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VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS: MEMBERSHIP ATTRITION  
AND STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

THESIS

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The problem of this research was to investigate David Sills' explanation of membership attrition in voluntary associations. Using the membership population of the Dallas Association for Retarded Citizens from 1969 through 1974, a survey was conducted to determine whether the organizational characteristics of bureaucracy, minority rule, and goal displacement are associated with membership attrition in a selected voluntary association. The findings of this study support Sills' ideas about the association of goal displacement and minority rule with membership attrition in voluntary associations. Bureaucratization, however, was not found to be related to membership attrition.

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## CHAPTER I

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Voluntary associations in the United States began during the Colonial period as the informal response of groups of people who volunteered to assist others with unmet human needs. Early voluntary agencies were formed for a variety of reasons: some groups sought to supplement inadequate governmental services; many religious groups wished to provide assistance to others within the framework of the church; still other groups wanted to provide help to special segments in the population (36, p. 21). By the first part of the nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that associations were widespread.

Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive, . . . If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society. Whenever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association (43, p. 106).

Historians and political theorists have noted the continuing development of voluntary associations in the United States. Charles and Mary Beard discussed the impact of voluntary associations on American life in The Rise of American Civilization. They wrote:

It was a rare American who was not a member of four or five societies. . . . Any citizens who refused to affiliate with one or more associations became an object of curiosity, if not of suspicion (3, p. 731).

James Bryce observed that voluntary associations play an important part in developing public opinion:

If it be true that individuality is too weak in the country, strong and self-reliant statesmen or publicists too few, so much the greater is the value of their habit of forming associations, for it creates new centers of force and motion, and nourishes young causes and unpopular doctrines into self-confident aggressiveness (8, p. 238).

Oscar and Mary Handlin remarked that the efforts of voluntary associations often entailed waste, inefficiency, and the duplication of effort; they concluded, however, that these costs were outweighed by the benefits provided by voluntary structures.

That the voluntary association sometimes served the ends of the state was less important than the fact it also offered society an alternative to it. By facilitating collective activity of all sorts, freedom of association enabled men to dispense with coercion and also encouraged an active rather than a passive attitude. It was not necessary to wait for the initiative of a higher authority in the face of the need for action; Americans knew how to set themselves going (16, p. 112).

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., believed that voluntary associations perform several vital functions: such groups train individuals in democratic self-government, help integrate the nation, provide a safety valve for tensions and ambitions generated by modern life, educate the public, and promote social reform (34). He also believed that the growth of associations in our history has been stimulated by the rise of cities.

Christopher Sower has observed that the belief in voluntary action in America has been a distinguishing feature of the American community (47, p. 57). Stenzel agrees, and he maintains that basic to the democratic tradition is the idea that voluntary service be offered in one way or another for the good of the community (41). From the studies of nonsecret fraternal orders, Gist concluded that organized fraternalism with its emphasis on mutual aid and good will, is a logical counterpart of the development of liberalism and democracy as a philosophic doctrine and way of life (14, p. 72). Naylor discussed the imponderable gift of service as being an essential part of the American culture (28, p. 19), and Hecksher feels that voluntary associations help us to preserve our core of idealism and keep us from being dehumanized (28, p. 20).

Laski has defined the principle of the freedom of association as "a recognized legal right on the part of all persons to combine for the promotion of purposes in which

they are interested" (22, p. 447). According to Laski, the right to association stems from John Lock's Letter Concerning Toleration (22, p. 449). Locke believed that the individual has a natural right to associate and, thus, needs no permission from government to exercise this right. On the contrary, civil society has an obligation to protect this right and must limit it only when it is clearly necessary to do so (40, p. 38). Locke's ideas were in opposition to those of Hobbs, probably the foremost advocate of the view that groups are a threat to the state. According to Hobbs, groups have no natural right to exist; they exist by virtue of the sovereign's concession (30). Although our Founding Fathers were somewhat distrustful of private groups and viewed them as necessary evils, they agreed with Locke and provided for the legal right to freedom of association via the Constitution. Over the years, a constitutional law of associations has developed.

Voluntary associations have been a part of the American tradition. Their continuing development has been noted in historical literature and political theory. Their right to exist is based on the right of freedom of association which is inherent in a democratic society. Voluntary associations are an integral part of our cultural heritage.

The remainder of this chapter includes a discussion of the types of studies that have been conducted of voluntary

associations, major issues related to the study of voluntary associations, and the hypothesis of David Sills concerning membership attrition in voluntary associations.

#### Types of Studies

The preceding section of this paper has established that historians and political theorists have noted the existence of voluntary associations throughout American history and have agreed that such associations are a part of democratic tradition. Other scholars have completed a variety of studies of voluntary associations. Researchers, however, have not established the field of voluntary associations as a separate and autonomous discipline.

That the study of voluntary associations is not a separate field with unique distinguishing concepts and orientations or with a generally acceptable theory for the analysis of associations is due in part to the lack of a standardized operational definition of voluntary associations. It is difficult to make comparative analyses without such a definition to facilitate replication and comparison of studies of voluntary associations. David Sills proposed the following definition which contains three key elements:

A voluntary association is an organized group of persons (1) that is formed in order to further some common interest of its members; (2) in which membership is voluntary in the sense that it is neither mandatory nor acquired through birth; and (3) that exists independently of the state (37, p. 363).

Exceptions to the definition do, in fact, exist. For example, membership in some labor unions or professional groups may be a condition of employment and thus not purely voluntary. Also, inherited membership in a church or a family society occurs. However, Sills feels that his definition is adequate and generally applicable despite certain exceptions (37, p. 363).

Studies of voluntary associations exist in the literature of several major disciplines. Sociologists have emphasized the functions of voluntary associations; formal organization scholars have focused upon the organizational processes of voluntary associations; and social psychologists have been interested in voluntary associations as an environment of individual persons. "For the most part, one finds a series of largely unrelated hypotheses dealing with various aspects of voluntary associations and with participation in them" (40, p. 1).

Some researchers have attempted to classify voluntary associations in typological terms: by size, internal structure, degree of outside control, societal function, source of support, location, membership characteristics, and intimacy of contact among members (40, p. 2). For example, Blau and Scott have divided formal organizations, including voluntary organizations, into four types according to the beneficiary of the association's activities:

"mutual-benefit associations" seek to satisfy their membership; "service organizations" provide help for their clients; "common-wealth associations" benefit the public-at-large; and "business associations" benefit their owners

(6). Arnold Rose believed that two basic types of voluntary associations exist: "expressive groups" and "social influence associations." "Expressive groups" act to satisfy or express interests which the members have. Members of these groups have interests which are "in relation to themselves," and they include such organizations as hobby clubs, sports associations, and scientific societies.

"Social influence associations" concentrate their efforts on the society in order to bring about some condition in a limited segment of the social order. All types of health and welfare associations are included in the latter category (32, pp. 50-71).

Babchuk and Gordon have classified organizations as "expressive," "instrumental," and "instrumental-expressive." Within each of the three categories, the groups are classified according to their status and accessibility. According to this nomenclature, for example, the Daughters of the American Revolution would be typed as an expressive association having high status and low accessibility. In contrast, instrumental associations provide a service, produce a product, or serve to maintain or create some normative condition (2). Lundberg has made a similar distinction

between types of groups; he contrasts "leisure" organizations, whose activities are ends in themselves, with "instrumental" organizations, whose ends are means to a valued goal (23, p. 126). Jacoby and Babchuk have designed a study to test the utility of the instrumental-expressive typology. They conclude that:

The evidence clearly supports the unidimensionality of the instrumental-expressive continuum applied to voluntary groups and suggests the validity of this framework. Members of voluntary groups appear in high agreement with each other regarding the objectives of the organizations of which they are members. Furthermore, such objectives are important in attracting members to join and participate in voluntary associations (20, pp. 461-471).

Other scholars have investigated the distinction between manifest and latent functions of associations. Warner has said that some women's groups "pose as civic clubs, organized to wrestle with a local community problem," while the real attraction for the members is the network of social relationships in which they are engaged (46, p. 123). Myra Minnis came to a similar conclusion about the New Haven organization that she studied. Although the group had a variety of stated, or manifest, objectives, the really important functions of the group were the latent, social benefits enjoyed by the members.

The basic purpose of the organization thus appears to be a human need for group association and the sharing of common experience, even though ideationally and practically these organizations may accomplish other goals (26, p. 103).

These examples of typological studies indicate to some extent the variety of classification schemes that have been used in the study of voluntary associations. As the next section of this chapter will indicate, however, a number of researchers have focused attention on the structural characteristics of voluntary associations.

### Major Issues

A review of the literature reveals that some researchers are concerned with the issues of bureaucracy, minority rule, and goal conflict in voluntary associations. These structural characteristics of voluntary associations often are viewed as inevitable and problematic.

### Bureaucratization

Gerald Bell believes that contemporary American society rests upon large bureaucratic organizations.

