

# Keeping the Lights On: How Government Funding Concerns Drive the Advocacy Agendas of Nonprofit Homeless Service Providers

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## ABSTRACT

Human service nonprofits have historically played an important role in advocating on behalf of the vulnerable populations that they serve. Growth in privatization has led many scholars and practitioners to wonder if increased dependence on government funds would compromise this role. The objective of this study is to explore the relationship between government funding and advocacy participation, goals, and tactics through a qualitative investigation of advocacy involvement in the field of homeless services. Results demonstrate that having government funding is associated with managers being highly motivated to participate in advocacy in the hopes of solidifying funding relationships. As a result, advocacy goals are focused primarily on brokering resources and promoting the organization rather than substantive policy change or client representation. Furthermore, in order to be perceived as a legitimate partner to government, organizations reject confrontational methods and advocate as insiders. Overall, these findings indicate perceptions about advocacy may need to shift as increased reliance on government funding has made advocacy participation and participation in collaborative governance virtually indistinguishable.

Growth in government contracts for social services has resulted in human service nonprofits becoming increasingly dependent on those government funds to carry out their work (Smith and Lipsky 1993). Likewise, policymakers have become dependent on nonprofits to provide expertise on needed services. This responsibility sharing has led to what scholars have termed the “hollow state” or “third party government” (Milward and Provan 2000; Salamon 1987). Recently, scholars have begun to explore the outcomes of this restructuring of social service delivery, including the degree to which the advocacy role of human service nonprofits may be compromised. This is important to understand as advocacy is a historically important role of the nonprofit sector and a tool used by many to support their mission (Berry and Arons 2003; Reid 2006). For human service nonprofits in particular, advocacy

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has often been seen as a unique outlet to address the structural forces that limit opportunities for the vulnerable populations they serve (Chetkovich and Kunreuther 2007).

Scholars have often assumed increased government funding would reduce advocacy involvement among nonprofits. The common reasoning was that dependence on this one funder would lead organizations to demonstrate loyalty by ceasing any potentially adversarial behavior (Schmid, Bar, and Nirel 2008). Recently, however, research has shown that government funding does not inhibit advocacy involvement (Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz 2004; Child and Grønbjerg 2007), and in some cases, such as in the field of human services, government funding has been found to be positively related to advocacy involvement (Mosley 2010; Nicholson-Crotty 2007; Salamon, Geller, and Lorentz 2008). For example, O'Regan and Oster (2002) find that the boards of nonprofits with greater reliance on government funding engage in more advocacy than the boards of nonprofits with less reliance on government funding—and that this advocacy involvement crowds out other important board activities, like fund raising.

Empirical data on why government funding may increase human service nonprofits' involvement in advocacy is scant, but several issues may be at play. For example, organizations that rely heavily on government funding may advocate in order to promote a closer match between the services they provide and government funding priorities (Leech 2006; Smith and Lipsky 1993). Another possibility is that advocacy may be thought of as an effective route to being considered a leader or expert in a particular area (potentially leading to advantages in accessing government funding). Alternatively, organizations with government funding may simply have better access to decision makers because of their established funding relationships (Kelleher and Yackee 2009).

Beyond involvement, how government funding affects what organizations are advocating for or how they carry out their advocacy is also unknown. The call for collaborative governance in public administration provides new pathways for nonprofit providers to be involved in policy decision making (Ansell and Gash 2008). But does providers' dependence on government resources limit what they are willing or able to advocate for? As human service nonprofits often serve marginalized populations in need of increased political representation, it is important to determine if they believe their voice has been compromised by a closer relationship to government (Berry and Arons 2003; Donaldson 2007). It may simply be that the changed relationship between public and nonprofit agencies has resulted in a focus on cooperative forms of advocacy. In the early 1990's Smith and Lipsky (1993) proposed that contracting politics may incentivize advocacy for service providers while simultaneously constraining their action but strong empirical evidence has yet to be established. Thus, it is unclear what institutionalized norms and beliefs exist in the sector regarding what forms of advocacy are most legitimate or effective, and how those beliefs may vary depending on government funding.

This research addresses three questions that are central to understanding how advocacy norms among human service nonprofits may be affected by reliance on government funding. First, why is government funding positively associated with advocacy involvement? Second, how might reliance on government funding affect advocacy goals or what it is that organizations are advocating for? Third, does receipt of government funding affect the advocacy tactics human service nonprofits, and if so, how? Findings from a qualitative study of homeless service providers in Chicago are used to shed light on these questions. With the exception of a few single organization case studies (e.g., Landriscina 2006), most

research on nonprofit advocacy has been done through the use of surveys. Although this is a useful way to assess involvement in advocacy on a broad scale, qualitative methods were chosen for this research in order to focus the analytical lens on how managers interpret the organizational environment, particularly around government funding, and how they process the incentives and constraints they perceive to be operating there.

Understanding context is vital to understanding why managers make the choices they do. For this research, area of service is held constant in order to more fully understand how organizational factors interact with task environment pressures (Stone and Sandfort 2009). Homeless services was selected as a policy field that may be analytically fruitful due to the major policy and funding shifts that have occurred with the recent growth in municipal 10-year plans to “end homelessness.” These plans, including the one found in Chicago, have resulted in rapid changes in government funding priorities, financial uncertainty for some homeless service providers, and new advocacy opportunities related to reshaping the new service environment.

### **Theoretical Approach**

Research on nonprofit organizations often understates the role of the policy environment in guiding organizational decision making and shaping strategic action (Stone and Sandfort 2009). Meanwhile, growth in government contracting has made it ever more important to seriously consider how the policy and funding environment interact to influence organizational behavior and outcomes. This is because for service providers with government funding, the policy environment and the funding environment have become increasingly one and the same.

This article argues that increased reliance on government funding among nonprofit human service organizations is providing incentives for organizations to engage in policy advocacy primarily to promote and extend the existing policy priorities that their funding is based on. Furthermore, this motivation—to ensure alignment between the policy/funding environment and organizational priorities—incites advocacy that is highly strategic and based on insider knowledge and personal relationships.

This article contributes to theory development and refinement in three ways. First, it contributes to an emerging theory base regarding political engagement among nonprofit organizations by focusing on the process and intention behind organizational action. Second, it helps refine our understanding of the role of trust and reputation in relationships between public and nonprofit managers. Third, it adds detail and nuance to the ways in which two existing organizational theories, new institutional theory and resource dependence theory, are helpful in explaining the advocacy behavior of human service nonprofits.

### **Government–Nonprofit Relationships**

Recently, public administration scholars have been in active debate as to the degree to which government–nonprofit relationships have a horizontal dimension as well as a vertical dimension (Amirkhanyan 2009; Kelleher and Yackee 2009; Kettl 2002). Many have argued that public management has shifted its focus from hierarchical governing to a more horizontal, associational form of governance (Hill and Lynn 2005; Milward and Provan 2000). From an economic perspective, the vertical features emphasized in principal-agent theory primarily characterize government–nonprofit relationships. As engaging in contracting

relationships is fundamentally an economic arrangement, this is where most service provider's relationships with government principals start (Van Slyke 2007). Looking at contracting from a political perspective, however, highlights notions of shared governance, public-private partnerships, and horizontal relationships (Kelleher and Yackee 2009).

Most nonprofit providers would likely prefer to move their relationship with government principals from a primarily vertical, economic one, with an emphasis on performance and accountability, to a more horizontal one, with an emphasis on shared responsibilities. Horizontal relationships increase stability, which is good for both nonprofit providers and public managers because it promotes cooperation and long-range planning (Milward and Provan 2000). Van Slyke (2007) terms this moving from a principal-agent relationship to a principal-steward relationship.

