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Political activity by Lehigh Valley non-profit organizations : a model for expanding political influence

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Political Activity by
Lehigh Valley Non-
Profit

Organizations: A
Model for
Expanding...

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Political Activity by Lehigh Valley Non-Profit Organizations: A Model for
Expanding Political Influence

by

Jason T. Martineau

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of Lehigh University

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in

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Introduction	3
Chapter I: Why Organizations are Not More Politically Active	4
The Rise of Professionalization	5
The Impact of Science on Social Work	7
Social Work's Position in the Market Economy	9
Conclusion	12
Chapter II: A Case Study: Political Activities of Non-Profit Organizations in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania	13
Methods	13
Findings	15
Frequency of Political Activity	15
Types of Political Activities	18
Distribution of Administrative, Client Centered and Community Centered Activities	25
The Effectiveness of Political Activities	29
Future Political Plans	34
Discussion	35
Chapter III: Interviews with Local Legislators	38
Methods	38
Communication and the Use of Information Short Cuts	39
Legislative Testimonials Describing Information Short Cuts	41

Regarding Political Power as Information Short Cuts	45
Client Participation on the Political Process: A Means to Expand Political Power	48
Expanding the Power of Administrative Centered Activities	51
1) Contacting Committee Chairs	51
2) Working with Organizations that Deliver Similar Services	53
3) Contacting Other Legislators Across the State that Serve Similar Clients	53
4) The Importance of the Legislative Staff	54
5) Having Board Members Contact Legislators	56
Conclusion	56
Chapter IV: Ways to Influence the Political Process	57
Voting	58
The Internet	65
Using the Internet to Meet Social Work's Goals	71
Conclusion	72
Chapter V: Final Remarks	73
Bibliography	75
Interviews with Organizations	77
Interviews with Legislative Officials	78
Vita	79

TABLES

Table 1: Types of Political Activity	21
Table 2: Distribution of Activities	25
Table 3: Number of Completed Political Activities	26
Table 4: Number of Completed Units by Administrative, Client and Community Categories	27
Table 5: Measure of Effectiveness	30

FIGURES

Figure 1: Organizations Participating in Political Activities

16

This study examines the political activities of 31 Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, non-profit organizations that provide services to the poor, mentally and physically challenged, and the general welfare of the community. The types and frequency of political activities performed, and the results that such political actions produce for the organizations were the focus. The purpose is to develop a paradigm that non-profit organizations can use to develop effective long term political strategies and goals.

Generally, the findings indicate that the organizations studied engage in a low level of political activity and tend to be inconsistent. Explanations for this indicate that organizations lack the resources, the belief that political activity is, in many cases, out of step with professional goals, and often don't pertain to the service/treatment that is provided to their clients. Lack of political information and interest also plays a role. Of those political activities completed, organizations generally favor centralized political actions executed by upper management, pertain to their particular concerns and be relatively inexpensive to complete.

This study also relied on interviews from one State Senator and four State Legislators. These interviews were designed to determine which forms of political actions are most likely to influence the political process. Overall, legislators interviewed argued that direct political action, i.e., the ability of a particular group to deliver votes, could have an impact on the type of legislation put forth or how the legislator votes on a particular bill. Regrettably, many organizations were not likely to encourage direct political action by their clients as such activity was in conflict with professional goals.

While much of the data suggests that certain types of political action may be difficult to foster, alternatives exist. For instance, developments in Internet communications can be a strong political force in terms of providing information and allowing clients to directly communicate with the government. Moreover, greater coordination between organizations in developing political action could lead to greater political recognition and thus greater influence. Political activity must be expanded if organizations hope to deliver quality services and lead to a social environment that promotes greater health and human happiness.

Introduction

Social Service organizations must take steps to expand political activity. Diminishing budgets and increased workloads strain social service agencies, diminish the level of care to those in need, and in a very real sense, threaten the long-term economic competitiveness of the United States. Indeed, when millions of American citizens remain impoverished, undereducated, and unhealthy we must begin to question our commitment to our democratic ideals.

While Social Service agencies may not be able to change all the conditions that cause so many to suffer, these organizations must take strong action to guarantee that more Americans have the skills and resources necessary to live healthy and happy lives. The best way for care giving professions to insure this is to expand their level of political activity. This will not be easy. Political advocacy is not central to the day-to-day administration of most of these organizations. I realize that there may not be the time or the resources to expand political activity in a significant way. Nevertheless, as I hope to demonstrate, effective alternatives do exist.

Before presenting means of influencing the political process, it is necessary to evaluate major historical developments in social work and their impact on the care giving professions' ability to impact the political system. Evaluating how social works' history, values and goals have affected its ability to advocate is important in forming alternatives to expand political action. Thus, in chapter I, I examine a number of important concepts, developments and professional preconceptions that I believe limit the ability of the care giving professions to effectively advocate. Examining these concepts is vital in formulating alternatives. Knowing what limits political activity is the first step to expand

political action. In chapter II, I examine the type of activities organizations in the Lehigh Valley are currently performing as a means to see what areas of political activity can be expanded. In chapter III, I focus on results of interviews with Lehigh Valley legislators to determine which types of political activities are most effective in terms of expanding political power. Understanding what is useful and convincing to key political players is certainly a necessary requisite to creating effective political strategies and techniques.

By evaluating the events that have shaped the values and goals of the care giving professions, examining actual political activities of organizations, and studying important political players and their environment, the alternatives presented in later parts of this paper will become clear. I believe that these alternatives meet organizations' professional goals and expand political activity; and a more politically powerful social work profession will lead to more informed and better-planned public policy.

Chapter I: Why Organizations are Not More Politically Active:

The National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) *Code of Ethics* states that the goal of social work is "to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being and the well-being of society." (<http://www.naswdc.org/Code/ethics.htm>)

The objectives contained in the *Code of Ethics* focus on both individual and social needs. Social workers are instructed to deliver individual treatment *and* work to produce environments that produce a healthier, more stable society. Regrettably, most of the

modern focus of social work is on individual, clinical treatment. Advocacy and political action aimed at altering institutions, laws and perceptions that are damaging to the larger society are no longer performed at the levels they once were. There have been periods, however, of great social advocacy. The Settlement House Movement, the reform efforts of the progressives and Saul Alinski and Pivin and Claurad in the 1960s and 1970s are a few examples.

The purpose of this section is to briefly evaluate the events and ideas that have taken social work away from its historical roots of advocacy and social reform in order to determine if these historic changes preclude the possibility of expanded political action now or in the future. For instance, can a few modifications in the way social workers engage in advocacy reestablish the profession as a force for social change, and if so, what adjustments must social workers make to be politically effective in the modern political arena? As I intend to show, there are indeed opportunities for effective advocacy.

Clearly, the reasons for the lack of consistent political activity are complex, but a few central developments provide many of the answers for the lack of political activity. The developments that I will focus on are (1) the rise of professionalization and professional goals, (2) the increased importance the social work profession has given to science and scientific methods and (3) social work's relationship and position within the larger market economy.

The Rise of Professionalization:

During the early 20th century, the field of social work was often criticized for its lack of professional goals and its inability to measure policy outcomes. Moreover, social

workers realized that the profession had yet to establish any type of literature or body of knowledge. With this in mind, social work began to develop professional goals, e.g., greater efficiency, the establishment of management and educational programs to help legitimize their goals. While the need to expand knowledge and unite social workers were recognized, these developments often came at the sacrifice of political activity. Mimi Abramovitz writes, "the effect of social work's move from charity to enterprise remains to this day . . . Many social workers endorsed the separation of professional and political goals." (Abramovitz 521)

Many social workers believe it is difficult to wed political activity with the delivery of services. They contend that it is simply unprofessional to encourage clients or community members to engage in political activity on behalf of the organization. However, if the social work community is to meet the objectives outlined by the NASW, organizations must expand their political activities. At first glance, political action may not appear to offer clear advantages to social service organizations and their clients. Organizations contest that the resources to be politically active are not available. Professional goals related to service, treatment and management simply don't create environments that spawn significant political action. Despite these supposed limitations, strong political action and community organization develop both political and social awareness of difficult social problems. And this creates opportunities for social service organizations to use their management and research skills to help solve social problem. In other words, the profession's commitment and investment in professional development will never be truly affective unless greater attention is generated to their causes and goals.

The Impact of Science on Social Work:

Social work became committed to scientific inquiry as part of the larger movement towards professionalization. It was believed that validating claims and theories through scientific inquiry would help legitimize social work's goals. To a degree, the profession's commitment to science has led to acceptance of some of its policies. However, the effort to emphasize a scientific approach may have also weakened the ability of the profession to meet its historic objectives of empowering the poor and the weak. According to Keith Kilty and Thomas M. Meenaghan, science "affirms attitudes of objectivity, impersonality, disinterest, and political neutrality." (Kilty and Meenaghan 447) When objectivity and political neutrality become entrenched, effective advocacy becomes difficult. Strong judgments, opinions and commitment to produce political reform must be maintained if the profession is to accomplish its broader social goals as outlined in the NASW code of ethics. Social work must remind itself that its first, and primary commitment is "to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people." (448) Science and calculations are not committed to values. Furthermore, when policy is based on valueless science, public policy becomes less concerned with human welfare or producing change that empowers society at large. A brief examination of America's growing commitment to science-based public policy shows that there is less commitment to the poor and vulnerable.

The election of President Nixon led to greater emphasis on scientific methods and measuring policy outcomes. The Nixon administration believed it was necessary to establish greater oversight of government-funded programs and to measure the success and failure of such spending by implementing cost benefit analysis and other quantitative

measurements. While the use of scientific inquiry may have been designed with the intent to increase productivity and better serve those in need, this new emphasis led to conditions where efficiency became the primary goal. Though often considered an important American value and central in policy development, constant emphasis on efficiency can be dangerous to the quality of a particular program. For instance, should a program that reduces teenage pregnancy by 3 percent be viewed as inefficient due to its relatively low reduction in teen pregnancy? The positive impacts of social service programs may not always be easy to quantify. Efficiency should not be the lone factor in determining the success or failures of a program, and social service agencies must begin to point out program benefits other than efficiency. (Stone 112)

Unfortunately, many social workers did little to object to such measurements of analysis. In fact, government emphasis on measured outcomes and efficiency was in line with social work's goals of increasing knowledge, measuring outcomes, and being accountable to the market place. The larger goals and objectives of the profession were lost in the push to be objective. According to Kilty and Meenaghan, the profession neglected "the broader concepts of society, opportunity and power. Consequently, the units of attention and intervention moved away from the group and more in the direction of the individual client, practitioner or both." (445-453) This movement towards individual treatment created a variety of disciplines and sub-disciplines within the profession of social work. This, in turn, made the broader goals of social justice much less clear.

Social work is not simply about measurements or policy outcomes. According to the NASW, the profession is dedicated to improving society for all people. At times,

science and its objectivity may make the expense of such goals appear unachievable or unjustified. Values and commitment to strengthening society overall must remain important if the profession is to truly meet its stated objectives. As Kilty and Meenaghan write, "values and norms also require human service professionals to examine the broader questions of who is getting service and who is not and what the focus of such intervention should be. This last issue, because it is political, requires the profession to recognize that the larger cultural and political context influences individuals and society." (445-453) In other words, if organizations fail to actively engage the political system, they will be unable to express their values or goals, and will be over-shadowed by competing systems of values and norms.

Social Work's Position in the Market Economy:

Social workers dedicate their time and energy to maintaining many of America's most cherished social values. These include strengthening the family, diminishing poverty and expanding educational opportunities. At the same time, Americans are committed to the market economy, maximum efficiency, free enterprise, and little regulation or government oversight. In essence, Americans have embraced a paradox, a mixed message. We desire better health care, stronger education and institutions that bolster family values, but we are often unwilling to take decisive action to obtain such goals as to do so would create conflict with the free enterprise system. This paradox makes it difficult for social organizations or the government to take the necessary steps to create a healthier and more productive society. For instance, Americans are very dissatisfied with the healthcare system, the expanded power of insurance companies and

the overall cost of healthcare. Yet many Americans do not want the government to step in and create more equity within the healthcare system. Public outrage, encouraged by the social work profession, must largely rely on government authority to make adjustments in healthcare or any other area of social policy for that matter. Americans often want changes to ease the pain caused by social problems, but are uncomfortable with the mechanism (government) that is empowered to make changes to reduce the impact of social problems.

