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Program Evaluation: An NGO's Attempt to use Volunteerism to Promote Community Development

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Program Evaluation: An NGO's Attempt to use Volunteerism to Promote Community
Development

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This thesis provides an ethnographic account of a NGOs effort to recruit and retain volunteers. Specifically, this project is a program evaluation of a community-based grant designed as a bottom-up approach to empower community residents to make changes in their community. The study details the many efforts - and obstacles - involved in this process. It is presented as a contribution to the anthropology of policy, to evaluation theory, and to applied anthropological methods. The investigator used participant-observation fieldwork and ethnographic interviews of both volunteer and non-volunteers to evaluate the program's successes and failures.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis presents the results of a program evaluation undertaken applying anthropological methods and perspectives to evaluate the implementation of a grant to provide social services. It accomplishes this by involving the participation of volunteers by a community non-governmental organization in a lower- to mixed-income neighborhood in Tampa, Florida. The overall goal of this thesis is to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of a grant not only from the perspective of the organization but also the community who was asked to participate in “community development from a bottom-up approach”. It also critiques the way the grant was written to understand whether it was written in a way that could even support this type of community development. The goal of this was to develop a process for better grant writing for the future.

I locate the study in the anthropological literature on neoliberalism – as a political theory and set of political economic practices – in the anthropology of policy, and in studies of volunteerism. I utilize a number of anthropological methods, including participant-observation fieldwork, focus groups, surveys, and key informant interviews, in order to understand how the grant was written and how the grant was received by the target community. The methods are used to evaluate the successes and failures of the process. I conclude by providing suggestions that other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) might use who endeavor to obtain funding for community services.

Background

This study was located in COM-UNITY (COM), an NGO located in the Sulphur Springs neighborhood of Tampa, Florida. I first found out about COM during my “Community Planning Programs and Strategies” graduate course at the University of South Florida in the spring of 2011. I was responsible for a service-learning project as a class requirement. The project I chose was working with a non-profit organization who had just received a grant to increase community development in their community. My previous work was focused on international community development so this seemed like an interesting class project, looking at local efforts to increase community development.

My role for the class project, along with two other students, was to create a volunteer training manual based on some existing literature from COM. This was good for my own skills building experience because it drew upon my background in international volunteering. One of my main academic areas of interest is in volunteerism, and I have always wondered whether trained volunteers are more or less successful than untrained volunteers. In my experience, trained volunteers are more successful because they are given the skills they need to succeed as opposed to volunteers who are not given adequate training. This lack of training can lead to feeling underappreciated, overwhelmed, or in the case of international travel, could even lead to culture shock when volunteers are ill-prepared for the pressures of international travel and volunteerism. This can lead to either feeling underappreciated, overwhelmed, or in the case of international travel, could even lead to culture shock when volunteers are ill-prepared for the pressures

of international travel and volunteerism. With this as my background I was interested to see how these problems might be solved by a volunteer training manual.

An initial meeting was held with two of the staff members of COM, the executive director and the site manager for the branch of COM where the research was taking place. As the two organization members began to discuss the grant I became interested in the parameters which can be considered a 'bottom-up approach' to community development, meaning the ideas for these projects would come from the residents of the community. After I researched the grant in more depth I asked the executive director if could volunteer along-side the volunteer coordinator, Dorothy, a pseudonym to protect her privacy, to learn more about the grant and eventually write my thesis on the experience and observations mainly from participant observation. As I will discuss in more detail during my study limitations section my research topic did change during the research, but the primary goals were to learn how successful a grant that took the local community into consideration when conducting community-based work might be. The executive director accepted my proposal, and I began working a little with Dorothy once the grant began in March of 2011. Once I finished school in the beginning of May of 2011 I began spending 10-15 hours a week volunteering for the organization.

Sulphur Springs

Although Sulphur Springs was once a tourist destination in the 1920s and 1930s, it has become an area known for low-income and high population density (Jackson 2009; Jackson 2010). The families in Sulphur Springs were more negatively affected by the latest economic depression because they were already living in one of Tampa's poorest

neighborhoods which is a key reason this area was picked for the implementation of this particular grant (Arney 2011). Sulphur Springs has been stereotyped as an area that is high in crime, prostitution, drugs, and other social problems. As an indicator of this 96% of students at the elementary school receive free or reduced lunch ("Sulphur Springs Elementary School website," 2010). Before the construction of an afterschool program run through COM the local elementary school was an "F" rated school. After two-years with the program the school was rated a "B" school ("Sulphur Springs Elementary School website," 2010).

One reason for this poverty, which has led to other social problems, is that many families came to Sulphur Springs after forced relocation from the Hope VI housing program,¹ a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program through the federal government. A long-term goal of this housing project was moving some of the families back into the newly reconstructed housing units; however, these families had to pass screening that many could not pass such as having no criminal record. Since many of the community residents were unable to meet these standards based on some of the data above these families were forced to move to other areas where housing could be found at an affordable rate (class lecture in community planning programs and strategies, February 8, 2011; Greenbaum 2002).

The outcome of this housing venture was families moved into Sulphur Springs, and other poor communities that accepted section 8 vouchers, now known as housing

¹ The HOPE VI Program was developed as a result of recommendations by National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, which was charged with proposing a National Action Plan to eradicate severely distressed public housing. The Commission recommended revitalization in three general areas: physical improvements, management improvements, and social and community services to address resident needs (HOPE VI:U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development).

choice vouchers.² This forced relocation created overcrowding and made scarce employment even harder to find because of the limited about of jobs available in this residential neighborhood. In addition, these families lost the social capital, the social networks and institutions that in some cases is the most important asset these families possess and whose connections and networks of support are crucial to their survival (Greenbaum, 2002).

While the original purpose of the program was to increase social capital by moving poor families into mixed-income housing the opposite occurred, families lost social capital in the form of a stable social network (Greenbaum, 2002). Many families in Sulphur Springs are still having trouble finding employment due to this forced relocation and lack of transportation and childcare. When the economic climate is poor it does affect these families where unemployment rates are already high. This grant is one way to allow families to reclaim social and human capital lost by this housing project.

The census information for Sulphur Springs is best understood by looking at zip code. The zip code for this region covers a much larger area than Sulphur Springs itself. This census information will be complimented by City-Data.com. Although this resource lists on its website that all information is not guaranteed for its accuracy any information used was confirmed though the time spent in Sulphur Springs. This data will be used only for comparison.

² The housing choice voucher program is the federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments.

Overall the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau reports indicate that approximately 35,000 people reside in the zip code that includes Sulphur Springs. Of those 35,000 people almost 23,000 people self-report as white in combination with one or more races, 10,000 self-report as black or African American, in combination with one or more races, and 11,000 self-report as Hispanic or Latino (of any race) (“US Census Bureau”, 2012). In the area of Sulphur Springs specifically there are approximately 5,500 people with at least half of that population being either black or African American (“City-Data.com,” 2011). The white and Hispanic or Latino population make up a majority of the rest of the population.

The census data indicated that in 1999 the median household income in the zip code was almost \$30,000. At that same time in the United States the average was over \$40,000 nationwide. According to the 2012 BEST Neighborhoods grant, which I gained access to while helping to revise the grant application in November of 2011, the community of Sulphur Springs is concentrated in 1-square mile, has 6,300 community members, and the per capita income is \$10,600 (letter to author from executive director of COM, November 8, 2011).

In terms of how the residents of Sulphur Springs compare to the overall city in which their community is located it appears that twice as many people in Sulphur Springs are living below the poverty line. There are more people in elementary through high school indicating that many more people in Sulphur Springs are under the age of 18. Despite the fact that many more people are in school the average number of people who

are attending an undergraduate college is almost half that of the larger city (“City-Data.com,” 2011).

Lastly, in terms of community, it is also important to note that although many people have recently moved into the neighborhood there is also a strong group of residents who have lived in the community for many years. These residents strive to make the community a better place (Spillane 2007). Many residents of Sulphur Springs are proud to call the area home. The residents can at times be a strong force who are not interested in the newest way to get their community money, but are mainly looking for ways to create sustainable change, this is not always through grants were the money is not a dependable stream but merely something that can come and go. Since the community is recognized as an area of low-income and high population density, in addition to COM there are many other civic and religious organizations working in Sulphur Springs. While this can be a good thing some residents do feel that change should come from within. These residents are also opposed on some levels to the heavy influx of grants currently being administered in the area.

COM

COM as an organization was founded in the mid-1840s, and is nationally recognized. Their goal within the community of Sulphur Springs is to strengthen the community from birth until the completion of high school. To accomplish these goals COM has applied for many separate grants in the community. The initiative began around 2009. While COM is involved in many worthwhile programs in the community of Sulphur Springs this research focuses only on their efforts through this grant.

COM's office in Sulphur Springs is attached to their local elementary school. For this reason the organization is not as recognized in this community as they might be in other communities where they have an independent building. Due to this they are often looking to promote themselves in the neighborhood and spread the word about the different services they provide. A main role of the organization at this time is running an afterschool education program for elementary school students. On site there is a site director who is also in charge of the woman who runs a literacy program. This woman who runs the literacy program shares an office with Dorothy who already worked for COM at a different location. She began work at COM once the grant began. She also works under the site director. There is also an executive director who works at the main office of COM. She is occasionally on location and was the woman I was first in contact with when I started the volunteer training project.

Grant Parameters

The grant that was received by Sulphur Springs was offered through the Corporation for National and Community Service, Volunteer Generation Fund. The purpose of the Volunteer Generation Fund, which is authorized through the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, as specified on their website, "is to increase the number of people who serve in meaningful roles as volunteers dedicated to addressing important needs in communities across America" ("Corporation for National & Community Service," 2012).

The BEST (Build-Engage-Sustain-Transform) Neighborhoods grant was originally implemented from March until September of 2011 which is when I conducted

most of my research. The grant was created around the idea of neighboring which is Volunteer Florida's model for community engagement. This asset-and-empowerment-based-approach to volunteerism "acknowledges that all people have something to contribute to the improvements of their community" (Volunteer Florida). Neighboring can impact all members of the community from young children to adulthood. Specifically, the program targets those that can be classified as low income or marginalized communities. Sulphur Springs fits these parameters as discussed in the introduction of Sulphur Springs. Since the time I have been conducting research COM has won another \$20,000 grant. The new grant has been written to include a longer grant cycle which will run for nine-months from December 2011 until September 2012. The information I will use for the grant parameters is based off the new application form which has only changed slightly since the last grant cycle.

The BEST Neighborhoods grant, through the approach the asset-and-empowerment-based-approach or neighboring, puts the community in charge of creating and implement six-projects intended to somehow improve the community. Through the help of a volunteer coordinator who helps to guide the community through the planning and implementation phases.

The grant also requires the volunteer coordinator to hold volunteer leader trainings which give individualized attention to the few community residents who show the most potential to create positive change in the community. These training help to makes these residents' experts in how to independently plan and implement their own

projects so that once the grant can no longer be applied for the projects are still sustainable.

Within the proposal itself the grant funders were looking for several important aspects in order to receive the grant. It was important that an underserved community was a part of the project and full points were awarded if it could be proved that those receiving the grant were utilizing members of the community as opposed to just serving them in some way. The grant also looked for instances where the applicants could prove they were using strength-based assessment (SBA) which is another way to empower residents using volunteerism and service for community development (BEST Grant). The ability to evaluate and track successful outcomes and measures was also of key importance to the application.

Although in the first round of the grant six-projects were to be completed in six-months, in the second round of the grant participants were given nine-months to complete seven-projects still with a goal to have at least 50 volunteers per event. At least one of the projects should also be some type of disaster relief training, and one should be to commemorate a national day of service or remembrance. Lastly, the grant specifically seeks communities classified as lower- to mixed-income.

About This Thesis

While the overall assessment of the research will be explained during the analysis of the fieldwork undertaken by the researcher one of the main findings is that while the grant was meant to increase volunteerism within the entire community of Sulphur Springs

the lack of community involvement made this difficult. As a result only a small fraction of the community was contacted about the projects and volunteer opportunities available at COM.

One of the reasons for the lack of community involvement was in the writing of the grant itself. Although the grant was intended to increase community involvement by empowering residents to make changes to their own community it was not written in a way that gave ownership to the community. This lack of ownership over the projects meant that residents were less likely to participate in the projects. While this grant did not engage the amount of community residents it intended to the overall assessment is that it did positively impact the people who it did reach. In the chapters to follow these assessments will be more thoroughly explained along with some other analysis of the grant, organization, and community.

The next chapter will consider relevant literature within the field of volunteerism and community development. First there will be a discussion of neoliberalism so that the reader can understand why the study of volunteerism and community development is important. The neoliberal context will outline the current political and economic climate that make volunteerism and community-based development so crucial. Next the anthropology of policy will be examined to explain how anthropology can study and evaluate as well as contribute to policy. Lastly, there will be a discussion of volunteerism and community development to better situate Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 will discuss the approach the author used to research this work. A discussion of anthropological research methods will be explained including: ethnography,

participant observation and fieldwork, key informants interviews, semi-structured interviews, and survey. Consideration will also be given to how the interview sample was chosen, and who the sample consisted of. This section is important to understanding the techniques used to collect information. A discussion of how data collection methods varied based on which audience, COM or the local community, will also be discussed since different methods were employed to gain trust in both instances.

The fourth chapter will first look at the making of the policy and the writing of the grant before it was received. This will help to understand why the grant was more or less successful. Next it will consider the implementation of the grant by COM and perception of this policy in the local community. From the community it will then take an in-depth look at how COM as an organization felt about the grant implementation. Once all parties have been considered it will consider the overall success of the grant, and why it may or may not have reach the audience it intended.

In the final chapter a reconsideration of the relevant literature will be conducted to understand how it fits with the research. The neoliberal context will again be considered to understand the privatization that Sulphur Springs is undergoing due to this grant implementation. How to approach policy in a meaningful way will also be considered. Lastly, volunteerism and community development will be looked at, mainly as a way to show that the decision for residents to get involved in community development is rarely a rational choice. How this will impact the future of volunteerism and community development, including why this an important field for anthropologists to be studying will also be discussed.

Chapter 2: Locating the Study in the Relevant Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to consider relevant literature within anthropology and other disciplines to which this thesis contributes. This chapter will be broken down into three main themes. First neoliberalism will be discussed to give a sense of the political and economic climate during which this research was conducted. The forces of neoliberalism also help explain why NGOs such as COM are entering into the realm of social services and care provision. Next, the relatively new field of the anthropology of policy will be reviewed for approaches best equipped to answer the main research questions posed in this thesis. Finally, I review the as-yet scant literature on volunteerism and community development, providing some brief examples.

The Neoliberal Context

The socio-historical context of the ethnographic context may be termed neoliberalism. According to David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism may be defined as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices” (Harvey 2005:2). It is a system of “accumulation by dispossession.” For Harvey, neoliberalism in action entails the “privatization and commodification” of public goods, such as nature, “financialization,” in which any kind

of good can be turned into an instrument of economic speculation, the “management and manipulation of crises,” including financial melt-downs, and, finally, as entailing “state redistribution,” in which the state becomes an agent of the upward redistribution of wealth (2005:159-164, *passim*).