Nonprofit "stewards" (as opposed to agents) see incentives for and place more value on collective goals, cooperation, and trust. Van Slyke (2007) finds that public managers often begin relationships with nonprofits assuming a principal-agent relationship, whereas nonprofit managers approach the relationship from the perspective of a steward. He also found that public managers ultimately do come to see providers as stewards, but that perception is based in trust and reputation, earned over time. Smith and Smyth (1996) also found that administrators rely on trust and long-term relationships to decide who to fund. Given accountability challenges, particularly in the human services (Romzek and Johnston 2005), what additional steps can nonprofit managers take to convince public managers to see them as stewards?

This article argues that advocacy, specifically, insider, relationship-oriented advocacy, is one tool that nonprofit managers use to try to communicate interdependence, build trust, and enhance their reputation as experts. Advocacy is a key way for service providers to promote their unique expertise, as well as provide input on accountability mechanisms and funding priorities. It also provides opportunities for providers to assist administrators with complex decisions and demonstrate loyalty. All of this assists with trust and reputation building and, thus, can help move their relationship with government administrators from principal-agent to principal-steward, thus helping to ensure stability of funding.

### ***Motivation and Goals***

Resource dependence theory helps explain why government funding is associated with increased motivation to participate in advocacy by asserting that organizations work to reduce uncertainty by exerting influence over their funding environment (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Moving from a primarily vertical relationship to a primarily horizontal one changes this power-dependence relationship, giving providers more influence over the terms of the relationship. Although it has been argued that public-private partnerships are by nature interdependent (Frederickson 1999; Salamon 1995), research has shown that government agencies are less dependent on nonprofits than vice versa because they are the principals and can pressure nonprofits for needed resources (Saidel 1991). In cases where there are only a few nonprofit providers and the service is needed, an individual nonprofit may hold significant power. But in policy fields where nonprofits actually compete with each other for government funding (like the one studied here), any one organization's leverage is reduced (Saidel 1991; Smith and Smyth 1996).<sup>1</sup>

1 That said, their potential power in coalition may be heightened.

For organizations dependent on government funding streams, like homeless service nonprofits, advocacy is a key way to increase leverage and gain control over their environment. For these organizations, the policy environment is not just relevant in terms of promoting client well-being, it is also crucial for funding stability. Thus, advocacy is strongly incentivized because alignment with policy environment—and renegotiating relationships with public managers—is so important to government-funded agencies. On the other hand, in the same policy context, given limited resources, organizations without such government funding may advocate less, or at times not at all, because their primary motivation for advocacy remains mission related and not tied to basic organizational functioning. They do not experience the same kind of power-dependence relationship with government and so are not concerned with renegotiating it.

Thus, organizations with more government funding may see advocacy differently than other human service nonprofits: not just an “extra” way of serving clients or meeting mission-related goals, but as a vital tool for ensuring organizational stability. Theory indicates that organizations that are more reliant on government funding may face additional incentives to advocate but may also be advocating in pursuit of different goals: to ensure funding stability and develop horizontal relationships with public managers and policymakers.

### **Tactics**

Different advocacy goals call for different tactics. Advocacy tactics must be carefully chosen if nonprofits are to highlight themselves as collaborative partners with a role to play in shaping the funding and policy environment. If, under conditions of resource dependence, advocacy goals are often to promote a better match between the organizations preferred service model and that of the public agency, organizations may find themselves focusing more on insider tactics and relationship building with policymakers than on education of the general public, awareness raising, or confrontational tactics.

An institutional perspective is helpful in understanding why organizations choose certain tactics and compliments resource-dependence explanations by highlighting the social context and mechanisms in which organization action is embedded (Ingram and Simons 1995; Oliver 1997; Tolbert 1985). Frederickson (1999) notes that new institutional theory is particularly useful for the study of public administration given the growth of horizontal forms of governance because its assumptions don't rest on authority but on notions of shared meanings and symbolic action.

New institutional theory asserts that the choices and preferences of individual organizations are embedded in specific cultural and historical frameworks (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). This can constrain individual action through the processes of coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Coercive isomorphism occurs when organizations adopt practices due to pressure or persuasion from other organizations they are dependent on. Normative isomorphism occurs as a feature of professionalization, specifically shared understanding due to similar formal education and professional networks. Mimetic isomorphism occurs when organizations imitate other organizations in their field that they believe possess a high degree of legitimacy. These processes lead organizations to respond to field level conditions in similar ways in order to comply with norms regarding what practices are considered legitimate or effective. What this means in regards to advocacy is that human service managers may believe that in order to be taken seriously by policymakers, they must comply with the strong institutional norms

that govern reciprocal political relationships. In other words, they may feel they need to become insiders.

In the social movement literature, this is sometimes seen as a tactical mistake. Most notably, Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that as organizations become more institutionalized or “inside players” they lose effectiveness as agents of change because concerns about organizational maintenance begin to take priority over social movement goals. Similarly, other scholars have raised the possibility of cooptation, including the channeling of advocacy energy into only relatively modest changes to the existing structure (Coy and Hedeem 2005; Gamson 1990; Selznick 1949). However, if the goal of advocacy is primarily to secure organizational resources, it may be that social movement-oriented goals about changing the system or raising awareness are secondary to institutionalized self-interest. Becoming an insider may actually raise advocacy effectiveness in regards to certain kinds of goals, such as securing funding streams. Thus, what Piven and Cloward (1977) saw as evidence of cooptation may be welcomed by organizations that wish to solidify relationships with government administrators.

Linking this perspective with the resource dependence perspective, it may be that homeless service providers whose advocacy goals are focused primarily on organizational maintenance engage in a more institutionalized form of advocacy, based on insider tactics and the pursuit of reciprocal relationships with policymakers. In this case, because their goals are not to change the system but rather to become more essential players in it, becoming an insider may help to meet their advocacy goals—indeed, it may be a goal in and of itself. In this way, investigating advocacy involvement helps shed light on how nonprofit agents are attempting to resist, infiltrate, or negotiate current political and economic arrangements.

### **The Context of Homeless Services**

Recognizing that environmental and institutional contexts play a key role in shaping organizational action as well as policy outcomes, field-level processes require direct attention (Duffy, Binder, and Skrentny 2010; Noy 2009; Stone and Sandfort 2009). Prior work has tended to look at advocacy across all nonprofits (Berry and Arons 2003; Chaves et al. 2004) or at human services broadly (Child and Grønberg 2007; Mosley 2010). This study addresses this lack of specificity by looking in depth at one human service field: homeless services. Because people who are homeless face high levels of marginalization but are unlikely to have the resources or opportunity to be involved in the policy process, homeless service providers play a particularly vital role in advocating on behalf of their client population (Snow, Soule, and Cress 2005).

Two contextual issues are crucial for understanding the policy field in homeless services. The first is the set of implications that result from the reliance of many homeless service providers on various types of government funding and the second is the significant policy upheaval that has come along with the growth of municipal plans to “end homelessness.”

First, for decades, homeless advocates, including providers, have been calling for increased government attention to the problem of homelessness (Rossi 1989). That work has paid off with increased state and federal government support for the work of homeless service providers, primarily through the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act. After it was passed in 1986, federal spending for homeless services went from virtually zero to



\$1.2 billion in 2000 (Smith 2002). This helped support many existing nonprofits and also led to the development of new organizations and services. As a result, many homeless service agencies are under 25 years old. These new agencies, as well as existing agencies, have grown rapidly with the influx of federal spending. However, in comparison to other human service nonprofits, homeless service agencies are still comparatively smaller and less professionalized (Mosley 2009). Today, most homeless service providers have a mix of private and government funding. Some, notably many faith-based missions, still depend primarily on private funding. However, many homeless service providers have come to rely heavily on local, state, or federal government funding in order to carry out their programs. Organizations receive this funding through a blend of grants, contracts, and fee-for-service arrangements.

