degree of Collaboration

Human service nonprofits work together in many ways, including referral networks, coordination of services, and joint fundraising. These kinds of collaborations are increasingly mandated by funders and are a reflection of how integrated an organization is in its field of service. Research has found that increased collaboration promotes access to resources and knowledge and facilitates ties to important institutions and decision makers (Alter & Hage, 1992). Increased collaboration may promote advocacy involvement for several related reasons. First, the increased legitimacy and ties that come with more collaboration may create opportunities for advocacy (Hojnacki, 1997), and these opportunities are known to increase with the more ties an organization has and the stronger those ties are (Aveni, 1978). Organizations that collaborate more may have increased access to knowledge and opportunities to join specific advocacy coalitions, which reduce the barriers to entry with regard to becoming

involved in advocacy (Berry, 1984). After all, collaboration on other things such as funding and client coordination may increase collaboration on advocacy as well. This is important because participation in coalitions is a very common way for organizations to participate in advocacy (Schneider & Lester, 2001).

Professionalization

Organizations can be said to have become professionalized when key members of their staff and leadership are trained in a specific profession or otherwise use tools and values specific to a given profession in carrying out their jobs. Examples of professions that may have an impact on human service organizations are social work, nursing, and psychiatry, among others. This is important for advocacy because members of a profession may have larger networks or more powerful contacts within the industry. These network relationships can facilitate advocacy. Professionals may also have had more opportunities to learn and practice advocacy-related skills, and may be more conversant in the major policy debates going on in their industry. On the other hand, professionals may be reluctant to engage in more radical social change agendas or to participate in advocacy if it is not a convention in their field (Markowitz & Tice, 2002). They may also be constrained by the need to preserve good relations with government administrators they consider colleagues. Research on SMOs has shown that professionalization is associated with increased formalization in the organization and leads to increased advocacy coalition work and more moderate tactics (Everett, 1992; Staggenborg, 1988).

Level of Formalization

An organization can be said to be highly formalized when tasks are highly specialized, policies and procedures are highly

codified, and structure is strongly adhered to (Hall, Johnson, & Haas, 1967). In formalized organizations, job descriptions and responsibilities are made explicit, and leadership is generally of a hierarchical nature. Formalization is important to control for because formalization is highly related to both size and the receipt of government funding. Formalization helps organizations receive and maintain government funding because it helps in maintaining the strict accountability standards called for in many government funding arrangements and it also contributes to the perception that the organization is a legitimate and responsible provider of services. Of course, larger organizations also tend to be more formalized and also tend to receive more government funding. The analysis presented below will help tease out which of these factors is most important in helping explain advocacy activity.

AN EXPLORATION OF ADVOCACY IN TWO DIFFERENT FIELDS OF SERVICE

Data from a recent survey of human service nonprofits conducted in Los Angeles County are useful for shedding some empirical light on the issues addressed above. The 2002 Los Angeles Survey of Nonprofit Human Service Organizations (Mosley et al., 2003) presents a representative overview of the state of the human service nonprofit sector in the current policy environment. For this survey, the executive directors from 641 eligible organizations participated in hour-long telephone interviews where they were asked about a variety of topics concerning the organization, including advocacy, financing, staffing, and organizational structure. This results in a unique opportunity to explore how advocacy behavior correlates with other organizational attributes.

For the purposes of the survey, human service nonprofits were defined as organizations

with 501(c)(3) status that offer services to promote individual, social, and psychological well-being. Strictly medical or educational organizations were excluded. To approximate the universe of human service nonprofits in Los Angeles County and include as many small, informal groups as possible, we identified organizations from five different sources: (1) the Internal Revenue Service list of registered organizations, (2) the California Secretary of State registry, (3) the databases used by Infoline LA, (4) The Rainbow Directory, and (5) the California Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development. From this process, we found that there are approximately 5,300 human service nonprofit organizations in the county. A random sample of these organizations was then selected for our survey, stratified by organizational size (when available) and location to ensure representativeness across the county and major types of nonprofit organizations. The overall response rate was 53%.³

For this analysis, the policy advocacy work done by organizations working in two areas of human service activity will be explored and compared.⁴ Comparing organizations across areas of service is useful because it allows us to see the impact of membership in different niches or task environments while exploring what common organizational factors may make a difference in advocacy involvement. The first area of service is special needs assistance, such as services to the elderly or disabled, including residential facilities, day centers, and recreational programs. The second is basic needs assistance, which includes food and nutrition programs, housing, and emergency assistance.

