NONPROFITS AND ADVOCACY

Engaging Community and Government in an Era of Retrenchment

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From Skid Row to the Statehouse

How Nonprofit Homeless Service Providers Overcome Barriers to Policy Advocacy Involvement

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The role of the nonprofit sector in advocating for the public good has been a topic of recent increased scholarly attention. Drawing on existing research on social movements and interest groups, this work has investigated the degree to which nonprofit organizations of all types are involved in policy advocacy, the barriers they face, and how this involvement varies among organizations (Andrews and Edwards, 2004; Bass et al., 2007; Berry and Arons, 2003; Chaves et al., 2004). As a result of this research, new questions have emerged. Research has shown that organizational characteristics such as professionalization and a higher degree of collaboration are associated with increased advocacy involvement, for example, but it has not confirmed the mechanisms by which this works (Mosley, 2010). Alternatively, several issues are thought to serve as barriers to advocacy involvement—e.g., fear of legal ramifications or lack of capacity—but more information is needed to address which barriers are most central in the minds of managers or how they may work together (Bass et al., 2007). Additionally, there is increased recognition that the answers to these questions may be different for nonprofits involved in different policy fields (Child and Grønbjerg, 2007; Stone and Sandfort, 2009). How these barriers may function to limit advocacy involvement is a major theme of this volume.

Nonprofits operating in human service fields provide a useful case to explore how barriers and incentives operate when it comes to policy advocacy. They are important because human service nonprofits are thought to be critical players in advocating on behalf of marginalized communities. Advocating human service nonprofits can help procure resources and improve policies by serving as vital information conduits regarding how policy is working on the ground. But because they are organized primarily to provide services, not to conduct advocacy, they also face substantial barriers to advocacy

participation. These barriers include severe resource constraints, a lack of experience and knowledge about policy advocacy, and confusion about what they are legally able to do (see Bass et al., chap. 10, this volume, for more information on the barriers and incentives nonprofits face around advocacy). Unfortunately, how these barriers interact, or why some organizations are able to overcome them and others are not, is still unknown. Human service nonprofits also have higher-than-average levels of dependence on government funding, and both they and their clients frequently interface with public policy regulations. This institutional context complicates any claims regarding "outsider" status and may present unique barriers and incentives for advocacy participation.

If scholars are to understand how to help develop and strengthen advocacy among human service nonprofits, we must develop more specific knowledge of how advocacy is experienced inside organizations, including how managerial beliefs and priorities interact with organizational constraints and the institutional context. Central to this understanding must be what motivates human service nonprofits to become involved in advocacy, which barriers are most pervasive in limiting or silencing advocacy activity, and what organizational and institutional structures facilitate involvement.

Building on previous work in this area (Bass et al., 2007; Berry and Arons, 2003; Child and Grønbjerg, 2007; Mosley, 2010), this chapter addresses these three things by looking in depth at a single policy field: services for the homeless. I argue that in order to advance the research on nonprofit advocacy, we need to pay greater attention to the specific context in which it takes place and unpack the organizational and institutional processes that incentivize and constrain action. Only then can we more fully understand the conditions under which advocacy can be successful—a major goal of this volume. To do this, I first review previous research findings, pointing to the key questions that scholars have yet to fully address. I then present findings from a qualitative study of homeless service providers in Chicago that was designed to shed additional light on some of these questions.

This chapter addresses three major barriers to advocacy participation that have been proposed and received empirical support in the literature. These are concerns about Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations, limited capacity, and lack of supportive and knowledgeable leadership. After presenting data that help to adjudicate which are most central and why, I then explore three organizational characteristics or practices that have been associated with increased advocacy involvement and demonstrate the mechanisms by

which they help organizations overcome the barriers mentioned above: use of collaborative networks, government funding, and issues of professional leadership. Three specific research questions are addressed. The first two—(1) what activities do organizational leaders consider advocacy? and (2) what are the most serious barriers to advocacy participation?—provide the necessary background to explore the central question of this chapter: (3) what organizational characteristics best position organizations to overcome those barriers?

Literature on Human Service Nonprofits and Policy Advocacy

As noted above, while the recent scholarly attention placed on nonprofit advocacy has answered many important questions, like all complex topics, it has led to the development of more questions. In this section I review the major findings that have resulted from this increase in attention, pointing to where more information is needed. These findings fall into three broad categories: (1) definitions of advocacy, (2) barriers to involvement, and (3) actions and characteristics that facilitate involvement.

Definitions of Advocacy

As Robert J. Pekkanen and Steven Rathgeb Smith point out in their introduction to this volume, defining advocacy is tricky business. The wide range of tactics that can be understood as advocacy complicate both the practice and measurement of advocacy. For this reason, understanding how managers define advocacy is important because it is impossible to fully understand what keeps organizations from participating in advocacy if researchers and managers do not have a shared understanding of the topic. Unfortunately, the nature of survey research might lead researchers to underestimate participation and thus overestimate barriers. In survey research, the meanings of specific terms are not open to negotiation. Researchers have a choice between leaving terms undefined (and thus privileging the definition of the respondent, which remains unknown and can be a devastating threat to reliability) or defining them a priori (which leads to greater reliability regarding the findings but may compromise construct validity).

The second approach, defining for respondents what is meant by specific terms like "advocacy," is generally preferred. As a result, surveys have asked

respondents about advocacy using slightly different definitions, and it is unclear which definition produces the most valid answers. This also makes comparability across studies difficult. Alternatively, some researchers choose to ask about involvement in specific activities, and use those to estimate advocacy involvement (Allard, 2009; Donaldson and Shields, 2009; Schmid et al., 2008). This approach cleverly sidesteps the definitional problems and increases reliability, but it limits our understanding of advocacy to only a few specific agreed-upon activities. Another approach is to rely on information reported on the Form 990 (e.g., Nicholson-Crotty, 2007) but doing so is likely to severely underestimate actual advocacy participation, as organizations are not required to report any advocacy activity that is not lobbying.