As the social work profession is part of and has even contributed to the development of our economic and political systems, it becomes difficult for the profession to remain completely dedicated to all of its values and goals. The profession must not become overly radical in its advocacy of the poor, or the institutions that support it. Thus it could be counter productive as the economic and the political structure have the ability to weaken the profession through punitive financial sanction or by public criticism. More specifically, social service organizations must be competitive, advertise for clients, and work to reduce costs all at the expense of quality care. The development of managed care coupled with modern management styles has clearly limited the profession's ability to become politically aggressive. Richard L. Edwards, Philip W. Cooke and P. Nelson Reid, writing in *Social Work*, state that:

social work managers must be prepared to perform different and sometimes conflicting or competing roles. These include roles that have to do with relating to the organizations' environment, such as those involved in entrepreneurship and strategic management, and roles concerned with internal operations. Furthermore, social work managers must be market oriented. They must be able to accurately assess the place of their organization with respect to supply and demand in their field of service sector, and they must adopt a "bottom line" mentality that has characterized the for profit sector. (468-480)

Not only are social workers limited by the position of the profession in the larger macro economy, but also they are required to run highly efficient organizations based on sound micro economic principles. This of course requires market evaluation and the development of marketing strategies that add to the bottom line. Radical political activity may threaten the ability of the organization to maintain stable sources of income and general support by the larger community. Additionally, developing micro managerial skills necessary for running day-to-day functions at a specific organization limits the time and resources that can be used for focusing on achieving the profession's larger social goals.

Inconsistency and contradiction inherent in American capitalism and many social workers' mixed feelings about this system make it difficult for the profession to advocate effectively for social change. As Mimi Abramovitz explains, "these contradictions (working to create a healthy, more stable environment vs. maintaining market forces) both create and complicate social work's assigned role as mediator of the conflicting needs of individuals and the requirements of the market economy. After all, to meet the basic needs of the individual and families and to fulfill the democratic vow of equal opportunity for all would undercut [the] profitability" that the market seeks to maximize. (518) Abramovitz is correct. Social work's place in American society is complicated by its position between the dictates of the market economy and Americans' desire to strengthen families, expand education, provide healthcare and empower the poor.

The ability of the profession to advocate is further complicated by political and economic shifts that constantly force the profession to readjust its relationship to the market economy. There may be periods, particularly during times of recession or

economic slowdown, when society is more tolerant of direct government action. In such an environment, it becomes easier for the care-giving profession to advocate policies that benefit the poor or others struggling because of economic slow-down. The Great Depression and the development of FDR's New Deal programs are prime examples. During the depression, social workers were in a political environment that enabled them to advocate many social policies Americans endorsed thus encouraging still greater activity. During more conservative periods, however, we see legislation, such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, that directly attacks programs benefiting the underclass. This legislation cuts benefits to single women and their children, places caps on benefits, and literally threatens the health and livelihood of many poor Americans. Many states have also cut benefits to the poor. In such periods, of course, social workers are less well equipped to defend their programs and institutions. The swing from periods of progressivism back to conservatism and its crippling effects on the ability of social work to meet its objectives is clear. According to Mimi Abramovitz, "the profit-driven market economy constrains social work's ameliorative agenda for individuals and communities." While the effects of the market on social work may "weaken during liberal and prosperous times," economic slowdowns impair social workers efforts to push social change. (519)

Conclusion:

Clearly, the rise of professionalization, the development of scientific standards and social work's relative commitment to the free market system limit the ability of the profession to advocate successfully. Generally, it appears that the care-giving profession

simply believes that political activity is less important than other commitments and objectives. To provide additional support for these claims, it is necessary to examine a specific population. Such study will, to some degree, demonstrate that professionalization, science and the market system limit not only the amount of activity organizations are willing to perform, but also the types of activities they are willing to execute. For example, social workers are likely to be more willing to write a letter to a legislator than they are to organize and lead a public demonstration. Writing a letter is faster, easier and less threatening than public demonstrations. Be this as it may, the importance given to professionalization, science and meeting market expectations do not exclude expanded political activity as later sections in this paper will show.

Chapter II: A Case Study: Political Activities of Non-Profit Organizations in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania:

Methods:

This chapter reflects the views of the leaders of non-profit social service organizations of the Lehigh Valley (Lehigh and Northampton County, Pa). Most of these organizations provide services to children, women, the elderly, the poor and/or the mentally or physically challenged.¹ Organizations were selected through personal knowledge and interaction with the Lehigh Valley non-profit sector and by examining publications that list Lehigh Valley organizations and the types of services they deliver.

¹ County agencies and large education and healthcare organizations were not included in the study. County agencies were not included because they are not permitted under the Hatch Act to actively engage in the political process. Large education and healthcare organizations were not included because they tend to better organized to influence the political process. Moreover, such organizations receive the bulk of their revenues from fees for service.

Surveys were completed with 33 of the 60 organizations identified through the selection process for a completion rate of 55%. This sample is representative of Lehigh Valley organizations as organizations focusing on children, job skills, healthcare, drug addiction, poverty, the physically or mentally impaired and senior citizens were included. In every case, the executive director or other member of upper management completed the survey. Interviews were sought with these individuals as they are most likely to have the best overall understanding of the organization and are in most cases responsible for coordinating the organization's political activities. The survey, completed between February 1 and March 6 of 1999, asked respondents to identify and describe their organizations' political activity for a period of one year--from February 1, 1998 through January 31, 1999.

The survey relied on open-ended questions. This method was selected because it provided respondents with greater opportunity to explain their answers and describe the types of political activities they perform.² Because political activity can be defined in a variety of ways, respondents were given several examples of political activity before questions were asked. Examples included: contacting an elected official; belonging to local, state or national organizations that encourage political activity; prompting clients to vote; and asking volunteers to become politically active on behalf of the organization.

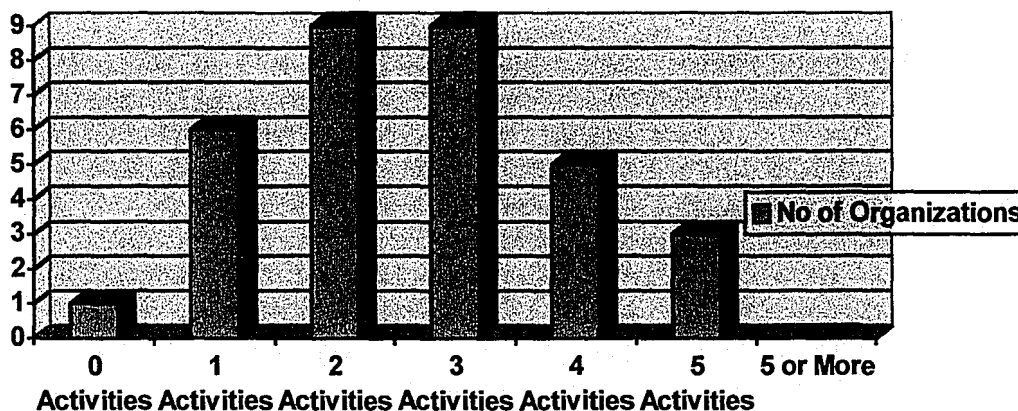
²The selection methods used in this study have a few disadvantages. Primarily, it was difficult to gather specific information about organizations given time restraints. Originally, 82 possible respondents were considered. However, some of these organizations were county agencies or programs that had to be excluded. Clearly, this shows that greater knowledge of the non-profit sector would have made it easier to formulate a sample more representative of the population from the onset of the study.

FINDINGS:

Frequency of Political Activity:

The results indicate a rather low level of political activity. The 33 organizations surveyed performed a total of 87 political activities from February 1998 to January 1999. The mean number of activities engaged in by an organization during that period is 2.61 out of a possible 16 activities. The 16 activities represent the total number of different activities performed by participating organizations. Please see Table 2 on page 17 for a complete list of activities. Table 1 shows that distribution of the mean loosely represents a classic bell curve. Few organizations participate at the high and low ends of the table. Most organizations (18 of the 33 surveyed) participated in 2 or 3 activities. However, this table also indicates that the overall level of participation is relatively low. No organization surveyed participated in more than 5 activities. One organization participated in no political activities.

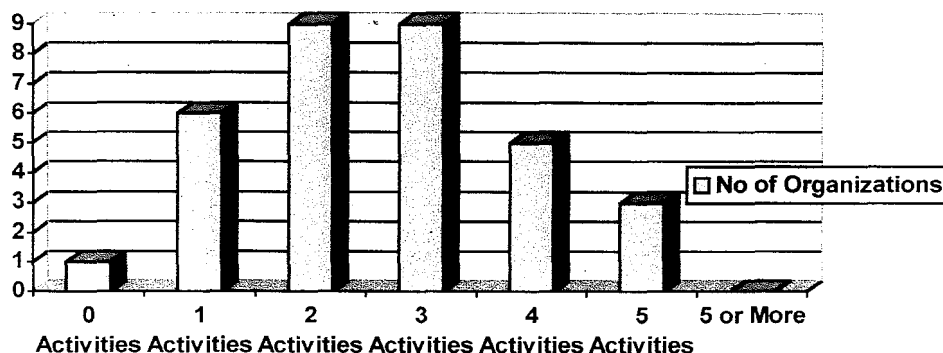
FIGURE 1: Organizations Participating in Political Activities³



These statistics provide a general outline of the level of political activity performed by organizations, but such information provides little explanation regarding why organizations are not more politically active. To complement these basic statistics and gain a deeper understanding of the surveyed organizations, first-hand testimonials are vital. These testimonials clarify such things as the purity of politics or the commitment an organization has towards political activities. One executive director, for instance, stated, "its difficult to answer these questions. We do not really plan any activities with regularity; we only do them as we need to. It's been a while since we have gotten political. There are many other things that we must attend to." Other organizations made it clear that they were only likely to become politically active, or become more politically active, when legislation threatened funding or the well-being of their clients: "we are

³ I did not ask organizations how many times they performed a particular activity. For some activities, however it is easy to deduce the number of times from the recorded testimonials. With other activities it is somewhat more difficult. Contacting elected officials, for instance, is harder to estimate. Nevertheless, the testimonials still provide some insight. As one organization said regarding contacting an elected official, "I think we contacted him [state representative] once or twice over the last year." I estimate that most organizations who do contact their elected officials do so 1-3 times per year.

FIGURE 1: Organizations Participating in Political Activities³



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usually just active when we believe that legislation is going to impact our constituency in a negative manner.” Clearly, such statements appear to indicate that organizations become more active when legislation affects their organization or clients. Some organizations, for example, stated that they held legislative breakfasts during campaigns to provide incumbents and candidates with information about their organization. Nevertheless, such testimony indicates that organizations do not have an ongoing, planned political strategy. Political activity is often undertaken only when an organization is confronted with legislation that directly impacts their organization and clients.⁴

Another explanation for a lack of consistent activity is limited time and funding. With budget cuts, increased caseloads and more responsibility, it becomes increasingly difficult to schedule and execute political activities. As one organization director stated, “there is a lot of work that must get done in a given day. Providing basic services remains our most important mission.” This statement reaffirms the general research in Chapter 1. Organizations are committed to individual treatment; the larger goals of the NASW are overlooked by a commitment to a micro, scientific objectivity and acceptance of general market forces. Moreover, lack of interest and knowledge of politics may explain differences in the level of activity from one organization to the next. Organizations with a greater frequency of activity clearly had management that possessed a strong

⁴ To a large extent, the development of professionalization has created a highly specialized social service system. This focus on specialization, while perhaps providing better services to their constituency, weakens the overall ability of the care giving profession to advocate for national policies that restore strong education, healthcare and opportunity for the poor. For instance, the National Association of Retired People (NARP) is generally not involved in policies that affect children. America did not witness an angry NARP during the 1996 welfare bill when child advocates called for increased funding for childcare. Fragmentation of social service agencies reduced political and organizational power.

understanding, knowledge and opinion of local political figures and issues affecting their clients and the community at-large. One organization that performed only one activity stated, "we really don't get involved in politics; it's not something that's vital to us."⁵ From this statement, it is clear that personal choice, beliefs, and knowledge play a major role in determining how politically active an organization is.