These two groups were chosen for several reasons. First, they provide an interesting juxtaposition with regard to policy domain and the political involvement of their client populations. Advocates for the elderly and disabled have been more successful in

mobilizing their constituencies and achieving favorable policy reform than have advocates for the homeless. Organizations providing special needs assistance are also often more professionalized, with important ties to medicine, social work, and other professional fields. Their funding environments are very different as well, with significantly more funding from both private and governmental sources available to special needs assistance organizations. Despite these differences, however, they represent similar proportions of the overall human services sector. By looking at the demographic profile of each group, their advocacy behavior and preferences, and how organizational attributes and advocacy participation interact, we can see more clearly how the unique set of incentives and constraints different types of human service nonprofits face may lead to different advocacy outcomes.

Demographic Profile

Basic needs assistance organizations and special needs assistance organizations were compared on six organizational attributes: (1) size, (2) level of formalization, (3) professionalization of leadership, (4) degree of collaboration, (5) percentage of government funding, and (6) advocacy participation. *Size* was operationalized as the total amount of expenditures in the organization's past fiscal year.⁵ *Level of formalization* was measured on a 0 to 5 scale. Organizations received 1 point on the scale for each element of formalization that the organization contained. The elements were (a) having formal job descriptions for each paid staff position, (b) having formal performance evaluations for each paid staff, (c) having formally evaluated any programs or services over the previous 3 years, (d) having developed a strategic plan, and (e) keeping statistical records on programs and services.⁶ *Professionalization of leadership*

was operationalized here as whether or not the executive director has a masters or professional degree or higher. *Degree of nonadvocacy collaboration* was measured by a scale reflecting the frequency of collaboration when obtaining funding, developing programs or services, or coordinating services for clients. *Percentage of government funding* was operationalized as the percentage of total revenue government dollars make up in an organization's budget. *Participation in advocacy* was measured as a dichotomous variable based on organizations' response to the question "Is your organization actively involved in advocating or promoting certain policy issues, or the interests of a certain group or groups?"

As Table 23.1 shows, the two areas have clearly different demographic profiles. Two

sample *t* tests and tests of proportion were performed to assess whether the differences between the two groups are statistically significant ($p < .05$), which they are in all cases, except degree of collaboration. The organizations involved in providing basic needs assistance are significantly smaller, younger, and less formalized. They also are less likely to have an executive director with a graduate degree, and they receive significantly less government funding. Perhaps because of these differences in both professional and financial capacities, basic needs assistance organizations are also less likely to advocate, as mentioned above, with 66% of special needs assistance organizations responding that they participate in advocacy but only 44% of the basic needs assistance organizations participating.

Table 23.1 Descriptive Statistics and Differences in Means and Proportions

	<i>Basic Needs Assistance</i> (<i>N</i> = 87)	<i>Special Needs Assistance</i> (<i>N</i> = 101)	<i>All Human Service Nonprofits</i> (<i>N</i> = 641)
Size (in millions)	Mean: 0.9 Median: 0.2 $t = -5.88, p = .000$	Mean: 4.8 Median: 1	Mean: 3.1 Median: 0.5
Level of formalization	3.1 $t = -4.93, p = .000$	4.1	3.7
Professionalized leadership	39% $z = -2.1, p = .035$	54%	46%
Degree of collaboration	Mean: 2.9 Median: 3 $t = -0.97, p = .332$	Mean: 3.2 Median: 3	Mean: 3.7 Median: 3
Percentage of government funding	Of the 44% that receive it: 35% of budget $t = -5.29, p = .000$	Of the 72% that receive it: 61% of budget	Of the 61% that receive it: 54% of budget
Participates in advocacy	44% $z = -3.12, p = .002$	66%	57%

Differences in Advocacy Incentives and Constraints

Next, it is important to ask whether it is the demographic differences or other differences having to do with the area of service that are contributing to the different rates of advocacy participation found in these two groups. Looking first at what factors promote advocacy for human service nonprofits overall and then looking to see if area of activity helps explain additional variance (holding the demographic factors constant) will allow us to see if the two groups vary on advocacy due primarily to demographic factors or due to other factors unique to each area of service.

In this analysis, logistic regression is used to assess the differential impact of the five independent variables outlined above (size,⁷ level of formalization, professionalization of leadership, degree of collaboration, and percentage of government funding), as well as area of service, in predicting advocacy activity. Two models are estimated. Model 1 reveals the degree to which each organizational attribute is related to advocacy activity for the entire sample of human service nonprofits. Model 2 reveals if area of service helps explain any additional variance in regards to involvement in advocacy activity. The survey commands in the Stata statistical package were used to account for the weighted data. In Model 2, the reference group for the area-of-service dummy variables is all other human service nonprofits, and the *N* for both models is 641. Both models were significant at $p < .05$.

