

Capacity Building for Community-Based Small Nonprofit Minority Health Agencies in Central Florida

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Abstract

Minority Community-Based Organizations (CBO) face unique challenges to capacity building, including the development of a viable volunteer base. The University of Central Florida Public Administration Department, under contract to the Orange County Health Department, has developed an ambitious team approach to capacity building in nine very small, nonprofit, minority CBOs. The project, presently in the second of two performance years, proposes actions and lessons learned of relevance to others in the fields of nonprofit management and volunteer administration.

Key words:

capacity building, community-based organizations, nonprofits, volunteering

Introduction

Crisis in the nonprofit sector in terms of funding, board vacancies, falling executive tenure, negative public and media scrutiny, and retiring baby boomers requires investment in capacity building (Light, 2004b). Yet the public increasingly demands efficiency and effectiveness from the nonprofit organizations in their operations. Capacity building produces the promised increase in capacity, which in turn produces the increase in effectiveness of the small nonprofit organizations. Legacy and renewal of the capacity building projects is “very much a necessity for sustainable effectiveness” (Light, 2004a, p. 10).

The University of Central Florida Department of Public Administration is currently executing a technical assistance project for the Orange County Health Department to assist nine different, very small, community-based nonprofit agencies. These agencies provide HIV/AIDS education and direct services to minority communities. Project deliverables include proposals for funding for the agencies (the major product), on-site training in financial management and strategic planning, group training using recognized regional leaders, concrete products such as a glossy annual report for public relations for each agency, and customized assistance in volunteer

management and board development. The university team includes faculty, grant writing experts, and graduate students. Benefits include assisting the Central Florida minority community, major student support and experience, building capacity for other training projects, and ample funding support. The project is currently on or ahead of schedule and is already being hailed as a model program by the project officer.

Target audience: Nine minority non-profit agencies working with HIV/AIDS issues in Orange County, FL and four neighboring counties. The agencies are very small, largely functioning with volunteer services.

The manuscript will address the following questions: What kinds of intervention can strengthen community-based minority health organizations' capacity building? How to reconstruct a minority health community's collective ability to address shared problems and responsibilities and capitalize on opportunities to improve the life of a distressed community? Does capacity building actually improve capacity and effectiveness?

Purpose of The Manuscript

The manuscript examines obstacles and opportunities to building the capacity for urban, community-based minority health nonprofit organizations in Central Florida. The manuscript also discusses the necessary conditions and strategies for success in engaging these organizations in broader voluntary collaboration with other similar organizations.

Theoretical Framework/Themes

Theoretical framework is primarily drawn from social capital and community partnership to explain capacity building for small nonprofit agencies (Chrislip, 2002;

Austin, 2000; Berger, 1983; Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Social capital is applied in this context to explain the ability of communities working together to solve the problems of our society (Weisinger & Salipante, 2005; Axelrod, 1997; Alter & Hage 1993; Nohria & Eccles, 1992; Coleman, 1990, 1988). Partnership refers to any intentionally collaborative relationship between two or more organizations. Joint ventures, multilateral collaborations, and public-private and public-nonprofit alliances are just some examples of this phenomenon. Partnership can also be perceived as a social exchange involving commitment of knowledge, skills, and emotions. From an organizational standpoint, partnership entails the commitment of organizational resources to an initiative involving two or more entities that come together and act on recognition that they cannot accomplish their missions alone (Gray, 1989). In recent years, such interorganizational collaboration has become a prominent aspect of the functioning of many different types of organizations. The number and significance of collaborative forms of organizing, including interorganizational teams, partnerships, alliances, and networks have increased tremendously. The value of effective collaborative relationships as well as the complexities and challenges they present have been recognized by many researchers, and they continue to be a frequent subject of scholarly and practitioner-oriented literature (Linden, 2002; Kanter, 1994; Powell, 1990; Gray, 1989).