Federal McKinney–Vento funds are distributed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and make up a large portion of the government funding homeless service providers receive. This federal money is distributed by local Continuums of Care which are collaborative structures comprised of local government agencies, providers, and other relevant stakeholders. Each Continuum of Care submits a single application for its region and then the money is distributed according to local needs. As a result of this process, individual agencies must stay involved with the Continuum of Care in order to monitor current policy developments, funding cycles, and service preferences. Providers also receive funding from other city and state agencies, particularly if they provide nonhousing-related supportive services (e.g., mental health, job readiness, etc.). Thus, homeless service providers can and do combine funding from number of different federal and local agencies, as well as the state legislature, to carry out their work.

What budgetary dependence on government funding means for providers is two-fold. First, with increasing competition for limited government resources, providers must work hard to maintain funding for their existing programs. Second, if they are unsuccessful, they may find themselves shifting service priorities to match state funding priorities through a process of both coercive and normative isomorphism. Recent work by Sosin et al. (2010) details both how sensitive human service providers are to changes in state funding and also how small changes in government funding priorities can have large repercussions on stability of services. Their analysis demonstrates that in order to maintain financial solvency, providers must strategically monitor state action and change their own behavior in purposive ways, such as rationing services or changing their service mix.

For example, one feature of the current policy environment that is important for homeless service providers to monitor is the growth of municipal strategic plans to “end homelessness.” In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the leading national advocacy organization on behalf of the homeless, initiated a campaign for local communities to create these plans. The US Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Bush Administration supported the concept and as of 2010, 266 communities had created such plans. Chicago adopted theirs in 2003.

Chicago’s plan, like many others, is centered around a “Housing First” philosophy (Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae 2004). This includes a sharp reduction in funding for emergency shelter and efforts to move all people who are homeless into permanent housing, with supportive services provided once they are housed. As a result, many organizations that once provided emergency shelter have changed the services they provide. In order to remain competitive for funding, many other agencies have also had to change eligibility

rules or target populations. Although the plan is line with what most advocates would ultimately like to see, the implementation issues are considerable. Many service providers claim that there are not enough resources available to fully carry out the plan, including a lack of affordable permanent housing and money for supportive services. Others say that eliminating emergency shelters is impractical (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless 2006). Ultimately, Chicago's Ten Year Plan has led to major shifts in both service priorities and available funding, creating a context in which providers must stay aware of rapid policy changes and adjust services accordingly.

## **METHODS**

In order to capture managers' interpretation and understanding of the incentives and constraints operating in their task environment, as well as the reasoning behind their choices, I conducted a qualitative study of an organizational field. One regional policy field, homeless services in the city of Chicago, was selected in order to maximize understanding of how the field-level policy context and other specific environmental conditions may affect advocacy involvement. These methods were chosen for their utility in maximizing depth of understanding (as opposed to breadth), which is crucial for addressing the relational, process-oriented questions addressed in this study.

Homeless service nonprofits were defined as those organizations with 501(c)(3) status where at least one of the organizations three largest programs specifically focused on serving the homeless. These organizations ranged from small emergency shelters to large multiservice providers. All the organizations in this study were primarily focused on direct service provision, not advocacy. Using databases and membership lists maintained by the National Center for Charitable Statistics, GuideStar, and the Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness, 84 such organizations were identified as currently operating in the city in August of 2008.

Due to the relatively small size of this population, a sampling procedure was devised to produce findings that are more representative than is usually possible in small-N research. In order to ensure that both large and small organizations were represented, the population was first stratified by size (as measured by expenditures) into seven groups. Organizations of different types (e.g., food pantries, shelters, and youth-specific) were then chosen out of each group to ensure diversity in type of service area. This process resulted in a sampling frame of 52 organizations.

Executive directors of selected organizations were initially notified by letter and then contacted by telephone to schedule an interview. Ultimately, 42 such directors could be contacted, agreed to participate, and were interviewed. The response rate was 81% with data collected from exactly half of the population of homeless service nonprofits in Chicago. In-depth semistructured interviews were conducted face-to-face<sup>2</sup> at each organization from August 2008 to April 2009. The interviews lasted between 1 and 2 h and focused on the organization's participation in policy advocacy, the reasons behind the organization's advocacy choices, and the organization's structure, finances, and

2 Executive directors were selected as interviewees because most organizations did not have a specific staff member to oversee advocacy, and the executive director was thought to have the best overall understanding of agency functioning. There was one exception to the location, as one executive director was only willing to complete the interview by phone.



collaborations with other organizations. Respondents were not given a definition of advocacy rather their own definition was sought out and adopted during each interview, through questions such as, “Even if you don’t participate in them, what kinds of activities do you think of when you think about advocacy?”

### **Analysis Procedure**

All interviews were digitally recorded, professionally transcribed, and then downloaded into Nvivo 8, a software package that was used to facilitate data management and analysis. All transcripts were used in the analysis with each organization considered a single case. The coding scheme used both inductive and deductive techniques in that theory driven codes were used to initially cut and analyze the data and then transcripts were coded inductively using a data-driven approach (Patton 2002). This coding scheme was developed using an iterative process with each transcript read and coded multiple times by two researchers as codes were refined and combined.

An explanation building technique similar to that described by Yin (2009) was used as the primary analytic technique. This process entailed considering a series of initial theoretical explanations about organizations’ advocacy behavior and then iteratively revising those explanations with themes that emerged from the data (Aronson 1995). In particular, themes were compared across subsamples of organizations that varied in theoretically important ways (e.g., amount of government funding, degree of advocacy involvement, and size). In all cases, these subsamples were intended to be rough reflections of the diversity of the sample, generally cutting the sample into three or four groups, as described below. These subsamples were not used as hard categories but as an analytical tool. Case to case comparisons were also made to inform the continuous nature of all the above variables.<sup>3</sup>

Extensive memoing was used throughout the analytic process. Memos were written for each case directly after each interview and then again during the analysis phase. Memos were also written on emergent themes from subsamples and potential connections to existing theory (Miles and Huberman 1994). Negative case analysis was also used to provide additional insight into sources of variation (Patton 2002), and member checking was completed near the end of the analysis to heighten the rigor of this analysis (Padgett 2008).<sup>4</sup>

### **Descriptive Statistics**

A quantitative portrait of the sample can be found in table 1. Measured as time elapsed since incorporation, the age of responding organizations ranged from 4 to 68 years, with an average of 22 and a median of 19. Responding organizations also ranged greatly in terms of their size, which was measured as organizational expenditures. Over the previous year, these expenditures ranged from \$7,000 to \$11 million. The mean was \$2,447,122 and the

<sup>3</sup> The comparison of emergent themes and patterns, both within and across cases, was facilitated by the creation of matrices (Miles and Huberman 1994). In these matrices, factors known to be positively associated with advocacy involvement (e.g., government funding and organizational size) were used to systematically contextualize variation within the data and facilitate cross-case pattern analysis (Eisenhardt 1989).

