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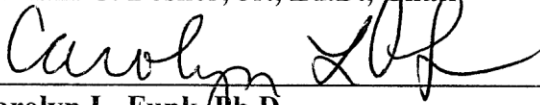
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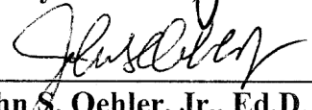
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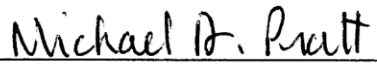
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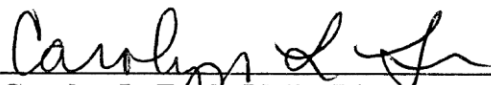
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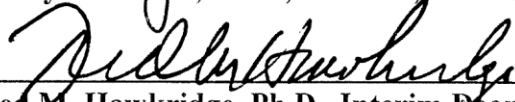
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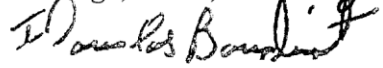
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**THE USE OF COLLABORATION IN NONGOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATION PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Debbie, and daughter, Jordan. Their love, support, and patience for the nine years of this journey are very much appreciated. I feel fortunate to have a family who understood my need to pursue a second doctorate and endured the times without me during the precious moments that I missed in the young life of my daughter. I love you both.

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ABSTRACT

THE USE OF COLLABORATION IN NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY

By Randy Dean Barrack, Ed.D., Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009.

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The purpose of the study was to explore the definitions, benefits, and challenges of collaborations as used by nongovernmental organizations in their pursuit of public policy advocacy, and more specifically the role of NGOs as advocates in the public policy process. A qualitative design using a case study approach was used to examine the collaborative strategies and techniques used by the 12 statewide education NGO members of the Virginia Education Coalition in pursuit of their advocacy goals in public policy. The direction of this study was guided by the following questions: (1) What is collaboration, and when, how, and why it is used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals? (2) What advocacy roles do nongovernment organizations play in public policy? (3) What collaborative strategies are used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

This study incorporates observations, in-depth interviews and a review of written documents. An interview guide consisting of 23 questions with probes and follow-ups was used as the primary data collection instrument. Each NGO was a case study in this multicase design. The study reveals that collaborations seem to exist in large part

because of the personal relationships of NGO representatives and that advocacy positions and goals are pursued when commonality or consensus is achieved among collaborators. The subordination of individual interests to the interests of the Coalition is addressed in the study. The study found that NGOs enter into collaborations not only when it is mutually beneficial, but also in support of a greater cause. The need of NGOs in the Coalition to speak with a single voice far outweighs their desire to push their individual policy advocacy goals.

This study contributes to the nonprofit sector in the literature and specifically addresses nonprofit collaboration and how collaborative strategies and techniques are used by NGOs to influence public policy. The findings of this study are useful for (1) NGO leaders to understand how to cultivate collaboration among leaders in other organizations, (2) the VEC to better understand their own member organizations, (3) coalitions in general to gain insights into the collaborative process.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Collaboration and advocacy have long been considered central functions of America's nongovernment organizations (NGOs). Many NGOs consider influencing public policy makers to be their most important service. The central target of organizational policy activity for NGOs is the state and local level (Nonprofit Sector Strategy Group, 2000).

The nonprofit sector is highly interdependent. In fact, it is becoming more and more difficult for NGOs to survive and succeed in advancing their missions while operating independent of other nonprofits. NGOs gain information, political power, and personal support from collaborating with other nonprofits to pursue advocacy goals. Thus, close working relationships, partnerships, and even joint ventures between nonprofit organizations are fairly natural occurrences (Salamon, Geller, & Lorentz, 2008).