Capacity building can be defined as activities aimed at building multi-dimensions of organizational capacity and effectiveness, including those such as partnership/networking essential to provide better service to distressed communities (Felkins, 2002). Capacity building activities mainly focus on leadership development,

organization development, and interorganizational collaboration (Hudson, 2005; Weisinger & Salipante, 2005; Staudt & Homedes, 2004; Doherty & Mayer, 2003; Chrislip, 2002; Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001; DeVita & Fleming, 2001; McNamara, n.d.). Capacity building requires investment in training, technology, and strategic planning. Nonprofit capacity building includes all the elements needed for organizational effectiveness. Capacity is an output of basic organizational activities such as fundraising, partnerships, board development, leadership, mission, financial management, strategic planning, governance, physical infrastructure, technology, and program evaluation. Nonprofit organization capacity is consumed in mission-related activities (Hudson, 2005; Light, 2004a; Letts, Ryan, & Grossman, 1999). Capacity is not the same as organizational effectiveness. Funding agencies are interested in seeing that organizational management, governance, and leadership are linked to organizational effectiveness and broader social impact (Kibbe et al., 2004; Letts et al., 1999). “Capacity building is not about creating unnecessary administration and bureaucracy, it is about systematically building organizations that have the clout to make a sustainable difference to pressing, social, economic and environmental problems” (Hudson, 2005, p. xxii).

In the capacity building efforts, full engagement of the board and staff, planning, outside support, and objective measures are critical (Light, 2004a; Kinsey, Raker, & Wagner (eds.), 2003; DeVita & Fleming, 2001; McKinsey & Company for Venture Philanthropy Partners, 2001). “In theory, capacity building is designed to change some aspects of organizations’ existing environment, internal structure, leadership, and management system, which in turn, should improve employee morale, expertise,

productivity, efficiency, and so forth, which should strengthen an organization’s capacity to do its work, which should increase organizational performance” (Light, 2004a, p. 46). Capacity building also requires engaging others in partnerships. Creating an effective organization is difficult without partnerships/collaborations and integrations (Hudson, 2005; Kinsey & Raker, 2003; Letts et al., 1999).

As Paul Light (2004a) rightly states, the majority of capacity building efforts in the nonprofit sector occur with minor, even no, contact with the outside world including consultant groups or other resources. The majority of capacity building is self-funded. Nonprofit organizations have little access to the kind of capital needed for capacity building compared to the billions of dollars the private sector spends on outside consultants (Light, 2004a). Most of the small nonprofits do not have the resources to hire or work with outside agencies for their capacity building projects. The Orange County Health Department and University of Central Florida Capacity Building Project is a blessing to the small nonprofit organizations in Central Florida. The agencies do not have the resources to afford capacity building.

Community development can be another goal of capacity building with the mobilization of the community resources available to individual nonprofit organizations (Hudson, 2005; DeVita & Fleming, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Gittel & Vidal, 1998). Organizations are key vehicles through which such capacity – community social capital – can be built and utilized. Strong and self-sufficient organizations can provide needed services to the distressed communities. These organizations can also be important vehicles for solving community problems.

Project Information

Deliverables: Annual fiscal assessments, annual budgets, recommendations for payroll systems and installation, annual reports regarding review of strategic plans, training on volunteer and board development, training on staff management, development plans, training regarding leadership skills, and 64 grant requests for proposal.

Grant Proposals: One team is providing technical assistance in drafting four proposals for funding per year per agency. In other words, the UCF team is required to draft 64 grant proposals for the targeted nonprofits. It is expected that this will result in funding for the agencies in the short term, and a greatly increased capacity to continue the proposal-writing process on the part of the nonprofits in the future. This is by far the largest (and most ambitious) part of the program. This team consists of 22 people the first year and is being streamlined to 15 members the second year. To date, 57 proposals have been submitted. As a result, funding in the amount of \$519,798 has been granted.

Financial Management: A specialist provides customized financial management services (on-site) in each of the nine agencies. This includes assisting with annual tax reports, quarterly financial statements, installing new software systems, and ongoing training for the adoption of these functions in the future.

