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# Applied Empirical Research on Nonprofit Organization Management: Survey and Recommendations

Kathleen M. Brown

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INSTITUTE FOR  
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION MANAGEMENT


**Applied Empirical Research  
on Nonprofit Organization Management:  
Survey and Recommendations**

by Kathleen M. Brown

Working Paper No. 1

*working papers*



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April, 1986

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**APPLIED EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION MANAGEMENT:  
SURVEY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

by Kathleen M. Brown

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This paper reports the results of a telephone survey and a literature search undertaken to determine the nature and scope of recent applied empirical research studies related to nonprofit organization management and to suggest what the priority areas for such research should be in the immediate future. The paper provided background material for the Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management at the University of San Francisco to use in setting its research priorities.

Applied research was contrasted with basic or pure research and was operationally defined as research "the findings of which could be of immediate use to managers and boards of nonprofit organizations in improving their organizations' functioning and/or in solving practical problems." Thirty-three people with expertise in the field of nonprofit management research were surveyed by telephone to determine their priorities for this type of research and to seek sources for the literature search. Priorities suggested by these experts included research on personnel management, strategic planning, computer use, financial management, program and performance evaluation, fund raising, volunteerism, boards of directors, linkage and collaboration, marketing, technical assistance provision, and management education.

The literature search surveyed business periodicals, social science periodicals, dissertations, and specialized publications in the fund raising and volunteer administration fields. Another source was Independent Sector's compilation of current research studies in the nonprofit field. Using the operational definition of applied research as a filter, these sources yielded a total of nine studies in volunteerism, five studies on boards of directors, three on personnel management, three on financial management, twenty-one on fund raising, six on evaluation, six on survival and change, two on strategic planning, two on for-profit ventures within nonprofits, two on purchase of service contracting, and one each on constituent involvement, information management, and executive competencies.

Using the data gathered through the telephone survey and the literature search, the following eight topics were suggested as research priorities for the Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management at USF: financial management; personnel management; funding the sector (including both fund raising and alternative funding sources); boards of directors; strategic planning; evaluation; technical assistance provision; education of managers. These priorities were seen to be of crucial importance to managers and boards of nonprofit organizations. They also seemed especially appropriate for study by a university-based institute with a graduate degree program in nonprofit organization management.

Most of the experts surveyed commented on the dearth of applied empirical research in the field. This was substantiated by the findings of the literature search. It was concluded that the Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management at USF would be adding greatly to the store of information available to leaders of nonprofit organizations by sponsoring studies in the priority areas listed.

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**APPLIED EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION MANAGEMENT:  
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**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management at the University of San Francisco with background material on which to base its decisions regarding research priorities. The project consisted of the following three components: 1) a telephone survey of experts in the field of nonprofit management to determine their priorities for applied empirical research; 2) a survey of recent research literature on nonprofit organization management; 3) recommendations for applied research priorities based on findings from the previous two parts with reasons why these should be priorities.

It is important to note that this study dealt specifically with **management** issues in the nonprofit sector, not with general research on the sector as a whole. The goal was to provide background information for decisions which will be made by the Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management about areas of research on which it wishes to concentrate. The Institute will specialize in **applied empirical research** in the field.

## DEFINITION OF APPLIED RESEARCH

In the field of research, a distinction is often made between **basic** or **pure** research and **applied** research. The **Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry** (1980), for instance, defines applied research as "research aimed at answering a practical question rather than developing a theory." Pure research in that same volume is defined as "research designed to answer a theoretical or academic question, or to develop a theory."

Other definitions are similar. In **The Conduct of Social Research**, Sanders and Pinhey (1983) state that pure research is usually conducted to gain knowledge simply for the sake of gaining knowledge. Researchers doing this type of study give little thought to the application of their findings to a problem of immediate concern. Applied research, on the other hand, is directed toward finding solutions to immediate problems, and the findings are generally used by policy-makers and other officials in making decision.

In **Methods in the Study of Human Behavior**, Ellingstad and Heimstra (1974, pp. 12-13) define the two terms as follows:

In recent years an increasing number of researchers have been designing and conducting experiments aimed at solving real world problems....Studies dealing with these kinds of problems are called applied research and are in contrast to the majority of investigations conducted that have no obvious relation to the types of problems we encounter in everyday life.

Many behavioral scientists feel that their research should be directed toward increasing our fund of general knowledge about behavior. These investigators are not concerned about whether the information gathered in their research can be used to solve any of the practical, real world problems that man encounters. This type of research is often labeled basic or pure research.