There are various types of collaborations. However, "Existing research stops short of explaining why nonprofit organizations develop certain forms of collaborations instead of others" (Guo & Acar, 2005, p. 340). A number of scholars have attempted to identify different types of NGO collaborations based on degrees or levels of collaboration intensity. According to Murray (1998), the degree of interdependence between parties in a collaboration is the key to understanding the difference in the actual forms of collaboration. Forms of collaboration range from sharing of information, to joint

ventures, to full partnerships and mergers. Murray argued that “at one end of the continuum in interdependence is the simple one-time transaction in which one organization exchanges something with the other; at the other end is the full legal merger of the two organizations” (p. 343). La Piana (1998) goes further by purporting that nonprofits are already looking beyond collaboration – “to build sustainable, long-term relationships that fundamentally change the way they function as organizations” (p. 3). Nonprofits have explored mergers, consolidations, and joint ventures with increasing frequency over the past decade. Each of these collaborative forms goes beyond the current definition of collaboration. Where collaboration implies coordination of service, NGOs will need to consider restructuring changes to their corporate structure and, frequently, a change in the organization’s locus of control.

The restructuring changes that La Piana found NGOs will need to do are not easily achieved. NGO leaders will need to yield some of their autonomy, open themselves to vulnerability, and expose their organizational cultures to outside influences. However, by doing so, he argued, essential NGO “services can be saved from extinction” (p. 3), their market position will improve, and doors to new opportunities will be opened. While the above might be the more desperate action for a NGO to take, most attempt to first become involved in some form of collaboration envisioning problems and seeking solutions from perspectives outside its own. Achieving creative and practical solutions to these problems requires new strategies and techniques for maintaining interdependence.

Gray (1989) found that entering into a collaboration offers a viable strategy for NGOs looking for creative solutions in a world of growing interdependence.

Collaborations essentially provide a framework for approaching problems and searching for solutions. However, Gray cautions that collaboration itself is not the solution. “It is a process in which stakeholders actively seek a mutually determined solution” (p. xviii).

Background for the Study

Contemporary democratic societies are widely accepted to be built around three sectors. The first sector is referred to in the literature as government (public administrations). The second sector is considered to be business (corporations or for-profit companies), and the third sector is nonprofit (nongovernment organizations). These three sectors – like a three-legged stool – must work together if societies are to strive toward balance in improving the lives of people and communities. Third sector organizations, NGOs, need to be capable of leading and modeling the complex world of social intervention with public policy advocacy. Consequently, NGOs are required to possess capabilities necessary to face new challenges and growing doubts about the capabilities of government, political and ideological resistance to expanded public spending, and growing concerns about America’s civic health. Most often collaborations are what all three sectors are turning to for answers in a world environment characterized by dynamism and rapid changes (Vernis et al., 2006).

Arsenault (1998) found collaboration by public and nonprofit organizations to be a key issue in American public administration. According to Grubbs (2000):

a public agency’s capacity to achieve public outcomes depends upon its ability to establish meaningful, effective relationships with other institutions of governance.

Practical experience, however, makes it clear that although collaboration within

and among organizations continues to be a stepping-stone for success, it never should be taken as a small step. Agencies involved in, or searching for, partnerships in the governmental and non-governmental sectors face a myriad of challenges along their respective paths to collaboration (p. 277).

The need for collaboration is based on a society frustrated with the inability to solve complex, demanding, and growing problems. It is inevitable that collaborations would continue to develop and grow between NGOs, business, and government in regularity and strategic importance (Austin, 2000; Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Salamon, 2002; Tapscott & Williams, 2008).

Beginning with Ronald Reagan, all presidential administrations have urged business and nonprofit sectors to assume a greater role in attempting to solve society's problems. This shifting of responsibilities has been increasing the demands on the nonprofit and business sectors and pushing them toward collaboration. "Collaborative nonprofit relationships have gradually migrated from the traditionally philanthropic, characterized by benevolent donor and grateful recipient, toward deeper, strategic alliances" (Austin, 2000, p. 44).

Collaboration is also occurring in all business sectors of society, including banking, financial services, retailing, automobile manufacturing, and many other fields. There is no reason to think that NGOs can – or should – be immune from it simply because of their tax exempt status. In many areas of the United States there are simply too many NGOs. In addition, as governing boards review their NGOs' mission statements and study how best to implement those missions, they often discover that they spend disproportionate amounts of resources dealing with how they are going to fund,

manage, and perpetuate them (McLaughlin, 1998). By optimizing resources, collaboration offers nonprofits developmental opportunities for constructive growth, and sometimes, actual survival.