The condition of neoliberalism has significance for this study. Neoliberalism has caused the withdrawal of the state from social services as a reaction to the failings of embedded liberalism, the idea that the state should make social services such as employment, economic growth, welfare, and healthcare a priority for its citizens. Under embedded liberalism there were even instances where the state should get directly involved to ensure the welfare of the citizens (Harvey 2005; Arney 2011). While this type of thinking was popular from the end of WWII through the 1960s, by the 1970s it became clear that this type of practice was not economically sound from the perspective of the ruling groups. While neoliberalism was not the only answer to the failings of embedded liberalism, it has been a popular solution that is still in use today.

This relates directly to this thesis because NGOs have been directly affected by the advent of neoliberal policy and practice. While neoliberalism has helped the non-governmental sector to flourish, it is in part because the state no longer provides the social services it once did, causing NGOs to step-in and fill the gaps left from the withdrawal of the state (Harvey 2005; Arney 2011). What this means for COM is that instead of the state stepping in to provide direct money for community development improvements, the state now offers grant money which takes the responsibility away from local and federal governments and moves the responsibility to NGOs such as COM.

Practically what this means is that COM has the responsibility of improving the community of Sulphur Springs, but has limited resources to do so as the grant money is small in comparison to the amount of money that might be expected to make lasting change in the community.

In the case of COM, the grant that the organization received, in conjunction with other grants that are available by the federal government, have allowed the organization to become better recognized in the area which is a benefit to them as they are trying to become an active presence in the neighborhood. The challenge is that without proper funding, since the state is no longer supporting these organizations, grants make the use of volunteers a primary way to accomplish the goals of the grant. In a later section rational choice theory will be presented as a way to explain why volunteerism might make sense in the instance of community members wanting to improve their community, but why in practice the theory does not always work.

If grants such as the one with which I worked are going to continually be written to support non-profit organizations who are taking on social service roles to fill the gaps left by a withdrawing government, then it is important to understand how people at the receiving end of these types of grants feel about them and are reacting to them (Harvey 2005; Arney 2011). This is why volunteerism and community development will be explained and considered later in this chapter. The goal of this research is to evaluate the implementation of this grant as it attempts to increase volunteerism at the community level. This evaluation goes well beyond what was done at this NGO as the end goal is to have literature that will benefit other non-profit organization who might attempt to

implement similar goals or organizational objectives. Understanding how the community reacted to this grant can serve as a framework for other policies, programs, and organizations who might be administering something similar. The evaluation to follow can also be generalizable to a wider audience.

It is also important to understand the motivation for writing such grants specifically for this socio-economic group. These grants are meant to improve the socio-economic status of those they are supposed to help and decrease dependency. In some ways this does not benefit the grant writers whose role it is to create grants for this population. Along with grant writers possibly not being able to relate to these people and as a result writing grants which do not necessarily accomplish what they set out to change there is also the possibility that grant writers do not want completely successful grants. If the grants did indeed improve the socio-economic status and decrease dependency of all they set out to help it could well affect the employment of these grant writers.

The practice of neoliberalism is a way to solidify the power of the ruling classes. While its backers claim that its practices are a way to improve the lives of the population at large, its positive effects are mainly for those with access to “private property, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital” (Harvey 2005:7). While some people within the community of Sulphur Springs have access to these different types of ways to increase capital many people within the community struggle to stay in rented houses and maintain low-wage jobs. This causes low-income communities such as Sulphur Springs to be stereotyped as a lesser place to live.

One way class power might be affirmed is the idea that it is the individual's responsibility to improve their own human capital. This means that in areas of social service, including, but not limited to, education, it is the individual's responsibility to seek out education and all the things that come with a strong education. Leaving this in the hands of the individual takes the responsibility away from the state to secure these social services for every member of society. This means that when a person is not able to achieve a certain level of education or have access to health care it is because of their own personal failing, and is not the fault of the state (Harvey 2005).

This theoretical and political understanding will set the backdrop for this research. The understanding that although COM benefits from the recognition and funding the grant gives the organization, it must attempt to make due with a small amount of money for the large undertaking of community development. This is because the state has moved away from the task meeting the social service needs of the individual because although the state should guarantee some freedoms, they do not guarantee these social services which are deemed the responsibility of the individual. Due to this those individuals who are not able to meet these needs are seen in a lower class than those who are able to meet and even exceed these needs.

How the goals of neoliberalism are carried out at the policy level will be the discussion of the next section. Since the state, during this era of neoliberalism, is withdrawing from social service initiatives, policies are being created that appear to be a benefit such as giving opportunities to local communities to be empowered to change their own communities. In reality this is just a way to inexpensively give communities the

money they need for social services they are no longer receiving from the state. The next section will be a discussion of how anthropology can be used to analyze these policies within a neoliberal context.

The Anthropology of Policy

This next section will look at policy, specifically how the anthropology of policy can be used to more clearly understand why policy is created and how it can impact the individual. Policy, or public policy, is described by Cochran (2002) as “an intentional course of action followed by a government institution or official for resolving an issue of public concern” (Cochran 2002:2). While this definition is not all-encompassing of how public administrators use policy, the basic idea is that a government institution or official is resolving the problems that are of public concern. Ervin (2000) states that, “Policy assumes that thoughtfully directed social action can lead to desirable outcome” (Ervin 2000:42), but what happens when these desirable outcomes are based solely on the ideas of what government institutions or officials think is the correct course of action and not the groups whose is raising the concern? If, as Ervin suggests, “Cultural assumptions of rationality, efficiency, and the need for explicit planning pervade such [First World country] institutions” (Ervin 2000:42) then what happens to social groups, those living in the United States and other less developed countries, when policy is decided for them by these institutions?

Geilhufe (1979) criticizes program designers for designing programs that do not meet the needs of communities because they are written to make themselves feel comfortable without considering that their comfort levels might be different than where

the programs are being implemented. Additionally, she comments, when programs fail, the program designers tend to blame the community for poor implementation instead of looking at how the program or policy was written. Again, we see the state designing grants or policies that take responsibility away from the state. If the grant fails it is because the resident, who already is unable to achieve the security of social services because of their own failings, was unable to accomplish what was given to them (Geilhufe 1979).

When reviewing policy it is also important to understand who holds the power. At first read of this grant it would seem that the power for planning and implementing the projects the grant mandates is in the hands of the local community. Shore and Wright (1997) feel that policies might be written in a way that suggest neutrality, however, that that is a key to their actual power (Shore and Wright 1997). Shore and Wright feel that policies are regulating bodies as they express in this quote, “The importance of policy as a subject of anthropological analysis arises from the fact that policies are major instruments through which governments, companies, non-government organizations (NGOs), public agencies and international bodies classify and regulate the spaces and subjects they seek to govern” (1997:2). This is an important quote because it changes the way one might look at the grant. Instead of an opportunity to have community-led projects it might be a way to make the community feel that they are in charge while actually continually being regulated and managed by the NGO who is administering the grant, and the federal government who created the grant.

So how does one go about assessing policy and understanding the impact that policy makes on a community? The question of what is policy and how can anthropologists contribute to its study has been posed in some part already. Policy can be interpreted as a way to solve the problems of society. Ervin feels that anthropologists are cultural interpreters (Ervin 2000:57). The anthropological training allows them to fill a position as a cultural interpreter in situations such as mediation or developing culturally appropriate solutions to situations. This type of training can also be useful when dealing with policy and program design and implementation.

Shore and Wright discuss how some researchers who study the anthropology of policy use Foucault's *dispositive* or "how ways of being and doing are framed" (Shore and Wright 2011:8) and Bourdieu's concept of habitus which is used to discuss the idea of structures within a social world, and the idea of individual strategy (Spencer and Barnard 1996). When looked at together these ideas can be used to explain how individuals can become habituated into structuring frameworks such as institutions, regulations, laws, etc. Shore and Wright feel there is a gap between how the pieces that make up the *dispositive* or habitus actually come together into any type of "assemblage" (Shore and Wright 2011:11). From Shore and Wright's perspective it is actually how policy brings these structuring frameworks together and into alignment that makes it "analytically productive" (Shore and Wright 2011:11).

Shore and Wright feel that Interpretive Policy Analysis is a better way to critique and analyze policy. This way of thinking, they feel, is different from more traditional ways of thinking about policy study. From their perspective, "Anthropology shares with

the interpretive turn in political science an aim to deconstruct policy in order to reveal patterns and processes in the organization of power and governance in society” (Shore and Wright 2011:4). This interpretive policy analysis goes beyond thinking about policy analysis in a linear such as rational choice theory. Rational choice theory will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter. Shore and Wright paraphrase a quote from Clifford Geertz (1973:5) which I will also use to ground this point, writing that “we take the analysis of policy to be ‘not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretive one is search of meaning’” (Shore and Wright 2011:8).

This interpretative approach, as suggested by Shore and Wright, entails the view that policy must not only be studied from the perspective of the policy makers. Anthropologists want to understand what the people who are receiving the policies think of the policies and how they interpret them. This has been called a “native point of view” or “folk-model” (Shore and Wright 2011:8). Some of the other questions that the interpretive approach can answer are How does a policy affect people? How do people engage with policy and what do they make of it? Rather than treating policy as something that is neutral, this approach looks at policy as “something to be problematized” (Shore and Wright 2011:8).

By using an interpretive model I can go beyond the rationality of why the grant might have been beneficial in its writing to how it affected the people it was meant to empower. How people, including the non-profit who received the grant, the volunteer coordinator who administered the grant, and the volunteers in the community who worked towards meeting the grant’s goals, were all affected differently by this grant and

engaged with it differently. By using this interpretive model it takes the power away from the federal government who created the grant, in some ways, and gives the power back to the people who might, in the next grant cycle, be able to own the grant with more certainty after understanding its objectives through a community lens.

Rational choice theory can be considered in understanding policy and how it is created. The main idea behind rational choice theory is that the cost of any decision made should not outweigh the benefits produced by the decision (Dye 1998). In this model the cost of any policy decision should not outweigh the benefits that are received from the policy. The costs that are considered are not only monetary; they include a number of other factors such as social and political values (Dye 1998).

Looking at rational choice theory on the level of the individual it has been stated that people are motivated by their own personal wants and needs. These are not the only motivations, even for rational choice theorists. The individual is also limited in some ways by social construct or acceptable ways that society allows them to achieve these goals. Since all of an individual's wants and needs cannot be met they must then make a rational choice as to what will get them closest to meeting these goals (Browning 2000).

Shore and Wright (1997) also discuss Gordon, Lewis, and Young's rational systems model which is an attempt to make policy a linear process. Within the rational systems model there is a clear sequence of problem identification, formulation of solutions, implementation, and evaluation. This linear pattern is problematic because it does not leave room for other ideas to enter into policy creation, evaluation, or analysis. Many policy analysts now share anthropologists view that anthropologists can be used to

go beyond the linear patterns of policy making and explore the “complexity and messiness of the process” (Shore and Wright 1997:16). The idea that policy cannot be created or studied as a rational entity because the individual is complex and situations are messy will continue to be discussed throughout the thesis.

Using rational choice theory as a model to understanding this grant makes sense when looking at it merely in black and white. From the outside the grant seemed to follow the basic rational choice tenet of the benefits of the program outweighing the costs. It could be assumed, using Dye’s overview of how to select a rational choice policy, that the community who was intended to receive the grant would indeed want community development projects to be implemented to better their neighborhood. It would also make sense in terms of cost-benefit analysis that paying Dorothy to run the training and then having community leaders volunteer their time would cut down the costs. It might even be more empowering for community members to see a member of their community leading these projects than an outsider.

After analyzing the implementation of the grant I can see that all consequences were not considered when weighing how the grant was to be written. It was assumed that people in the community would want or be able to volunteer their time free of charge on a weekly basis. In reality, people’s schedules did not allow for such volunteer effort, and the recruitment of volunteers for such training which itself ran over three weeks suffered as a result. In addition, community members were more interested in development projects that benefited them directly, and were not as interested in putting the time in on a project where there was no real personal gain.

The grant states that volunteerism is simply important to communities. How these policies affect people at the volunteer level, but also on the individual level will be the topic of the next section. How these policies motivate people to become self-empowered, and what is ultimately of importance to the volunteer is essential to be able to properly evaluate the process.

Volunteerism and Community Development

Understanding volunteerism and what motivates volunteers is an important aspect to this thesis. The literature in anthropology per se on volunteerism is almost non-existent so this thesis will consider literature across disciplines. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) wrote an article calling volunteers “the backbone of civil society” (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal 2008:68) which might speak to the fact that the state no longer supports social service so volunteers must step up and be that supported to distribute these services no longer provided. The article discusses how although volunteers are important their role in any organization is not solid or concrete. Their position is somewhat liminal, especially when volunteers first start their work. This is because they do not yet understand what their role is within the organization, even when they come with skills, how those skills will be utilized is unknown by someone who has never volunteered with the organization before. For this reason training programs are important so that volunteers fully understand their role and place. If volunteers do not understand their role the feeling of liminality could leave volunteers with a feeling of dissatisfaction, especially in a community such as where I did my research. It is important to make sure volunteers understand their role as volunteers, the tasks they are expected to complete, and that they

feel a sense of self-worth, just as they might in a paid position. It is also important to understand the volunteer's expectations here, and not just what the organization needs from the volunteer.

Proper expectation setting and training was at first a primary concern of COM. Once the projects implemented by the grant began the time for proper training and expectation setting started to disappear as the volunteer coordinator and small group of dedicated volunteers got busy trying to put together projects without the support of the volunteers the organization was hoping to recruit. Since recruitment efforts were stalled due to lack of time and several other reasons that will be discussed in subsequent chapters there was also a lack of proper training and expectation setting. This might have led to volunteers not feeling secure in their roles was also a reason that volunteer recruitment was lacking.

This point will be seen within the evaluation. The volunteers by and large were not trained for their volunteer positions, and specific volunteer positions were often not made explicit. When people would arrive at the different events they often did not know what to expect or what to do. This made volunteers less likely to engage with the program and uninterested to volunteer in the future. Volunteer leader training will also be discussed. While this gave people more knowledge on how to lead community projects there was still a lack of motivation within the group to create their own community-led project and see it through to completion.

Self-help rhetoric is embedded within the whole approach. By this I mean idea that volunteers can improve their community through volunteerism. This self-help

ideology has been critiqued by development theorists such as Reed (1995) who states, “Liberals and conservatives found consensus in the 1980s around the idea that poor communities can help themselves by forming wealth-generating initiatives, rather than waiting for government policies to deliver economic benefits” (Reed 1995:231). Reed feels that by emphasizing this self-help rhetoric that it is the same as blaming the poor for their poverty and current situation. Instead, Reed feels it is appropriate to “focus on structural economic inequality” (1995:231). Self-help is a large part of this grant, the idea that communities, with just a little training, can better their own communities. As previously stated, looking at this idea through the lens of an interpretive approach will allow me to understand how the community feels about this type of self-help rhetoric.