<sup>4</sup> This was done in two ways. First, an initial report reflecting major themes from the analysis was shared with all respondents and feedback was requested. Second, findings were discussed in person with organizational representatives attending advocacy coalition meetings.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive Statistics (N = 42)

Age	Range: 4–68 Mean: 22 Median: 19	
Size (as measured by expenditures)	Range: \$7,000–\$11 million Mean: \$2,447,122 Median: \$1,603,824	Small (under \$500,000): 26% Medium (\$500,000–2 million): 31% Large (over \$2 million): 43%
Percentage of government funding	Range: 0–100% Mean: 45% Median: 48%	None: 17% Low (1–33%): 19% Medium (34–66%): 28% High (67–100%): 36%

median was \$1,603,824. In order to facilitate analysis, the sample was split into thirds to form subsamples (as discussed above). In the results, when references are made to small, medium, or large organizations, it is roughly these thirds that are being referred to: under \$500,000, 500,000–2 million, and over 2 million in expenditures. The reader is reminded that in all cases, variables were ultimately analyzed as continuous, and subsamples were only used to facilitate analysis at the beginning stages and to aid in the reporting of the findings.

As is typical in this field, many organizations relied heavily on government funding to accomplish their work. Over 83% of the respondents were either partially or completely funded by the government, which ranged from 0 to 100% of their budgets. This funding includes grants, contracts, and fee-for-service arrangements. Again, to facilitate the analysis, I split the sample of organizations that had some government funding into thirds. Of that 83%, 36% were labeled “high reliance” with budgets that were comprised of over 66% government funds, 28% were “medium” with between 34 and 66%, and 19% of organizations were labeled “low” with less than 33% of their budgets comprised of government funding.

**RESULTS**

A basic, but powerful, finding that emerged from these interviews is the very high rate of engagement in policy advocacy among all these organizations.<sup>5</sup> Only three organizations of the 42 respondents were not involved in policy advocacy in any way, meaning that 93% participated. Of the three organizations that did not participate in advocacy, one was a large faith-based emergency shelter that intentionally did not pursue government funding, and two were small emergency shelters that received pass-through money from the city from another private organization. In both cases, this money made up a substantial portion of their budget (around 60%), but it does not come in the form of a contract, is unstable, and

5 This overall rate of advocacy involvement is much higher than has generally been revealed in surveys. Further investigation reveals that this discrepancy is likely due to differences in language used among scholars and managers. First, some respondents did not use the word advocacy when discussing their political engagement. They instead called it education or outreach, but then described activities that researchers generally consider advocacy, like talking to legislators about concerns in their community. Second, some directors did use the word advocacy, but then described activities that are not always thought of as advocacy by researchers. These activities included attending meetings and providing leadership in citywide planning councils. In order to retain fidelity to both respondents’ views and traditional definitions, in this article, involvement in “advocacy” can include any or all of those activities.

they have limited direct interaction with government officials around it. More information about organizations like these is provided below.

The depth of each organization’s participation in advocacy varied much more widely. In order to facilitate analysis and reporting of findings, categories for degree of advocacy involvement were determined by the following procedure: Two independent coders assessed each organization, using the following as evidence of advocacy involvement: amount of staff time spent on advocacy, involvement of the executive director, number of coalitions the organization is involved in (and the degree of their involvement), number of different tactics involved in, amount of advocacy contacts per month, and other indicators. Interrater reliability was 88% and in cases where coders disagreed, a single code was determined by discussion and consensus. Overall, 7% of organizations did not participate in any advocacy, 36% were involved in advocacy at only a low level, 24% were involved at a medium level, and 33% at a high level. For example, a typical “low” advocator might respond to email alerts to sign petitions and attend some coalition meetings but have no staff involvement in advocacy and only minimal time spent by the executive director. A typical “high” advocator might have an executive director who was participating in some sort of advocacy activity every week, at least one staff member whose job description included some advocacy and also be active members of several coalitions.

**Table 2**  
**Advocacy Attributes by Relationship to Government Funding**

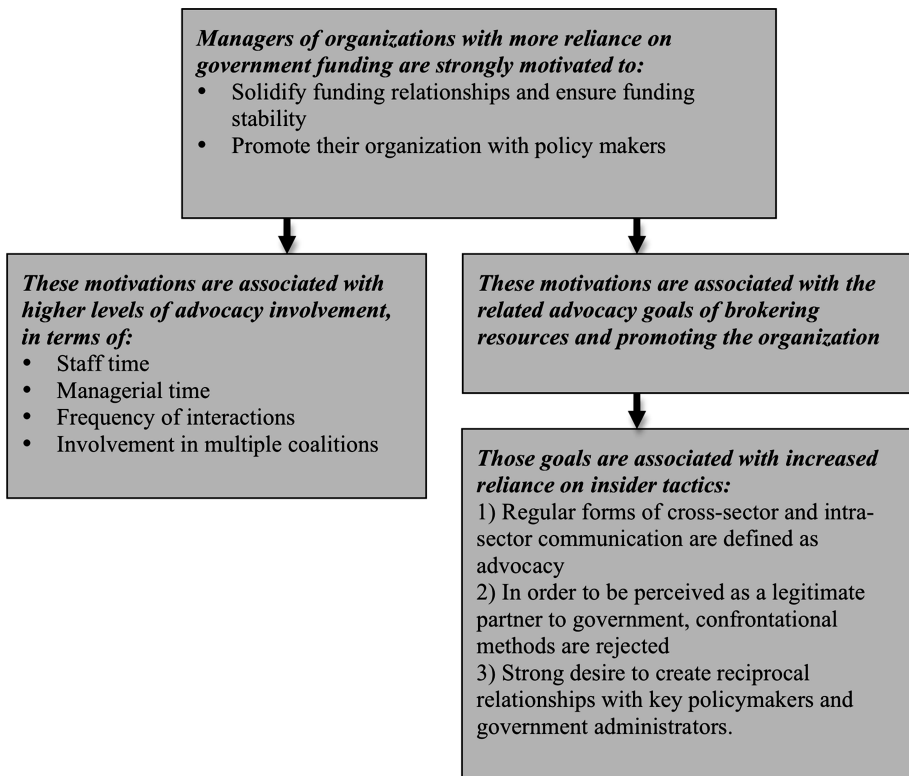
Organizational Types	Reliant on Government Funding		
	Main Group	Struggling Subgroup	Focused on Private Funding
% of sample	50%, (N = 21)	14%, (N = 6)	36%, (N = 15)
Average budget	\$3,248,083	\$637,212	\$2,320,630
% Government funding			
None	0%	0%	47%
Low (0–33%)	0	0	53
Medium (34–66%)	43	50	0
High (more than 66%)	57	50	0
% Advocacy engagement			
None	0%	33%	7%
Low	0	66	73
Medium	33	0	20
High	67	0	0
Primary advocacy goal <sup>a</sup>			
Change system	5%	83%	14%
Promote organization/gain resources	86	17	29
Represent client population	9	0	57
Primary tactical approach <sup>a</sup>			
Public education/awareness raising	5%	0%	42%
Direct communication with policymakers	95	100	58
Relationship building	90%	0%	50%
Providing outside input	5	0	50
Confrontational approach	0	100	0

<sup>a</sup>For those organizations that participate in advocacy.

In order to clarify differences between organizations that were reliant on government funding and those that were not, the sample was sorted into two groups—those with medium or high levels of government funding and those with low levels or no government funding. Table 2 provides a descriptive portrait of their different approaches to advocacy involvement. This table also shows that there is a small subgroup of government-funded agencies that behaved very differently from the main group. These organizations were much smaller and had lower levels of engagement in advocacy (two did not advocate at all). Notably, when they did engage, they were primarily motivated to “change the system” rather than to gain resources for their organization and often communicated in adversarial ways with policymakers. This small group is discussed separately from the main group of organizations reliant on government funding.