Collaborative forms such as mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures, alliances, and interorganizational networks help organizations better serve customers, acquire resources, compete over customers or raw materials, and gain or enhance competitive advantages (Devlin & Bleackley, 1988; Kanter, 1988; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978;). Although there is no “grand unified theory” of collaboration, research over the last three decades on the emergence of these interorganizational forms has contributed to an understanding of the factors that compel organizations to enter into interorganizational relationships such as alliances and joint ventures.

Although there is no widely accepted general theory of NGO collaboration, there are many theoretical approaches that several researchers have taken. Theories that have contributed to the explanation of the emergence of these collaborative forms include resource dependence, corporate social performance and institutional economics, microeconomics, political, strategic management and social ecology, and institutional and negotiated order. These theories are typically associated with addressing the antecedents and outcomes of collaborations. However, only a few theories attempt to address the strategies that contribute to the successful formation of these collaborations (Doz, 1996; Larson, 1992; Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Harrigan (1988) found that only 42% of alliances lasted more than four years. More recent literature addresses the failure of mergers and acquisitions. Rule and Keown (1998) indicate that “50% of alliances can be best considered successful” (p. 36).

Collaborations among NGOs in the past decade alone are a widespread phenomenon in the sector. With the potential for further federal tax cuts, combined with state and local budget crises and extra spending on homeland defense and the War on Terrorism, NGOs will likely look even more frequently to partnerships with one another as a way to strengthen and preserve their essential work (La Piana & Kohm, 2003).

The prevalence of collaborations for problem solving has been well documented in research on the corporate and government sectors, but little has been done in the nonprofit sector. Collaboration among organizations has occurred for decades in the fields of construction, publishing, film and recording, textiles, and the aircraft industry (Powell, 1990). Collaborations have been examined in a variety of policy areas, including education, environmental management, welfare reform, public health, transportation, and prison management (Dunn, 2000; Kamieniecki, Shafie, & Silvers, 2000; Rom, 2000; Rosenau, 2000; Schneider, 2000; Sparer, 2000; Wohlstetter, Malloy, Smith, & Hentschke, 2004). Governmental alliances in public policy appear to be as popular as they are wide-ranging. A 2001 (Rich, Giles, & Stern) nationwide survey of city halls and community-based organizations found that collaborative efforts for enhancing community development had grown at unprecedented rates in recent years.

According to Hessenius (2007), “the role of the nonprofit sector might play as a force within the public policy arena is potentially staggering – in terms of organizations, mobilization of grassroots citizen armies, fund-raising, lobbying activities, and changing media coverage of the political process” (p. 4). However, despite the rise of strategic, collaborative alliances, there is limited knowledge about how individual collaborations develop over time. Researchers have typically discussed distinct stages of collaborative

development, focusing, for example, on what motivates organizations to initiate collaborations or the various impacts of collaborations. There has been limited work on building a comprehensive theory about the evolutionary process of collaborations.

Purpose of the Study

As stated in the introduction, collaborations and advocacy have long been considered functions of American nonprofit organizations. Unfortunately, there is limited current data on how recent challenges are affecting nonprofit collaborations, types of collaborative forms, and engagement strategies in policy advocacy.

Of major importance to this study is collaboration, what it is, when, how, and why it is used by NGOs. In addition, the study explores the role of NGOs as advocates in the public policy process. Finally, the study examines how NGOs use collaborative strategies to pursue advocacy goals.

Through a review of the literature, this study defines collaboration and describes how NGOs have used various methods of collaboration to achieve their missions. This study reveals insights into the types, strategies, and frequencies of successful collaboration used by NGOs in pursuing advocacy goals.

Finally, this study presents research on very specific NGOs in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The research reveals how these NGOs use collaborative strategies and techniques in pursuing advocacy goals in public policy.

Significance of the Study

The literature on America's nonprofit sector has increased substantially in recent years with the growing interest in nonprofit studies. This increased interest is mainly due to the excoriation on the capabilities of government, political and ideological resistance to expanded public spending, and concerns about America's civic health. "While this increased attention has substantially expanded the base of information available about America's nonprofit organizations, it has not yet generated the clear understanding that is needed of the sector's changing position and role" (Salamon, 2002, p. ix). NGOs and the nonprofit sector in general, play an important, but perhaps underestimated, role in the development of public policy (Salamon, 2002).