What motivates community members to volunteer is important to understanding volunteer satisfaction. This grant was in some ways forced on the people on Sulphur Springs since the community itself did not apply for the grant but instead an outside organization. It is important for COM to meet the people of the community in understanding why volunteerism might be a benefit to the people of Sulphur Springs. Bussell and Forbes (2002) discuss several reasons that volunteers choose to volunteer. According to these authors, the first and arguably the most important motive to volunteering is an altruistic motive, or feeling an intrinsic reward (Bussell and Forbes 2002). In Sulfur Springs, altruism is a motivation for family members who have children that attend the elementary school with which COM is connected. The volunteer work in this case is a direct benefit to their children if they attend the afterschool program; many do.

The grant was written to impact community members on an individual basis. One to make a positive impact is by increasing “human capital” (that is, skills and abilities, education and knowledge). This can be seen in recruitment techniques since the literature suggests that volunteers are four times more likely to volunteer when someone asks them (Bussell and Forbes 2002). This statistic indicated that recruitment of volunteers, if expectations are properly set, could be a positive way to increase volunteerism in organizations such as COM. The benefits of improving human capital include learning skills that would improve volunteer’s chances in the job market and lead to employment. In addition, COM also recruits from within so when positions at COM become available the volunteers have an advantage over other applicants (Bussell and Forbes 2002).

The focus on the improvement of human capital is an aim of neoliberal theory. It is important to note that a specific aim of the grant is to improve human capital. Simply, a policy objective to be achieved through the grant, and in accordance with neoliberal thought, is to find a way to increase human capital in low-income areas – and to do so in a way that did not cost the federal government time or money. The creation of a grant to increase community development through self-help is a good way to make the funding agency look good with a goal of improving human capital to hopefully motivate community members from low-income communities to improve their social service conditions in other ways as well.

Since increasing human capital is in some ways a neoliberal creation there is also a possibility that the grant will affect people in Sulphur Springs in a negative way. How the grant relates to the people will be an important research topic because at the end of

the evaluation it will be important to understand whether the grant had an overall positive or negative effect on the community. How it affected the individual will be key to this research.

Another way to assess the overall effect of this grant on the community is by assessing volunteer satisfaction. Finkelstein (2007), in an article discussing satisfaction within volunteerism writes, “The findings suggest that more satisfied volunteers were motivated by altruistic values and the desire to put their skills to use in the service of others” (Finkelstein 2007:9). The idea of altruistic motives has already been discussed, but another way to create satisfied volunteers is to highlight skills they already possess. This follows the ideas of Gonzalez, “The more that participants can engage and identify with the topic matter, the more interest and motivation they will have” (González 2005:9). One way to match volunteers with areas they are interested was to have the volunteers complete a skills and interests survey. This original idea was to have this information logged into a database so that when volunteer work and also employment opportunities become available the COM can contact volunteers who already feel skilled in that area. While this will not always be a possibility it will be one way to increase volunteer satisfaction. It could also lead to employment.

Using this literature the assessments from the introduction can be seen. The way the grant was written did not meet societal norms. If the grant was to have been a success on the scale in which it was written, recruiting and retaining three hundred volunteers, then recruitment needed to be done in a way that met societal norms. Another important aspect of this, as seen in the literature above, would be making sure to understand what

makes volunteers in general more satisfied, and then also the volunteers in the community in general more satisfied is important for future grant cycles and other organizations.

Conclusion

This chapter orients the reader to some of the literature on neoliberalism, policy, and volunteerism. The guiding light of the policy used to write this grant came from a neoliberal perspective. Neoliberal theory states that the government should not intervene when it comes to matters of individual social services. It is the individual's responsibility to have the human capital to have access to social services. Since the state is withdrawing from providing these services, some NGOs have begun to find ways to access different types of social services, but they cannot do it alone which is why grants and volunteers are of great importance. Understanding what motivates volunteers and how grants can be written and implemented to have the greatest impact is of more importance now than ever.

While there is substantial work being conducted in the anthropology of volunteerism there is a gap in the research in terms of the anthropology of policy. Shore and Wright are leaders in the field of anthropology of policy, but when it comes to work with which to do a comparative study there seems to be little available. The anthropology of policy is an emergent field. Since current economic state is low how people on the ground react to policies that influence them directly is important. This research will serve as a model for organizations looking for a framework for similar work.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Anthropologists use a variety of approaches and methods when conducting research. This chapter will discuss the methodological approaches I employed during my field research. The methods selected were one that enabled me to identify the needs and wants of the study community, and the resources within the community. This approach can help with success at later stages when key people in the community are able to promote the program or policy or are able to give insight into the community and their needs. In this section I will first discuss the approach I take to the research in general terms to introduce the reader. I will then go through each of my research methods in-depth.

Overall I spent approximately nine months with COM. Beginning in January of 2011 I started helping the organization with the volunteer training manual. While I did begin helping the organization in January my fieldwork did not officially begin until the beginning of May 2010. From January to May I spent most of my time e-mailing with the staff and having meetings to organize their volunteer training manual. While this manual was ultimately never used it was a good way for me to learn about COM's policies and procedures, which were a part of the manual, before I began my more intensive fieldwork at the organization. When the manual was completed and school was no longer in session I began volunteering between ten and fifteen hours a week at the organization. This happened at the beginning of May 2011.

Generally speaking I volunteered Monday through Wednesday for four to five hours a shift. While I was at COM I did many different things each day including contacting volunteers or potential volunteers mainly through e-mails, partner organizations to see if they were interested in getting involved at events, to helping Dorothy brainstorm events through to implementation of the events. Once I began to feel more comfortable at the organization I also began conducting interviews on site.

While I was volunteering at COM and conducting my fieldwork I used many different research methods to conduct ethnographic fieldwork. By ethnographic fieldwork I mean the use of participant observation and semi-structured interviews to better understand the organization I was volunteering with and the community whom I worked closely to. One of my main methods was participant observation. As stated above the participant observation and fieldwork were the main ways in which I came to understand the organization and gain some rapport with the community members of Sulphur Springs. While most of the time I was working with COM there were several trainings held by COM that helped me to get to know the community members on a more intimate level. I also worked closely with volunteers before events to make sure everything ran smoothly before and during the event.

Other methods of ethnographic research were key information interviews and semi-structured interviews. The difference between a key informant and a semi-structured interview participant was my level of association with that person. Generally speaking the key informants were people I had seen repeatedly and had built up a better rapport with. For this reason the interviews also tended to last longer, possibly because I

was more comfortable with these people and these people were more comfortable with me so there was more of an opportunity for open dialog.

A convenience sample was used, defined by Schensul et al. as “any group readily accessible to the researcher that reasonably might be assumed to possess characteristics relevant to the study” (Schensul 1999:233). A convenience sample was the best choice because there were such a small number of regular volunteers. Overall thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted. Of those thirteen interviews two of the people interviewed were key informants. These were the staff members of COM who helped to introduce me to the community. Their interviews will be considered separately from the community interviews or semi-structured interviews in the ethnography chapter to follow.

As part of my convenience sample I asked every volunteer who I came into regular contact with at COM if they would be interested in doing an interview with me. I also looked through the volunteer sign-in sheets from any event that had been conducted during the grant. Anyone who volunteered at more than one event I called or e-mailed to see if they were interested in being interviewed. I explained why I was conducting the research, and that I wanted to make sure to have the opinions of the local community since they were the ones being affected by the grant. Many people were responsive. In some cases I did not even know the semi-structured interviewee before the interview was scheduled. At each event there was a sign-up sheet. If anyone was signed-up I would call that person or e-mail them depending on their contact information and ask if they were

interested in helping me with my research. No incentives were given other than helping out the community.

Two of my key informants were staff members at COM, Dorothy and David, Dorothy and David are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the people involved in the research. Dorothy is the volunteer coordinator and David was her immediate boss in charge of the afterschool program that worked with the elementary school. Dorothy was new to her position, but David had been in his position for several years so he had built up a strong rapport with the community.

A survey was also distributed. It was created by Dorothy through COM, [see Appendix 3 for a copy of the survey in English and Spanish]. This survey did not come from me directly, but I did help to distribute it while I was volunteering with COM. The survey was called a talent survey because it asked the people of Sulphur Springs about their likes and dislikes. The benefit of this would eventually be to build a database of volunteers with data on what they might be interested in doing in a volunteer setting. To this date the survey has not been analyzed or used in any way other than a quick summary that I did which showed that volunteers did care about their community. This was conducted in early June before the first volunteer leader training. The only purpose in discussing the survey is to show that it was a lost opportunity to learn more about the community. The survey was also infrequently given out although they ultimately could have been a great resource.

Critiquing the Talent Survey

Surveying the community might have been a great way to better understand what the community was most concerned about, and how to best contact community members. The survey asked in a multiple choice format what people enjoyed doing, what skills they wanted to share, and what they cared deeply about. There was also a fill-in section for people to write in about changes they might want to see in the neighborhood and other organizations they were involved in.

The information on the survey might not have been the most important that COM could have asked about. The point of asking about skills was so that people might be able to volunteer doing what interested them. As you will be able to see in the appendix the skills listed are not ones that are generally found as volunteer work at COM. Instead this section could have been used to give some different choices for volunteer projects that had been brought up by community members so that the most popular ones could have been chosen.

The fill-in section was also not the best use of space because people rarely filled in that section. Some people did not want to take the time; some people might have had trouble reading and then writing the answers. When I observed people doing the surveys they often had trouble reading the surveys because of a language barrier or educational barrier. While the section on other organizations could have been useful to get information about organizations to partner with people often did not fill this in either. What would have been much more helpful was a question asking what form of communication they preferred. Contacting people in an efficient way was one of the major

barriers the organization face. Overall, while the survey might have been a good tool to better understand the community, but the questions were not particularly useful. The survey was never analyzed beyond looking at what people cared about to use as a talking point during the volunteer leader training. In my opinion the survey was a lost opportunity to gain important knowledge from the community. The benefit of the survey was personal as it helped me to think more critically about volunteerism on a community level. Now that I have discussed my overall approach in some detail I will go through each of the research methods I employed in a more in-depth manner: ethnography, participant observation and fieldwork, key informants, and semi-structured interview.

Incorporating an Ethnographic Perspective

While many professions might use ethnography, which can casually be defined as “the study and systematic recording of human cultures; *also* : a descriptive work produced from such research” (Merriam-Webster, Inc. 2012) anthropologists have heavily incorporated this method of data collection into their practice. According to editors Barnard and Spencer, anthropologists use ethnography both as a product and a process: a product meaning a book or article written by an anthropologist and a process being participant observation or fieldwork, which will be explained later in this chapter. The editors explain that “ethnographies can be seen as the building blocks and testing grounds of anthropological theory, ethnographies and the ethnographic process from which they derive are also shaped and moulded by theory” (Spencer and Barnard 1996:193).

Within my own fieldwork I used ethnographic data to understand what was being written about community development and volunteerism within anthropology. As a process I used both participant observation and fieldwork, explained in the section below, to gain entry into COM, and to learn more about the community and people of Sulphur Springs. Ethnography was an appropriate method because to do an evaluation on this grant I needed to be a part of the grant during the implementation phase. If I had viewed the implementation as an outsider I would have missed many of the reasons the grant was less successful, but also not understood how even the small successes with the implementation were worth rejoicing over.

Conducting ethnographic fieldwork allowed me to become an active member of COM which meant understanding the daily running of the organization, and how much work recruiting volunteers is in addition to planning projects through to the completion stage. It also allowed me to understand the inner working of the organization to see first-hand how all the staff members worked together. While the ethnographic approach allowed me to become an insider at COM I was not close enough to the community to become an insider at the community level. I also believe it would take much longer than six months to become an insider in this close-knit community.

I was able to get to know some of the community members through COM in a way I would not have been able to do if I entered the community without some type of organization. In the community of Sulphur Springs there are many wonderful people, but since they have been characterized as a low-income community many people have begun to study them from local universities to non-government organizations and even just local

people trying to help out. This influx of people studying the community and trying to help has in some ways caused an opposite effect because the community wants to shut them out. Many times the projects that get implemented by outsiders are not sustainable without the outsider. When these peoples studies or grant money runs out they are no longer interested in the community or can no longer afford to stay there. COM is a tremendous organization because of their sustainability efforts in the area. Without ethnography I would not have been able to get as close to the organization or community and learn as much as I did in only six-months.

Participant Observation and Fieldwork

Fieldwork, long-term research conducted on a community of people, is much more than just spending time with people in any context. It takes the ability to engage with people you might at first have nothing in common with and many times can be an awkward experience that takes time to perfect (Spencer and Barnard 1996). Additionally, although other professions have been known to conduct fieldwork, anthropological fieldwork differs from other professions because of its epistemology, history, and socialization practice (Barfield 1997). Participant observation, extended time spent with members of a community engaging in their usual way of life as much as possible, is a similar experience. One cannot just arrive in a new area and expect to be accepted into a community. Many times it takes months before one can feel comfortable with the community's habits and practices. These methods are ways of gaining access into a community and beginning to understand another community's way of life while making as little impact on their community as possible.

Most of the work Dorothy did was organizing community members to take part in the different activities at COM. It was her responsibility to be the middleman between the organization and the community of volunteers. Once the grant got started she also recruited people for the six-projects her grant supported, and recruited people for the volunteer leader training she conducted which aimed to give people the skills they needed to conduct projects on their own.

As a participant observer I mainly assisted her in organizing different aspects of each project the community was working on. I also helped put together a massive volunteer contact sheet so that when projects were going on in the community we could have an effective list of volunteers who could help before the project began, during the project, or at best attend the different events so there was community presence.

The methods of participant observation and fieldwork were essential to this thesis because they helped me to gain insight into the community I could not have gotten as an outsider. It also gave me the opportunity to work closely with the grant, and understand all the intricacies that went along with it. I was also able to better understand the relationships between the different staff members at COM, and how the staff related to the local community. All of these pieces were important to the evaluation.

Key informants

While spending time at COM I had several informants, informants are those who willing choose to provide information about the community or organization in which one is working as opposed to only providing information when directly working together or

asked to give the information (Barfield 1997). While I had many people who were willing to interview with me and would answer the questions I had about the community or organization there were several people, including Dorothy and at least one community member who could be considered key informants. These were people with whom I built a special bond with while working at COM, and who I spent additional time as they helped me learn more about the community and organization with which I was working.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Another main methodology for this evaluation was conducting semi-structured interviews with two staff members from COM and ten of the most active volunteers from the community. While this sample size may seem small there were only at maximum fifteen active volunteers from the community at any given time. In terms of the staff members from COM I interviewed Dorothy and her direct supervisor, David. Although there were plans to interview their supervisor who I had worked with previously and was primarily responsible for writing the grant, due to timing constraints on her schedule the interview is still in the planning phase. Several meetings with that individual have taken place, however.

Since the sample size was so small every volunteer who participated in three or more of the projects was asked if they might be interested in taking part in being interviewed. Most were interested and almost everyone agreed. Some of those who agreed did not end up interviewing because of timing barriers or non-response when I tried to set-up an actual time for the interviews. The interview process is still ongoing as well as the research for this project.