Table 23.2 presents the results of this analysis. Looking first at Model 1, all five independent variables were significantly related to advocacy participation. With each unit increase in the amount of expenditures, the odds of advocating went up 26%. Organizations with a leader that holds a masters or professional degree had 60% higher odds of participating in advocacy, and each point on the collaboration scale

increased the odds by 35%. Having a higher percentage of government funding in an organization's budget also positively predicted advocacy involvement, although the effect size in that case was quite modest. Holding all these other factors constant, higher formalization was statistically unrelated to advocacy participation.

Turning to Model 2, the results appear much the same, and the area of service does not provide additional explanatory power. Thus, in this case at least, it is clear that it is differences in the demographic factors that cluster by area of service (size, professionalization, government funding) that are promoting additional advocacy participation on the part of special needs assistance organizations, not the more intangible features of each niche, such as policy domain. A limitation of this analysis, however, is that it contains only two areas of service and at one point in time. The effect of area of service would be reduced if the two policy domains were equivalent at the time of the study (e.g., if both were quiet, with no significant policy shifts on the horizon). That could easily be the case here. More research should be done to explore the role of specific policy environments within the human services in greater depth.

Advocacy Issues and Tactics

It is also important to understand the content of the advocacy engaged in by human service nonprofits as that is something scholars know very little about. For example, what kinds of tactics are they using, and what kinds of issues are they advocating for? It is clear from the analyses presented above that special needs assistance organizations tend to have more government funding and be larger, more formalized, and more professionalized than basic needs assistance organizations. These differences in size, professionalization, formalization, and government funding are associated with important differences in

Table 23.2 Logistic Regressions Estimating the Relationship Between Organizational Factors and Participation in Advocacy

Independent variable	<i>Model 1:</i>	<i>Model 2:</i>
	<i>Without Area of Service</i>	<i>Including Area of Service</i>
	Odds ratio (linearized standard error)	Odds ratio (linearized standard error)
Size	1.258* (.078)	1.253* (.077)
Level of formalization	0.932 (.077)	0.926 (.076)
Professionalization of leadership	1.597* (.311)	1.576* (.308)
Degree of collaboration	1.355* (.070)	1.362* (.071)
Percentage of government funding	1.010* (.003)	1.010* (.003)
Area of service		
Basic needs assistance	—	0.817 (.214)
Special needs assistance	—	1.319 (.371)

* $p \leq .05$.

their rates of advocacy participation. This clustering of organizational features, as well as other norms unique to each area of service, may also lead to differences with regard to advocacy issues and tactics.

First, many scholars would like to know more about what issues human service organizations choose to advocate on and why. Are they involved in policy advocacy primarily to influence their service environment in ways favorable to the organization, or is their advocacy truly stemming from concerns over their client's best interest? This is a difficult question to answer, because in many cases it may be that their advocacy benefits both the organization and its clients. There are also strong social desirability pressures for managers to frame advocacy choices as being primarily about clients needs.

As a first step in trying to understand what issues human service organizations

are advocating on, those organizations that were involved in advocacy were asked to briefly describe the "policy issues or groups" the organization advocated for. The question was open-ended, and the answers were coded into three groups: (1) regulatory, administrative, or funding issues affecting their area of service, including their own organization; (2) client well-being, without mention of issues that may also benefit the organization; and (3) both regulatory/funding issues and client well-being. For example, responses that mentioned specific funding streams or workforce regulations were coded as "regulatory/administrative." Responses that mentioned issues affecting specific groups of people (youth, disabled, elderly) were coded as "client well-being," and responses that contained elements of both were coded into the third group.

Table 23.3 shows the results of this analysis, which demonstrate clearly that the special needs assistance organizations advocate at a much higher rate around issues related to organizational maintenance and regulatory issues. This is an important finding, given that special needs assistance organizations are generally larger and collect more in government funding. This gives support to the idea that as organizations come to depend more on government funding, the content of their advocacy may be changed. Their higher rates of advocacy on regulatory/funding issues may be due to the fact that they are more beholden to government policies and regulations. Because of this funding relationship, it is clearly in their best interest to try and shape that regulatory environment in order to best meet the needs of their organization.

Looking into the more detailed responses of the organizations, many special needs assistance organizations specifically mentioned the names of the associations and interest groups that they belonged to. Special needs assistance organizations that advocated for issues relating to client well-being often were advocating for rights-based legislation (such as accessibility issues for the disabled) so that their population could participate more fully in everyday activities. For basic needs assistance organizations, common responses were for more funding in their areas of service (regulatory/funding) and for expanded educational, employment, and housing opportunities for low-income families (client well-being).