Let's face it. We are organization men. We are born in hospitals, educated in elementary, junior high, and high schools, colleges, and universities. While being educated we join clubs, fraternity and sorority organizations -- from the Boy Scouts to athletic teams. When we leave college we then usually devote a few years to the military and about forty years to a firm in order to maintain our livelihood. Throughout the years of our work life we tend to join unions, professional associations, community clubs, and societies. We spend our final days in hospitals and rest homes and then are buried by well-organized funeral establishments (4, p. 75).

The implication of this statement is that large organizations control lives. Although Weber saw the bureaucratic

organization as technically superior to all other forms of administration, he carefully noted the dysfunctions of a bureaucratic system. Weber felt that bureaucracy was unwieldy and incapable of dealing with individual particularities. He believed that bureaucratization leads to depersonalization and that man would in the future be imprisoned in an iron cage of his own making (11, p. 232).

Chapin has hypothesized that bureaucratic tendencies are present in all social institutions and that a process of formalization may be seen in the history of voluntary organizations in American culture. Chapin realized that bureaucratization means conformity for the individual. He wrote:

(a) voluntary associations develop (sometimes spontaneously, sometimes planned) to satisfy some need; and (b) voluntary organizations having once started their life career, grow and gain momentum toward formalization of structure. As growth in size of membership proceeds, structure subdivides into subgroups of smaller size and with different functions. Attitudes of members then become conditioned to the norms of the groups (often embodied in codes) that stipulate the expected behaviors, to the symbols of the authority and the function of the organization, and to its physical property. An increasing emphasis on conformity and status develops and the voluntary organization begins to have traditions. In short, the process of growth and formalization has run its course and the original "voluntary" organization has become a full-fledged institution (9, pp. 342-344).

After conducting studies of voluntary associations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, Chapin and Tseuderros concluded that the process of formalization is general and uniform in

character and accompanies the growth of an organization's membership (9, p. 344). As used by Tsouderos, the concept of formalization is essentially the same as that of bureaucratization (37, p. 367).

Wendell King identifies the development of voluntary associations as an example of a social movement. His conclusions are drawn in the main from the histories of the Grange, the Christian Science religion, and the Ku Klux Klan. King identifies three distinct phases in the life cycle of voluntary associations as social movements:

. . . the incipient phase, in which a handful of believers work toward a goal established by the founder (often a charismatic leader); the organizational phase, in which voluntary associations are established; and the stable phase, in which voluntary associations (if they survive) become increasingly professionalized, bureaucratic, and conservative (21, p. 67).

If one accepts King's identification of voluntary associations with social movements, the inevitability of bureaucratization in voluntary associations becomes a logical conclusion and the problems of bureaucracy become the problems of the association.

Scholars are generally agreed that bureaucratization implies professionalization. Yet, various researchers, including Blau and Scott, see a fundamental conflict between the governing principles of professionals and the governing principles of bureaucratic organizations. First, the professional is bound by a norm of service and a code of ethics

to serve the clients, whereas the bureaucrat is bound by a responsibility to promote the interests of his organization. Second, the authority of the professional is rooted in his acknowledged expertise while the authority of the bureaucrat rests on a legal contract. Third, bureaucratic decisions are often based on administrative considerations while professional decisions are based on professionalized standards. Blau and Scott have found that even semi-professional workers in a public assistance agency differed on the basis of their orientation to the organization or their orientation to the profession of social work (6, p. 176).

#### Minority Rule

More than fifty years ago, Max Weber observed that:

In every . . . organization, whether it be called a party, a society, a club, or whatever, authority in effect always takes the form of minority rule -- sometimes the dictatorship of an individual. It is the rule of one or more persons who are qualified by a process of selection or by virtue of their competence to assume the tasks of leadership and who have de facto authority in the organization (48, p. 56).

Sills believes that membership inactivity and non-participation is related to minority rule in voluntary associations and has summarized observations and research findings of various social scientists to support his contention. He suggests an impressive array of determinants which limit the possibility of active participation,

including organizational structure, large number of members, membership heterogeneity, absence of consensus, conflicts with other interests, formalization, minority rule, availability of time, absence of concrete tasks, and leadership requirements. Sills maintains that minority rule is not in keeping with the democratic process. "Since voluntary associations can exist only in societies in which freedom of association prevails, and since such societies are usually democratically oriented, it is expected that democratic procedures will govern the conduct of voluntary associations" (37, p. 369). Although most voluntary associations have constitutions, bylaws, or oral traditions that call for full participation by the members, and although representatives who are empowered to speak for their constituencies are selected through the process of elections, full participation in even the basic activity of voting for representatives is not even approximated (37, p. 370).

In his study of American voluntary associations, Segal noted limitations on participation in voluntary agencies during the depression years and particularly following 1933. During these years, he saw an increased professional self-awareness and a development of standards in the voluntary agencies. Volunteers were finding fewer opportunities to work with the clients. As agencies became more professionalized, direct service opportunities became more limited.

Social work unions were protecting the jobs of their members by insisting the volunteers have specialized training before being permitted to work with clients. Public agency workers were afraid of losing their jobs to the trained volunteers (36, p. 22).

In a recent study, Segal analyzed membership participation in four voluntary associations. Results indicated that the majority of the members (1) held membership for less than five years, (2) attended meetings irregularly, (3) did not serve on committees, (4) did not volunteer to work for the association, (5) were members of other civic groups, and (6) never voted in the association's business. These data indicate that the general membership does not participate in the routine activities of the association. Segal contends that this is usually the pattern that emerges for the general membership of most associations (36, pp. 60-61).

The tendency of organizations to develop internally nondemocratic structures as they grow older is generally accepted as fact by social scientists (40, p. 49). Robert Michels laid down his "iron law of oligarchy" several decades ago, and it is a well-established proposition, applicable to all types of organizations. Essentially the law is stated:

Organization implies the tendency to oligarchy. In every organization, whether it be a political party, a professional union, or any other association of the kind, the aristocratic tendency

manifests itself very clearly. The mechanism of the organization, while conferring a solidarity of structure, induces serious changes in the organized mass, completely inverting the respective position of the leaders and the led. As a result of organization, every party or professional union becomes divided into a minority of directors and a majority of directed (25, p. 32).

An oligarchy may retain power for many years without any significant challenge to its reign. In a study dealing with the League of Women Voters, Tannenbaum tested various hypotheses concerning the relationship between the control structure of an organization and the organization's effectiveness. Despite the League's long standing democratic ideology, he found that the same group of members in the average local league tended to remain leaders and to exercise more control than the members did as a group. The Leagues differed only in the degree of "oligarchy" they exhibited; they were never without some "oligarchy" (42, pp. 33-46).

Structural factors such as specialization and a hierarchy of authority, which develop to allow the organization to deal more effectively with its environment, contribute to the development of oligarchy too. Those filling the positions in the hierarchy acquire skills, knowledge, and a personal interest in maintaining their positions. These characteristics differentiate them from the average member and make it possible for them to retain their positions (40, p. 59).

Minority rule can be a source of dissatisfaction for members who feel that they have little chance to influence decisions, express their opinions, or ask for change. Members may feel that their participation is neither wanted nor needed. Doby remarks that people in power positions tend to emphasize the maintenance of power and a general resistance to change (12, p. 405).

#### Goal Displacement

Some researchers have focused attention on the relationship of the organization's goals to other aspects of the organization's existence. Associational charters usually contain a statement of organizational goals. For a variety of reasons, however, an association may not be pursuing its originally stated goals. Goals of an association may already be attained, they may be deemed inappropriate by a changing membership population, they may be rendered useless by societal changes, or they may be subverted by organizational procedures which become ends instead of means.

Studies of individual organizations have revealed the relationship of organizational goals to other aspects of organizational life. Sills' book on the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, The Volunteers, probably is the most outstanding of the individual studies. Grounded solidly in theory and method, his study was concerned chiefly with the relationships between the characteristics of the

organization's members and the organization's internal structure and success in achieving its goals. Sills specifically dealt with the problem of goal succession in organization. He concluded that "structural constraints in the organization" and "acceptance on the part of the community" may be crucial variables in determining whether goal succession (the adoption of new goals) or goal displacement (the process in which the means become ends having value in themselves) occur within an association (38, p. 198).

Other scholars have studied the process of adaptation in voluntary associations. The Young Men's Christian Association, like the National Foundation, was able to adapt to environmental change. When its original goals became irrelevant, it was able to redefine its objectives. Owen Pence described the increasing secularization of the YMCA in response to the increasing secularization of society. The organization gradually de-emphasized its original goal of improving the spiritual and moral condition of young men and instead stressed recreational and social goals (29). Zald and Denton analyzed the effect of various organizational features of the YMCA on the adaptability of the organization. They concluded that the structural characteristics of the YMCA were conducive to the transformation process. They explained that the federated structure of the organization led to decentralized decision making and

control by local elites. The association was, therefore, highly responsive to the needs of its typically middle-class clientele (54, p. 214).