Research from the Strengthening Nonprofit Advocacy Project (SNAP) highlights the importance of understanding more about how managers define advocacy (Bass et al., 2007; Berry and Arons, 2003). Anticipating that words like "lobbying" may be loaded for some managers, researchers systematically varied the words "lobbying," "advocacy," and "educate" in a single question to see if responses would vary accordingly. Not surprisingly, they found that many more managers responded positively to questions about "educating" than they did about the others (Bass et al., 2007).

To help shed light on how human service managers define advocacy and assess the degree to which their definitions are in alignment with those of researchers, managers in this study were explicitly asked how they defined advocacy and lobbying, and what activities they included in that definition. They were also asked about their participation in lobbying or other tactics researchers often consider advocacy, but without having those tactics labeled as such. This approach is in alignment with the broad definition of advocacy—"advocacy is the attempt to influence public policy, either directly or indirectly"—advocated by Robert J. Pekkanen and Steven Rathgeb Smith in this volume.

Barriers to Advocacy Involvement

Researchers have hypothesized that several barriers may keep human service nonprofits from participating in advocacy. The barriers that are most often mentioned are concerns about IRS regulations, limited capacity, and lack of supportive and knowledgeable leadership, although there are certainly others. While previous research has informed us that each of these barriers exist, we do not know which barriers are most central for which types of organiza-

tions or how these barriers may work together. Understanding more about how these barriers limit advocacy involvement is a major goal of this volume.

First, the potential barriers that come with the IRS regulations that restrict lobbying for 501(c)(3) organizations and prohibit activities such as electioneering are a central concern of many scholars. These regulations are complex and can be confusing, but they are attached to severe sanctions, including the loss of 501(c)(3) status. Research has shown that many nonprofits are confused about the rules and that fear of sanctions leads some organizations to opt out of advocacy altogether (Bass et al., 2007; Berry and Arons, 2003). More research is needed, however, on how different types of nonprofits interpret these regulations, and how this barrier interacts with other important organizational characteristics and barriers, such as size and professionalization.

Another advocacy barrier for nonprofits is a lack of capacity (Bass et al., 2007; Child and Grønbjerg, 2007; Mosley, 2010), which may be a particular issue in the human services field. The field in general is faced with severe resource constraints, and organizations are compelled to spend the majority of their resources on service provision (Hasenfeld, 1992). The capacity barrier is not simple, however, as capacity stands in for many issues and is measured in different ways depending on the study (generally either by number of full-time employees or size of budget). The actual barrier may be a lack of staff, a lack of financial resources, or a combination of the two. Capacity may also serve as a proxy for political connections (e.g., smaller organizations may have a harder time getting their "foot in the door"). This research addresses what specific aspects of capacity hinder advocacy for human service nonprofits.

Finally, research has shown that executive directors have primary responsibility for advocacy, as staff members often lack the time, expertise, or authority to be involved (Bass et al., 2007; Salamon and Geller, 2008). In many cases the decision to be involved in advocacy comes down to one or two individual leaders in an organization, which can create a barrier if that individual lacks training in advocacy, believes that advocacy is outside of the organization's mission, or does not believe advocacy will have meaningful benefits. Some scholars have thus hypothesized that human service managers may hesitate to be involved in advocacy for reasons of knowledge or expertise (Schneider and Lester, 2001). Research has shown that organizations with highly educated managers are more likely to be involved in advocacy (Mosley, 2010), but much more information is needed on what aspects of leadership are important. Leadership barriers include managers' beliefs,

access to professional networks, understanding of legal constraints, and personal passion. In this study the relationship between advocacy involvement and managerial practices and beliefs is explored in order to discover if one or more of these barriers is primary.

What Characteristics or Actions May Help Overcome Barriers to Advocacy Involvement?

Given these barriers, and the importance of advocacy involvement for the well-being of both human service organizations and their vulnerable clients, it is important to know what can help organizations overcome them. For some organizations, overcoming barriers may mean becoming involved in advocacy in the first place, and for others it may mean expanding their advocacy involvement to a more meaningful level. There are several variables that may facilitate advocacy in this way, and all may operate via a variety of mechanisms that are not well understood. In this chapter I investigate three—collaborative networks, government funding, and issues of professional leadership—by looking at how they may counteract specific barriers and the mechanisms by which they do this. I also assess the effect of specific incentives and barriers found in distinct policy fields.

First, collaboration is one of the most common tactics chosen by human service organizations involved in advocacy (Mosley, 2009) for a number of reasons. Collaboration may increase legitimacy, access to knowledge about policies and advocacy efforts, and access to policymakers (Hojnacki, 1997). Research has particularly emphasized the degree to which collaboration is done to gain or conserve resources, particularly for organizations with limited internal capacity (Galaskiewicz, 1985; Guo and Acar, 2005). Research has also shown that non-advocacy-related collaborations increase the likelihood that human service organizations will be involved in advocacy (Mosley, 2010), so perhaps some organizations simply have a collaborative orientation. Regardless, because collaboration is common among human service nonprofits, is particularly common as an advocacy tactic, and has the potential to allow organizations to participate in advocacy with a minimum outlay of resources, we need additional understanding about the ways in which collaboration may help human service nonprofits overcome advocacy barriers (see Sandfort, chap. 9, this volume, for more on advocacy collaboration).

Second, the relationship between government funding and advocacy involvement is of special interest in regard to human service nonprofits. Priva-

tization has led to an increased dependence on government funds throughout the humans services sector (Smith and Lipsky, 1993). Some fields, like homeless services, have grown considerably as a result of this trend, but they may have also lost some autonomy. Traditional wisdom long held that nonprofits that are more dependent on government funds would be less likely to participate in advocacy because of fear of alienating their government funders, driving away other possible sources of revenue, or because of the limited flexibility of government funding (Alexander et al., 1999; Nicholson-Crotty, 2009). But most research now suggests that government funding either has no effect or is associated with greater advocacy involvement (Chaves et al., 2004; Child and Grønbjerg, 2007; Mosley, 2010).