Another important issue to explore is what advocacy tactics are most commonly used by human service nonprofits. Is the pattern of advocacy tactics chosen by human service nonprofits similar to the traditional pattern of SMOs, interest groups, or neither? How closely are they working with policymakers? Organizations may choose specific tactics based on a number of different criteria, such as efficacy, efficiency, and cost; and those decisions are undoubtedly influenced by the organizational factors discussed above. For example, having more resources makes the use of more expensive tactics possible, having government funding may provide additional access to policymakers, and being more professionalized or formalized may lead an organization to choose more moderate tactics. As all these features cluster by area of service, that is important to explore as well. Table 23.4 presents the rates of participation in a variety of advocacy tactics for both areas of service as well as human service nonprofits overall. The results indicate that the two groups do indeed have slightly different patterns when it comes to the advocacy tactics they engage in.⁸

Basic needs assistance organizations were slightly *less* likely than other organizations to participate in coalitions, conduct public education, buy advertising space, or pay dues to associations or coalitions to lobby on their behalf. They were slightly *more* likely than other organizations to write editorials or letters to the editor. This pattern is

Table 23.3 Primary Issues of Concern in Advocacy Work

<i>Percent Advocating For</i>	<i>Basic Needs Assistance</i>	<i>Special Needs Assistance</i>
Regulatory, administrative, or funding issues	10%	27%
Client well-being	74%	41%
Both	16%	31%

Table 23.4 Percentage of Organizations Participating in Advocacy Tactics

<i>Tactic</i>	<i>Percentage of Organizations Responding "Yes"</i>		
	<i>Basic Needs Assistance</i>	<i>Special Needs Assistance</i>	<i>All Human Service Nonprofits</i>
Meets with public officials or their staff (either elected or appointed)	87	88	90
Participates in coalitions with other organizations for the purpose of influencing public policy	79	86	85
Participates in development or revision of regulations related to public policy	59	61	61
Provides public education on policy issues	47	61	57
Pays dues to an association or belongs to a coalition that advocated or lobbied on its behalf	43	69	55
Participates in government commissions or committees	47	38	47
Provides testimony on public policy issues	43	43	46
Writes editorials or letters to the editor of newspapers or magazines	46	41	42
Issues policy reports	18	18	21
Conducts demonstrations or boycotts	11	10	13
Buys advertising space in some type of commercial media for advocacy	5	15	12

consistent with a set of organizations that has limited financial resources. It appears that they are staying away from high-cost tactics that have an indirect payoff (such as buying ad space or paying dues to associations) or take up copious amounts of staff time (such as conducting public education or participating in coalitions). Instead, they opt at higher rates to participate in low-cost tactics that still reach a wide audience, such as writing letters to the editor. Despite the fact that their overall collaboration rates are about the same as other organizations, it

also appears that basic needs assistance organization are not as active in coalitions, another factor that could limit their advocacy involvement and effectiveness.

On the other hand, special needs assistance organizations were slightly *more* likely than other organizations to pay dues to associations or coalitions to lobby on their behalf, as well as to conduct public education. This is likewise consistent with their status as organizations with relatively high levels of financial and staffing resources and also consistent with the issues and groups

that they reported advocating for in Table 23.3. Interestingly, special needs assistance organizations had slightly lower rates of participating in government committees or commissions than other human service organizations, including basic needs assistance organizations. This may be a result of the policy environment they are operating in. For example, it may be in a period of policy stability so that fewer government committees or commissions are needed. Alternatively, these organizations may be reaching their goals in other ways, such as by paying dues to others to do this committee work for them.

Implications

This set of analyses reveals that organizations that provide basic needs assistance and organizations that provide special needs services, differ significantly on a number of organizational characteristics, including size, professionalization, formalization, and degree of government funding. Logistic regression analysis shows that the difference in their advocacy rates is likely due to the differences in these organizational characteristics and not because of the different policy domains that they occupy.

These organizational characteristics are likely important for advocacy in a number of ways. Having additional financial capacity allows organizations to take on additional projects, such as advocacy, and facilitates having more staff to be able to participate. Smaller organizations with a shoestring staff and budget don't always have the same luxury and may be quite constrained in their ability to engage in advocacy. Larger size also allows organizations to participate in a broader range of tactics, including tactics that are more expensive to engage in.

This analysis also showed that depending more on government funding creates a small incentive to advocate. Organizations

in that position may feel that they need to work to protect this vital funding stream and make sure that government expectations are in line with their own service preferences. This is also supported by the fact that special needs assistance organizations, which are more dependent on government funding, also tend to direct their advocacy content toward issues of organizational maintenance rather than client well-being. Dependence on government funding clearly increases the incentive for organizations to try to influence government decision making through advocacy.