Schmidt and Babchuk have found that goal succession has been a successful tactic for fraternal associations such as the Elks and Eagles. Contrary to other fraternal orders which have continued to cling to outdated rituals and have steadily lost membership, these two groups have dropped the old ceremonies and reoriented their goals and programs toward providing fun and entertainment in a club type atmosphere. As a result, these two associations have thrived in the midst of a general decline for fraternal associations (35).

In contrast, neither the Women's Christian Temperance Union nor the Townsend movement was able to adapt its goals successfully to a changing society. The WTCU reacted to the "change in American drinking habits and the increased permissiveness of drinking norms" by shifting its membership, while retaining its original goal of total abstinence. Since such a position no longer was fashionable, the membership declined (15, p. 232). The Townsend movement, on the other hand, did establish new goals when the advent of social security took the urgency from the original goal of national pensions for the aged. The leadership shifted the goal to the marketing of products and the creation of a recreational program for the aged. However, the new

objectives did not succeed, and the organization continued to lose members (24, pp. 3-10).

Scholars generally agree that voluntary associations must be able to shift their goals to accommodate changing societal conditions. The ultimate result of the failure to shift goal orientations will be membership attrition.

Contemporary comments by Wolfensberger in his position paper on "Research on the Dynamics and Effectiveness of Voluntary Associations" stress that the functioning of voluntary associations is by no means random and haphazard. It takes place in a relatively intelligible manner and is therefore relatively understandable and predictable. Wolfensberger concludes that if voluntary associations are to survive, they must have goals relevant to actions occurring externally to the associational confines. Often such goals are difficult to explain to the membership, tend to have long range implications, demand actions which are difficult to explain, and have a true purpose which is not immediately intelligible to the membership. Also, Wolfensberger comments that support for research on voluntary associations has been minuscule. "I am not aware that there has been any long-term systematic and programmatic research effort at any time in the world concerned with this problem" (52, pp. 1-14).

### Membership Attrition

Despite the omnipresence of voluntary associations in American history and in contemporary American society and despite their cultural relevance, scholars are concerned about problems of membership attrition and the viability of such groups in the future. Membership attrition rates are rising, and the resulting instability of the membership population can cause serious problems of associational continuity.

In researching the problem of membership attrition Segal discusses the influence of the Social Security Act of 1935 which established the principle of federal governmental participation in social welfare programs. The act had a great impact upon the role of many voluntary associations in that it relieved the organizations of the necessity of providing financial assistance to the indigent (36, p. 22). Wolfensberger agrees with Segal and has said that "where an extensive service system is completely operated by the public, or by quasi-public bodies, many associations are experiencing severe identity problems. They are no longer certain of their goals" (27, p. 9).

Both Wolfensberger and Naylor are concerned with the future of voluntary associations. Naylor writes:

There is a question whether the voluntary establishment can survive. Paradoxically there seem to be more persons willing to volunteer time and effort on behalf of their committee and fellow

citizens than ever before, and yet it is increasingly harder to find promising volunteers and to hold them until they are able to make a significant contribution to the program of the association (28, p. 12).

Wolfensberger emphasizes that two strong forces are needed if voluntary associations are to maintain their membership population:

. . . the elemental drive of a deeply-felt movement of the spirit in service of a good cause, and a hard-headed use of knowledge and of the ways of the world. This combination is rarely achieved, and more rarely sustained. Yet, in the world of the future, this is what our associations shall need if they are to succeed -- or perhaps even to survive (52, p. 43).

#### David Sills' Hypotheses

With several other scholars, David Sills is seriously concerned about the problems of membership attrition in voluntary associations. Sills believes that membership attrition is associated with specific characteristics of voluntary associations, and he places particular emphasis on the characteristics of bureaucratization, minority rule, and goal displacement (27, p. 3). Specifically, his hypotheses are as follows:

(1) Sills sees a relationship between membership attrition and the formalization or institutionalization of voluntary associations. An association becomes increasingly bureaucratized as it matures. For example, one empirical study of ten voluntary associations indicated two clearly

defined developmental stages: a cycle of growth and a cycle of formalization. The latter cycle is characterized by increasing bureaucratization, declining membership, and declining income (9).

(2) Sills postulates a relationship between membership attrition and minority rule in a voluntary association. While most associations have democratic traditions, governance is delegated to a minority of the membership to secure efficient action and specialized leadership. Such a minority can subvert the energies of the association, fail to adapt to the changing needs of the larger group, and cause a decline in membership (37).

(3) Sills hypothesizes a relationship between membership attrition and goal displacement in an association. The procedures that are established for the accomplishment of the association's goals often become ends in themselves rather than means for the accomplishment of those initial goals. Additionally, in mature organizations, secondary structures are often present with goals that are at cross-purposes with the overall goals of the association (37).

#### Summary

Voluntary associations have been an integral part of American history and culture. Their existence depends upon the right of freedom of association which is essential to the democratic tradition. Despite their omnipresence in

American society and despite the widespread participation of Americans in associations, many such groups function ineffectively or have ceased to function at all. Statistics indicate widely fluctuating membership populations which threaten the stability and survival of this traditional institution in society. After joining associations of their choice, thousands of Americans lose interest and fail to renew their membership.

Although serious problems of membership attrition exist in today's voluntary associations, few attempts have been made to investigate or explain the patterns of attrition or to relate the patterns to organizational characteristics. The assumptions of David Sills regarding the relationship between membership attrition and the presence of goal displacement, minority rule, and bureaucratization in voluntary associations may lend themselves to empirical investigation.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

#### Introduction

Beginning in the Colonial period of American history and continuing to the present time, voluntary associations have been an integral part of American life. Large numbers of people belong to and participate in various kinds of voluntary associations. Some observers argue that the institutions of a free society could not be maintained without the contributions of voluntary associations. Despite the importance of voluntary associations to American life, these structures tend to be fragile in that it is difficult to develop and maintain an active and vigorous membership. Annual rates of membership turnover are high, and membership attrition is a persistent fact of life for voluntary associations. Although a considerable amount of research has been done on voluntary associations, little of it has been focused on the problem of membership attrition. Little is known about the relationship between patterns of membership attrition and the organizational characteristics of voluntary associations.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem of this research was to investigate David Sills' explanation of membership attrition in voluntary associations. An effort was made to determine whether the organizational characteristics of bureaucracy, minority rule, and goal displacement are associated with membership attrition in a selected voluntary association.

### Hypotheses

With the expectation that attrition in voluntary associations is related to the members' perception of and reaction to organizational goals, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis IA: Transient members are less knowledgeable than core members about the goals of voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IB: Transient members agree less than core members with the goals of voluntary associations.

These hypotheses are consistent with the arguments of Sills, Wolfensberger, Segal, and others concerning the effects of goal conflict and goal confusion on membership attrition in voluntary associations. It is assumed that transient members are less likely than core members to understand and to agree with the general and long-range goals of the association. Transient members tend to view short-range goals as ends in themselves rather than as means for the accomplishment of the general goal expectations of the association. Lacking

the perspective and understanding the core members have concerning the primary objectives of the organization, transient members are more likely than core members to lose interest in the association and to choose not to renew their membership.

With the expectation that attrition in voluntary associations is related to the members' perception of a tendency toward minority rule in the organization, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis IIA: Transient members perceive more than core members a tendency toward minority rule in voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IIB: Transient members object more than core members to a tendency toward minority rule in voluntary associations.

These hypotheses are consistent with the arguments of Weber, Michels, Tannenbaum, and others concerning the organizational tendency toward minority rule. Sills considers this organizational tendency in voluntary structures to be related directly to membership attrition. It is assumed that transient members tend more than core members to see themselves as outsiders to the decision-making and operational processes of the association. Transient members perceive that power and authority are centered in a small, elite group to which access is limited. Feeling that their participation is unnecessary and objecting to the domination of the elite group, they are less inclined than core members to renew their membership.

With the expectation that attrition in voluntary associations is related to the members' perception of bureaucratization in the organization, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis IIIA: Transient members perceive more than core members a tendency toward bureaucracy in the operations of voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IIIB: Transient members object more than core members to the tendency toward bureaucracy in the operations of voluntary associations.

These hypotheses are consistent with the ideas of Bell, Chapin, and Tsouderos concerning the tendency of associations to formalize and bureaucratize their operations. Sills believes that the professionalization of formal organizational processes associated with bureaucracy leads to a reduced need for voluntary participation and thus to membership attrition in voluntary associations. It is assumed that transient members are more inclined than core members to see the association as a large, formal, highly-structured, inflexible, impersonal, professionalized organization. Transient members are inclined to perceive goal and program implementation as a well-established process that can be carried out without volunteers. Accordingly, they are less inclined than core members to renew their membership.