The authors go on to state that both kinds of research are necessary and that "one can cite many examples of research prompted by practical problems that has contributed significantly to the basic literature; conversely, one can



also find many examples of basic research that has proved to be extremely helpful in solving practical problems." (p. 13)

Even though the dividing line between basic and applied research is not always clear, we can cite a number of types of studies in the nonprofit sector that are definitely **basic** in nature; that is, they are undertaken primarily to increase the knowledge base in the field or to develop theories about the behavior of nonprofit organizations. Examples of types of basic research studies are the following:

- o Research on the scope of the sector, such as **Dimensions of the Independent Sector: A Statistical Profile**, published by Independent Sector
- o Research on the history of the sector
- o Research reporting charitable giving statistics, such as **Giving U.S.A.**, published annually by the American Association of Fund Raising Counsel
- o Research contrasting nonprofit sector institutions with government and business institutions
- o Economic modeling studies to explain the behavior of nonprofit firms in the economy
- o Research establishing theories and rationales for the existence of the sector
- o Studies which use theoretical modeling to predict the impact of tax changes on charitable giving
- o Studies which survey the impact of recent government cutbacks, such as **Government Funding and the Nonprofit Sector in San Francisco**, recently completed by the Urban Institute (also done in 15 other sites nationwide)
- o Statistical studies of corporate giving, such as the **Conference Board Annual Survey of Corporate Contributions**
- o Surveys of foundation support for different groups and movements, such as two studies done for the Commission on Private Philanthropy and Public Needs (1977) which established a low level of foundation giving to minority groups in general and Hispanics in particular

The above types of studies were excluded from this project because they were **basic** or **pure** in nature.

Throughout this study, **applied research** is operationally defined as research "the findings of which could be of immediate use to managers and boards of nonprofit organizations in improving their organizations' functioning and/or in solving practical problems." This definition was conveyed to those interviewed in Part I of this paper. It was also used as the major criterion for selecting studies to be included in Part II.

## **Part I: REPORT ON INTERVIEWS**

In order to assess the current need for applied research in the field of nonprofit organization management, thirty-three people with expertise in nonprofit management research were contacted for their ideas about sources of applied research in the nonprofit field and about their priorities for such research. (For a list of those interviewed, see Appendix A.) This paper will summarize their answers to the second question.

Using the definition of applied research given in the Introduction, many of the priorities would be excluded. In the interest of completeness, however, all recommendations will be discussed even though some fall outside the applied research definition. The priorities mentioned will be discussed in three categories: basic research, applied research, and basic/applied research. This latter category contains those research questions which essentially study the nature of a phenomenon (basic research) but whose results could be of immediate functional use to nonprofit organizations.

### **A. Basic Research**

The following studies would be done to develop theoretical models, study the nature of phenomena, and add to the basic fund of knowledge about the nonprofit sector. They can be classified in the following categories:

1. **Historical research:** history of nonprofit management as a field.
2. **Theoretical research:** studies to develop behavioral theories of nonprofit organizations; studies relating various theoretical management frameworks to the nonprofit sector; studies of the ethical dimension in nonprofits; studies to develop a model of the relationship between funding for direct and indirect services within an agency (how much of an agency's budget goes to direct services and how much to support services, at any given phase in the

organization's development); crossover studies to relate material from hospital and education research to the rest of the field.

3. **Research to increase the statistical data base in the sector:** tallies of the size of the sector and the diversity and characteristics of nonprofit organizations; research to develop a classification system for the sector; study of the allocation of funds among nonprofits in the United States; statewide survey of salaries in nonprofits; study of how many nonprofits own property.
4. **Research to study the nature of phenomena:** analysis of how a nonprofit's two principal audiences (funding sources and clients) affect board and staff; analysis of the nature of control in nonprofit organizations; analysis of how nonprofits are adapting to the emerging needs of society; analysis of what the increasing of service fees by nonprofits is doing to the poor; analysis of how community change organizations differ from community maintenance organizations in personnel and other areas; analysis of the effectiveness of voluntary agencies as opposed to government or for-profit agencies in areas such as child care.

#### **B. Basic/Applied Research**

The following studies, though basic in nature, suggest results which might be of help to current managers of nonprofit organizations. The thirty or so different issues can be classified in the following categories:

1. **Management education:** how can we educate people in the field; what is good management training in the sector; should we train generalists or turn professionals into managers; what would a quality internship program look like; how do nonprofits assess their training needs?

2. **Evaluation:** profiles of effective organizations and effective boards, CEO's, etc.
3. **Technical assistance:** how can technical assistance and management consulting be improved; how can organizations use outside professionals effectively; what is the impact of using business volunteers to provide technical assistance?
4. **Funding:** what is the potential for using institutional incentives in financing programs; how can we evaluate the effectiveness of funds granted; what is the impact of new types of funding such as program-related investments; to what extent does setting up a for-profit venture divert energy from an organization's mission; how can we determine the cost per unit of service; how do grantmaking practices affect nonprofit management?
5. **Fund raising:** what should the fund raising cost percentage be; what are the motivations and interests of individual donors?
6. **Boards of directors:** how do boards actually behave; how have they adapted to increased fund raising responsibilities; is the board model encouraged by funders truly effective; how do nonprofit boards differ from for-profit boards; is a large or small board more effective?
7. **Personnel management:** studies of what determines the quality of staff relations; how people make career decisions and what draws people to the nonprofit sector; rigidity in personnel policies (policies contrary to the human resources orientation of nonprofits); turnover and burnout; career development within the sector; nonprofits and labor unions; research on the effect of nonprofit pay scales on employees; research on how the short career