Larger organizations and those with more government funding may also have better connections to government administrators and policymakers, so getting people to return phone calls or even knowing who to talk to is a less intimidating task. This same set of benefits may flow from having a professionalized leadership and participating in more collaboration. Leaders with a masters or professional degree may be better connected and possess greater skills when it comes to advocacy. They may also be more knowledgeable as to its importance. More frequent collaboration with other organizations means more opportunities to learn about advocacy, share knowledge, and join coalitions. It also indicates greater integration into a specific area of service. The finding that formalization is not associated with advocacy participation when other factors are controlled for is not surprising. There is little reason to think that formalization, in and of itself, should promote or constrain advocacy. Here we see plainly that it is the other factors that often go along with formalization, such as increased size, government funding, and professionalization, that are strongly associated with advocacy involvement. What this set of results clearly shows us is that when it comes to promoting policy advocacy among human service nonprofits, capacity and connections matter.

When looking at what issues they are advocating for, special needs assistance organizations are found to be much more likely to advocate for issues related to regulatory or funding matters, likely a reflection of their closer relationship to government administrators. They are also more likely to use tactics such as supporting associations that lobby on behalf of their industry, which take considerable financial resources and are likely concerned with regulatory issues that affect the industry as a whole. This implies that although they are very active, their advocacy may be primarily concerned with maintaining the status quo, and less with changing structural conditions for their clients. Neither area of service, however, participates in a pattern of advocacy tactics that would be strongly associated with the work of either interest groups or SMOs. This is a further indication that the policy advocacy of human service organizations is unique and that these organizations make distinct contributions to the policy process.

THE IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICY ADVOCACY

Human service organizations involved in policy advocacy are credited with contributing to significant policy change in many individual cases, such as in the fields of domestic violence (Kurz, 1998) and child welfare (Danzy, 1996). Despite these individual successes, however, the overall effectiveness of human service organizations when it comes to policy advocacy is largely unknown. There is extensive literature (not to imply agreement) on the outcomes and impact of social movements and related SMOs (e.g., Cress & Snow, 2000; Guigni, 1998), but there is little systematic work that relates directly to the political impact of human service nonprofits.

This lack of information about the outcomes of advocacy is largely because the

direct impact of advocacy work by individual organizations is very difficult to study. The complexity of the policy environment cannot be easily modeled, and the number of different actors involved is enormous. Isolating the work of one organization and identifying it as the piece that made the difference is almost impossible. All the above is often true for social movements as well, but the success of a social movement is generally evaluated on the collective work of many organizations and individuals, making the problem of isolating specific actions less central. Additionally, advocacy work is also often a lengthy process, requiring years of diligent effort, networking, and education for even small changes to policy. Advocacy work that does not result in historical changes or is not well documented by the organization itself is often difficult to see, in retrospect.

Recently, foundations that fund advocacy work have begun to take an interest in how to measure advocacy outcomes. This shift has important implications for human service nonprofits, particularly those that have a difficult time raising money for advocacy from individual donors that might be concerned with overhead costs and want their money to go “directly” to the needy (Bowman, 2006). Many human service nonprofits have limited experience conducting policy advocacy and may not be skilled in evaluating the success of their advocacy work, which must be measured in different ways from direct service work. These issues and the difficulties involved in studying advocacy mean that foundations must be innovative in their approach to evaluating the success of advocacy-focused grant making.

A recent report from the California Endowment (Guthrie, Louie, David, & Crystal Foster, 2005), a national leader in funding policy change work, identifies seven key challenges involved in evaluating the impact of advocacy work. These are as

follows: (1) policy change is complex and nonlinear, which makes traditional logic models difficult to employ; (2) uncontrollable external forces intervene even when the organization is doing everything “right”; (3) change is slow; (4) strategies, activities, and expectations must often be adjusted midstream; (5) success can rarely be attributed to one organization or activity; (6) many organizations, including both foundations and nonprofits, are often confused about limitations on lobbying and draw lines in ways that are overly restrictive; and (7) nonprofits often feel that collecting data for evaluation is overly burdensome.

To overcome these challenges and make evaluation of policy advocacy work both meaningful and helpful, they give several suggestions. First, all parties should recognize that achieving actual policy change over the course of the grant itself may not be a reasonable expectation. To account for this, the grantee and the funder should identify specific activities that the grantee will engage in as well as an achievable milestone that they will work toward, such as a guarantee of support from a specific policymaker. The challenge is to show that the organization’s advocacy work is laying the groundwork for change by making the environment more receptive to their policy preferences. Other suggestions include setting goals that are flexible and responsive to shifts in the environment, considering administrative and regulatory action as an advocacy focus instead of limiting attention to the legislative sphere, and using the grant to build organizational capacity.

Building on previous work by Kingdon, Amenta, Guigni, and others, Andrews and Edwards (2004) suggest that there are five tasks that nonprofit advocates engage in where they may have a possible impact. These tasks are (1) getting the issue on the agenda, (2) gaining access to decision makers and decision-making arenas, (3) achieving favorable policies, (4) helping to

monitor and shape implementation, and (5) influencing long-term political priorities and resource allocation. Human service nonprofits may be active and successful in each of these, but their role and influence may vary. For example, they may be able to play a larger role in monitoring and shaping implementation than in influencing long-term political priorities. In terms of evaluation, each dimension also needs to be measured differently. An overarching explanatory theory or consistent methodological approach may not be possible. For example, success in agenda setting has been studied by looking at media coverage levels, and success in actually changing policy has often been looked at from a tactical perspective, such as the role of protest.