This project adds more empirical evidence to this debate. Although it now appears that government funding is positively associated with increased advocacy involvement, it is still not clear why. It could be that greater access to government decision makers facilitates involvement, or it could be an increased incentive to make sure government policy and funding decisions are in alignment with organizational priorities. These may not be mutually exclusive. Alternatively, the direction of the relationship may be reversed—it could be that organizations that advocate more wind up with more government funding. More information is needed to determine the influence of this field-level trend.

Third, just as some leadership characteristics may serve as a barrier for advocacy involvement, other characteristics may actually help facilitate advocacy. Clearly, leadership matters, but what causes some leaders to embrace advocacy more than others and overcome those day-to-day barriers? Professional norms around advocacy may be one reason. Nonprofit leaders come from a variety of backgrounds and have different orientations to their work (Suarez, 2010). Research has shown that nonprofit leaders who are management professionals (as opposed to amateurs or people with only substantive expertise) embrace different management tools (Hwang and Powell, 2009). Leaders with different backgrounds also are known to have a variety of interpretations of the field in which they work and share different norms (Fligstein, 1990). Advocacy may be one of these, as research has shown that having a leader with a masters or professional degree is associated with a higher rate of advocacy involvement (Mosley, 2010). Other leadership characteristics that may help facilitate advocacy include having a leader with greater access to policymakers, a better understanding of legal issues, or the execution of management techniques that integrate advocacy into the organization.

These characteristics may or may not be associated with professional norms, too. Advocacy may also be driven by more individualistic differences, such as personal passion or social justice orientation (Bass et al., 2007).

Finally, policy fields come with distinctive regulatory environments, interactions with government administrators, and connections to private resources (Salamon, 1987; Stone and Sandfort, 2009). Studies have shown that nonprofits from different policy fields also vary widely in whether they are involved in advocacy. Nonprofits in the health and environment fields, for example, have higher rates of involvement in advocacy than human service nonprofits (Child and Grønbjerg, 2007). Their higher rates of participation may be because the fields of health and environment are highly politicized, partially as a result of targeted lobbying efforts by private interests, and have strong government regulatory bodies. Additionally, political opportunity theory has long proposed that the friendliness of the political environment, which varies by policy field over time, can serve as a barrier or incentive to political activism (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). In a recent study of nonprofit reproductive health and family planning providers, Nicholson-Crotty (2007) found that reproductive health organizations were more likely to advocate when either their ability to deliver core services was threatened or when the political environment appeared favorable. I assess these policy field effects by studying a single, regionally constrained, policy field: homeless services.

Methods

This research focuses on one regional policy field—homeless services—in order to gain insight into how organizational constraints and managerial beliefs interact when it comes to advocacy involvement. Qualitative research methods were used to maximize understanding of how managers interpret potential barriers and incentives, as well as the context in which they act on their beliefs. The units of analysis were homeless service nonprofits, defined as organizations with 501(c)(3) status with at least one of its three largest programs specifically focused on serving the homeless. These organizations include emergency shelters, transitional housing providers, and providers of basic needs services, among others. Using a variety of databases and membership lists, 86 of these organizations were identified in the city of Chicago in August of 2008. All were primarily direct service providers, not advocacy organizations.

Because of the small population size, it was possible to use representative sampling in conjunction with the qualitative approach. The population was

stratified by size (as measured by expenditures reported on the organization's most recently available Form 990 tax return) and service provided (e.g., transitional housing, emergency services). The initial sampling frame consisted of 54 organizations, two of which were later found to be defunct, resulting in a final sampling frame of 52 organizations.

The executive directors of the sampled organizations were contacted initially by letter and then by telephone. Forty-two directors agreed to participate and were subsequently interviewed. These semistructured, in-depth interviews lasted between one and two hours and took place between August 2008 and April 2009. The interviews solicited information about a variety of topics related to advocacy involvement, including motivation, barriers, and tactics, as well as other organizational characteristics such as collaboration and government funding. The response rate was 81%, with data collected from half the population of homeless service organizations in Chicago.

All interviews were digitally recorded and then professionally transcribed. All transcripts were used in the analysis, using a coding scheme containing both inductive and deductive techniques. Codes reflected topics of a priori theoretical interest as well as those that emerged from open coding, reflecting new insights (Patton, 2002). Extensive memoing was also used in the analysis. Case summaries were written immediately after each interview, and additional memos regarding connections to existing theories and emerging themes were written during the analysis phase (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data from the interviews and memos were complemented with field notes written during participant observation at advocacy coalition meetings and other field-level events where advocacy was discussed.

Because of substantial correlation between variables of interest (e.g., size and government funding), negative case analysis was an important part of the analysis, used to provide additional insight into sources of variation (Patton, 2002). Member checking was also used to enhance validity; this was done through sharing initial findings with respondents, requesting feedback, and discussing the findings at several advocacy coalition meetings.

Results

Responding organizations varied on several characteristics of theoretical interest. Size varied greatly, with expenditures ranging from $7,000 to $11 million. The mean was $2,447,122 and the median was $1,603,824. Respondents also ranged on the degree to which they were financed by government funding,

from 0% to 100% of their budgets. About 83% of the organizations had some government funding, and about half of those organizations (51%) had a budget made up of more than 60% government funds. The professionalization of the executive director was assessed qualitatively; leaders differed considerably on variables such as their years of work in the nonprofit sector, level of education, and connections to others in the field. Less variation was seen regarding collaboration; all the organizations that reported advocacy involvement also reported involvement in collaborative groups, albeit to different degrees.

In regard to advocacy, great variation was found in the degree to which organizations participated in advocacy but, surprisingly, not on whether they participated at all. Managers in this sample reported high rates of engagement in policy advocacy. Only three organizations out of the 42 interviewed were not involved in policy advocacy in any way, meaning that 93% did participate. Although many of these organizations participated only in minor ways, this participation rate is substantially higher than is generally found in surveys of nonprofit advocacy. Although there are contextual issues that incentivize advocacy in this field that will be discussed below—specifically, opportunities for collaboration and reliance on government funding—this finding is likely at least a partial result of a qualitative methodology that allowed managers to define for themselves what advocacy meant. These findings are addressed in the first research question.