The interviews with the staff members were important because they served as a way to understand why the organization felt this particular grant was important for the community of Sulphur Springs. There are already many grants being implemented in Sulphur Springs to promote community development which I learned when interviewing a member of one of the local agencies. Another reason that the staff interview was important was to learn how they felt the grant implementation was going, and how their views differed from one another staff member to another and staff member to community member. Additionally, if there were any major red flags they could be dealt with during the implementation of the grant, and not at the end when there was nothing that could be done about it, [see Appendix 1 for a full list of Interview Questions asked to the staff].

The interviews for the community were also important. The interview began with gaining information of the participant's personal history (non-invasive), and how long they had been living in the community. The purpose of this was to learn a little bit more about the resident's personal history and build rapport. How long each person had been living in the community was interesting in terms of any correlation between length of residency and commitment to community development for Sulphur Springs although no correlations were found.

The next part of the interview focused on whether the person had ever volunteered in the past, and what motivates that person to volunteer. The following questions were about what each person was proud of in their community, and what could use improvement. The last questions were specifically about how successfully they felt the grant was being implemented by COM. This was important to understand what types

of projects they would like to see for their community; a copy of the questions that were asked to community residents can be found in Appendix 2.

These interviews, along with my research, were approved through the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. This process is in place to make sure that my research is ethical, and will not do harm to those I am researching. All of the interview questions and my research proposal was presented to the IRB committee, and was approved. There were multiple ethical considerations because of the community with whom I worked. I did not want the interview questions, in particular, to make the participants feel vulnerable or uncomfortable. When this research was designed the knowledge that I would be working with a low and mixed income community was in the forefront of my mind. Making sure to ask questions that were relevant to the research while understanding where the community members were coming from, and what might be most relevant for them since the perspective of how the community felt about the grant was so important.

Conclusion

These research methods allowed me to gain insight not only about the implementation of the grant through COM, but my participant observations actually allowed me understand the inner workings of the organization. Why each event happened the way that it did, ultimately how the outcomes could have been different, but why the implementation of the grant was challenging.

The methods also allowed me access into a tight-knit community. While I am still certainly not an insider within the community of Sulphur Springs I was able to participate in the events and build rapport with those volunteers who came regularly. This interaction helped me to understand the implementation of the grant, its successes and failures, from the community perspective as well.

However, the methods were not without limitations. Since I did spend so much time at the organization I often had trouble deciding when to step in as a volunteer and when to stand back. Many times Dorothy and I were the only two making sure that scheduled projects actually happened, doing all the event coordination since volunteers often helped at the events, but not with the planning of the events. Since there was limited staff available to help with the events, the idea of course was to have volunteers helping it was often hard to remain objective at times.

Another limitation within my methods was not having a more general survey to distribute to people after each event to better understand what people liked and disliked about the events COM was creating for the community. Another benefit to surveying in this way would have been asking about why they were choosing not to volunteer at COM although they attended the event. Lastly, we could have asked about how people like to best be contacted which might have helped to better understand the community. Since we often used the technique of e-mailing this turned out to be an ineffective method. By not adding this additional survey there was a lost opportunity.

Chapter 4: Ethnography of COM's Recruitment Practices

The purpose of this chapter is to take an in-depth look at the data that was collected during my fieldwork and participant observation with the end goal of evaluating how successfully the grant that was given to COM was implemented. Beyond the implementation this researcher is also interested in how the community of Sulphur Springs received the grant and its impact, if any, on the community it was supposed to empower.

In order to do this I will first discuss COM, why the organization might have applied for the grant. Next there will be a discussion of what the grant specifically asked of the organization, and how COM thought they might accomplish the goals of the grant. In the next section of this chapter I will look at the projects themselves in some depth, and how successful the implementation of the grant actually was specifically looking at the volunteer aspect. From there a discussion of the implementation, successes, and failures of the grant from the staff perspective will be considered. I will then give some reasons that I believe the grant might not have been as successful as it could have been. In the final section there will be a discussion of why the grant overall did not reach the amount of people or impact them in a way the grant writers might have specifically envisioned.

A Look at the policy from COM's perspective

As previously mentioned COM has been an organization since the mid-1840s. Due to this the organization's structure is strong, however, while I was conducting my fieldwork there was discussion with the volunteer coordinator that the site was going through some structure changes. Currently in the COM office at Sulphur Springs there are three staff members. David, is the site manager and in charge of the afterschool program. Dorothy, the volunteer coordinator, reports to David. There is also a woman who runs a literacy program who also works for COM and reports to David. David's direct supervisor, the executive director, was on site approximately once a month for meetings.

While there was an organizational structure in place for employees there was an open position at COM. This position, from what I understand, was a supervisory role so that each person should have actually been reporting back to this role which was not filled. As a result everyone had to take on more responsibility. This additional responsibility meant that even if there was a strong organizational structure everyone was busy trying to conduct their job along with extra responsibilities. The end result was that Dorothy, when she took on the volunteer coordinator position for COM had many responsibilities both with the grant and with other COM projects. All of the other employees also balanced a high level of responsibility, but since this thesis specifically looks at the grant implementation it is important to know that Dorothy did this job in addition to taking on other responsibilities at the organization.

Since there was a large need for action at the organization and not just bystanders, as I mention in the methods section, I was torn between getting hands on with the

organization and helping to implement the grant or standing back to understand the struggles that this organization was facing because it was under staffed. In the end I believe I struck a balance doing mainly administrative work, but trying not to interfere with the everyday running of the organization.

In the fall of 2010 the executive director of COM at the regional office applied for the BEST Grant on behalf of COM in Sulphur Springs specifically. The grant was applied for as a part of an overall revitalization effort for Sulphur Springs sponsored by COM called the Community of Potential. The Community of Potential is an effort to reach out and empower the entire community from birth through high school, college, and to a career. It is based on the idea that everyone can succeed given the opportunity. This Community of Potential, through programs meant to specifically target different age groups and segments of the population who need support is meant to be that help. The YMCA of Sulphur Springs has a very similar program that they are currently promoting called the Neighborhood of Promise. Since COM is currently looking to revitalize the entire neighborhood of Sulphur Springs this grant fit nicely with its current goals for the community.

The grant specifically asked for six projects to be completed between March 1, 2011 and September 30, 2011. In that time period a total of three hundred volunteers were to be recruited, fifty per volunteer project. These volunteers could repeat projects meaning that if one person volunteered at all six projects they would be counted six times.

The grant also mandated that members from the organization attend a Strength-based Assessment (SBA) and Neighboring training that was conducted prior to the beginning of

the grant implementation. This was paid for by the granting agency so that those implementing the grant would understand the BEST grant policies. Dorothy and the executive director did attend that training. After the training the grant mandated a basic SBA of the community by allowing community members to have Community Conversation which allowed the residents to discuss the needs of the community. Through these conversations the community could decide what type of projects could be facilitated to fix these needs.

The grant also mandates that the development of projects should be identified by the community members. The volunteer coordinator is also in charge of strategies for recruiting, training, managing, and retaining volunteers from all populations including veterans, disadvantages youth, children or incarcerated parents and persons with disabilities. The volunteer roles should have been measurable with SBA outcomes to attract and retain volunteers. The volunteer leader training was also a part of the grant parameters.

As per the grant at least one of the projects should be on a special day of service or remembrance. Each of the projects should engage a minimum of fifty volunteers. Volunteer Florida also conducted a program evaluation that each grant receiving organization must participate in. At the end of the grant there had to be a program to recognize the volunteers, and at each project documentation in the form of pictures should have been kept. There is also monthly reporting involved.

At the end of the grant cycle a successful organization should have accomplished the development of an internal operational system and financial management system that

provided organizational stability. The program should have also trained residents to use SBA for the community. The volunteers should have also learned how to reach out to other organization for assistance in planning and implementation of projects if there was a need. A job description for each volunteer role should have been created to attract and retain the volunteers. Volunteer Florida also mandates that at least fifty volunteers should have been retained to address the needs of the community.

COM received a \$25,000 grant, the maximum that was given to organizations, for the revitalization of Sulphur Springs. The money from the grant was spent on the projects carried out by COM, and it paid the volunteer coordinators salary. This grant fit nicely with the Community of Potential model already in place in the community. The grant was important to COM because it helped to further the reach that Community of Potential already had in the community.

To understand this policy from an interpretive policy analysis viewpoint, as Shore and Wright would suggest, it is important to not only understand the organization or the grant parameters, but also the volunteers who were affected by this grant and how they interpret the grant that was received by the community. Although it would be ideal to be able to begin this with how COM intended to reach the people they most wanted to volunteer from my perspective they did not have a clear recruitment plan from the beginning.

In the next section there will be an in depth look at the projects that were completed by COM, how volunteers were recruited, and how the volunteers reacted to this grant. Their reaction is particularly important since as I mention above the organization was

already understaffed so bringing on a grant like this which is workload heavy means that in order for it to be a total success volunteers were needed from day one to make sure that the projects were created, planned for, and implemented.

Staff Opinion

I conducted two interviews with staff members. The purpose of conducting interviews with staff members at COM was to better understand their motives for helping to facilitate this grant, and to better understand why, from their perspective, the grant was important to the community. The site director of COM, David, does not live in the community, but has been working in the community with COM for approximately two and a half years. Dorothy, project coordinator, prior to the beginning of the grant, had not worked in the community. This is an important aspect to understand since the grant was intended to be community run.

After analyzing the staff interviews it was clear that the two staff members had different views as to how the grant could be utilized both at COM and in the community. Dorothy felt the grant was mainly a vehicle to motivate the community. David was more excited by the prospect of having three hundred new volunteers to help with projects specifically at COM. In a way this is not surprising since David had worked at COM much longer than Dorothy. While I was doing my fieldwork at COM it was often his responsibility to find volunteers for projects, unrelated to the BEST grant, that COM was promoting. It was often challenging to find anyone who wanted to volunteer, especially since the volunteer pool was small which meant trying to engage the same people repeatedly. The rest of this section will discuss some of the staff views of the grant, and

give some examples of how both staff members viewed not only the grant but the community slightly different.

As mentioned above, one of the most compelling findings was the differences in how the staff members viewed the primary goals of the grant. Dorothy felt the grant gave COM a way to identify community residents who were passionate about community, and give them the resources, mainly through trainings, the resources to improve their own community. She also discussed the sustainability of the program, how the residents first learned by doing it with staff members, and then they would have the skills and resources to do it on their own.

David felt that the grant was positive because it was a way to engage COM with three hundred new people from the community who might not know what programs COM had to offer them. It also allowed COM and the community to do projects; many suggested by BEST grant, that they would not have thought of otherwise. He also mentioned the grant giving COM the ability to work with organizations, like the Neighborhood Association. He also liked that it allowed the community to be creative. He sighted one idea by a community volunteer who suggested promoting one of the events by ordering shoelaces with the name of the event and date so that people would attend. The idea was then to canvas the neighborhood to interact and invite people from the community to attend the event by handing out the shoelaces. While David did like the way the grant engaged community members his view was much more COM centered then Dorothy who really felt the primary purpose of the grant was to engage the community. For her COM was more a base to engage as opposed to the center.

During the interview Dorothy talked about generational poverty³. This is important to mention because it helps to explain her frame of mind although she was very passionate about helping the community. She feels that possibly several generations ago people living in this area really did need assistance, but at this point assistance has been given to the point that people expect and openly ask for it when possibly they do not need it. It has come to be expected. In this she means handouts from organizations like COM who might provide free meals or other basic necessities.

She also talked about the positive aspects of volunteerism in reference to the elementary school. According to her when parents volunteer it shows children that parents think they are important. This is firsthand experience from volunteering for her children's PTA.

Other positive aspects of volunteerism would be residents getting to know each other in the community. Along with this is getting to know the resources available to them in the community. Dorothy thinks volunteerism also helps to promote a sense of pride and comfort within the community which could lead to more people joining organizations like the Neighborhood Association, Neighborhood Watch, and attending events at school. All of this amounts to a greater sense of community.

David conversely talked about how parental involvement in the school was good for the kids. He also talked about the importance of volunteerism within the organization and the community because of the amount of goals and objects currently trying to be

³ Generational poverty, as described by Dr. Ruby Payne, is families who have lived in poverty for at least two generations, meaning children of parents in poverty grow up to live in poverty themselves ("GazetteXtra.com" 2008).

completed within the organization. This could tie back to the literature that was seen in Chapter 2. Since federal programs are withdrawing it leaves non-government organizations to step in and fill these voids. These organizations are generally underfunded, for example surviving on grants that must be renewed every few months. It means that volunteers are an essential part of the working of the organization. David did feel that the grant helped to increase volunteerism within the community.

When these interviews were conducted the grant was approximately half completed in terms of duration. I asked both David and Dorothy how successful they personally felt the grant had been so far. David felt that some of the positives were that knowledge of COM's resources for the community. He also felt that giving the community the opportunity to be creative about what they would like to see changed was a positive aspect. He commented on how it allowed more energy to be focused on positive aspects of the community. As examples he cited two of the projects, one was a disaster relief day that helped to prepare the community in case of a natural disaster. The other was a beautification of the Neighborhood Association which is located on the same grounds. These were projects and programs that could most likely not have been completed without the grant or energy that the grant built from the local community.

David also cited some negatives or things he felt were going less well with the grant. He suggested there was a lack of communication when implementing the projects. Since David prides himself on his work plans which are laid out months before any project he also felt that there was an element of procrastination with the

implementation of these projects. Along with this he felt that marketing efforts could be more aggressive.

In contrast Dorothy had some very different feelings about the overall progress of the grant so far. She felt positively that the grant had created an opportunity for a local teenagers to meet the mayor of Sulphur Springs, and she also thought the grant had positively influenced at least one other member of the community. Her opinion in terms of the grant was that it might only influence one person at a time, but it was in a positive way. The grant for her is about the small picture, touching individual's lives. In general the grant also helped to steer community members away from gangs, violence, drugs, etc.

Dorothy also discussed the positive benefits for the residents that attended the leadership training that hopefully they would be more vocal in self-advocating needs, understand the value of the neighborhood association- and how to connect with other residents. They would also hopefully be empowered to make changes by work with others, even those who are different than them since the community is ethnically diverse. Dorothy was concerned that six-months was not long enough to complete six-projects and create lasting change. At that point the leadership training team was still working on its first project, and the project was moving slowly. She felt the grant timeline was not long enough to implement and make a lasting impact in a community, especially if the person administering the grant is new to the community and must first gain community trust.

One area the staff members agreed upon was that this grant was important to the community because it was more community centered, whether that was the way it was

actually implemented or not, than other grants currently ongoing in Sulphur Springs. They felt the BEST grant was more about engaging residents. David mentioned that up until the point of the interview approximately 90% of volunteers at COM had children that currently attended the elementary school attached to COM. He felt the grant helped to impact the parents of these children who were coming out more often to volunteer. Again here was see the grant for him having the purpose if getting volunteers to help out at COM as opposed to it being community centered.

David's answers were much more administrative. He felt most of the outcomes would be measured at a later date. He also mentioned that COM would reapply for the grant in the next cycle. He was looking at how to retain the three hundred volunteers and maybe bring that number to four hundred, but felt from there it was be small increases in volunteers. David was much more interested in targeting specific parents and residents to help volunteer and create community.