The rise of professionalization, the importance given to science and the profession's position in the market system appear to affect the political activity of Lehigh Valley organizations. Those surveyed from Lehigh Valley organizations did not discuss the importance of politics in terms of improving the overall state of society; they viewed political action as a function to meet the needs of their own individual organizations or causes. Again, focus on individual treatment and the development of specialization that followed may be one factor contributing to organizations focusing on political issues that directly impact them. To further assess the influence of professionalization, science and the market, it is necessary to examine the specific types of activities organizations completed.

Types of Political Activities:

Organizations completed 16 different types of activities. Some activities were performed by the majority of organizations; many activities were rarely engaged in by participants. In all probability, the popularity of some activities over other types results from important historical developments in professionalization and education, social

⁵ Such statements reaffirm the importance of social work curriculums that emphasize the importance of political and community action. The professions turn to professionalization and scientific inquiry are clearly impacting the attitudes and perceptions of social worker's and their attitudes toward politics and community action.

work's commitment to measuring outcomes and scientific validity and the profession's position in the larger market system. In other words, the development, values and goals of the profession will, to a large degree, determine the types of activities organizations feel comfortable performing. Categorizing the activities will assist in determining what types of activities are most commonly executed, and in determining if the activities most commonly carried out are partially a result of professionalization and dedication to scientific knowledge and the market system. In creating these categories, testimonials were carefully examined and peer review was instituted to determine if the categorization of the activities was logical.⁶ The separate categories that were developed are outlined below.

- (1) Administrative Centered Activities: Activities placed in this category largely rely on key administration to execute political activities and strategy. Generally, upper management will interact with elite political players, e.g., legislators or management of key bureaucracies. Generally, the community or clients are not actively involved in these types of activities.
- (2) Client Centered Activities: Activities placed in this category focus on client participation in the political process. Generally, management encourages these activities. These activities tend to focus on client interaction with political elite. Clients were generally not encouraged to express their political opinions to the community.
- (3) Community Centered Activities: Activities placed in this category focus on community participation in the political process on behalf of the organization. Generally, the management of organizations is responsible for and encourages community activities.

⁶ The categories and their definitions are based on the activities organizations completed during the interview process. Clearly, even clients centered and community centered activities rely on key management from the organization. Regrettably, there appears to be little political activity initiated by clients, volunteers or the community at large.

These categories generally classify activities completed by organizations. As Table 1 indicates, administrative centered activities are the most commonly performed. Out of 16 different activities, 10 or 62.5% of all activities fall into the administrative category. The client and community centered activities each contain three activities. In total, client and community centered activities make up 37.5% of all activities.

Table 1: Types of Political Activities

TYPE OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	VALID PERCENT
<i>Administrative Centered Activities*</i>		
Membership in a national, state, or local association	25	75.8%
Contacting legislators by letter, telephone, fax or email	19	57.6%
Hold or attend a legislative breakfast or other such function with the intent to educate legislators or advocate for clients	6	18.2%
Visit elected officials in their district office, Harrisburg or Washington D.C.	4	18.2%
Invite elected officials to functions and fundraising events--no direct effort to lobby Legislators	3	9.1%
Board members contact legislators	2	6.1%
Legislative committee	2	6.1%
Provide legislators or candidates with booklets describing the organizations objectives and general information	2	6.1%
Testify about legislative issues before a government body	1	3%
Encourage employees to be politically active	1	3.0%
<i>Client Centered Activities**</i>		
Providing voter registration materials to clients.	11	33%
Encourage clients to contact elected officials	3	9.1%
Public Rally ⁷	2	6.1%
<i>Community Centered Activities***</i>		
Advocate with other Lehigh Valley Organizations. ⁸	3	9.1%
Encourage volunteers to contact legislators	2	6.1%
Provide political information to volunteers	1	3%

⁷ Out of all the activities, public rally was the most difficult to classify into a single category. The two organizations that performed this activity said that their clients were the key participants, that this activity likely encouraged a sense of empowerment and community involvement among their clients. On the other hand, this activity also involved the larger community, and thus, could be placed in the community centered activity category.

⁸ While only two organizations were put in this category, the actual figure is probably higher. During the interview process, for example, respondents stated that legislative functions were planned by several organizations. In some cases, I could have counted such activity as "advocating with other organizations;" however, the organizations themselves did not classify legislative function in this manner. Again, as much as possible, I allowed organizations to place their experiences into their own categories.

*Includes activities that require interaction between an organization's management and government officials. Activities included in this category are membership in national, state or local organization; contacting legislators by letter, telephone, fax or email; hold or attend legislative breakfast or other function; invite legislators to functions and fundraising events; visit legislators in their district office, in Harrisburg or Washington D.C.; testify about legislative issues before a government body; advocate with other Lehigh Valley organizations; legislative committee; and provide legislators or candidates with booklets.

** Includes activities that require clients to actively participate in the political activity. Activities included in this category are providing voter registration materials; encourage clients to contact legislative officials; and public rally.

*** Includes activities that are likely to develop a broader range of support in the community. Activities included in this category are encouraging employees to be politically active, public awareness, provide political information to volunteers, encourage volunteers to contact legislators.

By and large, the administrative centered activities are a natural product of professionalization, commitment to scientific objectivity and the profession's position in the larger market economy. More importantly the organization's decision to focus on administrative centered activities demonstrates, to some degree, that the profession perceives that it is the most capable force to articulate the policies and goals of the organization to the political establishment. Some social workers may perceive that clients are unable to express the needs of the agency, its clients and the general population as they are not trained or educated in a manner that enables them to express the concerns and issues effectively. Moreover, many organizations may lack the understanding or resources to provide clients with information about political issues impacting a group of clients, and in some instances, organizations may simply believe that clients lack the general skills to properly express political or social problems. Community members may also be politically ineffective for an organization for many of the same reasons. Social workers and other related professionals may certainly be in the best position to communicate the needs of the organization and its clients to the political

elite, but due to their small number and their inability to sufficiently draw attention to their cause, social workers are a relatively weak political force. Drawing on a specific example will make this point more clear.

Table 1 shows that the most commonly performed activity is membership in a local, state or national associations. The use of the association to plan political activities may be a result of professionalization. The profession's desire to develop national standards and goals may have helped to unite organizations to some degree, but individual political activity may be reduced, as members perceive that the larger association will be responsible for political activities or what is commonly referred to as the free rider effect in political science. Moreover, the desire to measure outcomes through scientific study may have led organizations towards activities that are easy to measure in terms of success or failure. Thus, organizations may be less inclined to encourage clients to vote, for instance, because of the difficulty of measuring the outcome of their efforts to register and get clients to vote. Finally, organizations are forced to rely on the market and in many regards accept its principles. Thus, it may be unwise to encourage clients or the community to become actively involved. There is simply too much at risk. Moreover, organizations may not want to relinquish control of political activities, as to do so would demonstrate lack of organization and professionalization. While it is difficult to validate these theories given the particular limitations of this study, the importance given to administrative centered activities deserves careful attention. For example, would organizations be more effective if they worked to expand client and community centered activities? If so, is it possible given current conditions, for organizations to take steps to expand client and community

activities? While these questions are not easily answered, examining the various activities in greater detail may provide some of these answers.⁹ Out of the 16 different activities, 12 of them are performed by 3 or fewer organizations -- or less than 10% of the organization. Association membership (76%) and contacting legislators (58%) are the only two activities in which the majority of organizations participate. A closer examination of these two categories, however, reveals that these statistics are somewhat misleading. Out of 25 organizations belonging to an association, 5 organizations did not describe their involvement in an association in a manner that would be described as political. Some respondents, for example, stated that the association helped with economic and technical support for various programs or services. Others maintained that association meetings were prime opportunities to network and exchange ideas. As one respondent stated, "the association meetings and other interactions helps me to gather information and discuss ideas. To a degree, we rely on the association to help with financial support." The association's primary function, in many cases, is to provide resources and expertise to help local organizations operate on a day-to-day basis.¹⁰ While such support is clearly valuable, it may be a weaker form of political action than many other activities organizations perform.

⁹ These categories were developed to help classify the data, make comparisons and draw conclusions. This proved vitally important in latter sections of this paper, particularly when formulating recommendations. It is worth noting that some activities could be placed in more than one category. I decided not to do this in order to maintain clarity.

¹⁰ This is not to say that membership in association is not at all political. Some organizations stated that the national association provided information about legislation and actively encouraged the local organizations to contact elected officials. In some cases, the association provided local chapters with pre-written letters that could be signed by the executive director and immediately mailed to the appropriate government official or agency. In three cases, respondents stated that the national association was helpful to clients because it showed them that there was organization and structure, and this provided a bases to encourage client empowerment and self-worth.

The number of respondents who reported that they contact elected officials is also somewhat misleading. Again, examination of testimonials makes this clear. One organization contacted a legislator about Governor Ridge's workers' compensation plan to determine how it would affect their payroll and liability expenses. Another organization contacted their legislator to gather information about the incorporation process. Clearly, such interactions were not designed to impact legislation affecting clients, bid for a grant, or seek an increase in appropriations.¹¹

Distribution of Administrative, Client Centered and Community Centered Activities:

The data indicates that organizations are committed to administrative centered activities. Table 2 shows, of the 16 different activities, 10 are in the administrative category, accounting 63.5% of the activity types. This evidence partially affirms my position that organizations are likely to focus on administrative activities. However, these results are not that surprising.

Table 2: Distribution of Activities

	No. of Administrative Activities	No. of Client Activities	No. of Community Activities
No. of Activities by Category	10	3	3

¹¹ Individual interviews with open-ended questions enabled me to more accurately gage an organizations commitment to a particular activity. By asking organizations why they belonged to an association or contacted a legislator, I was better able to determine if their action was direct, e. g., contacting a legislator to encourage them to vote for a particular bill vs. an indirect action, e.g., contacting a legislator about a bureaucratic problem. Distinguishing between direct and indirect action proved useful in determining the overall activity level.

Social service institutions are strong organizing forces that have access to resources and knowledge, and thus organizations will be responsible for a large proportion of the total number of activities performed. Despite this fact, organizations are not doing enough to provide their clients or their community with political information or to encourage clients or the community to actively and aggressively be politically active on the organizations' behalf. This becomes even more apparent after examining the total number of activities performed in each of the three categories. As Table 3 indicates, not only do organizations perform a narrower range of client and community centered activities, but they also perform these activities at a lower rate. Table 3 shows that organizations do not tend to include the community or their clients in their political activities at nearly the same level as administrative activities.

Table 3: No. of Completed Political Activities

	Administrative	Client	Community
Total No. of Activities	65	16	6
Total % of all Activities	74%	18%	8%

Table 3 shows that nearly 3 out of every 4 political activities are dedicated to administrative centered activities. Equally important, it is obvious that the profession is most reluctant to encourage community involvement in their political activities.

Tables 3 and 4 alone do not provide a complete picture of the political activities of Lehigh Valley organizations. Table 4 below breaks the data down further, showing that organizations are both politically inactive and remain overly focused on administrative activities. The advantage of Table 4 is it controls for the natural frequency

of administrative centered activities by taking the total number of possible political unites in the administrative, client and community centered activity categories and determining which of the three categories has the largest percentage of completed political units. The formula for determining the total number of political units by category is:

Administrative: 10 Administrative activities X 33 surveyed organizations = 330 Administrative units

Client: 3 Client activities X 33 surveyed organizations = 99 Client Units

Community: 3 Client activities X 33 surveyed organizations = 99 Community Units

Table 4: No. of Completed Units by Administrative, Client and Community Categories

	Administrative	Client	Community
No. of Completed Units	65/330 Completed Units	16/99 Completed Units	6/99 Completed Units
Percentage of Units Completed	19% of total possible units completed	16% of total possible units completed	6% of total possible units completed

This table reveals a more balanced approach to political activity between the Administrative and Client centered activities. Nevertheless, organizations remain slightly more committed to the administrative approach. The contrast becomes starker if administrative activities that are rarely performed are removed from the administrative category. Simply removing the activity to encourage employees to be politically active, the total percentage of completed administrative unites rises to nearly 22%. Moreover, Table 4 assumes that organizations have not overlooked legitimate political alternatives in the client or community centered categories. For instance, organizations could encourage clients to educate their friends and families about political issues impacting the

organization. This is a legitimate alternative in that it is somewhat likely to have a positive impact on the political process, particularly at the state level. This claim is supported by one of the state legislators interviewed for this project who stated:

There is no more effective way to communicate politically then to bring five people, and before the meeting make it clear that these people vote in your district and they have family and friends, who think this is the most important thing you should have on your mind right now.