ladder in small organizations affects the stability of those organizations

8. **Strategic planning:** how can the theory of stages of development in organizations be applied to nonprofits and what interventions are appropriate at which stages?
9. **Management:** studies of the role of the executive; use of participatory management techniques in nonprofits; studies of how managing nonprofits is different from managing for-profits; studies of what happens in organizations that use management by objectives.
10. **Marketing:** case study of a specific nonprofit marketing plan; impact of mass marketing vs. local communication
11. **Inter-sector relations:** studies which confront the distance between political rhetoric and what is actually being done by the government for nonprofits; studies of corporation/nonprofit interaction.

### C. Applied Research

The following research agendas mentioned by those interviewed suggest immediate, practical applications for managers. The format of such studies would probably be experimental or evaluative, testing alternatives or evaluating the effectiveness of models used in particular organizations. The issues can be categorized in the following areas:

1. **Personnel management:** which rewards, incentives, and forms of compensation work best; how can we attract and retain quality people?
2. **Strategic planning:** how to do it well

3. **Computers:** how to use them effectively; how to conduct a needs assessment
4. **Financial management:** how to use the tools of financial analysis; effective methods of cost containment; how to design a fee structure that allows the organization's mission to be carried out; novel ways of using philanthropic resources, such as loans and loan guarantees; how to standardize accounting principles and ways of filling out tax forms; how to use endowments and investment resources; how to analyze indirect costs
5. **Evaluation:** defining performance and outcome measurements; effective service delivery
6. **Fund raising:** how to conduct a fund raising feasibility study
7. **Volunteers:** creative uses of volunteers; how to use professional volunteers like evaluators and interviewers; how to combine volunteers and professional staff in a way that really works for service delivery
8. **Boards of directors:** analysis of different models of board retreats; impact on board action after board retreat; research on board recruitment and evaluation techniques for the whole board and its individual members
9. **Linkage and collaboration:** how can collaboration in joint ventures with other nonprofits be accomplished, how much pluralism in services is appropriate and what are the best ways communities can make decisions about mergers and dissolutions
10. **Marketing:** how to assess market size and demand
11. **Miscellaneous:** how nonprofits can lobby, how to determine insurance needs

## Part II: LITERATURE SEARCH REPORT

### PARAMETERS OF THE SURVEY

With the above research priorities mentioned by the experts in mind, a survey was taken to assess what actually exists in applied empirical research in nonprofit organization management. As previously stated, the literature search excluded studies which would be categorized as basic or pure research. This paper reports only on research findings which meet the operational definition of applied research; that is, they could be of immediate use to managers and boards of nonprofit organizations in improving their organizations' functioning and/or in solving practical problems.

This project was also limited to studies the findings of which could be generalized to a wide variety of charitable institutions in the sector. This excluded much of the research done by large national organizations such as the Council on Foundations, United Way, the YMCA, and the Association of Junior Leagues, all of which do research primarily to serve their affiliate organizations. The internal research done by these groups, such as salary surveys and client demographics, is of the type that would not be particularly helpful to unaffiliated organizations. Several studies done by these organizations that do have more general application are cited in this paper.

With some exceptions, the study also excluded the voluminous literature on private nonprofit hospitals, educational institutions, and religious institutions since those fields are already well covered by research institutes and national professional organizations. Also excluded was research on nonprofit but not philanthropic organizations such as professional and fraternal associations and nonprofit corporations like Blue Cross and other health insurance companies.



## **SOURCES USED**

The best sources of research on the nonprofit sector are: 1) the PONPO papers (Program on Non Profit Organizations) from the Institute for Social and Policy Studies at Yale University, and 2) the report of the Commission on Private Philanthropy and Public Needs (Filer Commission). Other sources surveyed were:

- o **Business Periodicals Index** from 1970 to the present

Topics: Charities  
Corporations, Nonprofit  
Foundations, Charitable and Educational  
Money Raising Campaigns  
Volunteer Service  
Voluntary Agencies

- o **Social Sciences Index** from 1974 to the present

Topics: Charities  
Corporations, Nonprofit  
Foundations, Charitable and Educational  
Fund Raising  
Voluntary Social Agencies  
Volunteer Service or Workers

- o **Comprehensive Dissertation Index**, sections on "Business and Economics" and "Sociology," from 1978 to the present

Key words: Agency  
Nonprofit or Not-for-Profit  
Voluntary or Volunteer

A computer search into the data base ABI Inform yielded a few additional studies. Independent Sector's **Research-In-Progress, 1982-83** and **Research-In-Progress, 1983-84** were also used. Back issues of **Fund Raising Management** to 1978, **Foundation News** to 1979, **Grantsmanship Center News** to 1981, **The Journal of Volunteer Administration** to 1982, and **Journal of Voluntary Action Research** to 1982 were also surveyed.