After analyzing the interviews given by staff members it is apparent that the views of the two staff members most closely connected to the implementation of the grant were differing in terms of who should be targeted for the grant and why the grant was important to the community. While David was more focused within the elementary school Dorothy was looking at getting more than just the residents who children attended the elementary school involved. During my participant observation I saw how it was easiest to reach out to the parents of the elementary school students because of the ability to market to them through fliers either going home in student's backpacks or during pickup and drop off of students each day. While the elementary school students were a

good starting place the grant was intended to reach a wider audience. This lack of focus on what residents could and should be engaged could have caused some problems for the implementation of the grant.

When looking at why the grant was important to the community Dorothy cited the importance of engaging residents to improve the community on their own, using the volunteering training as a way to have community members learn to improve the community on their own. David's comments were much more COM centered. He mentioned things like connecting three hundred volunteers to resources COM might provide. Again we see a lack of vision for who COM is trying to target.

Implementation and Perceptions of the grant

When I came on board in May the executive director and Dorothy had been to the SBA training, but no overall plan for volunteer outreach and implementation had been decided on. One of the projects had been completed, LionDay, and one was in the works, Sports Day, which ended up not counting as an official project. The plan was to do the volunteer leader training and then allow the community to choose projects from there. After the volunteer leader training which lasted until the end of June there was some momentum, but within a few weeks of the volunteer leader training there were once again no volunteers. As I will discuss they all backed out of one of the projects. After that Dorothy was mainly in charge of the projects, and then she went on a 3-week vacation where I still helped to volunteer in her absence. Once she returned the Family Walk-a-Thon was planned and the grant cycle was completed. This section will outline this

progression in more detail and discuss how the grant was implemented along with the opinions from the local community and me.

At the final thank you dinner thirty-five people were invited as people who were recognized for helping COM. Some of those thirty-five I did not recognize because they helped with different aspects of COM like the literacy program run by the other COM staff member. There were seven people, including myself, who had participated in five or more events. Approximately fifteen people participated in three or more events. In total there might have been twenty-five people who participated in one event including other COM members of the afterschool program and teachers at the elementary school.

As I mention above, the main issue this grant implementation faced was not having enough people to consistently work on the projects. In one way this was the fault of those working at COM who were not doing their job recruiting volunteers to help with the projects. In another respect it was the fault of the grant writers who merely assumed that people would want to volunteer because helping out ones community is the right thing to do. Ultimately, the problem was that there was so much work to be done accomplishing all of the grant parameters that there simply was not time to recruit people to help on the projects.

When I started volunteering at COM one of the projects had already been completed, an event called LionDay which was associated with the elementary school. This event was said to have gotten about fifty volunteers, mainly teachers from the elementary school, workers from COM, and the parents of those children that attended the elementary school. In addition there was a project in the works, a sports day planned

for the next month, and a family walk-a-thon which was to take place at the end of the grant as sort of the grand finale project.

While I was volunteering I was a part of the sports day which will be described in some detail below. This event was conducted by COM, but ultimately was not counted as one of the six projects. I also helped with the volunteer leader training which will be described in an effort to show how the community reacted to the implementation of this grant. The other projects were a disaster relief preparedness workshop, community newsletter, the distribution of the newsletter, a 9-11 day of remembrance event, and family walk-a-thon. I will comment briefly on most of these in an effort to show the volunteer support that was received, and how unconventional at times my summer fieldwork was. In most cases the projects are explained through the author's fieldnotes so they are written at the time when the project took place.

Sports Day

The Sports Day was an interesting example of how at times communication in the office was less than desirable. While it was ultimately not one of the counted projects the volunteers who participated in Sports Day were still counted as volunteers for the grant goals. The purpose of discussing Sports Day was to show the lack of communication in the office at COM.

On the first day of my volunteer service at COM Dorothy talked with me about what projects had already been done, what the next project that needed to be completed was, and what some of the long-term plans. The LionDay had already been completed, a

Sports Day was planned, and a volunteer leader training and community walk-a-thon were long term goals. It was run by another staff member at COM and a member of the local community. Within the first weeks of my fieldwork we heard that Sports Day was going to be cancelled even though we had been advertising it, as had the volunteer whose idea it was. Then suddenly the event was back on, but it was no longer funded by the BEST grant. This was confusing for community residents.

There was also an issue of the time the event would start. The community member who envisioned sports day informed us the people in Sulphur Springs do not come out until at least afternoon, but the event was scheduled earlier in the day. This community member and I never had the opportunity to do a semi-structured interview, but I did consider him a key informant as he volunteered at almost every event. We spent a lot of time throughout my fieldwork discussing the grant and the way that COM was implementing the grant in the community.

While this community member did not explicitly state why community residents did not want to participate in these types of activities until the afternoon it could be because they have jobs, other activities planned with their children, other activities are taking place in the community, or any number of other reasons. This community resident had seen other projects try to start earlier with no success. Since we was a member of the community he knew that generally speaking people from the community were not likely to attend events until later in the day. He was correct in his statement, and as a result there were limited people there for the first several hours, approximately 10-15 people who came from another non-profit organization in the community. Later in the day when

the volunteers had already put in a long day the community showed up to participate in the event. In total approximately 120 attended the sports day event. The miscommunication that occurred at this event put a rift in between the staff at COM and one of the most active volunteers.

In some ways the event was a success. At this particular event there was lots of support from other organizations who set-up booths to promote their own programs. In total approximately one hundred people came out to the event, and this event helped to get COM's program out to the community. Even at the end of the program this event was still one of the most talked about in the community.

Volunteer Leader Training

The volunteer leader training was intended to be the crux of the entire program. The idea was that community residents would learn how to run their own projects with the training conducted by the program coordinator. In addition to empowering community members this also makes the grant sustainable because when the grant is no longer funded the community would still have the knowledge to run the projects. Additionally, without the ability to pass the projects on to the community there is no element of sustainability. Without the sustainability aspect, as I will talk about in greater detail later in this chapter, there is a risk that the community would feel discouraged by COM's efforts.

Within Sulphur Springs there is a reputation that grants, organizations, and researchers come and go with their money. The community is beginning not to trust these

efforts because the community feels it does not see any positive change. This grant, if implemented properly, could be a way to change this perception. During my interview with the Smiths, an active community engagement couple in the community, whom I conducted an interview with; they called Sulphur Springs the “last accessible community”. By this they meant that agencies and non-profit organization could still apply for grants, like the BEST grant, to help this lower-mixed income community. They would like to see these grants written not with the community in mind but by the community. They feel that each grant only serves a small population within Sulphur Springs, not the community as a whole. While the BEST grant was not written by the community the purpose of the grant is to include the entire community. This is why I feel if it was implemented properly it could change the community’s perception.

The training took place over a 3-week period in June of 2011. A main goal of the training was to ask residents about why they have chosen to come, what strengths they have, and what they identify as a need in the community. From that need at least one project was to be created that all the volunteer leaders decided upon together then planned and implemented as a group.

The first volunteer leader training took place June 14th from 5:30pm to 7:30pm. At first only three people showed up so the program started late because there were not enough residents to get started. The volunteer leader training was not advertised. People were hand chosen by Dorothy because they expressed interest in involvement in the grant or they had been a frequent volunteer at COM before the grant began. Dorothy also sent an e-mail to other non-profit organizations in Sulphur Springs inviting them to the

training. By the end there were six people from the community who showed up for the training. Two were long-term community members, there was also two women had just moved into the neighborhood, and two were from outside the community, but were active in a church located in Sulphur Springs.

The training went relatively well. There was a discussion about staying positive when it comes to community development and looking at the glass half full, not half empty. The community talent survey, which was critiqued in the methods section, was next discussed to get people thinking about what their fellow community members who could not make it to the training really cared about. The first thing that was brought up was how caring people in the community are, the primary concerns are for children, the elderly, and healthy lifestyles. There is also a real desire to improve the situations in Sulphur Springs. This was the extent to which the talent survey was analyzed.

After the discussion about the talent survey we moved onto the workbook. Dorothy talked about how we might not be able to solve all the big problems, but we can solve some little ones. One of the big ideas was to have a block party so that people could meet and greet. There was also talk of joining the Neighborhood Association to stay better involved. The idea of a newsletter was also brought up. The community members wanted to put it out on a regular basis so that people know to look for it, and get excited about it.

The second volunteer training was a week later. There were some new faces at the training which was a positive thing since ideally as many as twelve people should have

gone through the training. This time the training focused more on the grant itself. Why COM is involved in the community, grant, and history of the organization.

We then went around to see what were some of the issues the volunteers felt were going on in the community. At this point we got to hear from some of the community members about what they really cared about in the community, and why they had chosen to come to the volunteer leader training.

The third training session was a wrap-up and celebration for those who had graduated from the program. During the volunteer leader training weeks there was a lot of momentum from the volunteers who attended, and a general feeling in the group that they could really accomplish anything they set their minds to. Unfortunately, once the volunteer leader training ended it took with it a lot of the momentum of the group. The next section will discuss the community newsletter that was the community development project the volunteer leader training group decided to pursue.

Newsletter and distribution

Once the volunteer leader training group stopped meeting it hurt the momentum of the projects. At this point several other projects had been completed in the community including a disaster preparedness event, but none, except for the community sports day which was not officially one of the projects, had involved community as volunteers, only as participants.

One of the main reasons for this was the way that COM chose to recruit people for their projects. Generally speaking there was not a lot of effort placed on the

recruitment of volunteers. Many times e-mails were sent about the programs several times to a list of approximately three hundred families in Sulphur Springs. This list was inherited from COM's afterschool childcare program. E-mails were also sent to other service providing agencies and organizations. There was a lot of emphasis placed on word of mouth recruitment. By this I mean that fliers were generally send home with the elementary school students after school and the hope was that interested parents would tell their friends and the word would spread from there. For the family Walk-a-Thon there was an effort to go door to door to let people know about the event, but I was not a part of that effort. They seemed to contact approximately one hundred household this way. At no time were the projects advertised in any mass way such as newspapers or the radio. Fliers were often printed, but they were only given out to a few residents who were asked to distribute them to their friends and neighbors.

The newsletter was going to be the first real community driven event. Two of the volunteer leader training participants said they were interesting in taking on the project. While the other volunteer leader training group members were more interested in helping to distribute the newsletter, but were not necessarily interested in helping with the creation. Almost immediately one of the participants quit saying she had taken on too much, and that while she at first wanted to help there had been a misunderstanding. She did not want to take on such as active role, and there were some personality conflict problems with the other volunteer on the project.

The other person involved said she would do a few things to get the project going. We met with her several times over a couple weeks, but in the end she also said she was

too busy. She was unable to help any longer. In the end the Neighborhood Association put together a newsletter, most likely the idea was spurred from our efforts, and Dorothy added some COM events to the newsletter and a back to school calendar. While it came out really nice looking it was certainly not community driven. One local resident did add some of her favorite recipes to the newsletter so that was a positive aspect. Dorothy spoke to the Neighborhood Association about putting out another newsletter and the association commented that there was not really a point if it was not community led. I was not actually there to witness the distribution of the newsletter. In total I believe about ten people helped to distribute it door-to-door in the community.

Disaster Preparedness, 9-11 Day of Remembrance, Family Walk-a-Thon

The other three projects ran in a similar fashion. As previously discussed, with all the planning that each project took there was rarely time to recruit members of the local community to help plan the projects. While each project was not well planned in and of itself there were a lot of details such as location, food, set-up materials, times that needed to be in place. This is what Dorothy spent most of her time planning. Even when community members were involved, as seen in the example above, there was little incentive or motivation to see an idea through to the implementation.

Once the grant was received Dorothy was placed in charge of the grant. While there should have been some long-term plans established from the beginning of the grant applications this was not the way in which Dorothy viewed the grant. Instead she took each project separately, in many cases completing one project before starting the next. This might be why the community members during the semi-structured interviews and

volunteer training often commented that there was a lack of communication and structure in the projects.

The disaster preparedness event consisted of service providers in the area who gave talks about what to do in the case of a hurricane and other disasters that are likely to hit the Tampa area. This was an event that had to be done as mandated by the grant parameters. There was a good turnout of community members at this event. There were approximately fifty people at this event. I say good turnout because Dorothy was pleased with the amount of people. The grant did not call for any specific amount of people, but for some of the projects only fifteen or twenty people showed up so fifty was a good number. The reason for the larger number of people was possibly because of the incentive of a free lunch and a disaster relief package which contained food that could be eaten in the event of a disaster. The Smith's do feel that many times people do show-up to places mainly for the free lunch. They have spoken to Dorothy about having programs where residents either pay a small fee to participate or have a potluck where each resident brings a dish to be consumed by all the residents. This is so that the residents have some sense of giving to the project. The Smith's feel this might give some sense of ownership over the projects. A limited amount of volunteers were asked to volunteer and subsequently only about seven people were there to volunteer, however, even if there had been volunteers at the event there would not have been much for them to do. In most cases when the projects needed help was in the creation period, not on the day of the event. There were limited jobs on the day of each event.

The Day of Remembrance was similar. I helped quite a bit on this event because Dorothy was out of the office for an extended period during the planning of this event. I was not actually able to be there on the day of the event, but the staff members of COM were mainly the ones who carried this event out. This event entailed the elementary school students in the afterschool program making pictures and writing letters to service men and women which were then mailed to the service men and women. There was then an assembly type event at the elementary school flagpole. This gave the children in the afterschool program a chance to learn about why service to the country is important, from the grants perspective since it was a mandated event.

The Family Walk-a-Thon followed a similar unfortunate pattern to the newsletter. While some people showed interest in the event in the end Dorothy was the one to orchestrate the entire event which she felt was her role as the volunteer coordinator, but she had trouble organizing every aspect of the events. While she tried to have the event at several different locations in the end the only place she was able to have the event was the elementary school. This furthered the problem of having everything revolving around the elementary school as opposed to a community-wide effort.

We also tried for many of the events to get other organizations to participate on the projects. While several other organizations regularly joined in on our projects there were many organizations who we contacted multiple times to join our efforts who were not interested in participating. In most cases Dorothy tried much harder to get other organizations to get involved, hoping they would help to get residents involved, than she spent trying to get individual residents involved. This was most likely one of the main

problems Dorothy faced, not effectively asking individual residents to be a part of the projects as volunteers.

Community perspectives

The community interviews or semi-structured interviews were important to this study because I wanted to understand how they viewed this grant. Although the grant asked for community participation it was still applied for and administered by outsiders. As one couple pointed out the grant was not applied for by the community so they felt that took power away from the community whether it was meant to benefit them or not. The questions were meant to get a feel for the community members who chose to donate their time. I wanted to get a better understanding of who they were, what motivated them to volunteer, and how effectively they believed the grant was being implemented. I also asked them about what type of improvements they wanted to see for their community. While I will discuss some interview questions in-depth in this section not all will be covered. A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix 2.

In terms of who the community who was choosing to volunteer their time was all but two of the community members interviewed n=11 were from the local community with one having moved out of the community several years before. Most had been living in the community for two-eight years although most had lived in multiple houses across Sulphur Springs during their time in the community.