## Definitions

### Voluntary Association

For the purpose of this study, David Sills' definition of voluntary association will be used:

A voluntary association is an organized group of persons (1) that is formed in order to further some common interest of its members; (2) in which membership is voluntary in the sense that it is neither mandatory nor acquired through birth; and (3) that exists independently of the state (6, p. 363).

### Organizational Goals

Organizational goals are the primary purposes for which an association is established and maintained. Goals often are recorded in an associational charter or constitution and are reflected in policies and programs of the organization.

### Goal Displacement

Goal displacement is the substitution of short-term goals for long-range organizational objectives. The short-term goals become ends in themselves rather than means for accomplishing the primary objectives of the organization.

### Minority Rule

Minority rule is the domination of organizational decision-making and operational processes by a small segment of the membership.

### Bureaucratization

Bureaucratization in voluntary associations is a process by which a loosely organized group is changed into a formal organization with increasingly professionalized, institutionalized, impersonal, and even inflexible operations.

### Core Members

Core members are members whose names appear on each of the five annual membership rosters examined for this study.

### Transient Members

Transient members are members whose names appear on some but not all of the five annual membership rosters examined for this study.

### Single-year Members

Single-year members are transient members whose names appear on only one of the five annual membership rosters examined for this study.

### Three-Year Members

Three-year members are transient members whose names appear on any three of the five annual membership rosters examined for this study.

### Research Procedures

To examine the relationship between membership attrition in voluntary associations and organizational characteristics

of bureaucracy, minority rule, and goal displacement, the Dallas Association for Retarded Citizens was selected for a case study. The DARC is an affiliate member of the National Association for Retarded Citizens which, through its Organizational Dynamics Committee, has documented a serious pattern of membership attrition in its local units. Analyzing a randomly selected, regionally stratified sample of twenty-four local units, the NARC researchers have determined that annual membership turnover rates range from 10 per cent to 55 per cent and average 35 per cent (4). Although the national population of retarded citizens continues to increase steadily, the membership of NARC and its constituent units continues to decline. Nothing is known about the characteristics or attitudes of the turnover membership in NARC. The influence of organizational characteristics has not even been addressed seriously by NARC.

For a number of reasons, the DARC chapter of NARC is an ideal group with which to conduct a case study of this type. First, it very clearly is a voluntary association according to the operational definition of that term adopted for this research. Second, its membership records are well-organized and reliable. By virtue of the fact that the investigator is Secretary of the organization, its membership data are readily available. Third, having been in

existence for more than twenty years, it is a well-established organization, yet, like so many voluntary associations, it experiences wide annual fluctuations in membership population. Fourth, as the largest local member unit in the state of Texas, it may be regarded as of sufficient size to warrant an intensive examination. Fifth, an intuitive assessment of the organization leads the investigator to believe that the DARC exhibits the structural characteristics of which David Sills speaks and that these structural characteristics may, indeed, be related to patterns of membership attrition. Finally, the Research Committee of the NARC was sufficiently interested in this study to provide financial assistance for the endeavor, and the staff and volunteers of DARC willingly provided secretarial assistance.

Using the membership rosters of the DARC for the five-year period from 1969 through 1974, the members of the population were divided into the categories of core members and transient members. The category of core members included all members whose names appeared on each of the annual membership rosters during the five-year period. Having renewed their membership each year, these persons were not part of the membership attrition from the organization. The category of transient members included all members whose names appeared on at least one but not more than four of the annual membership rosters for the five-year period.

Having failed to renew their membership during one or more of the five years, these persons were part of the membership attrition from the organization. The primary purpose of this study was to compare the responses of core members and transient members. The assumption on which the hypotheses for this research were based was that transient members would be inclined more than core members to misperceive the primary goals of the organization and that they would more readily than core members perceive and object to a tendency in the organization toward minority rule and bureaucracy.

From the category of transient members, data were extracted for single-year members and three-year members. Single-year members are transient members whose names appeared on only one of the five annual membership rosters examined for this study. Three-year members are transient members whose names appeared on any three of the five annual membership rosters examined for the study. It was assumed that a comparison of the responses of single-year members, three-year members, and five-year members (core members) would provide useful, additional data with which to evaluate the research hypotheses. It was anticipated that the responses of members in these three categories would be arranged along a continuum with five-year members representing one end of the continuum, single-year members

representing the opposite end of the continuum, and three-year members representing a response between the two.

To determine the members' perceptions of organizational goals, organizational bureaucracy, and organizational minority rule, a questionnaire was devised by the investigator for this study. The questionnaire included sixteen items, at least two items for each of the six hypotheses under investigation. With a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and providing instructions for completing and returning the instrument, the questionnaire was mailed to each member of the population in February, 1975. Approximately two weeks later, a follow-up reminder was sent to all members of the population urging them to complete and return the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix A; a copy of the cover letter for the initial mailing is included in Appendix B; a copy of the follow-up reminder is included in Appendix C.

Of the 927 questionnaires mailed, 305 were returned; data were collected, therefore, from 33 per cent of the population. One hundred thirty-four core members responded; this number comprised 44 per cent of all responses. One hundred seventy-one transient members responded; this number totaled 56 per cent of all responses. The seventy-five single-year members who responded made up 25 per cent of

the cases included in this study. The thirty-six three-year members who responded constituted 12 per cent of the respondents for this study.

Using frequency and percentage distributions, the data for this study are presented and discussed in the following chapter.

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## CHAPTER III

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of the survey and to provide an assessment of the extent to which the findings support the hypotheses adopted for this research. The chapter is divided into three sections: membership attrition and organizational goals, membership attrition and minority rule, and membership attrition and bureaucratization.

#### Membership Attrition and Organizational Goals

With the expectation that attrition in voluntary associations is related to the members' perception of and reaction to organizational goals, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis IA: Transient members are less knowledgeable than core members about the goals of voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IB: Transient members agree less than core members with the goals of voluntary associations.

To test Hypothesis IA the following questionnaire item was formulated:

DARC is involved in the following kinds of programs. Indicate the two types of programs in which you consider it to be most actively involved at this time.

- Public education and awareness of mental retardation
- Promotion of civil rights legislation for mentally retarded persons
- Operation of direct service programs
- Promotion of special education classes in the public school system
- Promotion of the development of community residential centers for mentally retarded persons
- Promotion of prevention and early discovery research

This question includes six program areas in which the Dallas Association for Retarded Citizens has been working. In recent years, the primary goals of the association clearly have been to promote public education and to establish community residential centers for mentally retarded persons. The response of the members to this question provided a good indication of their knowledge of the current goals of the association. It was expected that core members are more knowledgeable about organizational goals than transient members. The responses to this question are presented in Table I on the following page.

TABLE I  
MEMBERSHIP IDENTIFICATION OF  
ORGANIZATION GOALS

| Program Focus<br>(1) | Core Members<br>N=134<br>(2) |          | Transient Members<br>N=171<br>(3) |          | Three-Year Members<br>N=36<br>(4) |          | One-Year Members<br>N=75<br>(5) |          |
|----------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                      | Number                       | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                          | Per cent |
| a                    | 102                          | 76       | 69                                | 40       | 15                                | 42       | 33                              | 44       |
| b                    | 38                           | 28       | 70                                | 41       | 15                                | 42       | 34                              | 45       |
| c                    | 27                           | 20       | 64                                | 37       | 17                                | 47       | 15                              | 20       |
| d                    | 14                           | 10       | 49                                | 29       | 10                                | 28       | 24                              | 32       |
| e                    | 72                           | 54       | 53                                | 31       | 7                                 | 19       | 27                              | 36       |
| f                    | 15                           | 11       | 37                                | 22       | 6                                 | 17       | 17                              | 23       |

Responses from the two major categories of members indicated that core members were more knowledgeable than transient members about primary goal activities of the association. Seventy-six per cent of the core members selected the goal of public education as a primary focus of the association while only 40 per cent of the transient members chose this objective. Fifty-four per cent of the core respondents recognized community residential services as the second major goal in contrast to 31 per cent of the transient

respondents. Responses from core members, three-year members, and single-year members did not fall along an expected continuum. While 42 per cent of the three-year members recognized public education activities as a primary goal, 44 per cent of the single-year members did so. Similarly, while 19 per cent of the three-year members recognized the promotion of community residential centers as the second primary goal, 36 per cent of the single-year members selected this activity as a major goal. These findings indicate that three-year members were less knowledgeable about the primary goal activities of the association than were single-year members.

Respondents were asked to provide written comments about any aspect of the questionnaire, and certain of these comments lend additional support to Hypothesis IA. For example, one core member who had selected correctly both of the major goals of the association remarked, "Your programs and lectures are most informative. Could I purchase reprints?" With regard to public education activities, another core member wrote, "Although you have presented all of these subjects previously, I suggest more meetings for all members with knowledgeable speakers on matters such as legal rights, social security, income tax, job counseling, state schools, and community residential centers as they all apply to the retarded." A transient member, however,

commented, "Sorry, I really am not well enough informed to say."