What Activities Do Organizational Leaders Consider Advocacy?

In the interview, managers were not given a definition of advocacy, but rather asked to define the term on their own. Sample questions in the interview include, "Even if you don't participate in them, what kinds of activities do you think of when you think about advocacy?" and "Can you give me an example of something you recently did that you would consider advocacy?" Findings revealed that managers often interpreted certain activities they engaged in as "advocacy" that may not be obviously included in the definitions of advocacy used in most surveys. Notably, managers included most types of community outreach (e.g., newsletters, open houses) as advocacy, as well as attendance at meetings with fellow service providers, regardless of whether policymakers were in attendance or advocacy action was discussed.

Examples of responses to this question included, "Let me see. I mean we do hold things like community forums," or "We usually send someone to

meetings at the Alliance [the local U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development continuum of care network]." In both cases these organizations did not participate in advocacy tactics that were more obviously "public policy" work. But these activities are clearly focused externally on improving conditions in the larger political environment and should probably not be automatically excluded from advocacy definitions. Some managers had definitions that were even further afield, however, and acknowledged that their definition of advocacy may differ from that of the researchers. As one manager said, "How we're trying to do [advocacy] is more through educating our volunteers and our constituency about really treating people with dignity and love and care. So I know that's not where you're going with the whole policy thing." It should be noted that, when asked specifically, almost all managers did make a distinction between advocacy and lobbying, although their definition of lobbying was often vague.

A parallel finding is that, later in the interview, managers were asked about their involvement in a variety of activities that researchers commonly consider to be advocacy. These activities included involvement in advocacy coalitions and meetings with government agency administrators. Many times managers who earlier reported that they did not engage in advocacy did report engagement in these activities, a finding similar to that reported by SNAP researchers (Bass et al., 2007; Berry and Arons, 2003). When asked to reconcile these statements, respondents would say something like, "Well, I see how that might seem political. But to us it is just networking."

What Are the Most Serious Barriers to Advocacy Participation?

As mentioned above, three barriers are addressed in this section: concerns about IRS regulations, limited capacity, and lack of supportive and knowledgeable leadership.

Concern about IRS Regulations

As noted above, proponents of nonprofit advocacy and lobbying have long been concerned that many nonprofit organizations are not well versed in the IRS rules governing lobbying activity for 501(c)(3) organizations and worry that this lack of clarity might produce a chilling effect for advocacy involvement. This research revealed that confusion over the rules was common among homeless service providers in Chicago. These misunderstandings

clearly did not prevent organizations from participating in advocacy (as 93% were found to participate), however, and usually did not keep them from participating in lobbying, either.

Data from the interviews revealed that 50% of organizations participated in lobbying at some level, but only 24% responded in the affirmative when asked specifically if they lobbied. In other words, about half of the organizations that participated in lobbying were either unwilling to say so, or else did not understand what activities constituted lobbying (even though what they later described doing met the legal definition of the term).

This discrepancy is primarily a result of two common misunderstandings. First, many managers were unsure about what lobbying actually was and so participated in it without knowing they were doing so. When asked if they lobbied, for example, they would say no, and then later talk about a trip they made to the state capital with a group of other service providers to talk to legislators about the proposed state budget cuts.

Second, many managers noted a specific aversion to the word "lobbying" and preferred not to use it. Instead, they referred to their lobbying involvement as "educational," "advocacy," or "public policy." As one director said, "I like the word advocacy a lot better. It doesn't sound so political. It's really me talking about something that I'm passionate about . . . Lobbying kind of has a negative connotation in today's world." Another was even more descriptive: "lobbying, even the term kind of turns my stomach. I mean, I feel like, if I'm Amoco, and need this done so I can make more money, then I need to be lobbying. What we're doing, we're trying to educate them to make right decisions for their constituents . . . I guess in a sense that's lobbying, but this is really, I mean, it's our money, and it's coming back to us . . . Lobbying to me sort of has a more greasy feel to it."

About 21% of managers specifically, and erroneously, stated that they could not lobby because of their nonprofit status or because they received government funding. The rest knew that some lobbying was acceptable, but the vast majority was unsure about what the spending cutoffs were. They simply felt that that whatever they were doing, it certainly wasn't "too much." Only one executive director knew what the 501(h) election was, for example, but he did not bother selecting it because he felt there was no chance that they would spend enough for it to matter. One director, who freely reported involvement in lobbying, said the following when asked about reporting lobbying expenditures: "Well, we don't really have any, so we don't report any, frankly. I mean there's my time, but that's really more, it's public policy work, as opposed to

lobbying. It's really minimal, so it's not really worth reporting. Maybe 5% of my salary." "I ain't making a million dollars," he added, laughing.

In sum, these managers felt there was a qualitative difference between any lobbying that they might do and lobbying that is done on behalf of corporate interests. They viewed their work to be primarily educational, or as giving voice to underrepresented constituents. Essentially, lobbying was seen as self-interested. Because they did not see their lobbying work in that light, they did not consider it lobbying. As one respondent noted when asked about the difference between advocacy and lobbying, "I don't see a difference, but we can't call it lobbying if we do it . . . Lobbyists get paid. We don't. Bottom line."

The other half of respondents, who did not participate in lobbying, tended to be the organizations who were less involved with advocacy overall. Although some noted that they believed lobbying to be illegal, they also generally reported they were not interested in engaging in lobbying or did not have the time to go to the state capital (about four hours by car from Chicago). As one manager put it, "When you have a lot of restricted money, it's difficult . . . especially to the degree that it requires travel, because you don't have money in your budget that covers those kinds of expenses, it makes it difficult to accomplish. So sometimes you have to cover those expenses yourself. And depending on how often you do it, it can be expensive."

Finally, the following quote demonstrates that it is not fear or confusion about violating IRS rules that keeps one manager from lobbying; rather, it is the perceived staff time that monitoring takes: "I don't really find them [the lobbying laws] to be overly burdensome . . . I think that people can always get around prohibitions and lobbying if they need to and they want to. It's just not something that I would care to be involved in, because it would take staff time and resources in order to defend against it."