Table 2 shows that, as expected based on previous research, greater reliance on government funding was strongly associated with increased time spent on advocacy. These findings also show that, to a very large extent, directors of organizations with high levels of government funding made different advocacy choices than those that relied more on private funding. As will be shown, as well as spending more time on advocacy, they also had different goals and relied heavily on a sophisticated set of insider tactics.

**Figure 1**  
Model of Relationship Between Government Funding and Advocacy Involvement



As visually displayed in Figure 1, this article will demonstrate that, with a few exceptions, reliance on government funds is associated with high motivation to participate in advocacy. Managers report this is due to a strong perceived need to solidify funding relationships and promote their organization with policymakers. In comparison, managers of organizations without such reliance on government funding are less motivated to participate in advocacy as they see it as less essential for the organizations basic functioning.

Second, this article will show that that because their motivation is based in funding and organizational maintenance concerns, managers of organizations that are more reliant on government funding have different goals for their advocacy than managers of organizations that are less reliant on such funds. These goals are focused primarily on brokering resources and promoting the organization as opposed to raising awareness or altering current policy.

Third, to reach those goals, organizations that are reliant on government funding are also reliant on insider tactics. Their managers define regular cross-sector forms of communication as advocacy, reject confrontational tactics, and espouse a strong desire to create reciprocal relationships with key policymakers and government administrators. Managers of organizations that are less reliant on government funding focus more on awareness raising and donor outreach.

### **Reliant on Government Funding—Main Group**

Overall, managers of organizations reliant on government funding<sup>6</sup> were much more motivated to be involved in the policy process than those that were reliant on private donations. These managers reported that as their government funding grew, they became more intensely involved in advocacy by devoting more resources to it, joining coalitions and engaging with policymakers more frequently. Furthermore, when asked how and why they came to be involved in advocacy, directors of these organizations reported that they “had to be,” whereas directors of organizations with more private funding generally reported that advocacy was less of a priority.

When asked why they were involved in advocacy, one director of a government-funded agency reflected the views of most when she said, “The benefit—in terms of getting involved—is you’re able to stay in the funding stream.” The idea that policy advocacy is beneficial in obtaining resources for their organization was acknowledged by the vast majority of government-funded organizations and was cited as the primary reason they became involved. Some directors also mentioned advocating around contract requirements or negotiating performance measurement mechanisms but overall managers were more concerned about winning contracts and maintaining funding than they were about the details of those contracts.

Directors of these organizations overwhelmingly felt they needed to stay aware of trends in the policy and funding environment so that they could try and intervene if changes in that environment appeared to threaten their organization or its financing. As one respondent said about their advocacy motivation, “It’s self-interest, ultimately. There’s lot going on at the state and federal level that really affects our programs and our funding. There has been a huge shift . . . at least from HUD who’s our primary funder.” This reasoning, which

6 Government funding generally came from multiple sources and funding mechanisms, including grants, contracts, and fee-for-service arrangements. As respondents did not ordinarily distinguish between these sources and mechanisms when discussing pressures to maintain funding streams, they are discussed in unison.

was commonly espoused by these managers, is a classic expression of using advocacy to try to gain control over the funding environment. This is strongly in line with the interpretation of resource dependence theory given above. Clearly, organizations with little or no government funding do not face the same incentives as their funding stability is not as dependent on government action. However, the fact that these incentives created stronger motivation for advocacy, and thus, more participation, is an important outcome to note.

Overwhelmingly, advocacy was seen to be not so much a political endeavor but instead a very pragmatic organizational strategy. As one highly involved leader said, “It’s not rocket science. And I don’t mean in any way to demean the field or the sector, because I was new to the non-profit sector, but I had basic business training.” The sentiment that advocacy is an obvious solution to revenue issues was echoed by another director who said, “My assumption would be that in this day and age, any savvy executive director and senior leaders in an organization realize that they have to be involved in advocacy work to get a piece of the pie.” In other words, because of resource dependence on government funding streams, advocacy has become institutionalized as a professional norm.

Because managers whose organizations are reliant on government funding were motivated to participate in advocacy, particularly insider advocacy, in the hopes of solidifying funding relationships, their advocacy goals are likewise focused primarily on brokering resources and promoting the organization—not substantive policy change. Many directors were candid about the fact that their advocacy is intended to serve organizational needs as well as client needs. As one executive director stated, “We try to do both [change policy and obtain resources], but the first message that if you are a funder I would want you to get is [the name of the organization], and the secondary message is the needs of the population.” Most managers of government-funded agencies echoed this sentiment, communicating that while social change was important, it was not as pressing of a goal for them as funding stability.

These managers often made virtually no distinction between advocacy directed at increasing resources for the organization and advocacy aimed at improving conditions for their clients. In fact, no manager pointed out the possibility that client interests and organizational interests might at times conflict. As one leader pointed out, “We would take an advocate role when our programs are either going to be negatively impacted or if we can expand the services that we offer through some kind of policy change. It’s not quite as selfish as what it sounds like because we really believe that we do conduct best practices.” He went on to give the following example. “When the housing model of Chicago was changing . . . to a Housing First model it was pretty clear that a Housing First model is not an appropriate model for [our clients], and there are several reasons for that. But at the same time, we did not want to miss the funding train that was leading Chicago Housing First. So we wrote a policy paper on why Housing First was not appropriate for [our organization], but how it could be included in a Housing First model. That policy paper clearly was for our good, but we really believed it was a service for all of these homeless agencies in Chicago.” In this managers view, looking out for his organizations’ best interests is a way of serving clients and even other agencies who may be in the same position and unable to advocate effectively for themselves. This duality of purpose is why the majority of directors chose not to resist current political and economic arrangements with their advocacy but instead used advocacy to solidify their position within those arrangements.



### **Tactics**

Reliance on government funding affects not only the way these managers understand the importance of advocacy but also how it is defined and ultimately carried out. This is evident in a major reliance on insider tactics as seen through three key practices: (1) regular forms of cross-sector and intra-sector communication being defined as advocacy, (2) in order to be perceived as a legitimate partner to government, a rejection of confrontational methods, and (3) a strong desire to create reciprocal relationships with key policymakers and government administrators (see Figure 1). This tactical approach is a strategic way to meet the advocacy goals outlined above.

### **What "Counts" as Advocacy**

Managers defined many activities as advocacy that usually are not identified as such in the academic literature. When asked to describe what kinds of activities they engage in when conducting advocacy, managers occasionally mentioned "going to Springfield" (the state capital) or signing petitions but most often mentioned "attending meetings." When probed further about those meetings, many were meetings held by the local HUD Continuum of Care group, which is strongly committed to stakeholder participation. Some of these meetings were advocacy related, but most were not, focusing instead on discussion of local service priorities, how funds would be distributed, and needs for specific service populations (e.g., youth programming or supportive housing).

Defining this activity as advocacy was particularly common for managers of small- or medium-sized organizations that were actively growing through increased receipt of government funding. They were clear that attending these meetings and taking an active role in local governance issues would help solidify their reputation as leaders in the field and gain visibility for their agency. The meetings also have a strong collaborative governance aspect to them, where organizational leaders are able to provide feedback on local policy development and potential regulatory changes. As one director explained, "Being involved with it, it's obviously very important . . . because it's where a big chunk of our funding comes through. And it's making the decisions about what kinds of organizations or what kind of programs are going to be valued, how the rankings are going to be done. So we have a very real interest in being a part of it." Another pointed out, "We can't be everywhere, but there are certain key things, and we need to be signing in on some of these [meetings]. They need to know that we're there." These quotes reflect the institutional pressure directors felt to be active in these meetings in order to maintain funding and build organizational legitimacy.