All of the participants I interviewed had previously done some sort of volunteer work either in church, school, or with another non-profit organization. People heard

about the opportunity through a number of different ways, some have children that attend the elementary school that COM is attached to. Other heard about the opportunity through church, friends and family, and the PTA (Parent Teacher Association).

Understanding why people volunteer is important to this research. Some of the reasons these volunteers chose to do so was, in the words of one volunteer, “A job well done feels good”. Other volunteers were interested in putting job experience on their resume or having something to add to their resume. One gentleman was interested in a career working with children so he decided to volunteer at COM to have the opportunity to add working with children to his resume. Other just wanted the experience of volunteer work to add. Other advantages to volunteering were mentioned. Lastly, one volunteer mentioned that she volunteers because of how it impacts people’s lives. A good majority of people said they were interested primarily in volunteering with kids.

While many residents felt that COM was doing a good job implementing the grant some ways that the process could be improved or some peoples residents were having did come out during the interviews. One of the biggest criticisms was the time frame for when events happened. Especially in the beginning events were held in the early morning because in Florida it is too hot to be out during the day. Many residents do not want events that early in the morning, and would have preferred an afternoon event. This was a problem because many people, because of the stereotyping currently going on in the community, did not want to volunteer in the afternoon thinking that is when most of the trouble happens. Additionally, many volunteers were unwilling to give up, for example Saturday night volunteering.

In addition to the interview questions many of the residents had specific concerns or interests that went beyond what was covered in the basic interview. In these next couple pages I will discuss in some depth several people concerns for the community. Some of these concerns overlapped with one another, but in many cases each person had a person concern they were advocating for. In general this could be seen as making a grant to increase community development challenging if the community residents wanted different things.

Communication was also an issue. What is the best communicate with the community? One of the problems that COM constantly faced was the best way to access and communicate with the residents. As already discussed the community newsletter was not a huge success, but this has been a problem for a long time in Sulphur Springs. One resident mentioned that the only reason she knew that the resource center was opening near her was because she drove by. Other than that there was no advertising for its opening. Since most residents do not have access or have only limited access to the most convenient way to get information out, internet, it makes it hard to get the word out in ways that are not very time consuming. The access issue to communication is because most residents do not have computers or internet access in their homes. They go to public internet locations which most do not do on a daily basis. This was learned during one of the semi-structured interviews and from talking to residents during fieldwork. Most of the people interviewed mentioned that face-to-face communication and calls were the best way to get information across to people, but since there was limited volunteers at COM doing that way usually not possible because it was too time consuming.

Due to the lack of communication, another criticism from the volunteer leader training volunteers and semi-structured interviews was that events needed to be better organized. This comment came in different ways from at least three residents. Specifically at one of the first big events there was not enough signage to point people in the right direction to where everyone was getting together. This made everyone uneasy when they were already unsure about volunteering. There was also a comment that there needed to be a basic schedule or more structure so that everything ran more smoothly. The lack of advertising for the event was also mentioned as a problem.

Making sure that needs are met at each event was also brought up, especially for planning meetings. One resident commented that it was important to have childcare at events or to leave enough time before the end of school and the beginning of events to have time to do something with the children. Many of the residents voiced similar feelings that childcare needed to be provided to have a successful event.

During a joint interview two residents shared great insight into several aspects of the community, many that other residents briefly mentioned during their interviews. They referred to Sulphur Springs as the last accessible community which references how, due to the negative stereotypes associated with the community the community is viewed as a great place to conduct research because there are funding options such as grants available to work in these disenfranchised neighborhoods. The Smiths, felt that the amount of grants currently in the neighborhood left the community at a disadvantage. The greatest problem with the numbers of grants available, as they explained, is that none of them were written with community consent. Although there is need in the community they feel

that writing the grant without the support of the community or understanding the community's needs is still not really serving the community.

An additional problem is that there is a lack of knowledge among community members about the different grants. Each grant only serves a small population of the community instead of the grants focusing on the entire community. While most grants are written to engage the community there are usually almost no actual community members involved.

While the Smith's acknowledge that community participation might mean things move at a slower pace they feel that the benefit to the community would be much greater. The Smiths are advocates for teaching people how to do things themselves instead of giving handouts. While that is the basic tenet of this grant a main problem is that the projects implemented by the grant often have a hand out component. They feel that instead there should be some element of responsibility like paying \$1 to have a meal or even a potluck so everyone can show pride in something they make.

The Smith's feel that more outreach could be done with the parents of the elementary school children. They feel that in general agencies have not done a good job of outreaching into the community which is essentially what another resident directly spoke about during her interview, and something I saw time and again during my participant observation. During the volunteer leader training outreach was discussed to the point that the first project chosen was a community newsletter specifically targeted to let people know what was happening in their community.

Implementation of the Grant

From the information above I hope that it is clear that overall little work was actually done to include the community in these projects. The volunteer leader training was conducted and there was hope that the people involved in the volunteer leader training would tell people about the training and the word would spread from there. In reality this did not happen.

Most of the marketing for the events was done either by sending fliers home to the parents of the elementary school or by e-mail to the approximately two hundred people in the community who had joined COM's community mailing list. As will be discussed in the following pages this method of e-mail was ineffective for the community.

Overall many people in the community most likely had no idea that COM even received the grant or was offering opportunities for residents to get involved in community development efforts. This was the opinion of the Smiths who felt that COM had essentially only done enough outreach to let people involved with the elementary school know about the grant. Their opinion was important because they were very active in the community. Those who were aware often came to the events as participants, and many seemed to enjoy themselves. Even those who were somewhat resistant to the efforts often came to show their support like the Smiths.

My Views

Before looking at my results I wanted to comment briefly on representing COM in the community as someone who was viewed as an outsider. As mentioned before, while I believe I was considered an insider at COM, I was certainly viewed as an outsider in the community. In addition to not living in the community I was also representing the university. Not only did I attend the university, but I was working on an M.A. This definitely separated me from the community members. At times I am sure this knowledge made them uneasy. They were not sure why I was conducting the research or really why I cared at all.

To gain the trust of the community I spent a lot of time getting to know anyone in the community who was willing to speak with me. Before I began any type of real evaluation I spent approximately the first two months just getting to know people, and getting my face at as many volunteer activities as possible. This was beneficial because as people began to recognize my face they tended to open up to me. Although there are a lot of negative stereotypes that have come out of the community, in my opinion, those were not at all portrayed in the people who I spent time with. I would talk a lot about my research, and why it was important to me. Once people saw my face continually at the different events they began to trust that what I was saying about caring about the community was true. I talked with them about wanting to see how the grant was being run. I also talked about wanting to understand their idea of what needed to be changed in the community because how they viewed their own community was an important element to this grant.

While I did try to gain the communities trust there were still many people who were not interested in sharing information with me. Additionally many people most likely told me more of what they thought I wanted to hear rather than what was actually on their minds. This is to be somewhat expected, but it is still important to mention. For future researchers it is always best to have a member or even several members of the community that you can trust to give you good information. They can also be useful to validate information through. Although I really enjoyed working with the volunteer coordinator, if someone at COM was more of an insider to the community I think the whole grant would probably have run much more successfully. It would also have had a positive influence on my research because community members would have potentially felt even more comfortable talking openly with me about their opinions.

Results attributed to the way the grant was written

As previously stated, the grant asked for six community based projects, the ideas, planning, and implementation for these projects was to have come from the community. Dorothy's main role was recruiting the volunteers and conducting the volunteer leader training so that volunteers could be properly trained.

The grant, however, strongly suggests that programs run both some type of disaster relief training and some type of day of remembrance program. It was important for COM to honor these requests as the organization is looking to apply for the grant again in the next grant cycle. If they did not follow these recommendations they would most likely not be considered for the next grant cycle. Since these projects were more or less mandated by the grant the community was not able to take ownership of the projects.

This meant from the time the projects were introduced the community had little interest in helping to plan or implement the projects. As a result most of the planning and implementation fell to Dorothy and me. The information for this was gained through participant observation as I helped to plan the program when the volunteers were not able to be recruited to help.

An additional problem with the grant asking for these projects is that the projects were not necessarily ones that needed a large amount of volunteer support, especially at the event. As previously mentioned the volunteer base was only about twenty people and about nine people completed the volunteer leader training, including myself. This means that not only were volunteers not a part of the creation of the event, there was also not a lot of room for them to participate as volunteers at the event.

The disaster relief program was a success in terms of education for those that attended the event. Unfortunately, due to rain there was a moderately low turnout as most of the event was planned for outside. Those who were able to attend learned about the necessary staples in term of food and supplies in care of a natural disaster and where they could go to seek protection. This can be viewed as empowering on a personal level, but might not necessarily be viewed as community development.

The day of remembrance event brought in many volunteers because children from the elementary school wrote letters and drew pictures that were then mailed to service men and women. The event included the same children from the elementary school so while it might have been educational for them, again there was no real community development happening at this event.

Many of the points made in the section above can also be seen as a problem with the implementation of the grant. In the conclusion some attention will be given to how the program might have more effectively been able to engage volunteers even if the grant asked for a specific project. The point of separating the two sections was to make the distinction that although the program was supposed to be run as a bottom-up approach, by mandating projects to be completed, it took the ownership and power out of the hands of the residents and into the hands of Dorothy, COM, and the grant itself. Although only two of the projects were mandated it still affected the implementation of the grant as a whole.

Results attributed to implementation

In terms of the way the grant was implemented by COM and the volunteer coordinator there were several results of the evaluation that indicated why volunteer recruitment and retention might have been low. The first problem is that the way the volunteers were contacted was generally not in a way that met societal norms. This was confirmed during interviews with volunteers and at several feedback sessions that took place at the volunteer leader trainings as well as a thank you dinner held at the end of the grant cycle.

In this community people do not generally own personal computers and only some of them take advantage of computers available for public access. This makes e-mail communication a less effective than many other forms of communication. The community, based on interviews and conversations with residents, get their information

in ways like phone calls, face-to-face communication, and through newspapers, specifically one that was identified by residents as a popular one.

There are several problems with these forms of communication. In general residents carry disposable or track phones and numbers change on a regular basis. Due to this it is hard to keep up with changing numbers in a volunteer database. The problem with phone calls and face-to-face communication is that it is time consuming. Also, as discussed in the introduction, the community is negatively stereotyped and one of those stereotypes is that it is dangerous to walk around. This knowledge, whether based completely in fact or not, discouraged many people from wanting to canvas the neighborhood to get information out about events or recruit people.

Another problem was that from the outside the grant seemed to follow the basic rational choice tenet of the benefits of the program outweighing the costs. It could be assumed, using Dye's overview of how to select a rational choice policy, that the community would want community development projects to be implemented to better their neighborhood. It would also make sense in terms of cost benefit analysis that paying a volunteer coordinator to run the training and then having community leaders volunteer their time would cut down the costs. It would be more empowering for community members to see a member of their community leading these projects than an outsider.

It is clear, however, because I was a part of the implementation of the grant that all consequences were not considered when weighing how the grant was to be written. It was assumed that people in the community would want or be able to volunteer their time free of charge on a weekly basis. In reality people's schedules did not allow for such

intensive volunteer efforts. The recruitment of volunteers for the volunteer leader training, which itself ran over three weeks, suffered as a result. In addition, community members were more interested in development projects that benefited them directly, and were not as interested in putting the time in on a project where there was no real personal gain as discussed in the literature review section.

Another result of the evaluation showed that people were often agitated about date changes and having the programs in some ways be out of their control. Although at least one of the projects was in fact thought up by the community, a community newsletter. Residents wanted this so they could be aware of what services the different agencies in the community were offering, and anything else that might be happening. Although the community did in some ways take ownership, Dorothy had to okay the different projects with her supervisor before they could be confirmed, and at times dates changed based on what was best at COM and not the local community. Again there was a problem with the ownership of the projects for community residents.

A final result of the program in general was that people, during the interviews asked for programs that were already available in the community, but people were not aware of them. During the interviews if I heard people asking for something that was already available I made sure to let them know where they could find that service. Two of the biggest services asked for were youth programs, since one of the main resident complaints was that youth did a lot of “hanging out” (Mael 2011). There were already such programs available at the one of the local agencies. People were also looking for legal services which another agency provided for free. The purpose of the community

newsletter was to connect residents to some of these programs or even make them more aware of them.

Observations from the field

How successful was the program?

As discussed in the introduction and literature review grants such as this one can be beneficial to communities because they can help to strengthen community bonds, increasing social and human capital. This increase in social bonds can eventually even lead to economic gain. In this grant cycle the number of people reached was not necessarily representative of the overall community, however, some people were positively impacted. One volunteer said that they would take away from the grant experience, “Encouragement to do volunteer work and be a positive force” which truly was the overall objective of the grant.

During my participant observation I was able to observe the few people who regularly attended the projects grow closer relations. This type of social capital is important to have in any community, having those people in your community you can trust and call on in an emergency. During the family walk-a-thon event that was held in September I was also able to see the thirty or so participants who participated in the event sit down to eat together as a community and truly enjoy each other’s conversation. This was rewarding after spending six-months working to bring the community together.

I believe this type of success goes back to the interview with the Smiths. During their interview they commented that although it might take longer there are many

advantages of doing community development that actually involves the community. In Sulphur Springs the projects might take longer because residents do not all have regular access to computers so communication might be slower. It might also take a while to have the residents be completely on board with any project since they are somewhat used to people researching them with no end result.

The point of this is that at that last event I could see the benefit of involving community in community development. Watching people eat, laugh, and pick on each other while learning more about one another across a table was such a great end to my time in Sulphur Springs. If that type of community feeling can be remembered during the next grant cycle, along with the fact that if you move slowly, taking into account that this community might not be as proactive as one might hope, the program would be much more successful.

Unfortunately COM was not always able to wait for community to jump in. While the program was successful in the fact that it recruited well over 300 participants, meaning that in the six-month time frame 300 times people volunteered. One person could be counted multiple times, for instance I was counted at least five times as a volunteer as I was at five of the six volunteer events. The six projects were also completed so in some ways the grant was successful because it met those goals.

As previously stated just because it met the goals of the grant as laid out by the funding agency does not mean that a proportional amount of the community was positively impacted or more importantly that the projects are sustainable. In order for that to happen more work will need to be done.

Human Aspect, Interpretive Policy Analysis

In chapter 2 the idea of rational choice theory was introduced. While I explained that at first it might make rational sense to want to volunteer to improve one's neighborhood the reality is that many people, even if they wanted to, are not going to take the time to volunteer for a community development project. Additionally, as exposed in the interviews and during the volunteer leader training people do not all think the same way about what type of community development work should be conducted. Far from making a positive impact this disagreement on what type of projects to implement could even lead to fighting amongst community members if a consensus could not be struck.

One simple aspect that was completely overlooked, possibly because the community does have such a reputation for unemployment is that people would have the time to devote to volunteering in the community. While 50% of those interviewed were unemployed many were currently seeking employment and had families to consider.