The data tend to support Hypothesis IA, that transient members are less knowledgeable than core members about organizational goals.

To examine Hypothesis IB, the following questionnaire items were formulated:

- (1) DARC should sponsor meetings like the Down's Syndrome Conference.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Disagree strongly

- (2) DARC should work actively to promote community half-way houses for mentally retarded persons.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Disagree strongly

The purpose of these questions was to elicit information concerning the extent to which members were in agreement with the two primary goals of the association. The first question concerned the Down's Syndrome Conference, an outstanding example of the association's efforts to educate the public. The conference had been publicized widely and was well attended by DARC members. The second question concerned an organizational program designed to implement the goal of establishing community residential services. It was expected

that core members would agree more with primary organizational goals than transient members.

The findings concerning the first question formulated for Hypothesis IB are presented in Table II.

TABLE II  
MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH  
PUBLIC EDUCATION GOAL

| Level of Agreement<br>(1) | Core Members<br>N=134<br>(2) |          | Transient Members<br>N=171<br>(3) |          | Three-Year Members<br>N=36<br>(4) |          | One-Year Members<br>N=75<br>(5) |          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                           | Number                       | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                          | Per cent |
| Strongly agree            | 59                           | 44       | 56                                | 32       | 15                                | 42       | 31                              | 41       |
| Agree                     | 46                           | 34       | 42                                | 25       | 7                                 | 19       | 19                              | 25       |
| No opinion                | 27                           | 20       | 73                                | 43       | 14                                | 39       | 25                              | 33       |
| Disagree                  | 2                            | 1        | ..                                | ..       | ..                                | ..       | ..                              | ..       |
| Strongly disagree         | ..                           | ..       | ..                                | ..       | ..                                | ..       | ..                              | ..       |

Seventy-eight per cent of the core members and 57 per cent of the transient members indicated a positive response to associational efforts to sponsor meetings such as the Down's Syndrome Conference. Forty-four per cent of the

core members and 32 per cent of the transient members strongly agreed with such efforts while 34 per cent of core respondents and 25 per cent of transient respondents agreed. Twenty per cent of the core category and 43 per cent of the transient category held no opinion, and less than 1 per cent of the core members and none of the transient members registered disagreement with the public education goal. The data tend to support Hypothesis IB, that transient members agree less than core members with organizational goals.

Responses from core members, three-year members, and single-year members fell along a continuum in the "strongly agree" category. Forty-four per cent of the core members, 42 per cent of the three-year members, and 41 per cent of the one-year members indicated strong agreement with the public education goal. The continuum was not maintained, however, when both the "strongly agree" and "agree" categories were combined; the percentages in this instance were 78 per cent of the core members, 61 per cent of the three-year members, and 66 per cent of the single-year members.

The responses of DARC members to the second question formulated for Hypothesis IB are presented in Table III on the following page.

TABLE III  
MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH  
COMMUNITY SERVICE GOALS

| Level of Agreement<br>(1) | Core Members<br>N=134<br>(2) |          | Transient Members<br>N=171<br>(3) |          | Three-Year Members<br>N=36<br>(4) |          | One-Year Members<br>N=75<br>(5) |          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                           | Number                       | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                          | Per cent |
| Strongly agree            | 81                           | 60       | 63                                | 37       | 9                                 | 25       | 47                              | 63       |
| Agree                     | 42                           | 31       | 82                                | 48       | 22                                | 61       | 18                              | 24       |
| No opinion                | 8                            | 1        | 22                                | 13       | 3                                 | 8        | 8                               | 10       |
| Disagree                  | 3                            | 2        | 4                                 | 2        | ..                                | ..       | 2                               | 3        |
| Strongly disagree         | ..                           | ..       | ..                                | ..       | 1                                 | 3        | ..                              | ..       |

A strong 91 per cent of the core members and 85 per cent of the transient members indicated a positive response to associational efforts to promote community residential services. Sixty per cent of the core members and 37 per cent of the transient members strongly agreed with such efforts. Positive responses from core members, three-year members, and single-year members did not fall along a continuum, however. With a positive response of 87 per cent, the single-year members fell between core members (91 per

cent) and three-year members (86 per cent). Only one member indicated strong disagreement with this goal; in no category of respondents did the disagreement total more than 3 per cent. A high degree of consensus and approval was exhibited by all respondents in reply to this question.

Comments from core members further substantiated the high percentage of agreement with programs implementing the two primary goals. One member wrote, "Greatest needs are community based residential centers." Another member said, "Keep tryin. We like what you are doing." However, one transient member wrote, "I am very disappointed in the direction of DARC at this time." Another transient member noted, "I strongly feel that most of DARC's efforts should be directed at lobbying with the governing bodies of our public institutions rather than any other activity."

The data tend to support the idea that core members were more aware of the two primary goals of the association than were transient members. In all cases, however, core members clearly were in closer agreement than transient members with organizational programs designed to implement the primary goals. Unusual responses were noted in that single-year members indicated a significant awareness of the primary goals as well as agreement with the programs implementing the goals.

### Membership Attrition and Minority Rule

With the expectation that attrition in voluntary associations is related to the members' perception of a tendency toward minority rule, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis IIA: Transient members perceive more than core members a tendency toward minority rule in voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IIB: Transient members object more than core members to a tendency toward minority rule in voluntary associations.

To test Hypothesis IIA, the following questionnaire items were formulated:

(1) Who makes important policy decisions for DARC?

- Board of Directors
- Officers
- Staff
- Committees
- General membership
- Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

(2) Important decisions in DARC are made by a small group within the association and for the most part exclude the general membership from the decision-making process.

- Agree strongly
- Agree
- No opinion
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly

These questions were designed to provide information concerning the DARC members' perceptions of the decision-making process in the association. The governing body of the association is the Board of Directors, a group elected by the

members in an orderly and democratic process. It was expected that transient members would be more inclined than core members to perceive a tendency toward minority rule in the association.

The responses of DARC members to the first question formulated for Hypothesis IIA are presented in Table IV.

TABLE IV  
MEMBERSHIP IDENTIFICATION  
OF DECISION MAKERS

| Decision<br>Makers<br><br>(1) | Core<br>Members<br>N=134<br><br>(2) |             | Transient<br>Members<br>N=171<br><br>(3) |             | Three-Year<br>Members<br>N=36<br><br>(4) |             | One-Year<br>Members<br>N=75<br><br>(5) |             |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|--|-------------|--|-------------|--|-------------|
|                               | Num-<br>ber                         | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber                              | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber                              | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber                            | Per<br>cent |
| Board of<br>Directors         | 91                                  | 68          | 74                                       | 43          | 17                                       | 47          | 35                                     | 47          |
| Officers                      | 16                                  | 12          | 19                                       | 11          | 6  | 17          | 13                                     | 17          |
| Staff                         | 6                                   | 4           | 24                                       | 14          | 6  | 17          | 7                                      | 9           |
| Committees                    | 2                                   | 1           | 27                                       | 16          | 1  | 3           | 6                                      | 8           |
| General<br>Membership         | 9                                   | 7           | 15                                       | 9           | 1  | 3           | 10                                     | 13          |
| Other                         | 10                                  | 7           | 12                                       | 7           | 2  | 5           | 4                                      | 5           |

Sixty-eight per cent of the core members correctly identified the Board of Directors as the decision makers of the

association while only 43 per cent of the transient members selected this category. Twelve per cent of the core members and 11 per cent of the transient members selected the officers as the decision-making group. (Officers are elected by the general membership as are the remaining directors of the board). While only 4 per cent of the core respondents perceived the staff as the decision makers, 14 per cent of the transient respondents believed this to be the case.

One per cent of the core members believed that committees are the decision makers of DARC, while 16 per cent of the transient members believed this. Very few core members (7 per cent) or transient members (9 per cent) felt that the general membership made the decisions. Eighty per cent of the core members and 54 per cent of the transient members recognized the decision makers as the elected officials of the association, but, interestingly, neither group seemed to perceive the general membership as instrumental in the process even though the officials are elected by vote of the general membership. Identical responses were tendered by three-year members and single-year members in selecting as decision makers the Board of Directors (47 per cent) and the officers (17 per cent). Only 3 per cent of the three-year members saw the general membership as the decision-making body, although 13 per cent of the single-year

members did. As transient members viewed the decision-making process as being less democratic than core members, the data tend to support Hypothesis IIA, that transient members perceive more than core members a tendency toward minority rule.

The findings concerning the second question formulated for Hypothesis IIA are presented in Table V.