## **STUDIES**

Using the operational definition of applied research as a filter, little was found on nonprofit organization management in the business, social science, and dissertation literature. There was quite a bit on volunteerism, some of which could be directly related to management concerns and some not. Many of the management-related studies had been done on hospitals. Only by a stretch of the imagination could many of the other studies be defined as "applied" by the definition that was used. The studies are presented in the categories that emerged during the analysis of the material gathered from the various sources.

### **I. Volunteerism**

The number of studies in the field of volunteerism was surprisingly large in comparison to other aspects of nonprofit management. There are two journals in the field, *The Journal of Voluntary Action Research* and *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. Palmer and Stone, in the Winter 1984-85 edition of the latter journal, listed 54 recent dissertations related to volunteerism. Most studies found during the literature search, however, were of the basic type: research on the characteristics of volunteers in different settings.

Studies which seem to provide more general findings that could be applied to volunteer programs include the following:

#### **A. Motivation and Rewards**

In a study of 4-H volunteers, Henderson (1984) focused on how perceptions of volunteering related to definitions of leisure activity, suggesting that recruitment stressing the rewards of volunteering as a leisure activity might be effective. Rodríguez (1983) found that fulfillment of volunteers' wishes for security, new experience, and recognition correlated

positively with length of service. Gidron (1976) found that volunteers expected rewards pertaining to learning and self-development, social interaction, social recognition, and expressing one's other-oriented self. Pearce (1983) compared volunteer-staffed organizations with employee-staffed organizations in the same field and found no significant difference between volunteers and employees in intrinsic rewards, a finding with implications for the management of both volunteers and paid staff. In studying volunteers to ascertain if they were more likely to volunteer when their paid employment failed to provide certain emotional rewards, Miller (1984) found that individuals whose paid jobs were low in personal growth potential sought personal growth in their volunteer work, while individuals with satisfying personal job opportunities looked for support relationships in their volunteer work.

#### **B. Leadership Training**

Seely (1983) tested the hypothesis that community volunteers are more likely to become volunteer leaders if provided with a formal leadership training program. He found that prior volunteer experience and formal education in leadership skills were valuable prerequisites for program participants and that the training program had achieved its goal of expanding the community's pool of volunteer leaders.

#### **C. Recruitment and Placement**

Dabrowski (1979) found that working class women tended to enter the labor force before becoming involved in volunteer work. This finding has implications for recruiting employed working class women, an underutilized resource. Deen (1984) related volunteer job satisfaction to vocational preferences and volunteer placement and found that vocational preferences and volunteer placement were compatible for satisfied volunteers. Chambre (1982)

studied organizations with successful methods for attracting minority volunteers and found that organizations should stress the consistency between their own goals and methods and the needs and interests of minority communities and should communicate a special need for black or Hispanic volunteers in order to recruit them.

## **II. Boards of Directors**

As with research in volunteerism, the most frequent type of board study is a survey of the characteristics and motivations of board members. (Four articles and two dissertations of this type were located in the literature search.) Though interesting, these studies do little to improve board effectiveness since they seldom suggest a course of action.

Studies which might lead to further applied research or immediate in-the-field use include the following:

### **A. Board Power**

Middleton (1983) suggested two pure types of boards characteristic of low status and high status organizations and called for research on ways in which the status composition of boards affects their willingness to engage in conflict and their organizations' abilities to adapt to environmental changes. Provan (1980) examined the effect of board power on the ability to raise funds and found a positive correlation between board power and the ability to **maintain** funding but no correlation between board power and the ability to **increase** funding. Both these studies call for further applied research.

### **B. Business Executives as Board Members**

Unterman and Davis (1982) found that business executives on boards often fail to apply their management expertise to the nonprofit setting, especially in the strategic planning area. Their book, **Strategic Management of Not-for-Profit Organizations** (1984), provides "how-to's" for applying

strategic planning to the sector. Hirsch and Whisler (In press) conducted a comparative study of the ways in which Fortune 500 Directors behave when they sit on nonprofit boards. Their findings should point to methods for improving the effectiveness of trustees.

### **C. Board Training**

Thomas J. Savage (1982) of The Cheswick Center reviewed ten years of board projects and came up with ten common elements crucial to the success of a board development effort: key internal or external events require board action; the chairperson wants a more effective board; the board acts as a unit; a major part of the learning process takes place in a reflective retreat setting; trusteeship principles are learned in case discussion and reflection on actual practice; third party assistance can be essential; effective board development projects improve the ongoing life and governance of the institution; board development itself is an ongoing process; the institution financially commits itself to board development; the board monitors its own performance periodically.