By informing key political players that friends and family understand the issues and believe that they are important, legislators are likely to pay more attention to a particular issue or concern.

Table 4 also reaffirms that the level of political activity by Lehigh Valley organizations is relatively low. Even the highest performed category—administrative does not reach a 20% completion rate. This table also shows that organizations have done almost nothing to make the community aware of political issues and concerns impacting organizations and their clients. If organizations desire to play a larger role in the political process they must increase their political activity in all three categories. It is difficult to determine how much expansion in political activity is needed to impact the political process, but it seems unlikely that Lehigh Valley organizations as a whole are gaining political power or recognition with such a low completion rate of political activities.¹² Lehigh Valley social service organizations, as a whole, must expand their level of political activity. Consistent political action by all organizations could create an

¹² This finding invites further research. Specifically, it would be interesting to examine another geographical area such as Philadelphia. If organizations completed a higher percentage of political units in the Administrative, Client and Community categories in the metropolitan area, and there was greater spending for programs related to social service, this would lend some support to the theory that expanding political activities by social service organizations has a direct impact on the political process. I believe that such a study could prove important in demonstrating to organizations that political activity that is consistent and coordinated between many organizations is politically effective.

environment where social service organizations would have more input in policy formation.

The Effectiveness of Political Activities:

While evaluating the types of political activity and the frequency with which these activities are performed is essential in understanding organizations and their relationship to the political process, this information gives little insight into how organizations perceive the effectiveness of the political activities they perform. Clearly, the effectiveness of an activity will partially determine if organizations continue to engage in a particular activity. Moreover, confusion or uncertainty about the effectiveness of a political activity may be one reason why organizations are not more active regarding community or client centered activities.

Table 5 records organizations' perceptions of the effectiveness of the political activities they engaged in. Organizations' responses were classified as effective, not effective, not sure or too early to tell. This table lists both the number of organizations that rated a particular activity and the percentage of organizations that rated the activity. As Table 4 indicates, organizations are, in fact, somewhat uncertain whether their political activities are having a positive impact.

Table 5: Measure of Effectiveness

Political Activity	Effective	Not Effective	Not Sure	Too Early to tell
<i>Administrative Centered Activities</i>				
Hold legislative breakfast or other such function with the intent to educate legislators or advocate for clients.	83% (5)	---	17% (1)	---
Membership in a national, state, or local association	76% (25)	8% (3)	12% (4)	4% (1)
Visit legislators in their district offices, in Harrisburg or Washington D.C.	66% (4)	---	33% (2)	---
Invite elected officials to functions and fundraising events--no direct effort to lobby legislators.	66% (3)	---	33% (2)	---
Legislative committee	50% (2)	---	50% (2)	---
Contact legislators by letter, telephone, fax or email	47.4% (19)	21% (8)	26.3% (11)	5.3% (2)
Board members contact legislators.	---	---	(2) 100%	---
Provide legislators or candidates with booklets describing the organizations' objectives.	---	---	(2)100%	---
Testify about legislative issues before a government body	---	---	(1) 100%	---
Encourage employees to be politically active	---	100% (1)	---	---
<i>Client Centered Activities</i>				
Providing voter registration materials to clients.	20% (2)	20 % (2)	50% (5)	10 % (1)
Encourage clients to contact elected officials	20%	20%	20%	20%
Public Rally	---	---	100%	---
<i>Community Centered Activities</i>				
Advocate with other Lehigh Valley organizations	---	---	100% (3)	---
Encourage volunteers to contact legislators	---	50%	50% (2)	---
Provide political information to volunteers	---	---	---	---

In 7 of the 16 activities the majority of organizations rated the effectiveness of their activity as "Not Sure." Many of the organizations were unable to quantitatively measure the success or failure of their political actions, which may explain the lack of consistent, planned political activity by many organizations. On the other hand, Table 4 shows that most organizations do not believe that their efforts are completely ineffective. Again, this shows that organizations are simply unable to measure the success or failure of their efforts. This is encouraging, as it demonstrates that greater political activity may

be possible if organizations perceive that political action helps them to achieve the values and objectives of the organization. Perhaps the key to expanding political activity among non-profit organizations is to develop methods to evaluate the outcome of political activity. If organizations are able to see a cause and affect relationship between political activity and positive political outcomes, political activity will likely expand. Moreover, this uncertainty and confusion about political activity may result from lack of knowledge and understanding of the American political system. Reminding the social work professionals of Sal Alinsky and progressives could be helpful in expanding activity. More importantly, social workers should be aware of the success of such individuals and movements, and determine if their methods could succeed in modern American politics.

Although the majority of organizations were uncertain about the exact impact of their activity, Table 4 clearly reveals that organizations have the most confidence in administrative centered activities. While 5 of 9 administrative activities were rated as effective by a majority of organizations, only 1 of 3 client centered activities and none of the 3 community centered activities were rated as effective by the majority of organizations.¹³ It is also significant that some of the most highly rated activities (holding a legislative function, inviting legislators to functions, and visiting legislators in person) involve direct interaction between organizations' upper management and elected officials.¹⁴ Generally, it appears that elite-to-elite is perceived as the most effective

¹³ It is somewhat inaccurate to compare levels of effectiveness between activities that are rarely performed and those that are frequently completed. Nevertheless, certain generalizations and comparisons can be drawn. For instance, it is clear that organizations find the administrative approach to be most effective.

¹⁴ During my interviews with state legislators, they indicated that the most effective way to gain their attention was through face-to-face interaction. It is encouraging to see that some organizations are aware of the effectiveness of this type of activity. Moreover, as my data reveals, organizations are much more ambigous about the impact of letters, telephone calls and email and other forms of passive or less persuasive forms of interaction. This will be explained in greater detail in section IV.

political interaction.

Membership in associations, the second highest rated activity at 76% deserves careful attention. Some of the testimonials described membership in associations as effective because of the material benefits this tends to provide. Many organizations, for example, stated that associations were most effective when they provided technical or financial support while others maintained that associations provided opportunities to exchange information and education. One organization representative stated “communicating with association members helps to exchange information and learn about what is successful and what's not.” While these functions could spur greater political participation, it appears that associations are usually a form of indirect political action. To a degree, if this assessment is accurate and the activity of association is removed from the list of activities, organizations appear slightly more uncertain about the effectiveness of their interactions.

Examining a number of testimonials that were categorized as effective also reveals that organizations may be somewhat less certain if they are being effective as they statistical data seems to indicate. An organization contacting elected officials stated, “some of the reps know what we are about. I can't really measure it in dollars and cents.” Another organization participating in the same activity, “we contact legislators to educate them. We provide them with information and try to explain the circumstances that our clients face. I think this has some impact, but then again, they're politicians. They do what they need to do.”

Another organization's response (also placed in the effective category) remarked, “it (contacting legislators) got us more informed and a lot more in the loop. On certain

issues we are brought to the table as experts, and this has helped.” While this organization’s experience has certainly improved their level of knowledge and thus their ability to interact effectively with the political process, they are unable to specify how and to what extent they have been effective, “we may have influenced policy, but it’s really hard to determine this.” Clearly, even responses that were categorized as effective reveal some ambiguity. Communication between elected officials and the non-profit sector, while it certainly takes place, appears to be somewhat frustrating for some organizations, particularly in terms of assessing the effectiveness of their efforts.

While it remains clear that organizations are somewhat uncertain about the effectiveness of their efforts, it’s important to recognize that there is some realization that political activities are partially effective. Organizations simply have a very difficult time recognizing or measuring the impact of their activities. In Section IV, I will provide ways of measuring the effectiveness of political activities. This lack of certainty regarding political action may be one deterrent in expanding political activity. Despite these efforts, it must be understood that political action and the success resulting from it cannot really be measured with any great certainty. For instance, it is very difficult to determine if letter writing campaigns or having clients talk to a legislator is responsible for a positive policy outcome. In such instances, organizations must rely on different criteria to judge success or failure. The impact of political action is often most clear months or years after the activity is performed. Again, education focused on key political and historical events should make it easier for organizations to see the impact of political action.

Future Political Plans:

Respondents were also asked if they had plans to be politically active in the future. This question was included in the survey to determine if organizations carefully plan their political activities, or perform them on an as needed basis. The majority of organizations appear to execute activities when the need arises. Nearly 70% of organizations stated that they had no specific objectives; they planed to continue their current political activity with little or no alteration. As one respondent remarked, "we don't plan to be political. When an issue surfaces that affects our organization, then we will contact legislators or take other steps to try and influence the powers that be." Another respondent stated, "I really don't have anything specifically planned. We will continue to contact legislators and try to make ourselves aware of issues that may impact the organization." Another organization commented, "we will only be active when the needs arise. We have no specific plans or goals." Organizations appear to be reactive. It is also noteworthy that five organizations, or 15.2% of organizations that completed political activities, have no plans to be politically active in the future. Two of these five organizations rarely engaged the political process and stated that their bylaws and board of directors did not permit any form of political communication that could be conceived as taking a stand on policy. While the majority of organizations do not plan political activities, three organizations stated that they had become more politically active and that they would likely increase the frequency of their activity in the coming year. These organizations stated that government cutbacks seriously threatened funding and as a result, undermined the ability of the organizations to properly meet the needs of their clientele. Nevertheless, it appears that scheduled cutbacks, and not the desire to develop

a political strategy to help formulate national policy, was the motivation for an increase in activity. In other words, it appears that many organizations are only willing to engage the political process when their ability to serve their clients is undermined.¹⁵

Discussion:

Both the data and testimonials provide a number of explanations for the lack of consistent, planned activity. First and perhaps most important, organizations are unable to measure the outcomes of their efforts to influence politics and public policy. As Table 2 showed, many organizations are uncertain if their activities are having the desired affect. In some cases, organizations believe they are having no impact. This is a key observation because in such an environment it makes little sense to invest time and revenue to expand political power that may be difficult to measure and pin down its benefits for the organization and its clients. Management cannot afford to invest time and resources in activities that have no measurable impact.¹⁶

Understanding that organizations have difficulty measuring the outcomes of their activities is vital in formulating alternatives that expand political activity. For instance, it would be imprudent to recommend alternatives in Chapter V of this paper without providing some method to measure the outcome of the alternative. If organizations begin to recognize that they are influencing politics in a manner that benefits their clients and

¹⁵ Legislative breakfasts appear to be the one activity that some organizations plan persistently regardless of the changing political atmosphere. A few organizations also indicated that they attempted to meet candidates, particularly when there was an open seat in order to educate and explain an organizations' positions and needs.

¹⁶ In one instance, a respondent stated that she would discontinue her organization's efforts to register her clients. While she believe it was important, she complained that it was time consuming. This is not surprising given her assumption that her efforts had not been at all effective in getting her clients to vote. Clearly, a method to measure the outcome of her efforts might change her mind.

organizations, then organizations will develop confidence in their efforts, and perhaps expand their level of activities and formulate political/public policy objectives. Political activity will become orchestrated.

Another key observation in this study worth noting is the frequency with which organizations conduct administrative centered activities compared with client and community centered activities. By and large, organizations have engaged in a large variety of activities that foster administrative-to-government relationships.¹⁷ This is not surprising. Organizations found administrative centered activities to be most effective. Moreover, such activities were generally easy to perform and probably required the least mobilization. Be this as it may, client and community centered activities should not be neglected. A minority of organizations encouraged voter registration, and fewer still had clients meet with legislators. Moreover, organizations have not actively encouraged volunteers or gone to the community at large to discuss how public policy is impacting their clients or the community. Organizations that include all three types of activities will likely be in a better position to influence government policy. Political Scientist E. E. Schattschneider remarked that the best method to gain political power is to expand the scope of conflict (1-43)¹⁸ In essence, involve more people. Encouraging clients and the community to participate will hopefully expand the scope of debate and thus add to organizations' power. As a result, I propose a number of alternatives that directly or indirectly fall into the client and community categories. At the same time, these

¹⁷ Most organization appears to have moralized political activity. Only one organization reported that they actively encouraged lower-level employees to contact elected officials.