Limited Capacity

As was seen in a few of the above quotes, instead of legal worries, the advocacy barrier that managers reported to be most severe is limited capacity in terms of time and resources, which is similar to what has been reported in previous research (Bass et al., 2007). When human service providers participate in advocacy, they must do so while simultaneously providing services to clients, maintaining relationships with their community, and raising funds. Balancing these different demands was seen as difficult. "Frankly, part of the reason we're not more involved [in advocacy] is because we're so involved

with doing [service] that there just doesn't seem to be enough time left over to do the other part, and shame on us. But that's the reality." Another pointed out, "I mean, we [service providers] have a dual role. We have to push the envelope in terms of social change, and then we have to make sure that the work that we do gets done . . . And so that means that we have to make sure that we're adequately resourced to do the work, and then also to push the envelope. And it's very hard to do." These managers wanted to increase their advocacy effort but simply could not find the time or resources to do so.

When asked what it would take to expand their advocacy involvement, time was the most frequent answer given by managers. For the executive directors of these organizations, there simply is not enough time to manage the organization and participate in policy advocacy, too. As one manager put it, "[We] could be a lot better at advocacy, but we would say the reason we really haven't been is because we are just busy. That's really the main reason. It seems like every day we're putting out some kind of fire, whether it be funding or staff issues or, you know, being understaffed . . . although we know we need to do it more."

A perceived lack of time is strongly related to resource availability. In the minds of managers, with bigger budgets they could afford to hire someone to help with advocacy. "I would like to have a full-time staff person to work on advocacy, outreach, and public awareness. And I don't have it. I have a part-time person who also has an entirely different function. She's my office manager." Speaking about her desire to be more involved in advocacy, one manager said, "We definitely would love, love, love to do that. But, that takes up resources. That's, like, a person working on it and engaging, and—you know, it's not a case manager, because if they're doing that then they're not doing case management . . . maybe it's a program supervisor, but it's another task that she's got to do."

Several complained that finding funding to do advocacy was difficult. Because of resource constraints—both being underresourced and being reliant on inflexible government funding were mentioned—many managers felt that there was simply not enough money in their budget to be fully engaged in advocacy. Accordingly, many felt that specific funding for advocacy would help them be more involved. As manager noted, "We wanted to keep doing advocacy but we couldn't find money for it. So that's another factor that probably keeps us from doing advocacy is, you know, if somebody would throw some money at it . . . We kind of have to do that on the side. There's really no designated money for it that we have found." Laughing, she added, "So—we need to advocate for advocacy funding!"

Lack of Supportive and Knowledgeable Leadership

The decision to advocate often lies with executive director. Not only is she the leader of the organization, she is also the person with the greatest access to decision makers and stakeholders. Most executive directors interviewed reported that they themselves conducted the vast majority of the organization's advocacy efforts. As reflected in the quotes above, executive directors often reported that other staff members were either too busy serving clients or did not have the necessary expertise. Except in the largest organizations, resources were not available to hire specific advocacy-related staff. Many executive directors also felt that, as the public face of the agency, they were best situated to head up any advocacy involvement. Unfortunately, because they were often busy with other tasks, relying solely on the executive director to do advocacy meant that many organizations were not as involved as they would like. This situation was discussed above as one of limited capacity but can also be conceptualized as a leadership issue.

Involvement was also limited when the executive director did not see advocacy as central to the organization's functioning. A professional orientation to service over advocacy was articulated by several of these directors. Although they generally saw advocacy as a potentially valuable activity, direct service to clients took precedence for them. As one put it: "not that I don't think advocacy isn't important, but . . . if I had $50,000, I frankly would not spend it on an advocacy person. I'd put it into someone's pocket here, or mouth, or pay rent, or buy [medicine] for them. That's not the way I think we would choose to use money, honestly."

Other managers spoke of this in mission-related terms, although their personal beliefs were clear: "We can't get too involved in [advocacy] or else we're not doing our main mission, which is not advocacy in the public sphere. We advocate for the clients all the time, but we're not an advocacy organization, so we lend a hand. We participate a little bit and stay in touch, but try not to get too off topic." Another manager preferred to "Leave it to the Chicago Alliance; they have a staff person, that's that person's job to do that . . . I don't think I'm very good at it, either. So, I mean, I'm all for leaving things to do for people who are good at it. We do one thing and we do it very, very, well, and that is [provide direct services] . . . that's our mission, and we're going to stick with our mission."

Less often, but still present, were managers who felt that they just were not sure how to get more involved. These managers knew that their knowledge

and expertise were holding back the organization, but they did not feel positioned to rectify the situation. One executive director of a small, faith-based emergency shelter who had only a high school diploma and limited interactions with other directors said of increasing their advocacy and lobbying involvement, "From what I hear, all the money that they raised and all that, I would love to do that for [name of organization], but I don't know how to do it."

What Characteristics or Actions Help Overcome Barriers to Advocacy Involvement?

The high rates of advocacy participation in this field provide a useful angle for determining what organizational actions or characteristics help facilitate advocacy involvement. Two types of organizations in particular were useful analytical cases: (1) organizations that were only marginally involved in advocacy (because of the multiple barriers they faced, these organizations probably would not have participated at all if not for one of the characteristics listed below) and (2) organizations that were highly involved in advocacy (as evidenced through use of multiple tactics, frequent engagement, and high levels of sophistication).

I find that the advocacy of both of these types of organizations was greatly facilitated, albeit in different ways, by (1) efficiency gains achieved through advocacy collaboration, (2) organizational reliance on government funding, and (3) professional norms and beliefs. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the findings demonstrating how these three characteristics help overcome the barriers of limited capacity and lack of knowledgeable and supportive leadership, as well as the mechanisms through which this happens. Concerns about IRS regulations were not found to be a major barrier, so they are not included in table 5.1.