### **III. Personnel Management**

Only three studies fall into this category, a crucial one for managers of nonprofits today. Duvall (1981) compared union and nonunion employees in a hospital and found that union representation elections had not had a significant impact on wages or employer-employee relations. Wiehe (1978) studied role expectations among agency personnel and found more clarity of role expectations among executive directors than among other staff and board, suggesting what is perhaps a general educational need in the sector. Hellwig (1978) surveyed 83 nonprofit organizations and found only seven which reported having incentive compensation programs (bonuses, etc.) for employees. The experiences of the seven caused the author to conclude that well-

constructed merit increases and incentive plans have the potential for tying rewards to performance and could help nonprofits increase the effective use of their resources.

#### **IV. Financial Management**

Like personnel management, this important area was also short of applied research studies. In one study, Drtina (1984) listed the types of information needed to assess the financial performance of nonprofits and found that the data necessary for expanded scope audits is frequently missing. In another study, Reynolds (1981) investigated the role of information reported by voluntary health and welfare organizations in the decision-making processes of resource providers and found audited financial statements to be the most important source of information for all funding groups. A current study by the Council on Foundations and the Urban Institute of investment policies and practices among foundations could prove helpful to other nonprofits with investment portfolios. (This study was mentioned by Elizabeth Boris of the Council on Foundations in a telephone conversation on 6-25-85).

#### **V. Fund Raising Management**

The studies found in this area fall into the following broad categories:

##### **A. Donor Motivations**

Morgan, Dye, and Hybels (1977) compiled results from two national surveys of philanthropic activity. Among the most interesting of their findings was that givers of time also give more money. An informal survey by the Philanthropic Advisory Service of the Better Business Bureau (Killeforth, 1982) probed donor attitudes toward giving, accountability, and how donations ought to be used. Among the findings were that the vast majority of respondents (84%) felt that no less than 70% of their donation should go to program services. Three-fifths (62%) of the respondents indicated they

intended to look more closely at charities before donating in the future.

Chewning (1984) surveyed the attitudes of alumni donors and non-donors at Drake University and found that consistent communication with alumni was an important factor in obtaining donations while tax considerations and successful athletic programs were not. Richardson (1985) studied the motivation for individual giving among the 18 to 35 age group and found that people give to specific groups because of familiarity, habit, and nature of the appeal. Antonsen (in press) found a wide variance among employees at Honeywell, Inc. regarding the extent of their giving to United Way and analyzed this variance. Among her findings were that people who gave less felt more pressure to give and responded negatively to that pressure. No significant relationship was found between what people gave to United Way and what they gave to other causes.

Another study, a cooperative effort between the Council on Foundations and the Program on Nonprofit Organizations at Yale, is studying motivations for giving among wealthy donors. (This study was mentioned by Elizabeth Boris of the Council on Foundations in a telephone conversation on 6-25-85.) In addition, United Way of America and its local affiliates are engaged in ongoing efforts to measure opinions about and attitudes toward fund raising among donors. (These studies were mentioned by Dr. Russy Sumariwalla of United Way of America in a telephone conversation on 6-20-85.) Findings of all of the above studies could improve the fund raising and marketing efforts of a variety of nonprofit organizations.

#### **B. Corporate Giving**

Anderson (1983) surveyed attitudes of executives of major corporations toward corporate philanthropy, with emphasis on support of colleges and universities. He also suggested actions drawn from the results to improve

marketing strategies. Pollvy (1985) examined payroll deduction options at six large corporations that have allowed their employees to make gifts to non-United Way charities and found that allowing employees a greater choice of beneficiaries may stimulate more giving. Paterson (1981) conducted an exploratory study of giving by high technology firms in Massachusetts for United Way of Massachusetts Bay. He found that high turnover in these firms made continuous education about United Way important and that motivations for giving centered around the appeal of a united campaign and the perception of self-interest by individual employees (supporting services of use to them and their families).

#### **C. United Way**

Two studies by people outside United Way could prove useful to United Way-funded organizations or those attempting to become United Way agencies. Pfeffer (1977) found that United Funds are most dependent on those of their member agencies which can raise the most outside money since such agencies, if they withdrew from the Fund, could conduct effective competing drives. Pollvy (1982) identified motivating and impeding forces leading to decisions on new agency admission for eight local United Way organizations. Motivating factors included increased annual campaign revenues, external pressure, and the existence of competing campaigns; the principal impeding factor was lack of support for admissions by current member agencies of United Way.

#### **D. Fund Raising Cost Percentage**

Levis and New (1982) tested the use of information on average gift size and cost per gift as a supplement to the fund raising cost percentage as an indicator of cost-effectiveness in fund raising. Their findings suggest that an organization's fund raising effectiveness can be best determined by comparing its fund raising cost percentage to that of organizations with similar average



gift size. Grimes (1977) found that there are causative factors unrelated to abuse or fraud for variations in the fund raising cost percentage among charitable organizations and that the method of soliciting the public is the prime influence on the efficiency of fund raising efforts. Steinberg (1983) suggested that a level of fund raising should be selected such that an additional dollar devoted to fund raising would bring in exactly a dollar of additional donations. These studies are suggestive of further applied research agendas to enlighten the debate about this important and controversial issue.