As a result of this variation in the field and the difficulties inherent in evaluation work, research has tended to focus on a single campaign or the work of single organizations. Although it is limited, this research has clearly shown that policy advocacy by human service nonprofits can have a significant impact in policy debates and outcomes. For example, Schmitt and Martin (1999) investigated how a rape treatment center embedded in a community hospital was able to maintain an important advocacy presence over 20 years, significantly influencing policy at the national, state, and local levels. This study demonstrates that even when working inside a highly institutionalized environment, moral entrepreneurs can and do mobilize in support of system change. The agency studied used an unobtrusive mobilization strategy, including a variety of insider tactics to change the nature of the discourse and understanding about rape that was found in their service environment. Howse, Weiss, and Green (2006) provide another example. They report that national leadership by the March of Dimes and work by other nonprofit health care advocates has been important in helping expand state-level requirements

regarding health screening of newborn infants. Strategies used by these organizations include holding press conferences and other media-related actions intended to draw attention to the problem, congressional testimony, and the use of parents and other committed activists as volunteers. Goetz (1994) gives yet another example in his comparison of progressive policy adoption in cities across the United States. He found that nonprofit housing advocates (not all were human service providers) significantly influenced urban development policy by reframing policy debates and promoting new policy trends. They did this in a variety of ways, from taking up policy positions in mayor's offices to using electoral coalitions and litigation strategies.

A few authors have looked at advocacy in terms of what traits, tactics, and strategies are associated with overall effectiveness, although this area is less developed. Hofer and Ferguson (2007) studied best practices for human service interest groups that wish to intervene in the regulatory process through administrative lobbying. This form of advocacy can be very effective as it directly influences the implementation of policy, helping shape how legislation will be experienced by organizations and clients at the ground level. They found that avoiding conflict, becoming involved in the issue before the regulatory writing process, and cultivating access to important decision makers were all important predictors of effectiveness, while having a liberal policy position or choosing specific strategies were only indirectly connected to success. As mentioned above, other scholars (Berry, 2003; Schneider & Lester, 2001) have also suggested administrative lobbying as a promising tactic, as it capitalizes on the increasingly symbiotic relationship between local governments and human service agencies. They suggest that human service nonprofits form relationships with local administrators in their area of expertise so

as to ensure that lines of communication remain open and nonprofits have an opportunity to offer opinions and insight on regulatory and funding changes in their area. Much more work is needed in this area to draw more concrete conclusions about overall strategies for efficacy.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Human service nonprofits make a unique contribution to the field of advocating organizations due to their distinctive perspective as service providers and their focus on how the details of social policy matter in the lives of vulnerable individuals and families. They are one of many kinds of advocating organizations that work to influence policy making, but the work they do takes place in a very different context than that of traditional advocating organizations that are structured and run as interest groups or SMOs.

The changing funding environment brought about by privatization and devolution is clearly having an important impact on the advocacy activities of human service nonprofits by magnifying divisions in the field in terms of size and funding structure and leading many human service nonprofits to depend more on government for funding. The analysis shown here demonstrates that size, level of government funding, level of professionalization, and degree of collaboration are all positively associated with advocacy involvement. They may also play a role in guiding what kinds of issues an organization will advocate on and what tactics it will use. If they are leading organizations to advocate more for issues of organizational maintenance, which is quite likely, then advocacy by human service nonprofits may become more about maintaining the status quo than it is about meaningful social change. As these policy trends continue, scholars will need to continue to monitor how the evolving relationship between

government and human service nonprofits is changing their advocacy role, including what it is that they are advocating for. Scholars should also be attentive to how resource inequality among organizations may lead to different levels and types of advocacy involvement, possibly resulting in divergent policy outcomes that have real-life implications for clients.

Overall, advocacy by human service nonprofits is an important, but often overlooked, area of expertise and concern for human service professionals. Clearly, the literature on nonprofit advocacy is not as developed as it should be, and many areas concerning advocacy in human service organizations are worthy of further study. Research has not kept up with innovations in practice and changes in how the policy environment may influence advocacy in this sector. Knowing more about the unique contributions of human service nonprofits as policy advocates is crucial to our understanding of how they respond to political and economic changes in their environment, how they work to influence that environment, and the impact their political actions have on both client well-being and social and economic justice.