A problem I observed is that there were so few volunteers to draw from that when people took the time to volunteer once they went on the contact for every event list which could mean an event once a week. Many people, employed or not, do not have time for such intense volunteerism. As discussed in the critique of the talent survey, what would be more beneficial is if people were able to fill out a skill and interests survey so that COM knew what type of volunteer work they were interested in and how often they might be able to commit to volunteering. This way volunteers are not overwhelmed with volunteer opportunities. I believe this might cut down on the amount of people not

showing up when they say they are going to as well. To avoid having to let COM down they might agree to come then simply not show up.

At the thank you dinner at the end of the grant there were seven people, including myself, who had participated in five or more events run by COM. In total about thirty-five people were invited to be a part of the thank you dinner which meant that people participated in several events. I do not think it is for me to decide whether this is a representative number from the community, however, I think although the grant went well it could always go better next time.

While it would be impossible to say that the grant positively affected even a fraction of the community I do think that the people who were impacted were positively impacted which is a good start for a program in its infancy. The volunteers that went through the Volunteer Leader Training definitely learned a skill which they can now put on job applications, and many were positively impacted as this quote from the thank you dinner states, “My Wow Moment was seeing a difference for residents who became involved in the program”. While the community might not have entirely embraced the grant it did make an impression on a small portion of the community.

The residents who participated in the volunteer leader training and were at least committed to the idea of the BEST grant in spirit if not in person had some positive things to say about the grant. One community member, during a semi-structured interview was really excited to “find open-minded people, especially in such a diverse community”. However, with most things in life people seemed to have a lot more

suggestions and complaints about the grant implementation than words of encouragement or why it was a great success.

How successful was the Implementation?

After reviewing the interviews with David and Dorothy it is clear to see that by the mid-point of the grant their perspectives on who to target for the grant, and even the overall purpose of the grant were dissimilar. David was very focused on the elementary school, understandable because that was his main work focus, and Dorothy was more community focused, which was also understandable since the grant was community-centered. Although neither was explicitly to blame the fact that the grant was not focused at the implementation level could have led to some of the reasons why the implementation was less than successful.

Another problem with the implementation was the fact that the marketing strategy needed some work. As discussed in chapter 4 the organization at this point is still having trouble finding a marketing technique that works well in Sulphur Springs, this technique needs to be more community-centered, not e-mail. It must also take into consideration that time limitations are also a problem. Marketing, recruitment, and retaining volunteers was something that was brought up at almost every event held, and was a part of many community meetings as well meaning that other organizations in the area has similar problems with recruitment.

Overall I think the implementation of the projects could have been more successful. Here all the blame does not fall to COM but also to the grant writers and the

funding agency. The organization did struggle with recruiting and retaining community members for their projects. As a result the program coordinator was often left with the planning and implementation of the projects. Although in the end a hand-full of community members did obviously benefit from being a part of the process.

Conclusion

This chapter was meant to take an in-depth look at my participant observation and time in the field with COM and the community of Sulphur Springs. From the analysis of why the grant was written, as a part of a wider outreach of COM into the community helps to place why this grant was important to COM. In understanding that the organization is currently under tremendous stress being understaffed and overworked speaks to why the outreach efforts to recruit volunteers to participate on the grant might have also been lacking. In order to contact the people of Sulphur Springs in a way they are used to being contacted such as face-to-face or even over the phone is too time consuming to do when you are short staffed. While e-mail seemed like the easiest solution it proved to be ineffective in a community that has limited access to the internet.

The community itself felt neutrally about the grant. While they were happy to accept the programs that were a part of the grant they mostly did not seem eager to participate as volunteers or help with the preplanning of the events. Whether this was a result of the lack of communication and outreach from COM or was a reflection of the way they ultimately felt towards the grant cannot truly be evaluated without further research.

Overall it can be said that the grant did reach a very small portion of the community of Sulphur Springs. My time working at COM and with the local community allowed me to understand why the grant did not reach more people. The people at COM did want the grant to succeed and impact people in a positive way. Unfortunately, this was hindered by problems such as the organization being understaffed, and the staff not communicating clearly the goals of the grant as they saw them. One main solution for this in the future is to have someone from the local community fill the role of volunteer coordinator. This type of insight would allow for more insight into the community. It would also most likely fix many of the communication problems presented in this work.

As mentioned the blame does not fall completely on COM. The grant was not written in a way that gave COM a high probability of success. The grant stated the projects were to be community created and include a high volume of volunteers. It then imposed projects such as workshops that were mainly in place to give knowledge to the community members. Volunteers were not needed at these events, and there was not a high probability that volunteers from the community would feel empowered to organize such events. For this reason the grant not being as successful as one might imagine upon reading the grant is not surprising. In the next section the impacts of research such as this will be discussed, and the implications for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the last chapter of this thesis the goal is to understand, since we now know what policy means from an anthropological perspective, was the implementation successful, did the implementation of this grant (which is a policy in its own right) affect the community, and what the implications of such research are. It is also important to remember the main thesis goals of evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of the grant not only from the perspective of the organization, but also from the community who needed to support the grant for it to be a true success. To do this I will revisit the literature reviewed in chapter two. How this policy is shaped by a neoliberal climate will be discussed along with an interpretive analysis approach to policy. This will be coupled by understanding whether you can simply look at volunteerism as rational or if there are other aspects to consider.

This is especially important as COM has already begun a second grant cycle, along with twelve other organizations who also received the grant. It is clear that the funding for these types of programs will continue at least in the short-term. Having some type of understanding of how successful these programs are, and how they could become more successful is crucial. Due to this there will be a discussion of what could be improved for this next grant cycle. Lastly, applied implications will be considered along with a section on what I feel could be improved upon if the research were to take place again.

Review of the Literature in Relation to the Thesis

This research provides a clear example of neoliberalism at work. The grant was specifically targeted for communities classified as lower- to mixed-income which is how Sulphur Springs has been defined in the introduction of this thesis. These are communities that traditionally have the most need for social services. Since the state no longer supplies the services it once did to this community the idea of a grant that would help to give the community these services while supposedly increasing a sense of community and raising human capital at first glance appears to be something to be celebrated, not evaluated. After spending time volunteering with COM it is clear that the grant was not as successful as it could have been not only because of the way the grant was implemented, but also because of the way it was written.

As discussed in the literature review policy is often written in a way that makes policy writers comfortable, without concern for the community it will eventually reach. This policy was written with high goals such as recruiting and ultimately retaining three hundred volunteers to complete six projects in six months. The grant budget only allowed for one volunteer coordinator to be monitoring all of the volunteers and projects. As stated in the above chapters as well, since COM was understaffed, as many non-profit organizations are, this work heavy position only furthered the amount of work needing to be completed at COM. It was simply too much for one person who was not even full time to manage.

This grant provided an opportunity for the state to outsource some of the problems of Sulphur Springs to COM. In a way by taking on the Community of Potential,

along with the grant, COM accepted this attempt to privatized Sulphur Springs. According to Shore and Wright (2011) policy should be viewed from an interpretive analysis approach. This approach was useful to understanding this privatization attempt in Sulphur Springs. The people of Sulphur Springs are certainly not all alike, and each has different reasons, as seen in the semi-structured interviews, to either participate or not in this grant. It is important to understand the reasoning, and not just view the grant as something linear and rational that does not need to be interpreted. When looking from the outside the grant might even be viewed as a success. The grant parameter goals were met, however, this does not mean that the grant had any type of far reaching or lasting impact on the community it was meant to impact. The grant certainly did not foster any type of sustainability in the community (Shore and Wright 2011).

While the grant might be viewed as a success to the state or even the grant writers and administrators, this approach once again does not take the community into consideration. The grant assumed that people would rationally choose to volunteer because it was something positive for the community. There were no incentives in place for those who might chose to volunteer or considerations taken for why people might not choose to volunteer. In many cases people had careers, families, and busy schedules. Taking the time to volunteer and since so many projects were packed into such a short timeframe, along with the volunteer leader training, choosing to volunteer mainly meant a large time commitment, not just a few hours one day a month. This type of commitment was generally more than anyone in the community was willing to make. In this sense while it might seem from an outsider prospective that volunteering was ration in reality

the choice not to volunteer, but only to attend the programs the grant provided was the real rational choice.

Using the interpretive analysis approach, as stated by Shore and Wright, did allow me to go beyond the linear understanding of policy writing and implementation to understand how the grant was not able to truly impact the community it was meant to empower. Without this view I might also have believed that since the grant met its parameters it was truly a success. While it did impact several people in Sulphur Springs, as the Smiths commented during their interview, many service providing organizations impact only a small bubble of the community where their services can reach. As of right now it appears COM is reaching out to the elementary school children and their families. For the future grant cycles they need to decide whether they want to reach beyond that, and have a clear plan if they do of how to accomplish that successfully.

Rational choice theory can also be looked at here in terms of whose cost and whose benefit. When thinking about policy creation it seems like the grant, although written in a way that seems like it might include the community, still left the community out. This is in part due to the implementation, but also in part due to the way it was written. As has been discussed many times the state is currently withdrawing from social services leaving organizations like COM to step-in and fill the role. This grant is written in such a way that although it may seem like a positive, allowing community members the chance to make changes to their own community, it leaves the community members to take on the costs if they want the benefits. This applies similarly to COM. By taking on the

responsibilities of the grant it frees the state from the cost burden as now it is the non-profit organization and community's responsibility to take on the costs of the program.

If the grant is a success then they receive the benefits. If it is a failure they not only do not receive the benefits, but the blame falls to them instead of the state which is only a positive for the state or grant writers. While it is easy to see where the implementation of the grant could have been improved, this will be discussed in the next section, it is also important to look at the writing of the grant. This grant was certainly written in a way that takes the cost and benefits responsibility away from the state and places it on the non-profit and local community.

What has been Learned?

Based on the ethnographic data collected during the fieldwork and semi-structured interviews there are many different aspects of the program which could be addressed before or during the next grant cycle to make it more successful than the first. One of the first issues that should choice be addressed is the lack of communication. This is a problem that was discussed at COM, the volunteer leader training, project events, and interviews. It is clear that the forms of marketing that are currently used at COM are ineffective in terms getting volunteers recruited and retained. A better marketing strategy could also be employed to get community members to the event.

Making sure the community is aware of the events, on a community level, and not just at the elementary school is going to take more than just one new method of communication with the community. It is going to take the recruitment of some dedicated

volunteers. My suggestion is to recruit volunteers from the local community who have a better idea of how the community would like to be communicated with. This can be done at the next volunteer leader training. It might be useful to make recruitment and retention more of a focus of the training.

One of the main results of the evaluation is that community members lacked a feeling of ownership over the programs, especially since the projects were often times thought-up by COM or even required by the grant. While this is a barrier, the awareness of this lack of ownership is something that not only COM but other organizations looking to looking to do similar work should be aware of. How COM can move the privatization of Sulphur Springs and onto the community, which is another way that communities might become privatized or take ownership, is something that COM might consider for the future in order for the community to truly become involved in the implementation of the projects mandated by the grant. To get people the information about the events while giving them a feeling of ownership I think that focusing on getting volunteers who are members of the community should be a main priority.

To open communication into the community while focusing on successfully recruiting and retaining community-minded volunteers COM will need to first recruit these people to even get them to the volunteer leader training. One of my suggestions would be to recruit through larger media forms. Advertising in the local newspaper was one of the suggestions brought up by a community member. Also hanging fliers in areas where people in Sulphur Springs frequent the most. What I think might be the most successful to the hold a large Town Hall meeting at the beginning of the next grant cycle

with a large marketing campaign to get residents to attend. Free food would most likely be the best way to secure a large turnout. By large Town Hall meeting I mean spending several weeks advertising the event to the entire community. This would mean getting every volunteer COM currently has and asking them to help promote this meeting so that as many people in the local community know about the event as possible.

At this event there can also be a booth where the skills and interest survey can be completed by residents so that the survey can become a true tool for COM. The skills and interest survey, as discussed in chapter 4, at this point has only been completed by approximately seventy-five people out of thousands that live in Sulphur Springs. It has also been completed mostly by people whose children attend the elementary school. There could be unintended consequences in this if families whose children attend the elementary school have different views for their community than the rest of the general population.

The skills and interest survey in general also needs to become a better designed survey with clear objectives. At this point, after watching people fill it out numerous times, there is too much on the survey and relies too heavily on people volunteering information. By this I mean writing in information instead of just checking a box. While filling in information might lead to more information in this case the reverse is true as people usually leave it blank. The survey should ask people how they would like to be contacted (phone, e-mail, face-to-face, etc.), what community development projects they would like to see, and if they would be interested in volunteering on a project. This should all be done by checking boxes.

My recommendations also include getting more volunteers involved in the planning stage of the project. This can be accomplished more easily if communication flowed more freely between COM and potential volunteers. While this might not be easy due to time constraints of the volunteers I think that having set times of the week that volunteers know the volunteer coordinator will be working on the project so they can stop in and help might make it more accessible to people. Logging the hours of the volunteer in an area where all volunteers can see will give the volunteer a sense of pride, accomplishment, and ownership. A reward system for the volunteer who puts in the most hours per project or over the whole grant might also help. This system could also be in place for those who recruit friends and family to volunteer which will also solve the problem of low recruitment rates in the community.

One positive aspect is that in the new grant cycle there now needs to be seven projects conducted but in nine months as opposed to six. My suggestion to COM would be to spend the first month planning each project including dates, times, and location then assigning one community member to design a work plan for each giving them ownership over each project. This would help with David's comments on organization and giving oneself a long enough time to plan projects in advance. Additionally, it would help with the Smith's comments that in order for community to be involved in projects the projects must move at a rate that suits the community's needs and not COMs.

Focusing on COM, in terms of what was learned during ethnographic data collection, it would be better if all the roles at the organization were filled. This is difficult to comment on. There could be reasons beyond COM's control for why they

have not filled the vacant position such as not having the funds to fill the position. What would be a positive improvement is making sure that the staff members share similar views for the implementation of the grant.

As explained during the staff opinion section Dorothy and David had differing ideas on why the grant was important. Dorothy wanted the community to benefit from the implementation of the grant, but she lacked the necessary manpower to reach the community at large. David wanted volunteers specifically for COM's projects. The focus was not necessarily community development or community development was at least not the primary focus. Even this was not really achieved since Dorothy had to spend so much time planning projects that there was not the time to set up a successful marketing campaign to reach the community as a whole. This is a good lesson to other organizations looking to do something similar. It is important to make sure staff members share common goals and are clear when communicating to one another the goals of any initiative.

Along with this, specifically at COM, there need to be some consensus on whether or not the projects are targeting the elementary school students or not. The Smith's did make a comment about how many grants only focus on a small segment of the community or a specific problem within the community, but I am not so sure that is a negative thing. There is something to be said for taking on too much of the community and never making a real impact.

COM is lucky to have access to the parents of the approximately 500 students who attend the elementary school. Careful advertising of even that population could

increase volunteer involvement significantly. There could also be an event where prizes are received for bringing someone from outside the elementary school population to the event. That would be a fun way to get volunteers to recruit by themselves. Either way I think COM needs to decide their target audience and be more firm in their marketing approaches to that specific audience.