#### **E. Techniques of Fund Raising**

A series of three studies used experimental designs to test different approaches to solicitation with emphasis on the effect of legitimizing small donations. Claidini and Schroeder (1976) found that saying "even a penny will help" increased compliance with requests for money from suburban homeowners but did not affect average donation size. Reingen (1978) found that requests preceded by either a smaller request or an extreme request produced greater compliance than a simple request and found that adding "even a penny will help" produced greater compliance but smaller average donations. Brockner (1984) found that adding "even a dollar will help" or "even five dollars will help" yielded higher frequencies of compliance (with a pledge, not an immediate cash gift) than a simple request and also found that frequency of compliance was greater in face-to-face contact than in phone contact.

In other studies of the effectiveness of fund raising techniques, Block and Goodman (1976) compared the effectiveness of "other-centered" and "self-centered" fund raising campaigns in 99 corporations and found the "self-centered" approach more effective. Moore (1982) tested the effectiveness of "ad-like" communications for the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society and found that message appeals do have an effect on

subsequent belief structures, attitudes, and intentions to give. A study reported by Fink (1983) of the deferred giving program at Pomona University found that it is possible to estimate the cost-benefit ratio of a planned giving program and that the ultimate cost to obtain dollar benefit was much higher than expected.

It is important to note that applied research testing different fund raising techniques goes on informally every day in direct mail houses which test different mail packages and in development offices where the effectiveness of different approaches is measured. However, the results of this research are seldom made public and would often be too situation-specific to be of general use.

## **VI. Evaluation**

Studies evaluating the effectiveness of services are mainly interesting as examples of methodology, especially since qualitative evaluation is so difficult to do in the nonprofit sector. Bleach and Claiborn (1974), in evaluating hotline telephone crisis centers, used role-playing callers to telephone volunteer phone counselors and analyzed taped calls for information and counseling value. Chung (1981) compared a group of patients matched with volunteers to a control group not matched with volunteers in evaluating the effectiveness of a volunteer intervention model in helping chronically mentally disabled patients adjust to community placement. To evaluate the services of a family counseling agency, Dailey and Ives (1978) analyzed interviews of clients whose cases had been recently closed and correlated the degree of change with 18 variables.

Vigilante and Kantrow (1977), in evaluating the Community Service Society of New York, set forth a useful framework for evaluating agencies on five characteristics derived from conventional wisdom: responding to

community needs; developing innovative programs; emphasizing quality over quantity; mobilizing community toward social change; monitoring public social services. Hoerner (in press) is studying the impact of utilizing retirees as volunteers in secondary vocational education programs. He will measure the knowledge and skills attained by students assisted by volunteers and the attitudes of the volunteers.

Another evaluation study could be of use to evaluators in increasing the chances that their results will be used. Theiss (1983) tested hypotheses about the factors which increase the use of evaluation recommendations at the agency level and found that recommendations are most likely to be used if they directly address agencies' effectiveness concerns, if the agency has the structural capacity to implement them, and if there is a minimum of environmental resistance to their use.

There are probably many more evaluation studies sitting on agency shelves which a literature search would not uncover. Foundations and government agencies which have funded evaluation studies would be a good source of information in this area.

## **VII. Survival and Change**

The issues of evolution and survival in nonprofits are important ones today, and several studies address that concern. In studying six social service agencies, two of which had gone out of business, Hopkins (1983) found that agencies which cooperated with relevant forces in the environment were more likely to survive than agencies primarily concerned with ideological commitments to certain organizational structures and delivery of services to a very clearly identified population. Bycer (1981) studied the YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago from 1937 through 1976, during which the organization underwent a major transition in form. Her findings point out the need to

embed organizational values in everyday workings to preserve organizational character. Milofsky and Romo (1981) identified seven funding arenas from which community self-help organizations receive funds (non-local government sources; local government sources; corporate, financial and business elite groups; foundations; local ethnic, civic and religious organizations; local federated fund drives; independent fund raising by the organization). They found that the rules are different from one arena to another and that community organizations must change or adapt their structures and perhaps the values which govern their organizations when they change funding arenas.

Three studies not yet published are also focusing on survival and growth. Thompson (In press) is studying the termination or dissolution of nonprofits as a result of financial adversity, focusing on museums. Galaskiewicz (In press) is examining strategies used by nonprofits which received funding from governmental sources prior to 1981 to adapt to shifts in income. Strategies examined include employment of professional fund raising personnel, establishing of interlocking directorates, use of resource exchange networks, and generating revenue through fees and sale of goods. Wernet (In press) is investigating why some private, nonprofit human service organizations adapt and grow within turbulent environmental conditions while others stagnate and decay. He will identify specific organizational and leadership factors which contribute to the successful adaptation and survival of a human service organization.