Collaboration

The interviews revealed that participation in advocacy coalitions and other interorganizational networks was the tool managers felt best helped them overcome the barrier of limited capacity. The importance of these collaborations for the involvement of individual agencies is evidenced by the fact that 46% of the organizations that participated in advocacy participated *only* through collaborative methods. The primary mechanism through which collaborative networks facilitate advocacy is by allowing organizations to be

TABLE 5.1.
Barriers to Advocacy and Mechanisms to Overcome Them

Barrier	Facilitating Action or Characteristic	Mechanism at Work
Limited capacity	1. Collaboration	Allows organizations to be involved with a minimum outlay of time and resources
		Secondarily provides access to knowledge and information
	2. Professional norms	Associated with specific management techniques that build advocacy infrastructure
Lack of knowledgeable and supportive leadership	1. Professional norms	Associated with a change in managerial beliefs regarding the role and importance of advocacy in organizational functioning
	2. Government funding	Provides strong incentives for advocacy that leads managers to become more knowledgeable and supportive

involved with a minimum outlay of time and resources. Collaboration also helped organizations gain knowledge about current policy debates, but this was also seen as a time- and resource-saving feature.

Not surprisingly, the usefulness of collaboration in counterbalancing limited capacity was particularly salient for relatively small organizations. For example, one manager noted that if his organization had to work alone, it might not be involved in advocacy (because he felt it could not accomplish much), but as part of a network, "they can get a lot more done." Another manager of a small organization pointed specifically to how established coalitions make it easy for organizations like his to be involved: "There's a housing group that sends alerts all the time of when issues are coming before the legislature and I always try to support those, either by the phone call or the letter, that kind of thing . . . They make it pretty simple. Like they'll say, 'Please send this to your legislator.' We all do that because that's really simple, it's like a click of a button." Coalitions also help make more complicated advocacy endeavors, like lobbying trips to the state capital, achievable. "I have gone to Springfield. I typically will do that in conjunction with another organization. So one of our funders is [an intermediary organization], and they usually do a lobbying trip where we go down to Springfield. I have gone with [a different coalition] . . . They'll make arrangements for me to come and speak with lawmakers. And I really enjoy doing that."

The institutional context that supports this kind of collaboration is an important background to these comments. Homeless service organizations in Chicago are able to see the field in this way because there are multiple existing coalitions and other interorganizational networks that do advocacy. Most organizations had the choice of which networks to be active in, and there are strong field-level norms that support involvement with these groups. As Jodi Sandfort reports in chapter 9 in this volume, organizations become involved in these collaborations for different reasons, and the groups can have different levels of effectiveness. Most managers in this field, however, believed that the work of these coalitions and other collaborative advocacy structures boosted effectiveness and helped move their field forward. One manager found a coalition to be:

> very effective, and it's really getting funding for services and supportive housing and advocating for that and getting people motivated and letter writing and calling and all of that stuff. So they've been pretty effective at getting people to be involved, so, via email, being very direct on who to call, what to say, here's an example of a letter. Those are really great for people like myself who are busy, and just coming up with a letter just out of the blue is going to take more time that I don't always have. It's good to have a sample I can use and go from there. So I mean ultimately, I think it's been pretty effective.

As a result, this effort on the part of the coalitions was seen as an appropriate division of labor in the field. Another manager explained that the coalitions "aren't doing direct service, they are paid just for advocacy, and so they solicit feedback about needs from the organizations like ours and also incorporate input from people who are using services in our organizations . . . They do a lot of the legwork, so they help us to be more strategic in our advocacy, and they're able to say, this is legislation that is going to impact your organization, so we need you to write a letter to this senator, or we need you to come to Springfield for a lobby day, or things like that." As this quote indicates, managers often see the coalition leaders as experts in advocacy, but themselves as experts in ground-level concerns. Getting these two types of expertise together was seen as an ideal way to be effective while conserving resources.

Finally, as the above quote alludes to, beyond providing opportunities to get involved in ways that are easy and preserve resources, established advocacy coalitions can also increase capacity for advocacy by providing knowledge. This happens in two ways. First, they provide information about specific ac-

tions and keep organizations updated as to important policy developments, which allows organizations to essentially outsource this time-consuming task. For example, a certain coalition "is coordinating it or at least is informing us about it. I kind of always fall back to them because they have really been the most vocal source of information for us around the state budget issues with daily, if not multiple times, a daily update on what's going on and weekly conference calls and helping get information about rallies that are occurring all over the place." Second, coalitions provide low-cost, low-overhead ways to help managers educate their staff on how to be involved in advocacy. One manager said, "there's advocacy trainings that [a coalition] does, which is great. And so we had our intern go to that, which was really good. If we have any staff that has any time to do that, then they can go do that as well."

These findings illustrate that nonprofits that join advocacy coalitions often become more deeply involved in advocacy. Furthermore, these findings suggest that collaborative partners may have a large influence on venue choice, as individual providers often depend on these partners to let them know where the best advocacy opportunities can be found.

Government Funding

The executive directors interviewed in this study were clear that they believed advocacy to be a crucial tool in helping to secure and maintain vital government funding. Not a single manager reported that they thought policymakers would frown upon advocacy, or that their government funding made them less likely to advocate. Instead, for organizations reliant on government funding, advocacy was seen as an important way to keep government officials connected with the activities of the organization, their successes, and their challenges. Most importantly, though, advocacy was seen as an important way of exerting some control over their finances so as to maintain consistent funding for their services. One manager noted, when asked about the primary motivation for their advocacy, "because we need the funding from the government, and so we need to reach out to those people who are in positions of power, you know, to alter that funding . . . Those are the important conversations that we have with them."