Study Limitations

Within my evaluation there were several limitations to my research. The first main limitation was at the beginning of my research, when I wrote my proposal; I thought I was going to evaluate the effectiveness of the volunteer's satisfaction within the program. My research was going to focus on how effectively the program trained their volunteers. The hypothesis was that volunteers who felt they had all the proper tools, which they would gain through effective training, would be happier and more effective volunteers. After a few months of participant observation it became apparent that the program was not going to recruit enough volunteers to evaluate the program in this way.

Wholey (2010) suggests that one of the pitfalls to evaluation is not knowing when a program is evaluable. Along with this might be an effort to continue evaluating an aspect of the program that is not evaluable (Wholey 2010). Once I realized that this aspect of the program was not going to yield valuable results I changed the focus of my research to something of more benefit. This change in focus limited my study because I had to look for another aspect of the program to evaluate and decide how to evaluate it with a limited timeframe. I also had to go back through the literature to understand if a study such as this had ever been conducted before.

Wholey also suggests that evaluators can start evaluations too early (Wholey 2010). I think this might depend on what type of evaluation tools you are using. If you have the luxury of time and money to be able to do some participant observation, the benefits of which are getting to know stakeholders and having more knowledge of what you are evaluating even in the beginning phases, then I do not believe you can start evaluation too early, if I had tried to start collecting data on volunteers in the early phases of the program that might have been less effective.

Since I did have to change my research topic one pitfall of evaluation which I feel my evaluation has suffered is what Wholey calls use of inadequate indicators of program effects (Wholey 2010). When I was conducting my evaluation I did not have as many evaluation tools to draw from. As a result, as Wholey indicates, some of the criterion I could have evaluated was left out such as satisfaction surveys to participants at the end of each project that was conducted to make sure the projects were meeting the needs of the community they were meant to serve. Additionally, more tools could have been used or I could have spent more time familiarizing myself with different tools which is also reflective of the inadequately trained data collectors section of the book (Wholey 2010). This will be discussed in more detail during the suggestions for further research section.

One last pitfall that will also be discussed in more detail in the suggestions for future research section is the idea of using a comparison group (Wholey 2010). Wholey suggest that comparison groups can help to determine whether outcomes were a result of the program (Wholey 2010). In this case a comparison group would also been helpful to see how another program dealt with some of the less successful aspects of the program

like problems recruiting volunteers and lack of ownership over projects that were supposed to be community driven.

I also faced limitations as an outsider in the community. As already discussed my ethnographic research methods allowed me to be an insider within COM. While this method helped me to gain access to the community I was not considered an insider. Since this grant was supposed to be resident driven it meant that Dorothy and myself needed to get into the community to understand who the gatekeepers and stakeholders were. As I described in the results section, by not adhering to the ways the community preferred to be communicated we limited the successfulness of the program, especially in term of volunteer recruitment. While some residents were immediately excited by the idea of a community development project for Sulphur Springs with a bottom-up approach many of the residents were weary of the idea. Still today some of the residents are still not onboard with the idea of outsiders facilitating what the community should be doing for themselves in general the community was receptive to the ideas of the grant after several months.

While working with COM helped me to quickly get to know the residents it was also a limitation. Since I was working with COM on the grant most people during my interviews clearly did not feel comfortable fully expressing their views of the grant to me. When I conducted most of the interviews the grant cycle was about half way completed so the volunteers should have had at least some opinion of what was going well, and what could have been improved. Most people gave one word answers to the semi-structured interview question even when asked follow-up questions. Those that had more to say

about the grant got off topic quickly discussing what they felt needed to be changed in the community thinking that I might be the one to decide what projects to do.

While the interviews helped me to get to know some of the volunteers on a more personal level, as you can read in the thesis, I had to rely heavily on my participant observation and fieldwork over my interviews because people were hesitant to give me much information during the interviews. This could also be a reflection of when I did the interviews, maybe too early in the study, and the type of questions that were asked.

It is also important to remember that I was not seen as a neutral by the community. I was seen as a participant observer working not only for COM but also for the university. In the future I might also chose to volunteer on a grant like this, but as an outsider, not as a volunteer for COM or any other organization. While it might take me a longer time to get to know the community members it would also allow the community members to meet me on a different level. This could help with feeling of comfort towards me overall. By entering the community in this way I might also be able to eventually be seen as an insider. This would help me to view the grant not from the perspective of the organization, but from the perspective of the local community which is who the grant was supposed to empower.

Applied Implications

The results of this evaluation are important because they have the power to influence the way this program is run in the future. It extends much further than just this specific grant and even community development in general. The ability to understand

what motivates people to volunteer is crucial. As Harvey (2005) explains, in the future we will only see the state further withdraw from providing social services so understanding how to recruit and retain volunteers to work successfully through this bottom-up approach is crucial. Non-profit organizations simply do not have the funds to employ multiple people to work on these grants and other funding sources. On a larger scale this type of data can be shared with other programs looking to do similar work as an example of some things that do work from this model, and what can be improved upon to make this model even better.

The program, based on Harvey's work on neoliberalism, indicates that this thesis is significant enough to merit evaluation. This means that neoliberalism is causing the state to withdraw from providing needed social services. As the non-profits step in to fill this role it is important to evaluate and document the process so there is a record of success and failures to serve as a guide for other organizations looking to do similar work. As social services are turned over to non-profit organizations that need volunteers to keep them going it is important that those volunteers are satisfied along with the communities served. This type of community development, engaging the community to identify what type of services and projects are needed, is an important model as it increases the social capital of the residents, especially in low-income communities. While the program still needs work before it will become a true success, this evaluation will hopefully serve the organization with some recommendations that will enable it to become more effective and better engage residents, with or without the grant money.

This thesis also proves that an interpretive policy approach to evaluation can help to look past a rational and linear evaluation of policy and towards evaluations that can have a meaningful impact on communities where these types of policies and grants are meant to impact. As I have stated repeatedly throughout this thesis, the neoliberal climate will not be ending soon, so the ability to properly evaluate these types of policies and grants so that the organizations that are receiving these grants can have the best possible chance to truly make a sustainable impact in communities is essential. If this can be accomplished then maybe volunteers might truly feel more empowered to become a part of these program rather than merely sit back to receive the benefits.

Suggestions for Future Evaluations

In the future I would hope that an action plan that included the community could be implemented at the beginning of the grant cycle so that programs could be planned with plenty of time for implementation. With an action plan many people could be recruited so a few were not the only ones relied on. The time could be taken to make people aware of the programs with enough notice to volunteer in the planning and implementation of programs, and the dates could be more solidly set so that people could rely on the information they received the first time. This would also help to give ownership of the programs. Creating a logic model for the organization might be the most effective way to consider all aspects of the program that might need to be evaluated.

A Cross-Culture Comparative Approach can be helpful especially when a program or policy is implemented in more than one community. Ervin and Mackay note that people solve problems in all different ways so understanding how people and

communities implement policies and programs is important, especially when looking for ways to improve such programs. In the future I would hope that some type of program comparison or even meta-analysis might be conducted to understand what other programs have done or are doing. Most important would be to look at where this community is currently experiencing problems, mainly the recruitment, retention, and ownership or programs and see what that program is doing that may or may not be a success.

In the future I would also recommend performance measures so that the evaluation would be more easily about to measure things like validity, reliability, and satisfaction of participants. For this program I think the most important performance measures to be implemented would be outcomes, customer satisfaction, and service quality although all could probably be added to make the non-profit program more solid.

The organizational whole needs to more clearly establish their purpose on the community beyond the grant, if that is indeed their intention. If this is the case that they need to set-up some ways that they would be able to measure success such as number of volunteers who participated in the planning and implementation of the grant, not just who attended. They would also need to be more concerned with the number of volunteers retained as opposed to recruited once.

Customer satisfaction is extremely important to the organization at this point since it is the customer that they are supposedly creating this program for. Having a survey that measures customer satisfaction at the end of each community project that the non-profit organizes is crucial to understanding what the residents liked or would want to see improved. There can be space for contact information, how residents normally

receive information, and if they would be interested in voluntary work. In a basic way this can help solve the problem of getting community opinions on the projects and recruiting new volunteers, which the organization struggles with.

Lastly, service quality is important to measure the quality of the outputs. While the projects organized by COM are created for maximum benefit the real question is who they are benefiting. Enabling the projects to meet the needs of the community as the community sees the need, and then measuring the those projects/outputs for effectiveness, especially in a quantifiable way would strengthen the evaluation immensely.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions asked to Staff Members of COM

1. In your opinion, what is the primary goal of the BEST Neighborhoods grant?
2. How is this grant different from other grants and community improvement efforts already ongoing in the community of Sulphur Springs?
3. What outcomes do you see for the Sulphur Springs community through the implementation of this grant?
4. Why is volunteerism important for the Community Learning Center?
5. Do you think that residents will respond positively to this grant?
6. Why is volunteerism important for the community of Sulphur Springs?
7. Now that the grant is at the half-way point in terms of time do you feel like the goals of the grant are being accomplished?
 - a. Why or why not?
8. What else can be done to make the grant more successful, if anything?
9. What is the best way to get residents from the local community involved in community volunteerism?
10. What is the most appropriate form of communication when trying to reach out to the local community?
11. Are there already similar projects happening in Sulphur Springs?
 - a. If yes, what is their goal? When do they meet? Do you believe they would be open to collaboration? Why or why not.

Appendix 2

Interview Questions asked to Community Residents

- 1) Are you a resident of Sulphur Springs?
- 2) Are you currently employed?
- 3) Have you ever volunteered before?
 - a. If no, why?
 - b. If yes, why are you interested in volunteering? What motivated you to become a volunteer?
- 4) Do you have children who attend Sulphur Springs Elementary School?
- 5) How did you hear about the opportunity to volunteer with the COM? Or how did you hear about the events happening through the COM?
- 6) Do you see any personal advantages to volunteering in general? (Ways it could improve employability?)
- 7) What types of volunteer work are you interested in?
- 8) What parts of volunteering have you found challenging?
- 9) Do you feel that any part of your initial training could have better prepared you to meet the challenging parts of your volunteer experience?
- 10) What could make volunteering a more enjoyable experience overall?
- 11) Are there more trainings or informational sheets that could make your position useful?
- 12) How do you generally find out about your volunteer positions?
- 13) What do you like about the events happening through the COM?
- 14) What are some ways to get the community more involved in these events?
- 15) In what way it is best to contact the community about these events?
- 16) What are you the most proud of in your community?
- 17) What makes that certain place, business, street, park, person so great?
- 18) What are aspects that could use improvement in the community?
- 19) Can you think of ways that improvements could be made? What steps would need to be taken to make a change?
- 20) Would you be interested in helping to implement these changes to the location?
- 21) What resources do you feel you would need to make this possible?

Appendix 3 : Copy of the Talent Survey for Community Residents in English and Spanish

Sulphur Springs Community Talent Survey

We would like to connect people and resources in Sulphur Springs. Each person has value that can be used to benefit the community at large. Please list some strengths that you or other members of your family can give to our community.

1. Things you know something about and would enjoy talking about with others:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> culture | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> history | <input type="checkbox"/> games | <input type="checkbox"/> politics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nature | <input type="checkbox"/> self help | <input type="checkbox"/> other, please specify |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sports | <input type="checkbox"/> art | _____ |

2. Things or skills you know how to do and would like to share with others:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> technology | <input type="checkbox"/> coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> driving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cooking | <input type="checkbox"/> interviewing | <input type="checkbox"/> swimming lessons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> money management | <input type="checkbox"/> sewing | <input type="checkbox"/> other, please specify |
| <input type="checkbox"/> carpentry | <input type="checkbox"/> photography | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tutoring | <input type="checkbox"/> gardening | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> scrap booking | <input type="checkbox"/> home improvement | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> job hunting | |

3. Things you care deeply about?

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> healthy lifestyles | <input type="checkbox"/> neighborhood watch | <input type="checkbox"/> the environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> caring for children | <input type="checkbox"/> disaster preparedness | <input type="checkbox"/> economy / finances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> caring for the elderly | <input type="checkbox"/> food/clothing drives | <input type="checkbox"/> other, please specify |
| <input type="checkbox"/> literacy | <input type="checkbox"/> youth development | _____ |

4. What organization (churches, groups, leaders) do you know that we should contact to find more talents and skills to share with the community?

Name & Contact information

Name & Contact information

Name & Contact information

5. What are specific needs or changes you would like to see in the Sulphur Springs community?

1

2

3

6. Please give us information so that we know more about you and contact you, Please Print.

Name

Veteran (yes / no)

Ethnicity

Age

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Telephone

Email Address

Encuesta de talentos de la comunidad de Sulphur Springs

Nos gustaría mejorar la conexión entre los residentes y los recursos disponibles en Sulphur Springs. Cada persona tiene su propio un valor que se puede aprovechar para beneficiar a la comunidad. Favor de escribir las fuerzas que tiene usted o que tienen los otros miembros de su familia que pueden dar a la comunidad.

1. Las habilidades que tiene usted o las cosas de que conoce y le gustaría compartir con otras personas:

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> la cultura | <input type="checkbox"/> la música | <input type="checkbox"/> la educación/enseñanza |
| <input type="checkbox"/> la historia | <input type="checkbox"/> los juegos | <input type="checkbox"/> la política |
| <input type="checkbox"/> la naturaleza | <input type="checkbox"/> la autoayuda | <input type="checkbox"/> otro, escríbalo abajo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> los deportes | <input type="checkbox"/> el arte | _____ |

2. Sus habilidades o cosas que sabe hacer que le gustaría enseñar a otras personas:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> la tecnología | <input type="checkbox"/> entrenamiento | <input type="checkbox"/> conducir |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cocinar | <input type="checkbox"/> llevar a cabo una entrevista | <input type="checkbox"/> clases de natación |
| <input type="checkbox"/> administración del dinero | <input type="checkbox"/> coser | <input type="checkbox"/> otro, por favor escríbalo abajo: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> carpintería | <input type="checkbox"/> la fotografía | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tutoría | <input type="checkbox"/> jardinería | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hacer álbumes de recortes | <input type="checkbox"/> reformas en la vivienda | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> conseguir trabajo | |

3. Cosas que le importan:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> estilo de vida saludable | <input type="checkbox"/> plan de urgencia | <input type="checkbox"/> la economía y las finanzas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cuidado de niños | <input type="checkbox"/> sistema de recogida de ropa | <input type="checkbox"/> otro, por favor escríbalo abajo: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cuidado de ancianos | <input type="checkbox"/> desarrollo de la juventud | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> el alfabetismo | <input type="checkbox"/> el medio ambiente | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> seguridad vecinal | | |

4. ¿Conoce a unas organizaciones, grupos o líderes que pudieran compartir más habilidades y talentos con la comunidad?

Nombre y información de contacto _____ -

Nombre y información de contacto

Nombre y información de contacto

5. ¿Cuáles son las necesidades o cambios que le gustaría ver en la comunidad de Sulphur Springs?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

6. Favor de darnos sus datos para que podamos saber más de usted y para contactarle.

Nombre

Veterano (sí / no)

Ethnicidad

Edad

Dirección

Ciudad, Estado y Código Postal

Número de teléfono _____ -