NOTES

1. When using the term *nonprofit*, I am referring specifically to 501(c)(3) nonprofits, which is the largest category of nonprofit organizations, and the tax status that most human service nonprofits hold. Other kinds of nonprofits, such as 501(c)(4) organizations, face different kinds of regulations when it comes to advocacy and legislative lobbying.

2. Another special kind of advocacy, electioneering, which is the activity of working to promote the interests of a particular candidate, is either prohibited or regulated for all three groups.

3. This is a conservative number, including those organizations that could not be reached after 30 telephone calls. Many of those organizations

may actually be defunct. If one considers only refusals, the response rate is 90.5%.

4. The area of service that each survey respondent was active in was determined by coding their mission statement and the two largest programs in their budget. Each organization was classified by two independent coders. When there was disagreement among the coders, consensus was reached by careful review and discussion of each case. Eight major areas of service were represented: clinical services (29% of the sample), individual assistance (20%), special needs assistance (16%), basic needs assistance (14%), youth development (10%), crime and legal services (6%), child care (4%), and advocacy (3%).

5. Although both financial and staff resources are important reflections of capacity, only expenditures is used to measure size in the analysis to avoid problems with autocorrelation.

6. This scale was determined through exploratory factor analysis. All five items were entered into the analysis. A single dominant factor emerged that explained 78% of the variance after rotation and had an eigenvalue of 2.06. All items loaded more highly onto this factor than any other, at .8, .8, .4, .4, and .4, respectively. All five items also have similar relationships to dependent variables of interest, as evidenced by the strength and direction of the relationships in sample regressions. Chronbach's alpha was .74.

7. Size was transformed using a natural log to adjust for the large amount of variation and strong positive skew found in this variable.

8. A lack of power due to low numbers of advocating organizations eliminates the value of testing for statistical significance in this case.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, J., Nank, R., & Stivers, C. (1999). Implications of welfare reform: Do nonprofit survival strategies threaten civil society? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 28(4), 452–475.
- Alter, C., & Hage, J. (1992). *Organizations working together*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Andrews, K. T., & Edwards, B. (2004). Advocacy organizations in the U.S. political process. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30, 479–506.