### **Partners, Not Adversaries**

Interaction with government officials is a routine activity for most agencies reliant on government funding. Almost all the directors of organizations with medium or high levels of government funding reported meeting with elected officials, primarily to discuss funding issues but also to simply remind them they are "still around." Indeed, all these organizations focused their advocacy involvement largely on insider tactics, primarily meetings with city and state officials.

Respondents' descriptions of what brought this emphasis on insider tactics about reveal considerable normative isomorphism. Human service professionals are increasingly socialized into certain understandings of what advocacy actions are legitimate and which are not through advanced education and interactions with others in the field. This is why, to a large extent, they stayed away from tactics that could be considered controversial, like protests. They believed these activities to be simply ineffective. A few spoke of having

participated in these activities in the past, but no longer saw them as realistic. As one director clearly stated, “Marches, we’re beyond marches, who ever is still doing marches is lost somewhere in the 60s. It’s a sound bite, people see the march, and things go back to where they were. Come on, get a grip, but if it makes the people who march feel good, fine. So now, what do we do to bring it into reality? Set up a series of crucial meetings with crucial players that either stand in the way, or that help in getting it done.” This comment is reflective of others who noted that they believed the field had changed in terms of which types of tactics were preferred.

Respondents emphasized that they felt they were partners with government in providing essential services. To that end, most directors explicitly rejected an adversarial stance for their advocacy. Many felt that government representatives tried hard to be responsive to the needs of local providers. They knew that these officials were constrained by time and by their own budget constraints and thought they were doing the best they could. One director expressed this sense of partnership by saying, “I just always felt like, first of all, we’re all in this together. Our senator, our alderman, our mayor, they want this to be a better city. And so if you can look at it as partnerships rather than, ‘Send some money and leave me alone,’ I think that that’s helpful.”

Based on this partnership perspective, many leaders saw their advocacy role as one of educating officials rather than opposing them. This approach was thought to be particularly effective in helping legislators understand the implications of voting a certain way. For example, one executive director described a positive response they got from a state senator when they provided him with a packet of background information that supported their position on a particular bill: “I’ll tell you, our state senator said, ‘Thank you for giving us information. It would have taken so much time to even research it . . . now I can present it comfortably.’ So they really, really appreciate it. And then you have to have a relationship with them. You can’t have someone say, ‘Here, you need to do this and this and this.’ ‘Well, who are you? I don’t even know you,’ you know?” Thus, thinking of advocacy as a “partnership” relationship is seen by service providers as a way to build trust with government officials and an important strategy in their attempts to move a relationship based on economic dependence to a more horizontal relationship, based on reciprocity.

#### *Forming Reciprocal Political Relationships*

As indicated in the above quotes, the leaders of government-funded organizations worked hard to maintain positive relationships with public officials that grew over the years. Many even talked about officials as being friends: “I think where a lot of agencies make a mistake is they do not establish a good relationship with the local HUD people. So, we have phenomenal relationships with the Regional Director for HHS, the Regional Directors for HUD, and the program staff. I mean, HUD came out and did a monitoring visit for our shelter a couple weeks ago, and when the Program Officer came through the door, it’s like, ‘Oh, how’s your baby?’ . . . I think that has always proven to be very beneficial for us.”

The process of forming personal relationships with public managers and other policy-makers was quite intentional. Directors wanted the reciprocal benefits of a close relationship and felt that was necessary in the competitive funding environment. One said his strategy was to “contact friends to put pressure where necessary to remind people we need to be taken care of.” This was echoed by a different respondent who was even clearer about what the benefits were for her agency: “I know all the complete roster of our city, state and federal, elected and appointed leadership . . . Working those relationships helped us get an

increase in the supportive services line in the Department of Human Services, at least in the government's presented budget. We are getting really good at getting to know our elected and appointed officials and helping them to understand the scale, the complexity of the issue we're facing, and getting them to become our advocates, our champions in the legislature."

Managers emphasized the reciprocal, collaborative, nature of this relationship. As one director said, "Our government officials look to us as the experts and want to know from us what they should be doing and how they should be casting their votes. They're the people who hold the purse strings, that's the kind of thing they offer back to us." In other words, nonprofit managers offer knowledge and expertise, and in return, expect public managers to keep them in mind when making budgetary decisions. Managers do not see these relationships as potentially co-opting or as lowering their advocacy effectiveness, as Selznick (1949) or Piven and Cloward (1977) may have predicted. On the contrary, given that their goal is to form closer relationships with government policymakers and administrators, focusing on insider tactics and a partnership approach is seen as simply making sense.

Finally, those respondents most involved in advocacy worked hard to raise their public profile and be a "name brand" organization. The director of one such organization said, "when you want to influence public policy, you move your organization from being needed, to being necessary. It's literally the image issue, it's a mindset thing." Indeed, being highly visible (by joining coalitions, attending key meetings, or joining committees) was seen as a key way to grow an organization. One director who was highly involved in insider advocacy reports, "We've really developed our brand, who our organization is, our market positioning, where we want to be. As a result of having developed who we are, who our brand is, and the position we want, now we're implementing that by expanding our advocacy efforts. We are experts in our field. That is our market position." This kind of market-based language reflects that leaders think of advocacy primarily as a very pragmatic management tool.

Thus, although few of these managers had previous experience working in government, the most active advocates reported having built close professional relationships with public managers over their tenure as a director. None would go as far as to say that they felt as though their relationship was truly horizontal but most worked tirelessly to move it in that direction. Managers had to be self-reliant when it came to this activity. Although some had help from board members in making important connections, most managers did not discuss their boards as active partners when it came to advocacy. As one manager, who did have an active board, said, "You see a lot of organizations, unfortunately, that have paltry boards, or rubber-stamp boards, or boards that won't do any relationship-building, and so they're exclusively dependent on staff to do the work and the relationship-building." Because relationship building is so time-consuming, and something managers have little help with, having the motivation to protect and grow government funding is an important driver.

### *Lobbying*

One insider tactic, lobbying, deserves special mention. Defined as attempts to influence the passage of a specific piece of legislation, lobbying is the only advocacy tactic that is restricted, though not prohibited for 501(c)(3) organizations like the ones in this study. These organizations may spend only a limited amount of their budget on lobbying activity and may not use government funds for lobbying. Because the penalties can be severe, scholars have hypothesized that the lobbying regulations create a chilling effect for advocacy overall, and lobbying in particular (Bass et al. 2007). Prior research has shown that nonprofit

managers either have limited knowledge of the lobbying regulations or have an inaccurate understanding of them (Berry and Arons 2003). Other research found 501(c)(3) tax status to be an important predictor of decreased lobbying activity but found little relationship between government funding and lobbying involvement. (Leech 2006).

This research supports the finding that organizations often have limited or incorrect understanding of the regulations but does not support the idea that this has a chilling effect on organizations' involvement in lobbying. As expected, these respondents had a limited understanding of lobbying regulations; most were confused about the regulations and none fully understood the reporting requirements. However, that limited understanding did not hold them back from participating. Almost 50% of respondents overall participated in lobbying—although more than half didn't know that is what they were doing. Also, government funding seems to be positively associated with lobbying, not contrary to it. Most of the organizations reliant on government funding participated in some lobbying (86%). Two had even experimented with hiring professional lobbyists, with the intention of "diversifying their champions" in Springfield. On the other hand, none of the struggling subgroup of government-funded agencies lobbied and only 13% of the organizations focused on private funding did.