Because over 83% of respondents were at least partially funded by the government, such funding is a major incentive that is recognized by all members of the field, not just those that currently receive it. Interestingly, some of the most revealing quotes came from the directors of organizations that were

entirely privately funded. Almost all of these managers reported that if they had government funding, they would probably do more advocacy, but since they do not receive government funds, they find themselves prioritizing other activities. "It's not something that we have focused on so much just because, you know, I think you'll find other providers that have a whole lot more to do with advocacy than we do just because our funding base is a little different," one manager explained. The following quote also captures this sentiment well:

> Because we are privately funded, we are in a unique situation. We do get in-volved, we stay informed about issues that may affect our colleagues . . . But there is a bit of a struggle internally, how much we should do for issues that do not necessarily affect us. We do think that we should be involved in staying on top of things that affect the other organizations, and in turn, some of our former or current clients. But, also, there is our day-to-day operations, and we have to keep our own doors open, so there isn't a terribly large amount of resources that is involved in policy activism.

Sometimes managers of organizations without government funding seemed to feel that policy just did not affect them in the same way as organizations receiving government funding. As one noted, "We don't take governmental monies and so we don't—I mean we can express our opinion about how we feel that the government should run human services and medical care and health plans. But I don't think we probably get as involved as we would if we were receiving government money."

Organizations primarily reliant on government funds were found to advocate more frequently, and to see advocacy as more essential. When asked why his organization had moved to doing more advocacy, one manager forthrightly replied, "Self-interest . . . We've got to prepare for the future. And in order to grow the agency, which is something that we definitely want to do." Another supported this sentiment, making it clear that their increased advocacy involvement was directly tied to their government contract: "You're going to do more advocacy if you have more government dollars, because if you've got the government dollars they're incredibly important to the service you're providing, or you wouldn't have applied for them. They're too much work in all kinds of respects to not fight to keep those dollars."

Overall, government funding served as a major incentive for advocacy. It played this role for organizations of all sizes by shifting managers' calculus about whether advocacy was something their organization should be involved in. Managers of organizations with more government funding felt

they did not have the luxury of deciding whether advocacy was an important part of their organizational mission; rather, they talked about it as an important strategy for organizational survival. It also played a role in their choice of which venue to target. Because their advocacy is often focused on maintaining funding streams and relationship building with administrators, managers choose venues that support those goals, namely, administrative agencies that manage contracts and state legislatures that distribute funding.

Professional Norms

As noted above in the section on lack of supportive or knowledgeable leadership, a subgroup of respondents in this study felt that advocacy did not always mesh with their direct service mission, which presented a major barrier for the organizations they led. It is worth noting that all of these comments were made by managers who had more experience as service providers than as professional managers. Managers with career paths that were firmly focused on nonprofit administration generally found advocacy to be more central to their organization's mission than managers without that professional education or experience. These "management professionals" articulated a different set of professional norms and beliefs than other managers. Instead of seeing advocacy as a distinct activity, separate from their services work, management professionals saw advocacy as important for promoting the organization and its agenda, and as directly connected to their larger mission. Acting on these professional norms helped their organizations overcome both capacity and leadership issues. Meanwhile, characteristics such as personal passion, increased access to policymakers, and understanding of legal issues, while mentioned, were not nearly as influential as this difference in understanding of the role of advocacy in human service nonprofits.

Examples of advocacy-related statements from management professionals include "We're really an organization that focuses on helping [clients] become independent and sustain independence, and advocacy is an instrument of that machine" and "We just feel that that's a part of our job, not only to represent [the organization], but also to be involved in establishing policy and ensuring that needs of people who were homeless or previously homeless are being met." These quotes focus on how advocacy actually promotes services for clients instead of competing with services.

Interestingly, the few managers with business backgrounds but who entered nonprofit work near retirement age, often as a result of being on a

board of directors, did not share these norms. These managers were much more committed to the "service first" norms held by managers who had risen through the ranks or who had limited administrative experience outside their current organization. These "second career" managers made statements that indicated they saw nonprofit work as primarily charitable, and not to be sullied by too much interaction with the government.

Some of the management professionals actually set themselves apart from managers who did not see a connection between quality services and advocacy. They often spoke in business-like terms and focused on how advocacy is an important management tool. One such manager noted that "the other part of your mission is to say you're going to run the best business. You know, you're going to run the best administration . . . And I think not everyone does that—bridging relationships—to the degree that could manifest the success that we've had. And people ask, 'Why have you been so successful? How can you do that?' I point to our leadership and vision, and the relationship building that we've done over time. I think that's made the difference for us." From this perspective it is foolish not to be involved because, as another noted, "everything [policymakers] do, every decision they make, is going to make your job harder or easier."

These managers also tended to build infrastructure and capacity for advocacy within their organizations, which was particularly important for organizations that otherwise faced barriers to advocacy because of small size or limited budget. One manager reported, "Because we're fairly small, obviously we don't have a lot of staff. We're pretty lean actually. So we've been using interns actually to do [advocacy] and to work with our clients and to sort of get them involved. So we've been trying to tie in some of those pieces through our interns and trying to get not only the staff more involved but also board members as well as clients." Leveraging interns (to whom almost all homeless service providers have access through local schools of social work) and board members grows the resources of the organization in ways that have little impact on their ability to provide direct services.

Building infrastructure also means building an advocacy culture within the organization. An advocacy culture leads to increased capacity for advocacy, as it removes the burden from the executive director's shoulders and makes advocacy involvement less dependent on the beliefs of any individual director. Overall, while these executive directors still may do the majority of the advocacy work, they find ways to share the load. The following quote exemplifies this approach: "It's also part of the job description of every single

person here, down to the part-time staff people, to be involved in the advocacy effort. Whether it be on a committee of something, or representing the agency out in the community in some way, but it's really something that we weave into everyone's role. Our direct service staff may be more involved in micro, so that's why we add policy advocacy stipulations in all of the job descriptions. We actually have two staff members in advocacy training today."

Conclusions

This study adds to our understanding of the advocacy involvement of human service nonprofits by refocusing attention on ground-level processes and on managers' understanding of why and how advocacy should be carried out. While we have recently learned much about nonprofit advocacy involvement in a general context, research that investigates how specific barriers and incentives may interact with field-level policy and institutional contexts has been lacking. By studying a single population of organizations—homeless service nonprofits in the city of Chicago—I attempt to shed light on both the internal and external processes behind managers' decisions regarding advocacy involvement.