- Aveni, A. F. (1978). Organizational linkages and resource mobilization: The significance of linkage strength and breadth. *Sociological Quarterly*, 19, 185–202.
- Baum, J. A. C., & Oliver, C. (1996). Toward an institutional ecology of organizational foundings. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 1378–1427.
- Berry, J. M. (1984). *The interest group society*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Berry, J. M. (2003). *A voice for nonprofits*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Bowman, W. (2006). Should donors care about overhead costs? Do they care? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 35(2), 288–310.
- Chaves, M., Stephens, L., & Galaskiewicz, J. (2004). Does government funding suppress nonprofits' political activity? *American Sociological Review*, 69, 292–316.
- Chetkovich, C., & Kunreuther, F. (2007). *From the ground up: Grassroots organizations making social change*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Child, C. D., & Grønbyerg, K. A. (2007). Nonprofit advocacy organizations: Their characteristics and activities. *Social Science Quarterly*, 88(1), 259–281.
- Cress, D. M., & Snow, D. A. (2000). The outcomes of homeless mobilization: The influence of organization, disruption, political mediation, and framing. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105(4), 1063–1104.
- Danzy, J. (1996). Philadelphia's collaborative process for building a responsive agenda for kinship care. *Child Welfare*, 75(5), 651–662.
- De Vita, C. J., & Twombly, E. C. (2006). Nonprofits and federalism. In E. T. Boris & C. E. Steuerle (Eds.), *Nonprofits and government: Collaboration and conflict* (2nd ed., pp. 257–276). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160.
- Everett, K. D. (1992). Professionalization and protest: Changes in the social movement sector, 1961–1983. *Social Forces*, 70(4), 957–975.
- Ezell, M. (1994). Advocacy practice of social workers. *Families in Society: Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 75(1), 36–46.
- Froelich, K. A. (1999). Diversification of revenue strategies: Evolving resource dependence in nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 28(3), 246–268.
- Frumkin, P., & Andre-Clark, A. (2000). When missions, markets, and politics collide: Values and strategy in the nonprofit human services. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 29, 141–163.
- Galaskiewicz, J., & Bielefeld, W. (1998). *Nonprofit organizations in an age of uncertainty: A study of organizational change*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gamson, W. A. (1975). *The strategy of social protest*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.
- Gibelman, M., & Kraft, S. (1996). Advocacy as a core agency program: Planning considerations for voluntary human service agencies. *Administration in Social Work*, 20(4), 43–59.
- Goetz, E. G. (1994). Expanding possibilities in local development policy: An examination of U.S. cities. *Political Research Quarterly*, 47(1), 85–109.
- Guigni, M. (1998). Was it worth the effort? The outcomes and consequences of social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 371–393.
- Guthrie, K., Louie, J., David, T., & Crystal Foster, C. (2005). *The challenge of assessing policy and advocacy activities: Strategies for a prospective evaluation approach*. Los Angeles: California Endowment.
- Hall, R. J., Johnson, N. J., & Haas, J. E. (1967). Organizational size, complexity, and formalization. *American Sociological Review*, 32(6), 903–912.
- Hasenfeld, Y. (1983). *Human service organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Hasenfeld, Y. (1992). Power in social work practice. In Y. Hasenfeld (Ed.), *Human services as complex organizations* (pp. 259–275). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Hayes, K. S., & Mickelson, J. S. (2000). *Affecting change: Social workers in the political arena*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Herbert, M. D., & Mould, J. W. (1992). The advocacy role in public child welfare. *Child Welfare, 71*(2), 114–130.
- Hobbs, S. H., Ricketts, T. C., Dodds, J. M., & Milio, N. (2004). Analysis of interest group influence on federal school meals regulations: 1992 to 1996. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 36*(2), 90–98.
- Hofer, R., & Ferguson, K. (2007). Controlling the levers of power: How advocacy organizations affect the regulation writing process. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare, 34*(1), 83–108.
- Hojnacki, M. (1997). Interest groups' decisions to join alliances or work alone. *American Journal of Political Science, 41*(1), 61–87.
- Howse, J. L., Weiss, M., & Green, N. S. (2006). Critical role of the march of dimes in the expansion of newborn screening. *Mental Retardation & Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews, 12*(4), 280–287.
- Jenkins, J. C. (1987). Nonprofit organizations and policy advocacy. In W. W. Powell (Ed.), *The nonprofit sector: A research handbook* (pp. 296–315). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Kingdon, J. W. (1995). *Agendas, alternatives and public policies* (2nd ed.). New York: HarperCollins.
- Kirp, D. L. (2007). *The sandbox investment: The preschool movement and kids-first politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kurz, D. (1998). Women, welfare, and domestic violence. *Social Justice, 25*(1), 105–118.
- Laumann, E. O., & Knoke, D. (1987). *The organizational state: Social change in national policy domains*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Markowitz, L., & Tice, K. W. (2002). Paradoxes of professionalization: Parallel dilemmas in women's organizations in the Americas. *Gender & Society, 16*(6), 941–958.
- McAdam, D. (1982). *Political process and the development of black insurgency, 1930–1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meyer, D. S., & Minkoff, D. C. (2004). Conceptualizing political opportunity. *Social Forces, 82*(4), 1457–1492.
- Minkoff, D. C. (1994). From service provision to institutional advocacy: The shifting legitimacy of organizational forms. *Social Forces, 72*(4), 943–969.
- Minkoff, D. C. (2002). The emergence of hybrid organizational forms: Combining identity-based service provision and political action. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 31*(3), 377–401.
- Mor Barak, M. E., Travis, D., & Bess, G. (2004). Exploring managers' and administrators' retrospective perceptions of their MSW fieldwork experience: A national study. *Administration in Social Work, 28*(1), 21–44.
- Mosley, J. E., Katz, H., Hasenfeld, Y., & Anheier, H. K. (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.
- Nicholson-Crotty, J. (2007). Politics, policy and the motivations for advocacy in nonprofit reproductive health and family planning providers. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 36*(1), 5–21.
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Piven, F. F., & Cloward, R. A. (1977). *Poor people's movements: Why they succeed, how they fail*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Raffa, T. (2000). Advocacy and lobbying without fear: What is allowed within a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. *Nonprofit Quarterly, 7*(2), 44–47.
- Salamon, L. M. (1995). *Partners in public service: Government-nonprofit relations in the modern welfare state*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Salamon, L. M. (2002). The resilient sector: The state of nonprofit America. In L. M. Salamon (Ed.), *The state of nonprofit America* (pp. 3–61). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Schmitt, F. E., & Martin, P. Y. (1999). Unobtrusive mobilization by an institutionalized rape crisis center. *Gender & Society, 13*, 364–384.
- Schneider, R. L., & Lester, L. (2001). *Social work advocacy: A new framework for action*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

- Smith, S. R., & Lipsky, M. (1993). *Nonprofits for hire: The welfare state in the age of contracting*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Smucker, B. (1991). *The nonprofit lobbying guide: Advocating your cause and getting results*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Staggenborg, S. (1988). The consequences of professionalization and formalization in the pro-choice movement. *American Sociological Review*, 53(4), 585–605.
- Tilly, C. (2004). *Social movements, 1768–2004*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Wolk, J. L., Pray, J. E., Weismiller, T., & Dempsey, D. (1996). Political practice: Educating social work students for policymaking. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 32(1), 91–100.