## **VII. Management Decisions**

This catch-all category includes several studies which might be helpful to managers in specific program or administrative decisions:

### **A. Strategic Planning:**

Crittenden (1982) studied strategic planning in 303 nonprofit organiza-

tions and found that appropriate selection of specific planning elements within the planning apparatus may be dependent on existing organizational characteristics. Vogel (in press) is studying the role of strategic planning for small human service organizations to help alleviate problems of short-term uncertainty.

#### **B. Information Management:**

Seville (1983) studied users' information needs in health and welfare organizations. Among other things, she suggests that external reports should contain program information and should have two formats: a summarized section for wide circulation and a detailed section with limited circulation but easy accessibility.

#### **C. Constituent Involvement**

Cole (1980) reported the results of interviews with staff, trustees, and client representatives of twelve nonprofits permitting or experimenting with some degree of constituent involvement in their decision-making processes. His results suggest that success or failure of client involvement depends on an organization's ability to overcome periods of frustration and confrontation.

#### **D. For-Profit Activity**

In a study of nonprofit organizations' involvement in for-profit activity, Crimmins and Keil (1983) found that successful nonprofit enterprise usually involves working with assets an organization already has at its disposal. They concluded that the executive director of a nonprofit organization is the single most important influence on whether the institution engages in successful enterprise activities.

In another study, Nielsen (1984) presented a case history of fifteen organizations which have used market piggybacking (establishing a profitable position in a market unrelated or marginally related to an institution's primary

mission in order to self-subsidize the socially worthwhile but deficit producing primary mission). He concluded that nonprofits should carefully consider their circumstances and balance possible positive and negative effects before proceeding with this strategy.

#### **E. Purchase of Service Contracting**

Kramer (1982) summarized the advantages and disadvantages to nonprofits of contracting with government agencies to provide services for those agencies. Advantages include enlarged scope of services, relatively secure income, and enhanced community status while disadvantages include the gap between actual costs and government reimbursement, the increased requirements for fiscal and program accountability, and the loss of organizational independence. Maypole (1979) studied the impact of purchase of service contracts on eight agencies which had Title XX contracts and found no clear negative impact trends on internal production factors. Positive impact trends were found on overall budget, contracted program staff, and contracted program client numbers.

#### **VIII. Executive Competencies**

Heimovics and Herman (in press) are seeking to identify general competencies associated with successful and less successful performance of executives in nonprofit organizations. They are using the "critical incidents" technique in interviewing a group of executives identified by reputation as effective and comparing that group with a control group to see if the effective managers show different skills.

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

Applied empirical research in this field is in its infancy. People have been studying volunteers and volunteerism for some time, but nonprofit

management *per se* is a very recent and limited area of concentration. The studies which meet the definition of applied empirical research are dwarfed by those not included because of their basic and theoretical nature. There is, of course, a great deal of "how to" literature in the field, but most is not based on solid research. There is certainly a need for the type of research that could complement the anecdotal material and help nonprofit managers become more informed decision makers.

This is not to disparage basic research or, for that matter, the how-to literature based on the experience of talented practitioners. Several of the people interviewed for the project stressed the need for a theoretical base in the field, and many of the studies not included are very important to the knowledge base and professionalism of nonprofit management. But other organizations are doing basic research, so a concentration on applied research at the Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management at USF makes excellent sense. To be the manager of a nonprofit today is to be in a perilous position, and there is a critical need for studies which can be of immediate help to managers not only in running their organizations more effectively but also in insuring their very survival.

### **Part III: RESEARCH PRIORITIES**

It is evident from the many subjects mentioned by those interviewed in Part I of this paper and the limited number of studies found in Part II that much remains to be researched in the nonprofit sector. From all the possible priorities, this paper will suggest eight on which the Institute for Nonprofit Management at USF could concentrate. Reasons for the selection of each priority are included. The priorities are not listed in preferential order but are considered to be of equal importance.

#### **Priority #1: Financial Management**

Only three studies were found in the literature search, yet many financial management research questions were posed by the people interviewed. Financial management is an area where many executives are weak since they often reached administrative positions through professional training (social work, etc.) and lack knowledge of accounting, budgeting, and related subjects. Financial reporting in nonprofit organizations has been found to lack uniformity and to be inadequate for expanded audits (see p. 10 above). The suggestions of interviewees listed on page 24 contain a number of issues for applied research: effective use of the tools of financial analysis; methods of cost containment; designing appropriate fee structures; using loans and investments; analyzing indirect costs; standardizing accounting principles.

A further reason for financial management to be a priority is the current financial state of the nonprofit sector. With government cutbacks, nonprofits are facing the need to serve more people with fewer resources. Thus, better management of finances is an absolute necessity, and applied research that could help managers improve their performance in this area would be a real service to the sector.