Three research questions are addressed. First, what activities do organizational leaders consider advocacy? This is important information for researchers, as there appears to be a mismatch between definitions used by researchers and definitions held by practitioners, which threatens construct validity in survey research. Second, what are the most serious barriers to advocacy participation? Although this question has been explored in the past, more information is needed on the primacy of specific barriers and how this may differ among policy fields. The third question receives the majority of the analytical attention: what organizational features best position organizations to overcome those barriers?

First, the findings on street-level definitions of advocacy confirm that managers often have a slightly different definition of advocacy than researchers generally do. Managers in this sample defined advocacy more broadly than most surveys, including activities that were externally focused but not policy related. At the same time, however, they were also likely to think of some advocacy tactics as simply "networking" or "education." These findings imply that researchers need to be careful when asking managers about their advocacy involvement. There may be no single best approach; depending on their research question, some researchers may want continue to use

traditional definitions of advocacy, while others may wish to explore advocacy from the perspective of practitioners. The important thing is that definitional assumptions are made clear and decisions are made consciously, with full understanding of the implications for findings.

Three barriers were explored in this research: concerns about IRS regulations, limited capacity, and lack of knowledgeable, supportive leadership. Of the three, limited capacity stood out as the most severe barrier for organizations in this study. Leadership issues also were of concern. In particular, there appeared to be a subset of managers that saw advocacy as detracting from their organizations' service mission, thus making advocacy a low organizational priority. Given resource constraints, organizations with these types of managers generally advocated at low levels.

Interestingly, however, concerns about IRS regulations did not appear to be a major barrier for organizations in this study. Although many were confused about the rules governing nonprofit lobbying, that did not generally stop them. Advocacy rates were high (93%), and so were lobbying rates (50%). The organizations that lobbied were about evenly split between those that knew they were lobbying and simply did not worry about going over the stated IRS limits and those that did not call what they were doing lobbying even though it met the legal definition. None of the groups in this study opted for the 501(c)(h) election. Overall, although managers' confusion does bring up concerns about compliance with IRS regulations, in this study concern about IRS regulations was not found to be a major barrier.

Why is it, though, that some organizations overcame barriers around limited capacity and leadership while others did not? Most organizations participated in advocacy, but many only at low levels. Three organizational features were found to help organizations become more deeply involved in advocacy: participation in collaborative networks, government funding, and professional leadership.

First, between coalitions, stand-alone advocacy organizations with collaborative components and other interorganizational networks that do advocacy, homeless service organizations in Chicago have a choice of partners for their advocacy efforts, and essentially all of them do collaborate on advocacy. These networks allow organizations to "plug in" to existing structures and participate in advocacy in ways that are straightforward and require minimal outlays of time and resources. For small organizations in particular, these collaborative networks were essential for their involvement, and even for larger organizations, collaborating allowed the organization to be involved

in more advanced ways. By providing structure, information about current policy, and how to get involved, as well as trainings for staff and information about venue selection, these collaborative groups greatly increased the capacity for advocacy involvement in the field and help set the stage for non-profit advocacy to be more successful.

Next, human service managers come from a wide variety of backgrounds (Hwang and Powell, 2009; Smith, 2002). While some come from professional backgrounds and see themselves as nonprofit management professionals, many rise through the ranks and have limited administrative experience or training outside of their own organizations (Suarez, 2010). This study found that executive directors who considered themselves to be management professionals and came to their organization with administrative training or experience saw advocacy in a different light than did other managers.

Professionalized managers espoused a shared norm that advocacy is an appropriate tool to improve and grow services and did not believe that advocacy was in competition with those services. Contrary to other managers, professionalized managers saw advocacy as an essential part of their job, not as an additional task to be undertaken only in times of emergency or when time and resources allow. They believed that the political connections built through advocacy participation would create opportunities for growth and provide legitimacy; this was true even for organizations less reliant on government funding. Adoption of these professional norms helped leaders overcome limited capacity, as they simply did not view advocacy as optional. They found the time and resources to do it by employing specific management techniques to help overcome limited capacity. For example, they built strong infrastructure for advocacy throughout their agency and often encouraged a "culture" of advocacy where all staff members were encouraged to consider advocacy as part of their jobs. These strategies helped build the conditions for successful advocacy involvement in their agencies and are similar to the strategies highlighted elsewhere in this volume (see Bass et al., chap. 10, this volume).

The other organizational feature that helps organizations overcome leadership barriers is government funding. Government funding appears to incentivize advocacy in the minds of leaders, increasing the likelihood that the organization will be more deeply involved in advocacy. Managers of government-funded agencies saw advocacy as likely to have a direct payoff for the agencies' services. As a result, even managers with a service orientation regarded advocacy as more important as their government funding

increased. All managers care about the bottom line. When advocacy is associated with maintaining it, as it was for agencies reliant on government funding, managers came to see advocacy as a more important part of their job.

There are limitations to this work; most notably, its generalizability is unknown. That said, these findings provide an important benchmark against which studies from other fields and other locations may be compared. Similar dynamics may exist in other fields with analogous conditions, such as high levels of government funding and interorganizational networks. Future research should also take note of the findings here regarding definitions of advocacy, especially when determining wording for surveys.

Overall, this research demonstrates that advocacy is often integrated into organizations more deeply when its professional utility is emphasized through professional norms, government funding, and strong ties to existing networks. These specific features of the organizational and institutional context—which differ among policy fields—incentivize or facilitate advocacy involvement. Interestingly, even in the field of homeless services, where beliefs about the need for social justice and wealth redistribution are common, advocacy is not generally spawned from altruistic motives; rather, it often stems from professional and managerial self-interest. Strengthening advocacy in this field and others may be better accomplished by encouraging organizations to view advocacy as a way to balance mission and resource demands (Frumkin and Andre-Clark, 2000), not as a purely mission-driven activity. Interestingly, each of the organizational features mentioned here—professionalization, reliance on government funding, and increased collaboration—are growing across the nonprofit sector. Perhaps we will see a growth of advocacy in the sector as a result.

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