As previously stated, collaboration and advocacy have long been considered central functions of America's nonprofit organizations. Unfortunately, there is limited current data on how recent challenges are affecting nonprofit engagement in policy advocacy, and how this varies by field, size of organization, or other factors. Little is known about what factors affect the willingness of nonprofit organizations to engage in collaborations and advocacy, or what forms their involvement takes (Salamon, Geller, & Lorentz, 2008). In addition, there is little work on how NGOs represent – or fail to represent – their constituents in the public policy process. Moreover, there does not appear to be any particular scholarly interest in the political behavior of nonprofits (Berry, 2003).

This study contributes to the nonprofit sector in the literature and specifically addresses nonprofit collaborations and how collaborative strategies and techniques are used by NGOs to influence public policy. The data collected in this research study will

allow others to learn about the collaborative strategies used by NGOs as they influence public policy decision makers.

Research Questions

A qualitative design using a case study approach is used to examine the collaborative strategies and techniques used by selected Virginia nongovernmental organizations in pursuit of their advocacy goals in public policy. The general scope and direction of this study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is a collaboration, and when, how, and why is it used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals?
2. What advocacy roles do nongovernment organizations play in public policy?
3. What collaborative strategies are used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

Definitions Used in the Study

Certain terms and concepts warranted specific definitions to provide a common frame of reference and clarity for the study. Seven terms that have special significance for this study are identified in the following paragraphs:

NGO – A nongovernmental organization (NGO) is a not-for-profit entity that is organized on a local, national or international level to address issues in support of the public good. Mission-oriented and made up of people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to

local, state, and federal governments, monitor policy and program implementation, and encourage participation of civil society stakeholders at the community level. They provide analysis and expertise and influence public policy. Some NGOs are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, the environment, education or health (United Nations, 2005, as cited in Gray, Bebbington, & Collison, 2006). NGOs are organizations which are neither governmental (public sector) organizations, such as central or local government services or public hospitals, schools or universities, nor private (for-profit) commercial organizations, such as local and transnational corporations (Gray et al., 2006).

Collaboration – Collaboration is the process by which a group of people bring together their knowledge and insights to achieve a common goal they cannot achieve by themselves. Their goal could be to co-create new knowledge or a new insight or perhaps to co-develop a new product or a new technique (Logan & Stokes, 2004). Collaboration is the mutual agreement and exchange of aid between service providers and organizations with similar missions or with missions targeted at protecting and benefiting the constituencies that the NGOs serve (Reid, 1999).

Advocacy – Advocacy is the public expression and representation of interests and concerns which focuses on influencing policy, laws and securing collective goods (Jenkins, 1987; Salamon, 2002; Berry, 2003). Advocacy is the act of pleading for or against a cause, as well as supporting a proposal (Hopkins, 1992). Advocacy is a vital, traditional role of NGOs (Salamon, 2002). Berry (2003) found that in their role as advocates, most NGOs have no active opposition. At the state and local level, NGOs

working on behalf of their constituents generally encounter few, if any, other organizations offering policy makers an opposing point of view.

Lobbying – Lobbying is a specifically focused form of advocacy to influence legislation – specific laws that are formal statements of policy. NGOs can urge legislators to pass laws and provide funds that solve a problem. NGOs can stop actions that would have negative impacts on issues and communities (Avner, 2002). Almost all types of NGOs, in fact, lobby government with an eye toward eventually influencing policy makers’ understanding of issues or their impact on them (Berry, 2003).

Grassroots Lobbying – Grassroots lobbying is an attempt to influence public policy by affecting public opinion and includes the dissemination of political materials and coordination of activities designed to garner public support (Reid, 1999).

Direct Lobbying – Direct lobbying activities are targeted at elected officials in an effort to compel them to take actions that benefit the client groups of the nonprofit organizations (Reid, 1999).

Third Sector – Third sector is another name by which the nonprofit, or voluntary sector is known, with government or public administrations and the private sector (business or corporations) being the first two sectors (Vernis et al., 2006).