¹⁸ See E.E. Schattschneider' *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realists Vision of Democracy in America*. Hindsdale, Il. The Drydan Press esp. pp1-43

alternatives should not conflict with the commitment of social service agencies to professionalization, scientific validation and the market. In fact, the most effective alternatives will work to include these commitments.

One observation that I did not record or consider in this study is the demand placed on the management of these organizations. Clearly, day-to-day management activities require substantial energy, effort and resources. In other words, the time and resources to develop political objectives, and the actions to meet these goals may not be present. Personal relationships, the telephone interviewing process, and social work literature certainly support this. Therefore, alternatives that are overly time consuming and expensive should be avoided. In the best-case scenario, activities that influence public policy and help organizations complete day-to-day administrative tasks must be considered.

The final observation realized through the survey process is that organization's management's knowledge and opinions about politics impacted how active an organization was.¹⁹ Although the respondents were not asked to rate the importance of political activity in the day-to-day functioning of their organization on a scale, I could easily distinguish between those who possessed a clear understanding of local issues and political personalities, and those who had little knowledge. The more information about politics respondents appeared to possess, the more activities they performed. This reaffirms the position that political education will have an impact on the frequency and

¹⁹ During the interview process, I recognized that the respondent's knowledge of and interest in politics may have some impact on how politically active an organizations is. Respondents who could easily recall the name of legislators, for example, appeared to perform a greater number of activities on a more frequent basis. This is not at all surprising. If there were more time, it would have been beneficial to question respondents about their social work education to determine if programs that emphasis politics and public policy influence social workers to be more political in their administrative and clinical duties.

sophistication of organizations' political activities. This judgment is supported by those in the social work community who argue that the profession's withdrawal from political action is partially explained by the general lack of interest and knowledge the profession has of politics and the formation of public policy.

All of these observations were used to develop the alternatives in Chapter V; however, first it is important to gain a deeper understanding of local political personalities to determine which forms of communication and political action are most effective in gaining their attention. By directly approaching elected officials and asking them which political alternatives have the greatest impact, effective alternatives become easier to develop.

Chapter III: Interviews with Local Legislators:

Methods:

I interviewed three Lehigh Valley Pennsylvania State Legislators, representing people in the Lehigh Valley, Jennifer Mann, T.J Rooney, Steve Samuelson, and one Pennsylvania State Senator, Charles Dent, to provide non-profit organizations with some insight into legislators' thinking and experiences. The interview questions were developed after the completion of the surveys with non-profit personnel; the survey results were used to formulate interview questions. Statements quoted in this section will not be attributed to individual legislators. To maintain anonymity, each legislator was assigned a capital letter, A, B, C or D, allowing the reader to see differences in opinion between the various legislators.

The questions asked during these interviews focused on three central areas. First, I focused on the communication between legislators and the non-profit sector. I asked these questions to determine how legislators perceived and used this communication in developing opinions, concepts and possibly even policy. In other words, did legislators view their interactions with non-profit organizations as an opportunity to gather useful information, or did legislators perceive this interaction to be of little importance and mostly ceremonial in function? Second, I asked legislators what impact political apathy is likely to have on the ability of organizations to influence public policy, and more importantly, what steps organizations could take to become more politically active and effective. Third, I asked legislators what steps or initiatives could be utilized more effectively by local organizations to impact the political process. With these questions, I concentrated on the methods organizations could utilize to enhance the effectiveness of their administrative centered activities.

Communication and the Use of Information Short Cuts:

The first area that I focused on during the interview was how legislators used their interactions with local non-profit organizations to educate themselves about issues impacting nonprofit organizations and their clients. Before the actual survey process, I recognized that legislators are under tremendous pressure to be familiar with a variety of subjects. Legislators are asked to formulate policy and create laws to regulate business and commerce, the environment, education, health, energy use, poverty programs, transportation and communication. While some individuals dedicate a lifetime of study and work to just one of these topics, legislators are required to have some understanding

of all these areas. Thus, legislators must find sources of pertinent information which requires little time. In other words, legislators are looking for what I call an information shortcut, a way to find information that enables them to formulate opinions, concepts and perhaps even policy, quickly and efficiently.

Although information short cuts can take many forms, I will limit my discussion to two central types. The first type provides legislators with information in the form of statistics, policy briefs, testimonials and recommendations. Generally, social workers have excelled at producing this type of information short cut as a result of their effort to develop a body of knowledge and use science to validate their findings (see section 2). The second type of information short cut relies on power and influence. Because the political process is highly competitive, legislators are attracted to or influenced by an interest or group based on the amount of power the legislator can gain from supporting it or opposing it. Groups that are capable of investing money in politics, have active members and an administration capable of invigorating community action find that they are better able to influence the political process to produce the results that meet the needs of their organization. Such groups may not have to produce accurate, scientifically proven data to achieve their results, as the ability to express political power is clearly and easily understood by politicians. It is this form of communication that legislators hear first.

Examining the individual testimonials of the legislators shows that the legislators welcome more traditional information short cuts (reports, statistics and policy briefs), but the expression of political power is a very clear and understandable form of communication to the legislator. If the care-giving professions are ever able to wed the

strength of their knowledge and expertise with real political power, they will be much more capable of producing an environment that benefits their clients.

Legislative Testimonials Describing Information Short Cuts:

When I entered Legislator A's office, I found him/her sitting at a desk examining a large book. I noticed that many pages were book-marked. During the interview process, I discovered that this large volume was the Pennsylvania State budget. Legislator A stated that he/she spent a great deal of time looking through it, but still felt uncertain if he/she grasped all of its complexities or their impact on local constituents. Legislator A comments:

The budget's like a thousand pages I think. I try to familiarize myself with as much as I can, but sometimes personal contact from a citizen, a group may be able to bring something to my attention, and there are many ways to do it.

Legislator D also admits that there is simply too much to know and welcomes opportunities to utilize information short cuts about issues he/she is unfamiliar with.

Legislator D remarked:

I have learned from very early on that there are a whole array of issues that come up on the floor that you did not talk about in the campaign or are even familiar with. So it is helpful for various groups and people who are advocates of certain cases, issues or groups to express themselves.

Both Legislator D and A's remarks reaffirm that legislators generally welcome information short cuts. Legislator A's comment about the state budget was particularly enlightening. Legislator A revealed that he/she is concerned that an important funding issue or other critical aspects of the budget was being overlooked. To better represent the constituency, Legislator A was hopeful that a citizen or group could highlight the flaws in

the budget and bring them to his/her attention so he/she could take the necessary steps to better represent his/her constituents. Legislator A was actively seeking an information shortcut. Legislator D's remarks showed that there is a wide-variety of policy issues, many of which will not be completely familiar to the legislator. According to Legislator D, there are simply too many issues. Again, this shows that legislators desire information short cuts. Without them, legislators may not possess the information they need to intelligently enact policy or effectively represent their constituencies. An organization that is able to provide a legislator with an information short cut that meets that particular legislator's needs will find that it is better able to influence policy. It should be evident, then, that non-profit organizations can help shape public policy if they can provide legislators with information short cuts to help them formulate public policy.

If legislators do encourage the use of information short cuts as the above testimonials indicate, it is important to find which types of information short cuts provide legislators with the best information in a form that is convenient and efficient. To determine this, I asked legislators to compare mail, e-mail, telephone calls and direct, face-to-face communication and asked them which of these forms of communication provided the most valuable information short cuts and were most likely to influence the legislator. Generally, these data show that the legislators believed that direct, face-to-face communication was more effective than letters or telephone calls. There are a number of possible explanations for this finding. One reason may be cultural. America values the idea of direct, participatory democracy. Legislators want people to believe that citizen involvement is the key for successful government. Thus, legislators may have stated that

direct communication is most effective to meet traditional American values and concepts of democracy.

American values may have impacted their answers to a degree, but the testimonials seem to confirm that mail and telephone calls are simply less effective information short cuts. Some legislators stated that their offices were inundated with telephone calls and especially snail mail. In other words, letters and telephone calls are less effective information short cuts because legislators have difficulty distinguishing among them. There are simply too many calls and letters. As Legislator D remarked:

“Well, there’s no doubt. There is nothing like a fact-to-face meeting. I’ve dealt with people over the phone and I have never seen them face to face, and there is a difference. There are people, for example, who will send you a lot of mail. It’s difficult to respond. It’s difficult if they send you a letter. If they say we’re writing to oppose this bill, that’s helpful to understand their position and hear their argument. And it helps you understand the whole issue more. Then at the same time, there are people who send a letter introducing themselves. Well, [representative points to desk] my desk is relatively messy today, but you can see, with the volume of paper work we have here, you don’t have time to read everything that comes in the mail or someone drops off. So, it’s much more effective if someone has a point to make or if they just want to introduce who they are and what their group does, it’s always better to meet face to face.”

Legislator C stated that a single letter had little affect:

“They simply generate a response. As opposed to receiving the perfunctory letter, having people come here is by far the most effective.”

Legislator B revealed a similar experience.

“A lot of groups prepare very nice publications that provide a lot of good information, but I get overwhelmed with information everyday. Letters and annual reports. I can spend my whole life just looking at annual reports, reading annual reports. Everybody’s reporting on something. When someone is really interested in talking about an issue, on the other hand, they setup a time and come in and say this is what we’re doing. Here are some materials and here are some affected by what we’re doing. That just helps. It kind of personalizes the issue.”

Legislator B, C and D revealed that they were overwhelmed with information, particularly letters and other forms of publications. The consensus among the legislators was that information is abundant. There is an information overload. Organizations that fail to distinguish their information will discover that they have less input and influence over the legislative process. Organizations should not diminish their interaction with legislators through the telephone or mail, but other alternatives must be developed and executed if organizations are to maximize political efficiency. Personal, face-to-face interaction appears to be one of the most promising activities.²⁰ Lehigh Valley organizations should attempt to use this method more frequently.

The popularity of face-to-face information short cuts appears to result from the unique qualities that this form of communication offers. Legislator D finds that face-to-face interaction simply saves time:

"I always appreciate meeting with people directly. I can't read as fast as I can talk and listen to someone talk. I can't write as fast as I can speak. You can accomplish much more in less time."

Clearly, face-to-face interaction appears to be a more effective means of communication. While legislators may find it difficult to meet with all organizations, they do seem to value direct interaction for its ability to provide valuable information quickly.

It would appear, then, that organizations that provide legislators with the most efficient information short cuts, are positioned to benefit from the political system. The

²⁰ E spoke somewhat more favorably of mail and telephone communication than the other legislators did, but he/she still emphasized the importance of personal, direct communication:
"Face-to-face meetings are the best. We are able to talk to them in depth about what they're seeking, but I think letters are also effective. We do get a lot [of letters], but it's a way to bring an issue to a legislator's attention. "

non-profit sector, with its emphasis on education, professionalization and scientific integrity should be well suited to develop efficient and useful information short cuts that are capable of impacting the legislative process. Regrettably, the care-giving professions have discovered that efforts to advocate and educate lawmakers have not created policies of budget expenditures that support social service agencies. Expanded face-to-face interaction only has a modest influence on the legislative process. Those advocating for greater childcare expenditures after the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, for instance, provided mounds of statistical data demonstrating that funding was inadequate. Advocates testified, provided briefing reports, and passionately discussed the hardship welfare reform would impose on children. This, however, was not enough. The information short cuts fail to influence policy outcome. While this is frustrating, the reason for failure is easily recognized: lack of political power and influence. In other words, the ultimate information short cut for the legislator is political power, i.e., financial support, voter turnout, and a strong, organized group. Organizations that are able to combine their knowledge and expertise with real political power will be the most effective communicators, and these organizations will find the greatest political success.