### **Reliant on Government Funding—Struggling Subgroup**

As noted above, a small subgroup of six organizations stood out from the rest of the organizations reliant on government funding for having lower levels of advocacy engagement overall. When these organizations did advocate, it was often motivated by frustration with the system and undertaken with a more confrontational approach. Upon further investigation, these agencies were found to be uniformly (1) small, (2) low in professionalization, and (3) primarily emergency shelters or organizations that provide only supportive services. This is important because these two areas of service are struggling in the current policy environment. HUD does not fund supportive-services-only organizations and so they must turn to the state of Illinois, which is under severe financial strain. Likewise, Chicago's 10-year plan to end homelessness does not provide much support to emergency shelters, preferring to fund interim and permanent housing. All these managers knew their funding was unstable at best. As one reported, "All of the billions of dollars that's coming down to help the homeless, it never reaches us. We have to strain and struggle to keep our program afloat. It's all at the higher level, you know."

This group was less involved in advocacy for several reasons. First, their leaders were less professionalized (in fact, two of the executive directors were formally homeless themselves) and so were sometimes unsure about how to become involved. They did not have strong connections with other homeless service managers in the city and tended to be much less involved in local coalitions. Second, their small size, in terms of both staffing and financial resources, constrained what they were able to do. Perhaps most importantly, though, they uniformly expressed great frustration with the system but believed they were powerless to change it. For example, one director reported reducing her advocacy involvement, saying, "I used to talk a lot. I backed away from it. It's useless trying to talk to [government administrators] about what is needed to help these people." Another director reported great frustration with the 10-year plan in particular saying that it was "stupid" because the Bible said that "the poor will be with us always." However, she admitted that she did not speak up against it because she felt that no one would listen to her. When asked

if others felt similar to her, she said, “yes, but then they went with the plan because you don’t go against the powers that be.”

Perhaps because of their feelings of powerlessness, the largest difference between this group and the main group of government-funded agencies is that this group often talked about advocacy in terms of confrontation—something all the other agencies explicitly rejected. When one director was asked how she approaches advocacy, she said, “Jumping on top of the table. Making my presence known. I mean calling a spade what a spade is. I mean that’s just how it works.” For them, calling “a spade a spade” meant speaking out aggressively against current policy, often the 10-year plan or even current government officials. This strategy was anathema to the relationship building approach of the other organizations reliant on government funding. Instead of talking about “making friends” and “branding” their organizations, these managers conceptualized advocacy as fighting—often, fighting for a larger purpose. For example, “I’m not fighting just to go out and say you’re wrong. It’s not about *who’s* right. It’s *what’s* right that I’m fighting for. The right thing is to help the people.” Although this language is metaphorical, it reveals a very different understanding of how advocacy should be undertaken and what type of posture is appropriate than what was held by other agencies, as described above.

Several directors felt the field had changed, such as one who reported that “in his day” they used to just go downtown to “raise hell” and things got done. He reported that he was proud to be a “squeaky wheel” and shunned the sort of collaborative work that most government funded organizations embraced. In his view, those meetings were ineffective—just people “sittin’ and talkin’ with no action behind them.” Like others, this manager had received more government funding in the past, but was not as successful under the current Continuum of Care system and 10-year-plan, and was unsure about the future of the agency.

Overall, these managers believed that the field was moving in the wrong direction—both for their clients and for their organizations—and several reported that more involvement with government agencies would only make things worse. They were concerned about increased regulation and oversight they believed would come with greater government involvement in the field. As one leader said, “I’m known to tell them, y’all get out of my way, you understand. I can’t help the people if you all coming in here monopolizing my time.” But at the end of the day, they felt it was hard to give up the funds. As another reported, “We keep doing it. We keep accepting it. When I say ‘we’ the providers, I mean there’s a couple of providers in particular who feel—who want to start a revolution.”

### **Focused on Private Funding**

Managers of organizations primarily reliant on private funding had a drastically different interpretation of why advocacy is, or is not, important to their agencies. For them, advocacy was far less urgent. As one leader concluded, “We can only do so much! Advocacy, political advocacy is not part of our mission. That will help, but I’d rather focus on what we do, and that’s case management.” Because these managers don’t need to advocate in order to maintain funding, they see advocacy primarily as an extra service and not as the essential management tool that the directors with government contracts saw it as.

Interestingly, directors of organizations that were primarily reliant on private funding recognized the pragmatic aspect to advocacy involvement espoused by the managers above. These respondents pointed out that time spent raising money from private donors was a primary barrier to being more involved with advocacy and noted that advocacy



wasn't as crucial to their organizational functioning. One respondent summed up this perspective when she said, "I think if we were publicly funded, then yes, we would be much more involved in [advocacy] because obviously if I were depending on state or federal money for my budget . . . I would feel that I would have to be much more vocal about public issues. Not that I don't have strong feelings about them, but as I say, you only have so much energy to devote to whatever you're doing."

This quote helps reveal the importance of time and resource constraints. Human service organizations that are not as reliant on government funding don't experience the same kind of pressure to spend limited resources on advocacy. Instead, directors report that they need to spend that time reaching out to private donors or working directly with clients. The leader of one organization with little government funding and also little advocacy pointed out, "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." These directors, advocacy is optional, a choice that reflects mission and preference—not an organizational priority.

Along with many being somewhat less motivated to participate, those that did participate had advocacy goals that were more about representing their clients and making sure their needs weren't forgotten than promoting their own organization. In terms of what they were advocating for, these leaders were much more likely to talk about issues like healthcare needs and affordable housing—issues that were unlikely to gain their organization any additional funding but would certainly be helpful to their clients. One director summed up the difference between advocacy conducted by organizations reliant on government funding and those that were not as, "I suspect that organizations that are government funded . . . will advocate more heavily in areas that would impact their funding. Whereas ours, it's sort of on a matter of general principle but not on something that specifically impacts us." Some managers expressed frustration with what they saw as a lack of vision on the part of other providers. As one director said, "I mean I think a lot of these groups are working at saving the scraps. You know we should building new affordable housing and such. It's a frustrating process at times." Another reiterated this point by saying, "What we believe is that we need to do front line work, and but we need to be changing the playing field, right. That the folks that we service, there's other ways to serve them.

Although many did participate in insider tactics similar to the agencies more reliant on government funding, they often did so with a different approach. When talking about their communications with policymakers, they often spoke less about relationship building and more about providing input or making sure that policymakers knew the issues. The tone is one of an outside expert, not one of a friend. It should also be noted that, like the main group of government-funded agencies, these organizations all rejected adversarial tactics. This demonstrates the considerable isomorphism evident in the field in terms of which tactics are considered legitimate or appropriate.

However, instead of participating in insider tactics, many of these agencies focused their advocacy on educational activities that would be visible to their donors—such as writing newsletters, outreach through new media, and holding educational events for the public. This was very uncommon in the organizations that were reliant on government funding. For example, one manager noted that their biggest annual fundraiser, a charity run, "definitely has an advocacy component to it because we hope to get hundreds and hundreds of people here to educate them about what these issues are." Another mentioned that a big part of her advocacy participation was, "for example, when there's hatred towards homeless people



from police and a homeless person gets beat up—I have a blog, I write about it, I try to call attention to it.” These tactics are clearly targeted to the general public and potential donors, not government administrators.

Raising awareness with the public was a major theme that came up often with organizations of this type. One manager reflected the views of many when she said, “When you talk about advocacy, you know, there’s some very different levels of it, and one of the very greatest baselines of anything around advocacy is awareness. Until people are aware that there’s an issue or a problem, nothing’s going to happen.” As another manager put it, “in terms of advocacy, probably for me it’s not as much government as it is, ‘Let’s get people involved with caring for others because they’re too wrapped up in their own little country clubs.’”