## **Priority #2: Personnel Management**

Personnel questions were often mentioned as priorities by those interviewed, yet only three studies were found in the literature search. There was great interest among interviewees in how to draw good people to the sector and how to retain them. There was concern about how nonprofits "use people up" with low salaries, long hours, and personnel policies contrary to the human services orientation of the sector. There was also interest in designing incentive and compensation programs that would work within the unique financial constraints of the sector.

In the experience of many people in the field, personnel management often takes a back seat to service provision. That may be appropriate, but effective management of personnel is certainly crucial to effective service delivery, and the strength of that connection is sometimes missed by managers. Applied research that would help to improve the performance of administrators in the personnel management area could greatly improve the stability and effectiveness of the sector in providing services to clients and communities.

## **Priority #3: Funding the Sector**

Compared to financial and personnel management, fund raising is an area in which more research has been done. Yet the new emphasis on fund raising by almost all nonprofits suggests that the need for more research is crucial. Interviewees suggested continued research on the fund raising cost percentage and the motivations of donors. Another practical suggestion dealt with fund raising feasibility studies. With greatly increased competition for individual, corporate, and foundation funds, any applied research that could help organizations improve their effectiveness in fund raising would be enormously helpful. Studies which assessed the feasibility of different methods or the potential for giving in various communities could help nonprofits be more

efficient in their fund raising efforts.

Little research was found on **alternative funding sources**, yet this area is becoming more and more important as nonprofits seek new ways to make up the difference between government or foundation funding and actual costs. Studies of for-profit activity are beginning to appear (see p. 17), but many more could be done to help assess the effectiveness of this kind of undertaking for various groups and the essential elements needed for success. Other areas suggested by those interviewed include the use of program related investments, incentives for cost containment, and loan guarantees. Research on fee-generating services and the effect that raising fees has on poor clientele would also be helpful to managers and boards making decisions in this area.

#### **Priority #4: Boards of Directors**

Studies on Boards of Directors tended to be descriptive and to focus on boards with high status members such as business executives. People interviewed suggested a number of important research questions related to the effectiveness of boards: how do they actually behave (as opposed to how models and by-laws say they should); how have they adapted to increased fund raising responsibilities; what size board is most effective, which recruitment and evaluation techniques work best, and so on.

Boards are under increased pressures and increased scrutiny. Any research that would help them perform more effectively would be welcome. This is especially true for community boards of small to medium-sized organizations without high status members, since most models of board development have been created by universities, hospitals, and cultural institutions whose boards tend to be made up of community leaders. Research which clarified the appropriate roles of board members and staff during various phases of development in nonprofit organizations would also be helpful.

### **Priority #5: Strategic Planning**

Studies of strategic planning in nonprofits have begun to appear (see pp. 16-17), but much more should be done in this area. This need is underscored by the Untermann and Davis study (see p. 8), which found that boards often fail in strategic planning despite the presence of business executives.

How to do strategic planning well was a priority raised by several interviewees. Another suggested topic was how theories of stages of development relate to nonprofits and what interventions are appropriate at which stages. Research that could answer these questions would be enormously helpful to boards and managers in their decision-making processes. Strategic planning is also an important topic as organizations attempt to identify their niche in an increasingly competitive environment and as they consider mergers or collaborative efforts with other nonprofits.

### **Priority #6: Evaluation**

Several studies evaluating the effectiveness of specific programs were cited on p. 14 of this paper, but only one (Vigilate and Kantrow) was found which set forth a general framework for agency evaluation. No studies comparable to *In Search of Excellence* for the nonprofit sector were located. Several interviewees suggested that profiles of effective organizations, boards, and managers are needed. Several also mentioned the importance of defining performance outcome measures and evaluating the quality of service delivery. Research that could define characteristics of effective organizations and become a model for evaluating service delivery would greatly strengthen the sector.

### **Priority #7: Technical Assistance Provision**

No studies related to the provision of technical assistance were found, yet this area is of growing importance in the field. Several interviewees

suggested that studies to answer the following questions were a priority: how can technical assistance and management consulting be improved; how can organizations use outside professionals effectively, how effective are business volunteers in providing technical assistance?

Research on technical assistance at USF makes further sense for two reasons: it is a new and, therefore, wide-open area for study, and it relates to the Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management's educational orientation. Providing technical assistance is one way education is brought to organizations, and the quality of technical assistance by various types of providers has implications for the education of managers and consultants in the field.

#### **Priority #8: Education of Managers**

As with technical assistance, there were no studies found on the effectiveness of management training, yet much interest in such studies was expressed by those interviewed. Questions asked were quite fundamental: what is good management training in the sector, should we train generalists or turn professionals into managers, what would a quality internship look like? With so many new programs opening at colleges and universities, research to determine the most effective ways to educate managers seems very timely. It is also a natural for USF's Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management to encourage research that could lead to improvement of its M.P.A./N.O.M. program.

#### **Conclusion**

These eight topics are the recommended first priorities for applied research at USF. Studies in these areas could make a significant contribution to the practice of management in the nonprofit sector.

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## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

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