TABLE V  
MEMBERSHIP IDENTIFICATION  
OF MINORITY RULE

| Level of Agreement<br>(1) | Core Members<br>N=134<br>(2) |          | Transient Members<br>N=171<br>(3) |          | Three-Year Members<br>N=36<br>(4) |          | One-Year Members<br>N=75<br>(5) |          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                           | Number                       | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                          | Per cent |
| Strongly agree            | 4                            | 3        | 16                                | 9        | 7                                 | 19       | 8                               | 11       |
| Agree                     | 36                           | 27       | 62                                | 36       | 7                                 | 19       | 19                              | 25       |
| No opinion                | 26                           | 19       | 64                                | 37       | 13                                | 36       | 34                              | 45       |
| Disagree                  | 40                           | 30       | 20                                | 17       | 7                                 | 19       | 9                               | 12       |
| Strongly disagree         | 28                           | 21       | 9                                 | 5        | 1                                 | 3        | 5                               | 7        |

Thirty per cent of the core members and 45 per cent of the transient members indicated a positive response to the

statement about the general membership's exclusion from the decision-making process. While only 3 per cent of the core members and 9 per cent of the transient members strongly agreed, 27 per cent of the core members and 36 per cent of the transient members registered moderate agreement with the statement. More than half of the core members (51 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement while only 22 per cent of the transient members selected disagreement categories. Nineteen per cent of the core respondents and 36 per cent of the transient respondents indicated no opinion. Responses to the agreement categories did not fall along a continuum; core members registered 30 per cent, three-year members indicated 38 per cent, and single-year members signified 36 per cent. Curiously, replies designated in the disagreement categories did fall along a continuum, with the tabulations indicating a 51 per cent response from core members, a 22 per cent response from three-year members, and a 19 per cent response from single-year members.

Comments returned by the respondents tend to support further the statistical tabulations. One core member responded, "Decisions are made by the Board and should be." Another stated, "It is the responsibility of the Board to make decisions. This is the reason the general membership elects them." A third commented, "It is far wiser to have the active knowledgeable group making the decisions -- especially if they are well-informed. Many people in the

general membership do not take time to inform themselves even when they are presented with appropriate materials." One transient member commented that the decisions were made by "wealthy illiterates." Another attributed the decision-making power to a few influential persons behind the scenes. The data tend to support the assumptions in Hypothesis IIA, that transient members perceive more than core members a tendency toward minority rule in the association. Additionally, the core members more correctly identified the specific decision-making body, and apparently they considered that body, the Board of Directors, as truly representing the general membership which had elected them.

To examine Hypothesis IIB the following questionnaire items were formulated:

- (1) How do you feel about the way important decisions are made in DARC?

Not enough persons involved in the process  
 Too many persons involved in the process  
 About the right number of persons involved in the process  
 Don't know

- (2) DARC should be a democratic organization.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Strongly disagree

These questions were designed to provide information concerning the reaction of DARC members to a tendency toward

minority rule in their association. It was assumed that transient members would be more inclined than core members to feel that not enough people are involved in the decision-making process and that the organization should be democratically structured.

The responses of DARC members to the first question formulated for Hypothesis IIB are presented in Table VI.

TABLE VI  
MEMBERSHIP IDENTIFICATION OF  
DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES

| No. of<br>Persons<br><br>(1) | Core<br>Members<br>N=134<br><br>(2) |             | Transient<br>Members<br>N=171<br><br>(3) |             | Three-Year<br>Members<br>N=36<br><br>(4) |             | One-Year<br>Members<br>N=75<br><br>(5) |             |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|--|-------------|--|-------------|--|-------------|
|                              | Num-<br>ber                         | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber                              | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber                              | Per<br>cent | Num-<br>ber                            | Per<br>cent |
| Not enough                   | 25                                  | 19          | 39                                       | 23          | 5  | 14          | 18                                     | 24          |
| Too many                     | 12                                  | 9           | 11                                       | 6           | 3  | 8           | 2                                      | 3           |
| Right<br>number              | 68                                  | 51          | 33                                       | 19          | 7  | 19          | 15                                     | 20          |
| Don't know                   | 29                                  | 21          | 88                                       | 51          | 21                                       | 58          | 40                                     | 53          |

Fifty-one per cent of the core members felt that the right number of persons was involved in the decision-making structure of the association, but only 19 per cent of the

transient members selected this category. Nineteen per cent of the core members felt that not enough persons were involved in the decision-making structure while 23 per cent of the transient members chose this response. The data indicate that core members were more satisfied than transient members with the number of persons making decisions for DARC. Responses did not fall along an expected continuum. About the same percentage of three-year members (19 per cent) and single-year members (20 per cent) approved of the number of persons involved in the important decision-making processes of DARC, as compared with 51 per cent of the core members.

Table VI indicates that approximately 38 per cent of all respondents designated the "don't know" category. While 21 per cent of the core members responded in this manner, more than half (51 per cent) of the transient members held no opinion. Apparently, a rather large percentage of the membership was not knowledgeable about the decision-making structure of the association. Despite the lack of awareness of many, the data compiled from the remaining categories indicate that some support exists for the assumptions in Hypothesis IIB, that transient members object more than core members to a tendency toward minority rule.

The findings concerning the second question formulated for Hypothesis IIB are presented in Table VII.

TABLE VII  
MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH  
DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE

| Level of Agreement<br>(1) | Core Members<br>N=134<br>(2) |          | Transient Members<br>N=171<br>(3) |          | Three-Year Members<br>N=36<br>(4) |          | One-Year Members<br>N=75<br>(5) |          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                           | Num-ber                      | Per cent | Num-ber                           | Per cent | Num-ber                           | Per cent | Num-ber                         | Per cent |
| Strongly agree            | 93                           | 69       | 128                               | 75       | 16                                | 44       | 57                              | 76       |
| Agree                     | 26                           | 19       | 25                                | 15       | 17                                | 47       | 8                               | 11       |
| No opinion                | 9                            | 7        | 16                                | 9        | 1                                 | 3        | 10                              | 13       |
| Disagree                  | 5                            | 4        | 2                                 | 1        | 1                                 | 3        | ..                              | ..       |
| Strongly disagree         | 1                            | 1        | ..                                | ..       | ..                                | ..       | ..                              | ..       |

A large percentage of members believed that DARC should be a democratic organization: 89 per cent of the core members and 90 per cent of the transient members. A slight difference existed between the two groups in the "strongly agree" response, however; 69 per cent of the core members strongly agreed with the statement while 75 per cent of the transient members did so. Five per cent of the core members disagreed with the concept, and 1 per cent of the transient members did so. Slightly fewer core members than transient

members expressed no opinion. The data seem to indicate that transient members more strongly favor democratic rule, even though only 19 per cent of them felt that the right number of persons was making the decisions in the association.

Comments from transient members reinforce their perceptions of the tendency toward minority rule and the lack of opportunity to participate in the affairs of the association. One such member wrote, "I have never been asked to participate in anything except giving money." Another remarked, "Members should have a stronger voice in the organization." A third echoed the sentiment, "I can't seem to find any encouragement for my active participation. That tiny little annual membership fee is minuscule compared to the overall contribution this member would make if constructively directed."

Responses from core members, three-year members, and single-year members did not fall along a continuum. While 89 per cent of the core members felt that DARC should be a democratic organization, 91 per cent of the three-year members and 87 per cent of the single-year members agreed with this statement.

The data generally tend to support Hypotheses IIA and IIB, that transient members perceive more than core members a tendency toward minority rule in the association and that they object to minority rule more than core members.

### Membership Attrition and Bureaucratization

With the expectation that attrition in voluntary associations is related to the members' perception of bureaucratization in the organization, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis IIIA: Transient members perceive more than core members a tendency toward bureaucracy in the operations of voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IIIB: Transient members object more than core members to the tendency toward bureaucracy in the operations of voluntary organizations.

To test Hypothesis IIA, the following questionnaire items were formulated:

- (1) The procedures, policies, and programs of DARC are flexible enough to permit creative change in the organization when it is needed.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Disagree strongly

- (2) Procedures and policies of DARC are efficiently implemented by staff without the assistance of volunteer help.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Disagree strongly

These questions were designed to provide information concerning DARC members' perceptions of a tendency toward bureaucracy in operations of their association. It was

expected that transient members would be more inclined than core members to perceive such a tendency.

The responses of DARC members to the first question formulated for Hypothesis IIIA are reported in Table VIII.