Design and Method

Given that the focus of the study is the definition and process of collaboration and its use in advocacy, as reflected by NGO leaders’ perceptions as well as the organizations’ documents, a qualitative approach appeared most befitting. “Qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people”

(Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 2). According to Vernis et al. (2006), the greatest asset of nonprofit organizations lies in their people. “They find their key to success in a prepared and committed human team” (p. 127). Human actions are significantly influenced by the setting in which they occur; therefore, one should study that behavior in those real-life situations. Vision, mission, goals, strategies, and objectives are all vital to the success of NGOs. How these elements interplay among NGO leaders in collaboration and advocacy are crucial aspects of an environment.

The research design for this study included rigorous techniques, including detailed discussions with participants in the study, examination of their artifacts and visits to their organizations’ offices – their natural settings – to find answers to the research questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). “Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 39).

The qualitative tradition of case study is used in the design of this research because it is an exploration of a case or multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). This collective study examines 12 cases.

In this study, NGOs that are identified as education organizations who collaborate through advocacy in the Commonwealth of Virginia were chosen as the case study. “The idea of qualitative research is to purposefully select informants... that will best answer the research question” (Creswell, 1994, p. 148). According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), “studies focusing on society and culture in a group, a program, or an organization typically espouse some form of case study as a strategy. This entails immersion in the

setting and rests on both the researcher's and the participants' worldviews" (p. 55). The methodology includes a multiple case design – each organization selected is considered a case, and the series of cases are treated as experiments. The level of analysis on each organization concentrates on the perceptions of the executive director or president. This approach of interviewing NGO executive directors or presidents was modeled after Eisenhardt's study on the concept of power centralization in organizations (1989) and the suggestions made by Mason (2002).

Limitations of the Study

Constraints in this study have been placed on the number and the specificity of the premises used in the research instrument. The NGOs used in this study are current members of the Virginia Education Coalition. The study addresses only one segment in the NGO sector – professional education organizations. Generalization of the results will be tentative and conditional to the targeted case populations selected for this study and limited to the adequacy of the research population. Study results are limited to the time and circumstances of the particular collaborations encountered by the respondents and reflexivity of the researcher. The data from this study represents self-reports by respondents of their perceptions of events and people. Finally, the results inevitably are influenced by the insights and values of participants and will be limited to the reader determining transferability of the study's findings.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The organization of the remainder of this study is divided into four chapters. Chapter II represents a review of the related literature. Chapter III contains a description of the research methodology for this study. The analyses and findings of the study are reported in Chapter IV. Chapter V contains concluding statements and suggestions for further study based on the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter II is to address the findings of a review of the literature about the research project. The first section of this chapter briefly addresses the history of collaboration, answering such questions as what it is, how it is used, by whom, and for what purpose by nonprofit organizations (also referred to as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)). The second section presents an overview of the theories generally associated with collaboration. The remainder of Chapter II presents the findings from the literature on how NGOs use collaborative strategies to pursue advocacy goals in public policy.

A Brief History

Collaboration is emerging as a diverse focus of scholarly research and debate. However, answers to questions, such as “What is it?” and “How is it used?” lack consistency across the disciplines. The literature is vast, multidisciplinary, and rich with case research. The wide range of theoretical perspectives results in an equally wide assortment of definitions and understandings of the many meanings of collaboration. No “true” definition of collaboration actually exists (Thomson, Perry, & Miller, 2009).

According to Vernis et al. (2006), “collaboration has become one of the most important concepts for not only those who study nonprofit organizations but also those who study other fields in the social sciences” (p. 10). Neither the emergence of the nonprofit sector nor the collaboration among sectors is entirely new. However, “what is new is the recent boost in the significance that the nonprofit sector has in people’s lives and in the number and the scale of intersectoral collaboration” (p. 43). Salamon (2002) also found that “The field of nonprofit studies has swelled into a mighty stream fed by growing doubts about the capabilities of government, political and ideological resistance to expanded public spending, and concerns about America’s civic health” (p. ix).

O’Toole (1997) and Powell (1990) in their research discovered a growing body of multidisciplinary research suggesting that the world has become increasingly “networked,” demanding forms of organizing quite different from bureaucracies or firms. They attributed the emergence of these new forms to various factors such as devolution, increasingly rapid changes in technology, scarce resources, and rising organizational interdependence. O’Toole and Powell described a need to create new organizational and social structures that can be achieved by organizations as they interact with each other through a process called interorganizational collaboration. Interorganizational collaboration occurs when two or more organizations perceive mutual benefit from interacting with each other. Private and public donors to NGOs are increasingly requiring organizations to demonstrate collaborative relationships. Establishing and building upon interorganizational ties through collaboration is one way to effectively allocate scarce resources (Thomson et al., 2009).