Strategic Planning: Another customized service is strategic planning assistance leading to an updated operational planning document. This service includes working with the advisory board as well as the executive director and other significant parties.

Training Sessions: Some training for the nine agencies is provided in a group setting.

This training covers a variety of topics including: board development, volunteer management, diversity and cultural awareness, management practices, public relations, effective grant writing, communication strategies, and so forth. Approximately eight group training sessions are offered over the course of the contract. These training sessions are generally provided by the recognized leaders in the Central Florida nonprofit community.

Annual reports: Each agency will receive a glossy annual report that can not only be used to accompany funding proposals but can be used for public relations purposes as well. The annual reports will be short and in proportion to the agencies, but will include pictures, mission statements, strategic planning information, and the basic financial information of the agency.

Customized assistance: Finally, a certain amount of customized assistance is being provided by university staff working on the project. In particular, many of the graduate students volunteer some of their time in providing direct services to clients in order to better understand the agency with which they are working. Several agencies have utilized undergraduates performing service learning projects in a volunteer capacity. Additionally, the project allows enough flexibility to shift learning objectives to meet the needs of the group or specific agencies.

Methodology

The organizations will not be named to protect their anonymity and those associated with these organizations and their boards. This manuscript is a critical reflection on field experience not a systematic scientific inquiry. Surveys were conducted in the first and second year of the project with the participant agencies. Participant observations, interviews, and conversations

with associates provided information to the study. We also examined many unpublished documents about the organizations.

Project Benefits: Benefits To The Community, University

This program offers a rare opportunity to work with numerous community agencies that are struggling to provide direct services to Central Florida's minority communities. These agencies, in their turn, are working to prevent one of the most ravaging diseases in society, as well as to provide support services for those who are infected.

This program provides the opportunity for eight students to be paid while gaining extensive experience in grant writing. The students work with seasoned specialists at the university who provide extensive training in the process and a detailed review of every product before submission.

Because the Department of Public Administration has long offered graduate and undergraduate Certificates in Nonprofit Management, and now offers a Masters in Nonprofit Management, the project plays to the strengths of the Department of Public Administration. The project team is extraordinarily strong because the university was already providing related educational services and had a history of very modest technical assistance projects. Because the likelihood of exceeding expectations is high, reputation expansion is likely.

Due to its size and visibility, the Capacity Building Program for Small Nonprofits takes the Department to a new level of institutional capacity and reputation. It will enable the Department to demonstrate its ability to execute other large technical assistance projects involving any type of organizational capacity building effort in the future in both public and nonprofit settings.

Doing good is good, but doing good is even better when ample resources are provided for your mission. This has

certainly been the case with this project, which has been replete with solid indirect cost recovery as well as project staffing dollars.

Findings And Conclusions: Lessons Learned

- Student volunteer efforts within the organizations helped them develop useful familiarity with the client database and service terminology.
- Use of minority media and joint projects with other volunteer organizations amplified minority volunteerism.
- Utilization of minority clients as organization volunteers provided valuable input to overall agency program development and improvement and improved the minority volunteers' sense of connection to the mainstream community.
- Minority volunteers proffered lack of personal time due to health and economic hardship as a detractor to volunteer availability.

The capacity building project produced the promised increase in capacity, which in turn will hopefully produce the increase in effectiveness and visibility of the agencies in the region. From our experience, for successful capacity development projects: trust between the organization and the capacity building provider is essential; organization must be ready; continuing relationships should be maintained; organizational learning occurs in a positive partnership environment; and capacity building should be arranged to different learning styles.

Implications for the Profession: The design and execution of the project and lessons learned from the project can have some important relevance to others in the fields of nonprofit management and volunteer administration.

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Marla Krause, MPA was awarded her Bachelor of Arts, Liberal Studies degree by the University of Central Florida in May 2003. Ms. Krause earned her Master of Public Administration degree and Graduate Certificate in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Central Florida in August 2005. She recently completed an internship with the Orange County, Florida, Growth Management Department Planning Division. Marla also has extensive experience in publishing and in the development of graphics and Web sites.