TABLE VIII  
MEMBERSHIP IDENTIFICATION  
OF FLEXIBILITY

| Level of Agreement<br>(1) | Core Members<br>N=134<br>(2) |          | Transient Members<br>N=171<br>(3) |          | Three-Year Members<br>N=36<br>(4) |          | One-Year Members<br>N=75<br>(5) |          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                           | Number                       | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                          | Per cent |
| Strongly agree            | 32                           | 24       | 23                                | 13       | 2                                 | 5        | 10                              | 13       |
| Agree                     | 50                           | 37       | 33                                | 19       | 10                                | 28       | 14                              | 19       |
| No opinion                | 41                           | 31       | 75                                | 44       | 16                                | 44       | 33                              | 44       |
| Disagree                  | 7                            | 5        | 32                                | 19       | 8                                 | 22       | 15                              | 20       |
| Strongly disagree         | 4                            | 3        | 8                                 | 5        | ..                                | ..       | 3                               | 4        |

Sixty-one per cent of the core members and 32 per cent of the transient members perceived that the association is a flexible one. These figures include 24 per cent of the core members and 13 per cent of the transient members who

indicated strong agreement. Only 8 per cent of the core members disagreed that the association was flexible, in contrast to 24 per cent of the transient members who disagreed. Responses for both agreement and disagreement categories fell along an expected continuum. Sixty-one per cent of the core members, 33 per cent of the three-year members, and 32 per cent of the single-year members perceived the association to be flexible while 8 per cent of the core members, 22 per cent of the three-year members, and 24 per cent of the single-year members perceived the association to be inflexible.

At first glance, the data seem to indicate support for Hypothesis IIIA; however, it must be noted that a large percentage of all responses fell in the "no opinion" category. Substantial numbers of both core members (31 per cent) and transient members (44 per cent) registering no opinion indicated that many members were unfamiliar with the internal structure of the association.

The findings for the second question formulated for Hypothesis IIIA are reported in Table IX on the following page.

TABLE IX  
MEMBERSHIP IDENTIFICATION  
OF EFFICIENCY

| Level of Agreement<br>(1) | Core Members<br>N=134<br>(2) |          | Transient Members<br>N=171<br>(3) |          | Three-Year Members<br>N=36<br>(4) |          | One-Year Members<br>N=75<br>(5) |          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                           | Num-ber                      | Per cent | Num-ber                           | Per cent | Num-ber                           | Per cent | Num-ber                         | Per cent |
| Strongly agree            | 11                           | 8        | 17                                | 10       | 1                                 | 3        | 9                               | 12       |
| Agree                     | 35                           | 26       | 30                                | 18       | 7                                 | 19       | 9                               | 12       |
| No opinion                | 43                           | 32       | 67                                | 39       | 12                                | 33       | 32                              | 43       |
| Disagree                  | 18                           | 13       | 26                                | 15       | 10                                | 28       | 18                              | 24       |
| Strongly disagree         | 27                           | 20       | 31                                | 18       | 4                                 | 11       | 7                               | 9        |

Generally core members more than transient members perceived an efficiency profile. When the agreement categories were combined, core members registered 34 per cent agreement while transient members indicated 28 per cent agreement with the efficiency profile of the association. Only 8 per cent of the core members and 10 per cent of the transient members strongly agreed. Strong disagreement was expressed by 20 per cent of the core respondents and 18 per cent of the transient respondents; for both core and transient members,

the combined disagreement categories totaled 33 per cent. When efficiency is used as an indicator of bureaucratization, the data do not support Hypothesis IIIA.

Comments from various members were contradictory. One core member wrote, "We believe DARC has made great strides and have no constructive recommendation for any changes in procedures and policies." Another core member observed, "I have little direct contact with DARC and know very little about the workings of the organization." The bulk of the comments relating to the questions for Hypothesis IIIA was the simple statement, "Don't know."

Response data on both questions for Hypothesis IIIA tend to be somewhat contradictory. Core members perceived the association to be more flexible and by implication less bureaucratic than transient members. Yet, core members perceived the association to be more efficient and by implication more bureaucratic than transient members. As evidenced by the sizeable percentage of no opinion responses, members do not demonstrate sufficient awareness of the internal structural characteristics of the association to perceive conclusively the presence of the flexibility and efficiency profiles in organizational operations. The data, thus, are not decisive enough to lend support to Hypothesis IIIA, that transient members

perceive more than core members a tendency toward bureaucracy in the organization.

To test Hypothesis IIIB, the following questionnaire items were formulated.

- (1) Rules, procedures, and policy implementation in DARC should be simplified and involve less red tape.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Disagree strongly

- (2) Volunteers should supplement staff in the implementation of DARC procedures and policies.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Disagree strongly

The purpose of these questions was to elicit information concerning the reaction of DARC members to bureaucratic tendencies in the operations of their association. It was expected that transient members would be more likely than core members to object to such tendencies.

The responses of DARC members to the first question formulated for Hypothesis IIIB are presented in Table X on the following page.

TABLE X  
MEMBERSHIP IDENTIFICATION  
OF RED TAPE

| Level of Agreement<br>(1) | Core Members<br>N=134<br>(2) |          | Transient Members<br>N=171<br>(3) |          | Three-Year Members<br>N=36<br>(4) |          | One-Year Members<br>N=75<br>(5) |          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                           | Number                       | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                            | Per cent | Number                          | Per cent |
| Strongly agree            | 6                            | 4        | 23                                | 13       | 3                                 | 8        | 8                               | 11       |
| Agree                     | 39                           | 29       | 44                                | 26       | 10                                | 28       | 20                              | 27       |
| No opinion                | 40                           | 29       | 72                                | 42       | 17                                | 47       | 36                              | 48       |
| Disagree                  | 27                           | 20       | 16                                | 9        | 3                                 | 8        | 8                               | 11       |
| Strongly disagree         | 22                           | 16       | 16                                | 9        | 3                                 | 8        | 3                               | 4        |

Thirty-three per cent of the core members and 39 per cent of the transient members registered a positive response to the need to eliminate red tape from the association. Four per cent of the core members and 13 per cent of the transient members strongly agreed with this need. Sixteen per cent of the core members and 9 per cent

of the transient members strongly disagreed with the statement. When disagreement categories were combined it was found that 36 per cent of the cores and 18 per cent of the transients were included. These data support Hypothesis IIIB but, as was true in the findings of Hypothesis IIIA, a large percentage of no opinion responses appeared; 29 per cent of the core members and 42 per cent of the transient members. Once again it appears that many members were unfamiliar with the internal structure of the association.

Responses tabulated in the agreement categories fell along a continuum: from core members (33 per cent), from three-year members (36 per cent), and from single-year members (38 per cent). The differences were so slight, however, as to be inconsequential. A similar pattern appeared with the no opinion replies when core members registered 29 per cent, three-year members registered 47 per cent, and single-year members registered 48 per cent.

The responses of DARC members to the second question formulated for Hypothesis IIIB are presented in Table XI on the following page.

TABLE XI  
MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH  
VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

| Level of Agreement<br>(1) | Core Members<br>N=134<br>(2) |          | Transient Members<br>N=171<br>(3) |          | Three-Year Members<br>N=36<br>(4) |          | One-Year Members<br>N=75<br>(5) |          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                           | Num-ber                      | Per-cent | Num-ber                           | Per-cent | Num-ber                           | Per-cent | Num-ber                         | Per-cent |
| Strongly agree            | 63                           | 47       | 97                                | 57       | 13                                | 36       | 38                              | 51       |
| Agree                     | 28                           | 21       | 27                                | 16       | 12                                | 33       | 13                              | 17       |
| No opinion                | 22                           | 16       | 29                                | 17       | 5                                 | 14       | 15                              | 20       |
| Disagree                  | 19                           | 14       | 15                                | 9        | 6                                 | 17       | 8                               | 11       |
| Strongly disagree         | 2                            | 1        | 3                                 | 2        | ..                                | ..       | 1                               | 1        |

When the agreement categories were combined, 68 per cent of the core members and 73 per cent of the transient members indicated agreement with the need by the association for volunteer help. Forty-seven per cent of the core members and 57 per cent of the transient members strongly agreed that the association had such a need. It seems evident that most members did not perceive DARC as a bureaucratic organization to be run without the help of volunteers. Transient members more strongly than core members advocated the

use of volunteer help in the association and, by implication, saw the staff as less efficient than did core members. Responses from the core members, three-year members, and single-year members were almost identical in that core members and single-year members registered 68 per cent while three-year members registered 69 per cent in the combined agreement categories. The "no opinion" category was selected by 16 per cent of the core members and 17 per cent of the transient members.

In general, the data do not tend to support Hypothesis IIIIB, that transient members object more than core members to the tendency toward bureaucracy in the organization. Most of the members in all categories saw a strong need for volunteer participation and, by implication, did not perceive the association as bureaucratic. Responses actually indicated that core members saw the association as a more efficiently operating group than did transient members, a finding which tends to disprove the assumptions of the hypothesis. Fifteen per cent of the core members and 11 per cent of the transient members did not feel that volunteers were needed to supplement staff.

Comments from both categories of members tended to reinforce the interpretation that they do not view the association as a bureaucracy. Such comments strongly indicated that they perceived DARC as an association with which

they can identify personally. One respondent remarked, "I feel that the staff are compassionate, personally involved, and devoted to their work." Another wrote, "A big thank you to DARC. Their recreation programs are high points to our family because of the pleasure they give to our son." Still another respondent mentioned that the people at DARC had really helped her when she most needed help. Finally, one core member commented that it really felt good to have someone to talk with and to help him whenever he had problems.