Collaboration comes in many forms and expected outcomes. Types of collaboration differ in practice in several substantive ways. According to Gray (1989), collaborative designs are initiated in the “context of ongoing litigation; others are efforts to preempt litigation. Some arise out of pessimism, as last resorts to settle bitter, protracted conflicts; others emerge out of optimism, as visionary explorations for new possibilities” (p. 132). “Depending on the context, collaborations also produce different outcomes, ranging from increased appreciation and better understanding of the domain to policy recommendations to contractual agreements” (p. 240).

Existing research stops short of explaining why nonprofit organizations develop certain forms of collaborations instead of others (Guo & Acar, 2005). Snaveley and Tracy (2002) found collaboration to be a social exchange involving commitment of knowledge, skills, and emotions by the leaders and staff of participating organizations. Cropper (1996) asserts that collaboration is an “intense form of mutual attachment, operating at the levels of interest, intent, affect and behavior; actors are bound together by mutually supportive pursuit of individual and collective benefit” (p. 82). Collaborations have risks, however, and individuals must be willing to risk their personal as well as organizational reputations, “relinquish a measure of stability and control over their work lives, and enter into unequal exchanges as a partner that is expected to contribute more resources than weaker partners, or a partner willing to risk working with more powerful entities” (Snaveley & Tracy, 2002, p. 62).

Chrislip and Larson (1994) defined collaboration as a “mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work toward common goals by sharing knowledge and information (communication) and more than a relationship that helps

each party achieve its own goals (cooperation and coordination)” (p. 5). They described collaboration’s purpose as being “to create a shared vision and develop a plan to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party” (p. 5).

According to Snavely and Tracy (2002), “collaboration takes place out of self-interest; organizations perceive a tangible benefit perhaps in the form of capturing financial resources including cost savings and economies of scale, and strengthening the organization through mission accomplishment” (p. 64). Huxham (1996) also contends that NGOs’ self-interest is a necessary requirement for successful collaborations. He purports that individual NGOs must be able to achieve their own objectives better in a collaboration than they could alone.

In addition, Austin (2000) found that the benefits of collaboration also include enhanced technical expertise and technologies, access to other NGOs, enhanced name recognition, and new perspectives. Gray (1989) further includes benefits of intrinsic value, such as a clearer understanding of the collaborative parties’ differences and an improved working relationship. Collaborative parties are better able to develop mechanisms to create and coordinate future interactions that can be beneficial to all.

Thomson and Perry (Thomson et al., 2009; Thomson, 1999; Thomson & Perry, 1998) define collaboration as a “process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions” (p. 412). They emphasize that collaboration is a multidimensional, variable construct that is composed of the following five key dimensions: (a) governance, (b)

administration, (c) mutuality, (d) norms, and (e) organizational autonomy. Governance and administration they describe as being structural in nature. Mutuality and norms are described as social capital dimensions and organizational autonomy involves agency. These dimensions of collaboration as addressed by Thomson, et al. emerge from the growing body of research on collaboration (Gray, 1989, 1996, 2000; Huxham, 1996; Huxham & Vangen, 2000), and research on interorganizational relations (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994) and organizational behavior (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1986). These fields of research strongly support, and are in tandem with, the view of collaboration as a process “through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, 1989, p. 5).

In describing the process of collaborating, Gray (1989) addresses five factors that can positively influence the chances of success. They are: (a) agreement on scope of collaboration, (b) timing, (c) careful management of process, (d) negotiating in good faith, and (e) maintaining good relationships with constituencies. Agreement on scope includes the importance that all collaborative parties know from the beginning the scope of the effort and level of commitment, because differing expectations can derail the proceedings. “Scope includes the general problem domain and the intent of the collaboration (for example, information exchange, drafting recommendations, and so forth)” (p. 264). Timing of an issue can be critical in determining whether stakeholders are ready to collaborate. According to Post and Ewing (as cited in Gray, 1989), an issue’s maturity is reflected by where it is on the issue’s life cycle. An issue that has not reached the point of having attained a measure of attention may not be ready for