Regarding Political Power as Information Short Cuts:

Thus far, I have shown that legislators desire information short cuts that are easy to understand and distinguish from other forms of information. Social work's drive to professionalize, which includes the development of educational standards and reliance on scientific inquiry to justify the actions of the profession have enabled it to develop

information short cuts that are clear, organized and in most cases scientifically accurate. Despite these accomplishments the care-giving professions play a small role in the formulation of public policy. As revealed by the 1996 Welfare Act, accurate information and research may play only a small part in how policy is developed. Conservatives argued that laziness, out of wedlock births and other similar social problems were a result of welfare policy, without providing accurate information to back such claims. While liberals could point to a lower poverty rate and prove that women on welfare had similar numbers of children as "traditional" families, the integrity of their knowledge and experience were invalidated due to lack of political power and organization. Their information and statistical data were supported by political power. In essence, then, the ultimate information short cut is political power. Power creates and shapes policy.²¹

The interviews with local legislators also revealed that they were keenly aware of the importance of power. Again, examination of specific testimonials more clearly reveals that political power is the most important information that can be expressed. Legislator B stated that he was more likely to take an organization or group seriously if they were organized and committed to impacting the political process:

“When someone is really interested in talking about an issue, on the other hand, they set up a time and come in and say this is what we’re doing. Here are some materials and here are some affected by what were doing. That just helps. It kind of personalizes the issue.”

²¹ The best example that represents this phenomenon is the NRA. Those opposing the NRA, in my opinion, have clearly developed a number of information short cuts that include accidental fatalities, escalating violence and the lack of constitutional and Supreme Court presidents supporting freedom to bear arms. Despite this, the NRA and its 30 million members have the ability to create real, organized political power that most legislators cannot ignore. As a result, legislators are influenced by the NRA's political power, and truthful information becomes less important.

Here the words "really interested" are used to describe face-to-face interaction, which according to the legislator, reveals that the group or individual is more committed to making his or her point of view. Thus, when groups meet with the legislator face-to-face, he/she recognizes that this group is committed to its cause. This information is vital to the legislator, as it informs him/her about how much time and energy he/she should expend in attempting to address the concerns of the organization. If he/she believes that an organization is only mildly committed to influencing the political process, it is not in his/her direct interest to invest substantial time. Such an organization is not likely to organize, protest, or encourage other members of the community to become involved.

Legislator C is much more direct about the importance of political power in the legislative process. Legislator C argues that the non-profit sector must expand its knowledge of politics and then take action:

"Organizations (A) need to make sure their people understand these issues and (B) be equipped to do something, i.e., vote. Because I get sick and tired of going to these events around here where I hear legislators blow smoke up their ass [the non-profits] on Friday afternoon and then on Monday going to the floor of the House watching them stick it up their ass. What they say and what they do are often completely at odds with reality. And therefore, the only way you can overcome that is to have consequences."

A number of important points are brought to light in this statement. First, the ability to deliver a consequence for or against a legislator for taking a particular policy stand requires political power. Legislator C's assessment that organizations must establish consequences (or rewards) for legislators is well warranted. As already indicated, groups that have been politically successful have provided legislators with both consequences and rewards. At the moment, non-profit groups provide neither. Generally, non-profit constituents are not outraged to the point of taking direct, aggressive political action e.g.,

parades, demonstrations and general efforts to expand the scope of debate. Thus, organizations are not perceived by legislators as a force for upsetting the electoral balance. Moreover, service organizations cannot offer financial rewards or even votes for that matter. In short, the non-profit sector will continue to be underrepresented in policy decisions if organizations do not work to expand their political power base.

Legislator D goes so far as to suggest that there is a direct correlation between policy and voter turnout among various groups:

“Let me first say that I think there is a direct correlation between the attention a group gets and their attendance at the voting booth. I think if people want their concerns and issues recognized, it’s very important that they vote. I think there is a correlation. As a representative, it is my intent and my goal to represent everyone. Whether someone votes should not factor in when helping people. All Right. But the reality of how the system works is that those groups who are heard from at the voting polls are going to be listened to in the big picture.”

Legislator D’s statements reveal that legislators wish to represent and help all their constituents. But as Legislator D recognizes, this isn’t always the case. Those organizations with political power are the ones that will receive the most benefit from government policy. Again, if organizations are to truly represent the interests of their clients, they must work to maximize the political power of their organizations. Political power is without doubt the shortest and clearest of information short cuts for the legislator.

Client Participation in the Political Process: A Means to Expand Political Power:

These interviews revealed that there is little interaction between organizations’ clients and legislators. Neither organizations nor legislators are actively working to foster

greater client participation in the political process. To some degree, legislators benefit from the administrative centered approach. As one legislator explains:

“If you’re going to be an effective legislator, one of the most important things you can do is understand your constituents. And a lot of the time, the people who lead non-profits are the leaders for a larger group of people, and if they’re advocating for those people, its important to interact with them. For me, what is helpful, is that they can articulate and express the concerns of that group.”

From these remarks, it appears that management’s dominance in expressing the needs of the organization and their clients is helpful because they summarize or express the needs of the entire group, an information short cut that enables legislators to learn about the problems facing a particular group relatively quickly. Unfortunately, this need for efficiency makes active participation by clients somewhat of a hindrance for both the legislators and non-profit management.²² For non-profit groups, it may be time consuming and somewhat expensive to organize a group of clients to meet legislators. The legislators, on the other hand, have little to gain from meeting the clients. They can simply learn about the clients from the administration. However, according to some of the surveyed legislators, organizations that are able to demonstrate that their clients are politically motivated and capable of expressing their views, may receive greater response from legislators. This is particularly true if clients vote is based on the way the legislator hands a particular issue or law.

Legislators did state that meeting clients to discuss their concerns could have a lasting impact as it makes the issues more personal. In all likelihood, meeting both client

²² While only one legislator made this observation, it seems evident that it would be easier for legislators to gather information from non-profit's management than an entire group. Moreover, legislators and management's are more likely to share a similar culture and socio-economic status, thus enhancing communications between the legislator and management.

and management may result in greater political power. In such cases, the information short cuts that are presented will have more effect because the legislators sense greater political power. As Legislator C remarks:

“There is no more effective way to communicate politically than to bring five people, and before the meeting make it clear that these people vote in your district and they have family and friends, who think this is the most important thing you should have on your mind right now. And they [organizations] do not do that nearly as effectively as they are capable.”

These remarks reaffirm much of the survey data. First, it reaffirms the survey data; organizations are not actively working to encourage their clients to engage in the political process. As Legislator C remarks, organizations are not "nearly as effective as they are capable" in terms of having their clients engaging in the political process. Perhaps more importantly, Legislator C has made a distinction between communication that relays information in an efficient manner and communication that expresses political power. While Legislator C might concur that meeting with non-profit management is an easier and more efficient means of gathering information, he/she clearly states that meeting clients is a much more powerful form of political communication, particularly if these people vote and are willing to express these ideas to others.

Clearly, it may be expedient for organizations to exclude their clients from the political process. Organizations may not want to invest the time or resources to educate them about political and social issues. Moreover, political interaction tends to take place among elites; including clients would disrupt this process. Nevertheless, involving clients in interaction with the political elite demonstrate organization and commitment to a cause. Here, organizations are performing both administrative and client-centered

activities. This demonstrates a broader base of power, and is an effective and powerful form of political communication that all organizations should work to enact.

Expanding the Power of Administrative Centered Activities:

The vast majority of organizations provide legislators with information short cuts. A few alternatives can be implemented to expand political power. These include (1) contacting committee chairs about legislation or other issues affecting your clients; (2) contacting legislators across the state who may interact with clients similar to yours; (3) working more closely with local organizations offering similar services; (4) getting to know legislative staff members; (5) and encouraging board members to become politically active. While some of these activities certainly require time and staff resources, many of them are simple to implement.

1) Contacting Committee Chairs:

The Pennsylvania State Legislature, like the U.S. Congress, selects a number of its members to oversee various committees. In Pennsylvania, the committee chairs who are most important to the non-profit sector in the Lehigh Valley are in general, Roy Reinard, Urban Development, Jere W. Schuler of Aging and Youth, Denis M. O'Brien Chairmen of Health and Human Services and most importantly, John E. Barly, Chairman of Appropriations. No organizations during the interview process mentioned contacting any of the chairs of the above mentioned committees. This is an oversight that non-profit organizations in the Lehigh Valley should not allow to continue. Appropriations is the most powerful committee, responsible for allocating funds. Organizations are more

likely to be able to increase expenditures for social service programs if they are able to convince the head of Appropriations that such funding is needed. Information short cuts may be helpful but, political power is more important as this is the form of communication legislators react to first. One way to demonstrate your power is to have your local legislator write a letter of support for a particular funding increase. Legislator D makes this clear when he/she writes:

“Certainly lobbying the chair of the Appropriations Committee can never hurt. If the chair of appropriations gets a bunch of calls from the Lehigh Valley, it might not do much, unless a legislator from the valley contacts him. That will impress him.”

These remarks indicate that it is more effective to have a state representative from the Lehigh Valley contact the Appropriations chair on behalf of the organization. Clearly, a member of the House or Senate will have more influence with the committee chairs as the committee heads depend on the representatives for their position. Asking your legislator to contact the chair of appropriations or other committee members is not time consuming. This is an activity that can be conducted during regular interactions with local legislators. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that a legislator would not contact a committee member on behalf of an organization unless that organization possesses political power. A legislator can only make so many requests of the committee chairs. Organizations will need to generate letters or develop other types of support from clients and the community to convince the legislator that it is in his/her interest to present the concerns of the organization to the Appropriations chair. Again it is important to communicate political power when interacting with legislators.

2) Working with Organizations that Deliver Similar Services:

One way to convince a legislator to approach a committee head is to demonstrate that a particular concern or issue is important to a number of local organizations. If, organizations plan and actively work together to attain similar objectives, information should be shared and efforts optimized. While nearly 20% of organizations do attend political breakfasts or other similar functions where a number of organizations are present, most organizations appear to perform their political activities independently of each other. Only 9% of organizations, for example, reported that they advocate with other organizations in the Lehigh Valley. Most organizations do not act with others probably because organizations have not generally developed political plans. As the survey data indicate, most organizations seem to execute political activities when a specific policy or law impacts their organization or constituency, and this make it more difficult for local organizations to perform political activities in unison or develop wide-range political goals and objectives. Nevertheless, political organization is a key component of political power. As Thomas R. Dye and Harmon Zeigler write, "organized interests are potent political realities." (221)

3) Contacting other Legislators Across the State that Serve Similar Clients:

During the interview process, legislators did reveal that they often consult with each other regarding public policy. Such interaction is vital to eliminate duplication and maximizing efficiency. According to Legislator D:

"I often discuss issues that affect the Valley with other legislators because the issues are not contained to a single district. It helps to work together."

Given that many legislators work together, particularly if they share a similar geographic region or population, it is beneficial for organizations to contact all legislators in the state who deal with similar issues as the legislators in the Lehigh Valley districts. No organization stated that legislators or other non-profit organizations serving similar populations in other areas of the state were contacted as part of political activities. This practice should be altered, as political force requires collective action. State and national organizations must move away from information short cuts and work to have local agencies play a more vital part in the political action of the larger association. Although local organizations may believe that expanded political activity, particularly outside their geographic area, is unobtainable, a few options exist. First, the state and national associations can provide local organizations with key contacts and perhaps the resources to work with legislators and organizations outside of their geographic area. Organizations that desire to impact the political process more effectively can certainly contact the associations and obtain the information they need. Equally important, the development of the Internet and other electronic tools make it simple and convenient to contact organizations and representatives outside the geographic region. If organizations are able to form stronger bonds with organizations and legislators seeking similar policies outside the local region, organizations will provide a more united voice and thus be in a stronger position to impact the process of developing policies.

4) The Importance of the Legislative Staff:

As indicated, legislators must be well versed in a wide variety of subjects. Consequently, legislators often rely on their aides to gather information, present

summaries, and in many instances, provide recommendations. The legislative aide plays a major role in determining if information is presented to the legislator. Thus, it is important for organizations to develop relationships with legislative aides as well. There may be instances, for example, when the legislator is unable to attend an event or respond to a letter. In such cases, the aid is left to make a decision. The survey data reveal that no organization asked legislative aids to be board members or participate in events. Organizations reported that they contacted legislators to educate them about the needs of their clients, but no organization stated that they actively worked to inform the legislative aid as well.²³ Organizations should recognize that contacting an aide could have a direct impact on the legislator. This is made clear by the testimonials. According to Legislator D, "They (legislative aides) bring all of their life experiences with them. So yes, they do have an impact on how I do my job." While Legislator C expressed a similar view, "I encourage my aides to get involved with the community. Other legislators do this as well. I would say that my aides do have an impact on the way I do things."