The data do not support the hypotheses concerning a relationship between membership attrition and bureaucratization in voluntary associations. A sizeable number of the respondents were unable to answer the questions for those hypotheses, and the positive responses were often conflicting.

#### Summary

Responses were tabulated from 134 core members and 171 transient members. Hypothesis I, that membership attrition patterns are related to the members' perceptions of organizational goals, was supported by survey results. Transient members were less informed and less in agreement with organizational goals than core members. Hypothesis II, that membership attrition patterns are related to the members' perceptions of a tendency toward minority rule in the

association, also was supported by the survey results. Transient members more than core members perceived a tendency toward minority rule in the association, and more transient members than core members objected to the minority rule tendency. Hypothesis III, that membership attrition patterns are related to the members' perceptions of bureaucratization in the association, was not supported by the survey results. Most members did not perceive the association as bureaucratic. Many members of the association indicated little awareness of the internal structure of the organization. Any supportive data must be evaluated in terms of the large percentage of no opinion responses from all members.

David Sills' ideas about the association of goal displacement and minority rule with membership attrition in voluntary organizations were supported by the findings of this research. However, bureaucratization was not found to be related to membership attrition. It is interesting and perhaps significant that Sills considered the tendency toward oligarchy and the displacement of goals to be the two major "pathologies" of voluntary associations (1).

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## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY

Beginning in the Colonial period of American history and continuing to the present time, voluntary associations have been an integral part of American life. Large numbers of people belong to and participate in various kinds of voluntary associations. Some observers argue that the institutions of a free society could not be maintained without the contributions of voluntary associations. Despite the importance of voluntary associations to American life, these structures tend to be fragile in that it is difficult to develop and maintain an active and vigorous membership. Annual rates of membership turnover are high, and membership attrition is a persistent fact of life for voluntary associations. Although a considerable amount of research has been done on voluntary associations, little of it has been focused on the problem of membership attrition. Little is known about the relationship between patterns of membership attrition and the organizational characteristics of voluntary associations.

With several other scholars, David Sills is seriously concerned about the problem of membership attrition in

voluntary associations and has worked extensively in this field. He believes that membership attrition is associated with certain characteristics of voluntary associations, specifically, bureaucratization, minority rule, and goal displacement. The problem of this research was to investigate Sills' explanation of membership attrition in a selected voluntary association.

With the expectation that attrition in voluntary associations is related to the members' perception of and reaction to organizational goals, a tendency toward minority rule in the organization, and bureaucratization in the organization, the following hypotheses were formulated to guide the research:

Hypothesis IA: Transient members are less knowledgeable than core members about the goals of voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IB: Transient members agree less than core members with the goals of voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IIA: Transient members perceive more than core members a tendency toward minority rule in voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IIB: Transient members object more than core members to a tendency toward minority rule in voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IIIA: Transient members perceive more than core members a tendency toward bureaucracy in the operations of voluntary associations.

Hypothesis IIIB: Transient members object more than core members to the tendency toward bureaucracy in the operations of voluntary associations.

To examine the relationship between membership attrition in voluntary associations and organizational characteristics of bureaucracy, minority rule, and goal displacement, the Dallas Association for Retarded Citizens was selected for a case study. Using the membership rosters of the DARC for the five-year period from 1969 through 1974, the members of the population were divided into the categories of core members and transient members. The primary purpose of the study was to compare responses of core members and transient members to questionnaire items formulated specifically to test the hypotheses listed above. It was assumed that transient members would be less knowledgeable and sympathetic with the primary goals of the organization than core members and that they would perceive and object to an organizational tendency toward minority rule and bureaucracy more readily than core members.

From the category of transient members, data were extracted for single-year members and three-year members. It was assumed that a comparison of the responses of single-year members, three-year members and five-year members (core members) would provide useful, additional data with which to evaluate the research hypotheses. It was anticipated that the responses of members in these three categories would be arranged along a continuum with five-year members representing one end of the continuum, single-year members

representing the opposite end of the continuum, and three-year members representing a response between the two.

The findings of this research appeared to support Hypothesis I, that membership attrition is related to the members' perceptions of organizational goals. Transient members were less informed and less in agreement with organizational goals than were core members. The survey results also tended to support Hypothesis II, that membership attrition is related to the members' perceptions of a tendency toward minority rule in the association. Transient members more than core members perceived a tendency toward minority rule in the association, and more transient members than core members objected to this tendency. The survey results did not support Hypothesis III, that membership attrition patterns are related to the members' perceptions of bureaucratization in the association. Most of the members, whether core members or transient members, did not perceive the association as bureaucratic. Many of them indicated little awareness of the internal structure of the organization.

The expectation that responses from core members, three-year members and single-year members would fall along a continuum did not materialize for Hypotheses I and II and appeared only partially in response to Hypothesis III. The responses of single-year members were more closely aligned

with those of core members than with those of three-year members.

David Sills' ideas about the association of goal displacement and minority rule with membership attrition in voluntary organizations were supported by the findings of this research. Bureaucratization, however, was not found to be related to membership attrition. It is interesting and perhaps significant that Sills considered the tendency toward oligarchy and the displacement of goals to be the two major "pathologies" of voluntary associations.

APPENDIX A

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

## MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Research Committee  
 National Association for Retarded Citizens  
 Dallas Association for Retarded Citizens

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. In which of the following years have you been a member of the Dallas Association for Retarded Citizens (DARC)?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 1970
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 1971
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 1972
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 1973
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 1974
  
3. Do you plan to renew your membership in 1975?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Yes
  - \_\_\_\_\_ No
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know
  
4. DARC should sponsor meetings like the Down's Syndrome Conference.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Agree Strongly
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Agree
  - \_\_\_\_\_ No opinion
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree strongly
  
5. How do you feel about the way important decisions are made in DARC?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Not enough persons involved in the process
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Too many persons involved in the process
  - \_\_\_\_\_ About the right number of persons involved in the process
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know
  
6. The procedures, policies, and programs of DARC are flexible enough to permit creative change in the organization when it is needed.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Agree strongly
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Agree
  - \_\_\_\_\_ No opinion
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree strongly

7. DARC should operate a sheltered workshop for persons who are mentally retarded.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Disagree strongly

8. Rules, procedures, and policy implementation in DARC should be simplified and involve less red tape.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Disagree strongly

9. DARC is involved in the following kinds of programs. Indicate the two types of programs in which you consider it to be most actively involved at this time.

Public education and awareness of mental retardation  
 Promotion of civil rights legislation for mentally retarded persons  
 Operation of direct service programs  
 Promotion of special education classes in the public school system  
 Promotion of the development of community residential centers for mentally retarded persons  
 Promotion of prevention and early discovery research

10. Who makes important policy decisions for DARC?

Board of Directors  
 Officers  
 Staff  
 Committees  
 General membership  
 Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Volunteers should supplement staff in the implementation of DARC procedures and policies.

Agree strongly  
 Agree  
 No opinion  
 Disagree  
 Disagree strongly

12. DARC should work actively to promote community half-way houses for mentally retarded persons.

\_\_\_\_\_ Agree strongly  
\_\_\_\_\_ Agree  
\_\_\_\_\_ No opinion  
\_\_\_\_\_ Disagree  
\_\_\_\_\_ Disagree strongly

13. DARC should be a democratic organization.

\_\_\_\_\_ Agree strongly  
\_\_\_\_\_ Agree  
\_\_\_\_\_ No opinion  
\_\_\_\_\_ Disagree  
\_\_\_\_\_ Disagree strongly

14. Important decisions in DARC are made by a small group within the association and for the most part exclude the general membership from the decision-making process.

\_\_\_\_\_ Agree strongly  
\_\_\_\_\_ Agree  
\_\_\_\_\_ No opinion  
\_\_\_\_\_ Disagree  
\_\_\_\_\_ Disagree strongly

15. Procedures and policies of DARC are efficiently implemented by staff without the assistance of volunteer help.

\_\_\_\_\_ Agree strongly  
\_\_\_\_\_ Agree  
\_\_\_\_\_ No opinion  
\_\_\_\_\_ Disagree  
\_\_\_\_\_ Disagree strongly

APPENDIX B

INITIAL COVER LETTER

## TO ALL MEMBERS AND FORMER MEMBERS

DARC is participating in an important research project about membership attrition. Please complete the enclosed questionnaire immediately and return it to us in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

Your personal response will be confidential, but the composite results will be published later this year. All present AND former members are asked to participate. May we thank you for a very prompt response?

Membership Survey Committee  
Dallas Association for Retarded Citizens

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP REMINDER

DALLAS ASSOCIATION FOR RETARDED CITIZENS  
3121 North Harwood, Dallas, Texas 75201

Last week DARC mailed you a membership survey questionnaire. Did you remember to complete and return it? If not, please do so at once. We need your response. Thanks for helping.

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