collaboration. In contrast, an issue that may have passed the legislative stage may no longer be ripe for collaboration until specific questions arise regarding implementation by an administrative agency (Harter, 1986). Careful management of process is critical to the success of collaboration. Agreements on conduct and process issues must be discussed openly. Ground rules that are understood and agreed upon are an essential step in assuring that collaborative parties will accept responsibility for the process. Negotiating in good faith is an essential factor to the collaborative process. In the Bingham (1986) study, questioning the intentions of other negotiators led to more than one failure in collaborations. Maintaining good relationships with constituencies needs to be part of the collaborative process because participants need to confer with and gain the commitment of their constituents before any final agreements are reached.

In addition to process as a successful factor in collaboration, Gray (1989) also includes member factors as being important. Member factors include the stakeholders who are invited to participate in a collaboration and their willingness to participate. “One of the most serious limitations is not involving key stakeholders” (p. 264). The Bingham (1986) study cited case studies in which key stakeholders were left out of collaborations and as a result, the ability to implement the decisions was more often impaired.

Stakeholders must have some incentives to collaborate. To be successfully involved, they must have a compelling reason to try collaboration. “They must have believed that their interests will be protected and advanced throughout the process” (Gray, p. 263).

While there is no formal step-by-step process to enter into a collaboration that is adhered to by individuals or groups, there remains a fundamental set of issues that must be addressed in the course of any successful collaboration. Scholars do agree on what it

takes for everyone to get to the table and to explore, reach, and implement an agreement for a collaboration. Gray (1989) describes these fundamentals as a three-phase model: (1) problem setting; (2) direction setting; and (3) implementation. According to Carpenter (as cited in Gray, 1989, p. 57), there is a need to develop the necessary “process literacy” and to understand and manage the steps within each phase. The steps of each phase are listed below:

Phase 1 – Problem Setting – has the following steps: a) common definition of problem, b) commitment to collaborate, c) identification of stakeholders, d) legitimacy of stakeholders, e) convener characteristics, and f) identification of resources. Phase 2 – Directional Setting – includes: a) establishing ground rules, b) agenda setting, c) organizing subgroups, d) joint information search, e) exploring options, and f) reaching agreement and closing the deal. Finally, Phase 3 – Implementation – includes: a) dealing with constituencies, b) building external support, c) structuring, and d) monitoring the agreement and ensuring compliance (Gray, 1989, p. 57).

Although certain phases and steps will hold different meanings and context for various collaborations, the importance of the process is critical in planning and conducting successful collaborations. “Good-faith efforts to undertake collaboration are often derailed because the parties are not skilled in the process and because insufficient attention is given to designing and managing a constructive process” (Gray, 1989, p. 93).

Coffin (2005) described collaboration as both irresistible and unpredictable. He said that his colleagues in research collaborate to clarify questions, sharpen arguments,

influence practice and many other reasons. He views collaboration as a process that consists of three cumulative stages: diagnosis, description, and mutual accommodation.

Fosler (2002) found that collaboration involves a significant degree of mutual planning and management among peers involving the alignment of goals, strategies, agendas, resources, and activities; an equitable commitment of investment and capacities; and the sharing of risks, liabilities, and benefits. He suggested that collaboration, therefore, involved something less than authoritative coordination and something more than tacit cooperation.

Collaboration can be an effective tool to address the complexity of increasing social problems. In this context, the commitment of collaboration requires not only the public and private sectors, but the nonprofit sector as well, in addressing contemporary social issues, such as job training, urban renewal and economic development, escalating health care costs, and homelessness. This type of three-sector collaboration became more frequent beginning in the 1980s with the emergence of a wide array of public-private partnerships. As a result, growing interest developed into how to make collaborations work (Hood, Logsdon, & Thompson, 1993).

In explaining how collaboration can work, Simonin (1997) identified four fundamental phases of what he terms the “collaboration cycle”: (a) identifying and selecting potential collaborators, (b) negotiating the terms and structure of a collaborative agreement, (c) monitoring and managing an ongoing collaboration, and (d) terminating a collaboration.