Clearly, organizations can strengthen their chances to influence policy by contacting aides, explaining the issues that are important to them, and asking them to explain this to the legislator. Every interaction with the legislative process must be utilized to the fullest.

²³ While no organization reported that they actively worked to educate legislative aids, it is clear that aids have received much if not all of the information that organizations have provided to legislators. Despite this, the survey data reveals that organization failed to recognize that interaction with the legislative aide is an opportunity to gain political influence.

5) Having Board Members Contact Legislators:

As legislators actively seek out opportunities to expand their political power, it may be advantageous for organizations to have board members contact legislators, particularly if an organization has a prominent board member(s). For instance, some organizations have business executives, lawyers or other notable individuals as board members. Such individuals may have some influence within the political system. Legislators who are contacted by such individuals may pay more attention to that particular organization. A strong, politically active board can certainly be a strong asset.

By and large, most organizations are not using this political activity to their advantage. Only 6.1% of organizations reported that their board members actively advocated on behalf of the organization, as reaffirmed by Legislator C:

“One thing most organization are not doing and they should is have their board members take a more active role. In many cases, the board is well positioned in the community. They have influence.”

The legislators' observations are certainly correct. Organizations should encourage their boards to be more active in the future. This will force legislators to pay more attention to the issues that concern the non-profit sector.

Conclusion:

Power is central to the American political process as demonstrated in the preceding sections. The care-giving profession's decision to move towards greater professionalization has enabled it to develop a body of convincing research that certainly justifies greater recognition in policy development. These efforts will be of little use if members of the profession are unable to use their expertise to influence public policy or

reshape institutions to produce a happy, safe and healthy environment. Organizations must recognize that information short cuts are not enough. Political power must be cultivated. As the legislators indicated, it takes real power to enact legislation. In Part V, I provide a number of alternatives that combine the requirements of the modern profession of social work, consider current political realities and work to expand the power of organizations, particularly through client and community centered political activities.

Chapter IV: Ways to Influence the Political Process:

The purpose of collecting and analyzing these data is to present organizations with information to enhance and expand their understanding of the political process, and to provide concrete examples of what actions can be taken to impact politics in a way that benefits both client and organizational needs. The recommendations presented here were developed by evaluating the survey data, interviewing local legislators to determine which types of political activities are most likely to get their attention and influence public policy, and by reviewing existing literature about social workers and their involvement in public policy. Reviewing these various sources indicates that some alternatives are more likely to be accepted than others. For example, after evaluating the profession's beliefs and values relating to political involvement, it is evident that the most successful alternatives will be those that focus on individual treatment of clients, meet social work's goals to increase efficiency and expand the base of knowledge, and avoid conflict with the established principles of the market economy. At the same time, these recommendations must be formulated to meet existing political conditions and values,

e.g., reduced federal spending, greater state control and more support for individual responsibility. Most importantly, these alternatives must not be overly time consuming and costly and policy outcomes must be clear and easy to recognize. Clearly, this sets limits. Nevertheless, the conditions that must be accepted also provide a number of opportunities to empower the weak, strengthen our community, expand social learning, invigorate democracy and make government accountable to the people. Of course, the success of these alternatives lies in the hands of non-profit organizations.

Voting:

Perhaps the most powerful and easiest alternative for organizations to implement is effective voter registration. This client-centered activity can be an effective means for organizations to expand their political power and create a sense of empowerment and independence for their clients. Moreover, this activity meets the goal that is in line with the NASW's mission to empower people "who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty." Despite the importance given to self-reliance and empowerment by the NASW, only 33% of organizations actively encourage their clients to vote, and of those, only 20% stated that their efforts to increase voter turnout among their clients had little or no impact on the political process. As one organization spokesperson stated, "it's difficult to know if people vote once they're registered." Another organization claimed that voter registration efforts have had a "minimal impact on getting their clients to vote." Such comments are not at all surprising. Over the last several decades, political scientists and sociologists have compiled a large body of evidence indicating that the poor and less educated don't show up on Election Day. Some studies show that the amount of

education people complete has a direct impact on the rate of voter turnout. Studies indicate that income has a direct correlation with voter turnout. Clearly, low income, lack of political knowledge, level of education and family structure do play a major part in voter turnout. And regrettably, these are characteristics that often describe the client base for many organizations²⁴.

Recent statistical data indicate voter apathy among the poor is intensifying. A 1995 census report shows that voting by citizens earning less than \$5,000 dipped 20% in 1994, down from 32% in 1990. Individuals earning between \$5,000 and \$10,000 slipped from 31% in 1990 to 23% in 1994. (Callahan 70) Clearly, the poor are not participating in the electoral process at the level that they should; and at first glance, there appears to be little hope for changing this trend. In fact, many organizations participating in the survey were aware that their clients have backgrounds and lifestyles that reduce the likelihood that they will participate in the electoral process. As one organization spokesperson stated, "our clients simply do not have the educational background or the desire to participate in politics." Other organizations claimed that it was difficult to measure the effectiveness of their voter registration and had little idea if their efforts were having an impact. Time and again, organizations were uncertain about the effectiveness of their efforts.

All the evidence seems to point to a rather depressing conclusion: the poor will simply continue to exclude themselves from the political process. A closer examination

²⁴ For more information about the American elections and voting patterns please see . Pivon, Frances F. and Cloward Richard P. *Why Americans don't vote* . Pantheon Books 1989; Philips, Kevin. *The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath* and Doppelt, Jack C and Shearer, Elen. *Sage Publications*

of the American electoral process shows that the only hope for change is if organizations take necessary action. Perhaps the most important point, and one that is often overlooked, is that the registration process in America is cumbersome. Unlike European countries, which often combine registration and voting, Americans must take time to fill out an application, drop it off at the county courthouse with limited hours of operation, and then travel to a polling place several weeks later to vote. As people move, they must re-register in their new community. This may not seem substantial, but when 15-20% of American move each year, some are bound to forget to register while others simply won't want to take the time to learn where and how to register in a new location. Others don't want to register for fear of being selected for jury or revealing their identity to a spouse. Whatever the reason, registration remains a barrier to greater voter participation. As William H. Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale write, "we have observed that registration requirements are the last major legal impediment to voting." (158)

If voter registration remains an impediment to voter participation, and if the poor are less likely to be registered, what will result if initiatives are undertaken to register the poor? Will they vote at the same levels as those who already have a history of voting, or will such efforts have little impact? Somewhat surprisingly, a number of studies indicate that the poor and under-educated are almost as likely to vote as the educated and wealthier classes, *once* the registration barrier has been crossed. As Pervill Squire, Raymond E. Wofinger and David P. Glass observe "even unlikely registrants are relatively frequent voters when they do register." In fact, "the less educated act much more like the better educated, once they have crossed the crucial barrier of registration." (52) A study conducted by Benjamin Highton of the University of California at Berkley

shows that education and income have less impact on voter turnout in states with less restrictive voter registration laws. (Highton 566-573). Studies of the Motor Voter Bill give further proof that restrictive registration practices limit voter turnout. A study measuring the impact of the Motor Voter Bill in the 1992 presidential election indicates that states that had implemented motor voter legislation had higher rates of registration and voter turnout than states that had not yet enacted the law. More importantly, there was no significant difference in voter turnout between current registered voters and those who registered and voted as a result of the Motor Voter Bill. (Franklin and Crier 104) Time and again, "whether one looks at the wealthy or the poor, the relatively educated or uneducated, the old or the young, the major factor that structures group turnout is the level of group registration." (Jackson and Robert 259)

Numerous studies indicate that providing voter registration materials and explaining the registration and voting processes to the poor expands their participation in the political process. Organizations that have supported voter registration, then, have had an impact. Organizations that stated their efforts to register clients has had little or no impact on getting their clients to vote may have focused on studies that examine on low voter turnout among the poor and not the difficulties imposed by the registration process. And while the poor may continue to be under-represented in the voting population, it is important to remember that there is little difference in voter turnout between an affluent voter and a poor voter, once the registration process is complete. Organizations, then, must continue to register their clients and explain the voting process. If organizations do this, they may see increases in funding as a result for their efforts. As Lehigh Valley legislators made clear, there is some correlation between the amount of government

services available to a group or organization and the number of voters they can produce. Becky Cain, President of the League of Women Voters also points out that “the first thing that a candidate does is go down to the registrar and find out who’s on the list of registered voters. And if you’re not on it, they’re not interested in you.” (American 76-77)

Organizations that are mobilized and able to deliver large blocks of voters see increases in funding. “Lower-class Mobilization and Policy Linkage in the U.S.” States appearing in *The American Journal of Political Science* measured welfare spending from 1978 to 1990 and found that spending was highest when the lower classes were mobilized to vote. As the authors point out, their data “provides strong evidence that lower-class turnout is associated with the generosity and equity of welfare benefits in the states.” (Hill and Hinton-Anderson 79) Organizations will continue to see their budgets shrink or discover that they have less influence in the formation of public policy unless they are able to demonstrate political power. Expanding the number of voters committed to the care-giving professions is certainly one way to accomplish this.

Political scientists and sociologists often overlook the benefits of electoral participation on the individual. Social workers and psychologists find that electoral participation can create concepts of empowerment, citizenship and hope among individuals suffering from various social and psychological disorders. Individual treatment, as indicated earlier, is generally the unit of treatment that the care-giving professions focus on. Because voting is a highly individual act that displays the choices and values of the individual, encouraging clients to vote can be combined with the treatment process for many organizations. Voting is a process that expresses

empowerment. A number of organizations participating in the survey reached similar conclusions. The voting process "creates a sense of empowerment for clients, while 'promoting citizenship'" according to one organization spokesperson.

A small minority of social workers believes that traditional therapy can be combined with political action. Carolyn Morell, for example, believes that political activity and drug intervention can be combined. In doing so, individuals can work together in a team atmosphere to change cultural patterns and institutions that promote drug use, racism, homelessness and underemployment. Such activity, according to Morell, "can foster stronger community ties, and enhances empowerment." (310) Barry Checkoway concludes that "organizing is an empowering process that enhances psychological well being" and "as individuals unite in solidarity, they reduce their isolation and interact with others in ways that . . . contribute to their real and perceived power" (97) If these claims are correct, then voter registration and political participation in general can be made part of the treatment process because voting encourages empowerment and self-sufficiency, is a cherished American value and is a relatively non-threatening form of political activity. Clearly, the effort to register clients meets many of the profession's goals and values. It is an activity that can successfully be measured to some extent, and it does not threaten the profession's position in the larger market structure.

While providing registration materials is by far the most fundamental action an organization can take to encourage more clients to vote, other steps should be taken to increase the effectiveness of voter registration efforts. First, it is important to be aware of Pennsylvania's registration laws. Unfortunately, the registration process in Pennsylvania

is more cumbersome than in many other states. Thus, familiarizing yourself and staff with registration requirements can help ensure that clients are eligible to vote. Organizations must make sure they offer voter registration materials well in advance of the election if their efforts are to be successful. It is also helpful to make clients aware of the registration process and when they must register. If there is any confusion or uncertainty about voter registration, the League of Women Voters or a local State Representative should be contacted. Again, organizations must actively encourage their clients to register and vote if voter registration efforts are to be successful. This may mean helping clients fill out registration forms, asking clients if they know where they need to go to cast their vote, and quite possibly even providing clients with transportation to the polling place.

Providing political information and resources to clients will further increase voter turnout. A number of studies indicate that political knowledge has an impact on voter turnout. During presidential elections, for example, more Americans vote because there is a plethora of information about the election. In off year elections, on the other hand, there is much less information available and fewer people vote as a result. While this clearly requires greater effort and time on the part of organizations, political information can be distributed in a number of ways. First, invite candidates to meet with clients. Local state senators and legislators will more than likely take the time to do this. This is a particularly effective method because some studies do indicate that face-to-face encounters with candidates are one of the most important forms of political knowledge. Moreover, individuals who do meet with candidates are more likely to vote as a result of their meeting. Another option is to contact the League of Women Voters for voters'

guides. This information can be made available at the organization's office. A similar option would be to encourage clients to call Lehigh University's ElectionLine, which enables citizens to listen to recorded messages about various issues important to candidates. While clients may never act on such information, the very effort communicates that political involvement is important and that it is worth pursuing.