## DISCUSSION

Ebrahim (2010, p. 629) recently wrote that “one is hard pressed to find social service nonprofits that see policy work as a critical piece of what they do.” Other scholars and practitioners have worried that increased reliance on government funding might lead social service providers to further reduce advocacy engagement (Schmid et al. 2008). This research supports the opposite conclusion on both counts. Findings from this study of the advocacy involvement of homeless service providers show that social service nonprofits are actively engaged in advocacy and that more government funding actually serves as an incentive for organizations to engage in policy advocacy more deeply. However, as visually displayed in Figure 1, their advocacy goals are very often squarely focused on maintaining the funding streams the organization has come to depend on and tactics are structured to maximize goodwill and minimize conflict. As a result, this article sheds light on the process by which advocacy by nonprofit service providers may serve to amplify rather than challenge current political and institutional arrangements.

Managers of most organizations highly reliant on government funding perceived many more incentives for advocacy in the environment than constraints. Advocacy was seen as a way to access funding, negotiate current funding policies, and infiltrate powerful groups. All these were seen as important ways of coping with resource dependence and beneficial for the organization in the long run. Conversely, leaders of organizations reliant primarily on private funds saw advocacy as much less of a priority, and felt their time was better spent working with private donors or with clients directly. Although they often reported some advocacy participation, they were comparatively much less involved than organizations with greater percentages of government funding. They also had different goals, speaking more of the need for awareness raising than maintaining funding streams. A third group, organizations with significant government funding but struggling in the current policy environment, also advocated less than those organizations more successful in their pursuit of government funding. Although they expressed great frustration with current funding and policy priorities and saw themselves as in opposition to government administrators, they felt powerless to affect real change.

These findings cannot be explained by the argument that government-funded agencies just have better access to decision makers. Directors of most agencies reliant on government funds were clearly more motivated to participate than directors of organizations without such reliance. Also, the organizations in the struggling group did little advocacy despite having funding connections. The findings also cannot be explained by the argument that some directors don’t advocate because they don’t believe that social change is necessary.

In fact, many of the privately funded and struggling organizations that advocated rarely, if at all, were vehement that “the system” was flawed. Time and resource constraints, however, made focusing on service delivery seem a more appropriate and pressing goal.

These findings provide strong support for the argument of Smith and Lipsky (1993) that government funding can influence providers’ overall advocacy posture, causing them to become more politically sophisticated and collaborative with government, embracing a partnership role rather than renegotiating it. In this study, most managers of organizations reliant on government funding see government not as an adversary but as a necessary partner for doing their work, albeit one that requires educating. Directors perceive their contribution to that partnership as one of informing policymakers about realities on the ground, and what service providers need to better carry out their work. In this way, advocacy is important method by which nonprofit managers are attempting to communicate “stewardship” and build trust with public managers (Van Slyke 2007). By forming ongoing relationships with policymakers and promoting themselves as experts in their field, managers are able to emphasize their value and enjoy the benefits of a more horizontal, reciprocal relationship rather than be at the mercy of a relationship primarily characterized by its vertical, economic dimension (Kelleher and Yackee 2009).

The growth of various collaborative governance mechanisms has likely contributed to this process as it has opened up new pathways for organizations to be involved in policymaking (Ansell and Gash 2008). Public managers should be aware that these processes are being interpreted in this way by participating service providers. These nonprofit managers believed their advocacy goals were best accomplished through insider tactics, specifically, meeting with government officials and administrators directly. Managers believed that having close connections to policymakers would be rewarded, and overwhelmingly chose tactics that would facilitate those relationships. Thus, these advocacy “tactics” were sometimes exactly the same as participation in stakeholder processes. In this way, advocacy, specifically insider advocacy, has become an institutionalized, routinized activity among government-funded agencies. Partially due to normative and mimetic isomorphism, directors believed they must participate in insider tactics, and participate at the highest levels, in order to stay abreast of fast moving policy and funding developments. They believed that organizations not participating, or not participating in the correct ways, would be left behind or seen as less important than other agencies. Furthermore, data from the subgroup of organizations that were struggling, but reliant on government funding, suggest that they may be right.

Findings from this study have important implications given the shift toward privatization in human service fields generally. Increased dependence on government funds seems to be making advocacy on behalf of clients largely symbolic, at least for organizations reliant on government funds, in that it is inseparable from advocacy in support of organizational goals. This indicates that we need to change the way we think about advocacy in this sector. Explanations about motivations to advocate should not rely on preconceptions about nonprofits as purely idealistic or altruistic actors rather they should recognize the effects of power relationships in determining the ways in which nonprofits can (or might wish to) affect substantial social change. People often think of an adversarial relationship when they think about advocacy, but as nonprofits and government work increasingly together advocacy is not about critique or about building a movement rather it is based on friendly persuasion and insider connections. The degree to which this insider advocacy posture is effective or good for public outcomes is outside the scope of this

article, but future research on the implications of this institutionalized brand of advocacy will be important for rating the overall health of the human service nonprofit sector.

Overall, these findings imply that advocacy engaged in by human service providers may be supporting current political and institutional arrangements more than it is calling for fundamental change. If organizations' advocacy communications are increasingly focused on issues of organizational self-interest, there is a danger that the needs of the homeless community in general may be being ignored. For example, if youth shelters are advocating for more youth services funds and supportive housing providers are advocating for more dollars for supportive services, how are policymakers to sort out priorities for the field overall? After all, government is also dependent, to a degree, on nonprofit providers to provide feedback about emerging issues and policy implementation. This points to perhaps an increasingly important role for coalitions and other infrastructure organizations that are positioned to see the field in its totality and advocate on a broader basis. Future research should look into the degree to which these groups do or do not present a unified voice for the field.

One limitation of this study is that although respondents reported that their advocacy engagement changed as their reliance on government funding grew, without data from multiple points in time causation cannot be confirmed. However, it is likely that change is happening at both the individual nonprofit level and the field level. First, as organizations in this study reported, many adopt different advocacy practices as they increase their reliance on government funding. This happens over time as very few organizations are founded with government funding in place. Second, because the field as a whole is now more reliant on government funding, the field level norms around advocacy have likely changed as well, with the field as a whole more involved and more likely to use insider tactics. Since the passage of McKinney–Vento in 1986, there have been many new entrants to the field of providers, including 20 of the 42 respondents in this study, who likely adopted some of these norms from their start. Additionally, although it doesn't change the conclusions of the study because these data were collected during the beginning of the 2008 recession state level budget instability likely intensified managers' beliefs that organizational maintenance needed to be a priority.

Finally, like all qualitative research, there are limitations to the generalizability of this location and field-specific study. However, these findings may be helpful for understanding institutional arrangements in other fields and locations where similar conditions, such as high levels of government funding and a changing policy environment, exist. Future research that provides a comparison with other fields, perhaps less dependent on government funding, would also yield important insights as to the degree to which these findings are field-specific.

Information from this study on how nonprofits experience relationships with dominant players in their environment also calls for additional research on how to support advocacy that is attentive to both client and organizational concerns. Given the extent of resource dependence, many nonprofits experience in regards to government funding, it is unclear if it is possible to disentangle self-interest from social change. However, having a better understanding of how nonprofits negotiate and understand relationships with government funders may assist in efforts to help nonprofits advocate more effectively and engage in advocacy that goes beyond organizational maintenance. Instead of asking where client representation ends and self-interest begins, we may need to ask how organizations can better balance these goals.

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