The Internet:

33% of the surveyed organizations have a World Wide Web site, and several others indicated that they were in the process of establishing a web presence. Clearly, more organizations will be on line in coming years. This is not surprising given the current growth of the Internet and its changing characteristics. For example, the Internet is no longer the tool of the technological elite. Minorities, and people of all backgrounds and interests are using the Internet in ever-greater numbers. Over the last several years the Internet has become much easier to access due to decreasing costs, public access and web TV. Many public libraries, for example, now have Internet connection and some cities are providing Internet access in recreation centers and schools. As a result of cost reduction and greater public access, Internet use has skyrocketed. Bruce Bimber writing for *Polity* shows that the number of Americans accessing the Internet has increased by an average of 50 to 75% over the last several years. (Bimber 134) A 1998 a study completed by The Interactive Solutions Group indicates that 63 million or 30% of Americans access the Internet. More importantly, recent studies show that Internet users more closely parallel the general population. Interactive Solutions Group has also found that the "lifestyles, choices and profiles of Internet users are starting to parallel the entire

nation.” (Maguire 19) “A Web That Looks Like the World” published in the March 22nd, 1999 addition of *Business Week* provides similar data. According to the article, 20% of web users are over age 50 and 46% of all new Internet users are women. By the end of 1999, 32% of African American household and 43% of Hispanic households will be on line. (Business Week 46) Clearly, then, the Internet is not limited to the educated and wealthy; rather it is a technology that is spreading to numerous groups with varying degrees of education and financial standing. As the *Business Week* article indicates, “the Web isn’t mostly a hangout for techno-nerds anymore. On the cusp of a new century, it is being embraced by every age and ethnic group. Indeed, Internet demographics are quickly coming to match America’s diversity.” (46)

The growth of the Internet has created a debate about its ability to expand community development, mobilize grassroots campaigns, and produce meaningful communication between government, citizens, and the non-profit sector. Understanding this debate is important because it will, to some extent, impact the way the Internet is used and perceived by the care-giving professions. Some argue that the impact of the Internet is greatly exaggerated. They question the validity of claims that the Internet will create tighter communities, reduce the power of elites, and spur greater political knowledge and participation. To a certain degree, these critics are correct. The Internet is often viewed as a panacea for complex social problems. Al Gore and others boldly claim that the Internet can reduce global pollution, strengthen families, make government more accountable to the people and spread peace throughout the world:

[The Internet] will allow us to share information, to connect, and to communicate as a global community. From these connections, we will derive robust and sustainable economic progress, strong democracies, better solutions to global and local environmental challenges, improved

healthcare, and--ultimately--a greater sense of shared stewardship of our small planet.

The Global Information Infrastructure will help educate our children and allow us to exchange ideas within a community and among nations. It will be a means by which families and friends will transcend the barriers of time and distance. (Davis 48)

Gore's statement and similar statements clearly show over-confidence in a technology that remains relatively undeveloped. Critics argue that we must take a harder look at this technology before such claims can be substantiated. Some argue, for instance, that the technology will only solidify current trends, e.g., the technology will benefit the wealthy, exclude the poor, strengthen existing political beliefs and will be largely controlled by big business. A number of social scientists fear that the development of "web communities" will create a decline in traditional community involvement and interaction. Bruce Bimber argues that the Internet will simply create an intensified state of pluralist/interest groups in politics. As Bimber writes, "I do not forecast an end to the highly pluralistic and fragmented nature of the polity, a decrease in intense political competition among groups, or the emergence of a common good that binds the public together . . ." (47) Others argue that the Internet will suffer fate similar to radio and television. Large organizations and money will monopolize the Internet.

Although many of the concerns voiced about the impact of the Internet on American society deserve careful attention, the Internet can spur community discourse, disseminate information central to making prudent political decisions, and empower groups that tend to be out of the mainstream both socially and politically. The relative success of the Internet to create stronger communities lies in the very nature of Internet communications. Evan Schwartz writing in the *National Civics Review* puts it best:

The Internet's capacity to function as a vehicle for community lies in the differences between it and all previous communications media. While telephones are primarily a one-to-one medium and television a few-to-many medium, the hypergrowth of the Internet marks the beginning of many-to-many communication. (Schwartz 39)

With "many-to-many" communication, all people have the opportunity to participate in debates and discuss issues, access information, and even publish their own opinions at relatively little cost.

While the structure of this technology may potentially provide greater opportunity for dialogue because of its unique capacity to create "many-to-many communications," people must first take the necessary actions to form and foster virtual communities. Communities that already have strong community organizations and established patterns of communications will find the Internet is an effective tool because it can be used to strengthen *existing* community patterns. In other words, communities that have established areas of community interaction such as schools, churches, civic organizations and local political organizations can use the Internet to further strengthen existing patterns of communications. An experiment in Austin, Texas, uses the Internet to empower real communities, not "virtual ones." As Gary Chapman and Lodi Rhodes explain in *MIT's Technology Review*, the Austin Free Net relies on the "geographical community" because it "is often much stronger and more tangible in low-income areas" and "in such communities, the Net would best serve to help cement the bonds that already exist, rather than to link individuals to a vast, far away market place." (50) By relying on the traditional geography of the city, organizers have placed free Internet terminals in places that people already frequent in the community, libraries, community centers, government agencies, churches and community police stations. Clearly, by placing

terminals in these areas, organizers are producing "a web of network links and communication patterns that resemble those one finds in the community already." (50)

This experiment has done more than just maintain community action and participation; it has empowered and built confidence in individuals. For example, Jay la Garza, 14, has benefited tremendously from this program: "My parents wouldn't let me out at night because it's dangerous where we live. There are drug dealers and criminals. But they let me go to Free-Net sites to do what I love to do most, which is help teach people the Internet." (Chapman 50) Not only has Jay taught himself this powerful technology, he is teaching others. Because most of the urban poor in the Austin area were unfamiliar with the Internet, let alone how to construct web pages, a number of steps had to be taken to educate community members about the benefits of this technology. One way to disseminate this knowledge was to have people receive free web training. In exchange, people were then expected to train others, which created "informal, ongoing, social learning." (Chapman 50) Clearly, the use of the Internet in Austin has strengthened the traditional community, created a sense of empowerment for low-income people, expanded communication, and increased knowledge. These are all goals and values the care-giving professions are committed to expanding.

A similar experiment in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania provides further evidence that the Internet can strengthen a community. The Three Rivers Free-Net, a creation of Carnegie Library, provides web training, equipment, e-mail, and other technical support to government and non-profit organizations looking to utilize the power of the Internet. To date, the site has provided Internet services to more than a thousand organizations and receives over 60,000 hits each day. Like the Austin Free net, the Pittsburgh site,

(<http://trfn.cplgh.org>) "emphasizes local content and linking to related information with the intent to create a rich web of community information." The Pittsburgh Free-Net has also placed Internet terminals in geographic locations commonly traveled to by the poor. To date Internet services are available in community centers, police stations, government agencies and retirement homes. The Pittsburgh site provides further proof that the Internet can bolster traditional community interaction by capitalizing on existing patterns of communication and community interaction. Again, volunteers are used to train non-profit organizations that want to create a web site. Besides creating a tighter community, this service has also enabled community service organizations to reduce duplication and identify gaps in service. (Holmes 51-55) Clearly, the Austin and Pittsburgh experiments make it very clear that Internet communications can help social workers meet their professional needs. The Internet expands knowledge and learning, increases efficiency, strengthens local communities and empowers individuals.

While the debate about the impact of the Internet will continue, Austin and Pittsburgh are two examples indicating that the Internet can benefit communities. Those arguing that the Internet encourages disintegration of community are wrong at least in the cases of Austin and Pittsburgh. In fact, a survey examining 5 Internet awareness groups by James E. Katz and Philip Aspden find that Internet users are more likely to be involved in community and civic groups. As the authors write, "the Internet appear[s] to augment traditional social connectivity," and both short and long-term users "reported that time spent with friends and family face-to-face or by phone since they started using the Internet had not change[d]. (84-85) The Internet does not create a society of

introverts leery to interact with people around them, but it does provide social workers and other community activists with one more tool to build up the community.

Stronger communities with increased communications and interaction are better suited to influence the political process. In other words, the establishment of community web sites and Internet access is a form of indirect political activity. Yet, the Internet can be a powerful direct means of expanding political communication and government accountability. The structure of Internet communications is the central reason why this medium may potentially create important political changes. As already noted, the Internet allows many-to-many communications. Use-net groups, whether in similar geographic regions, or spread across the nation now have the ability to communicate their ideas and attempt to influence public policy. Moreover, the use of e-mail to contact legislators is cost-effective and simple to do. All the legislators that were interviewed for this study indicated that e-mail was very helpful, as it enabled them to respond nearly instantaneously. Legislators predicted that Internet and e-mail would play a much larger role in their efforts to communicate with their constituency. Equally important, e-mailing legislators about legislation can impact policy. Former Governor Weld of Massachusetts, for example, indicated that his voting habits have been influenced when he was inundated with e-mails.

Using the Internet to Meet Social Work's Goals:

The Internet meets many of social work's professional values. First, the Internet is an efficient and cost-effective way to advertise services, interact with clients, and communicate with multiple groups. In short, this technology reduces costs and saves

time. The Internet, as already noted, encourages community interaction at the local level, an important goal for many community activists. This is critical considering that more decisions regarding social policy are or will be made by state and local government as made evident by recent political developments. Encouraging clients to use the Internet is compatible with social work's need to accommodate market requirements. Investing in this technology increases the knowledge of the agency and its clients; it is considered to be a prudent capital investment. Politically, encouraging clients to contact government officials or produce web sites and use-net groups is also in line with current political beliefs. Gore and other government officials believe that the Internet should be dispersed to all people because it can strengthen democracy. Newt Gingrich even argued that the poor should have access to computers and the Internet to enhance education. Clearly, the political establishment seems to want Internet communication to be available to all.

Conclusion:

The alternatives presented in the latter portion of Section IV and in Section V can greatly expand the political power of organizations. These alternatives are in line with the goals of the care giving-professions. Organizations that combine these alternatives with their existing political activities should see some results. It may not mean greater spending for the organization, but if clients are able to expand their participation in the political process, organizations will be working toward meeting the profession's goals of empowerment and self-sufficiency.

Chapter V: Final Remarks:

The general lack of consistent political activity by Lehigh Valley non-profit organizations must be changed. Social workers have developed explanations and even alternatives to some of America's most enduring and troubling social problems. This expertise, however, will be lost and misused if the care-giving professions continue to neglect political action. As Karen S. Haynes writes,

Does it make any sense for clinicians to spend hundreds of hours to keep a family together, only to watch public policy rip them apart again? Is it reasonable to work to empower parents and address the issues facing them and then leave them with outdated and punitive policies that may destroy them? If we are willing to devote everything it takes to keep a family functioning and intact, then we must also be willing to turn our efforts to advocacy in the political arena. (504)

The care-giving professions, as a result of both internal and external forces, have changed considerably over the last few decades. In most ways, these changes have created an environment that makes political activity more difficult. Many organizations simply believe that strong political activity conflicts with their professional goals and in many cases, is not effective anyway. Nevertheless, I have demonstrated that political activities can be formulated to meet organizations' professional goals. Developing community based web sites, for instance, demonstrates the profession's expertise in information technology *and* provides a starting point for expanding community centered political activities. Encouraging clients to engage in the political process can build confidence and empower clients. Such clients will have a greater sense of control and feel empowered as a result of their participation in the political process. At the same time, the political actions of organizations may actually produce changes in the institutions and social arrangements responsible for many of the problems clients must face. Again,

political activities do not have to come at the sacrifice of organizations' professional goals.

Finally, the cost and risk associated with political action are small in comparison to what can be achieved. Greater mobilization and activity can create economic and social policies that recognize the conditions of the poor and medically fragile. If Americans are capable of creating a policy and culture that recognize the conditions and lifestyles of a greater number of Americans, we will have taken the next step in our progression towards greater health, happiness and freedom for all Americans.

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