Austin (2002) found three different types of collaboration: (a) philanthropic, (b) transactional, and (c) integrative. Although each type has its own distinct characteristics

and functions, some collaborations may evolve from one type or stage to another. The philanthropic collaboration is the relationship of charitable donor and recipient. This is the type that most characterizes the nonprofit-business relationship. Austin reports that this type is increasingly migrating to the next level – the transactional collaboration. This collaboration involves explicit resource exchanges focused on specific activities such as cause-related marketing, event sponsorships, and contractual relationships. The integrative collaboration is the merging of participants' missions, people, and activities into a more collective action and organizational integration. It is appropriate to a joint venture and is considered the highest strategic level of collaboration.

Collaboration is currently in vogue. A Google search returned over 88 million hits. Google CEO Eric Schmidt says, “When you say ‘collaboration,’ the average forty-five-year old thinks they know what you’re talking about – teams sitting down, having a nice conversation with nice objectives and a nice attitude. That’s what collaboration means to most people” (Tapscott & Williams, 2008, p. 18).

“Collaboration implies doing something together.... It is the desire or need to create or discover something new, while thinking and working with others, that distinguishes the action” (Hargrove, 1998, p. 3). Rodrik (1997) suggested that such action can be defined as social cooperation and is one way in which democratic participation in politics can generate compromise. As individuals meet and deliberate, they come to understand each other's viewpoints, develop empathy, recognize the value of moderation, internalize the common interest, and de-emphasize narrow self-interest.

According to Tapscott and Williams (2008), “the first tangible evidence of the predisposition to collaboration appeared sixty to seventy thousand years ago in the cave

paintings and primitive tools left behind by hunter-gatherer communities” (p. 63). It became evident that groups with collaborative habits were more materially successful than those in which more narrowly self-interested behavior seemed to be the norm. In 8000 B.C., Homo sapiens began to settle down and a cooperative division of labor was devised between communities and constructed social rules and institutions were ultimately developed. Eventually, cities, armies, empires, enterprises, nation states, and social movements emerged within a brief period of evolutionary time.

According to O’Neill (2002), the existence of associations, distinct from families and kin-based groups, territorial units and tribes, has been documented in primitive and ancient cultures by anthropologists and historians. These associations began to appear when the transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer bands to food-producing villages led to stable, larger, and more complex human groups. A similar rise of associations also takes place following economic or political change. Particularly noticeable is the growth of associations during the onset of large, urban, and administratively complex societies. O’Neill contends that such associations came into existence over time because “they met certain needs that were not being met by the family, state, or market, or even by host-society charitable agencies” (p. 40).

Collaboration has been and still is a powerful human tool for solving complex social problems. Finding creative solutions requires envisioning problems from perspectives outside one’s own environment. The wisdom of crowds – first identified with Homo sapiens millennia ago – provides a framework for approaching problems and searching for solutions through collaboration (Gray, 1989). Surowiecki (2004) found

that “under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them” (p. xiii).

According to Howe (2008), “the amount of knowledge and talent dispersed among the human race has always outstripped our capacity to harness it” (p. 41). Howe’s assessment seems to be aligned with Surowiecki’s (2004) findings on the intellectual collaboration of groups – or group intelligence – that was demonstrated by a host of experiments conducted by American sociologists and psychologists between 1920 and the mid-1950s, “the heyday of research into group dynamics. Among the findings were that diversity in groups is, on its own, valuable” (p. 30).

Ostrom (1990) found that individuals who lived together in a local setting regularly communicated with one another, and developed what he referred to as “shared norms and patterns of reciprocity” and thereby possessed enough social capital to resolve their collective action problems (p. 119). He concluded that the stronger the ties among organizations and the more social capital, the greater the likelihood of collective action.

“Collaboration is a promising approach to producing usable knowledge and confers other benefits as well” (Schuman & Abramson, 2000, p. 11). Many NGOs have long lamented the “disconnect” between those who study the nonprofit sector and those who actually practice in it, and the lack of usable data that flows from this divide. Page (2007) would agree with this finding, having found that a knowledgeable, diverse collaborative group is more apt at solving problems. Surowiecki (2004) would agree as well, and cautioned that “intelligence alone is not enough, because intelligence alone cannot guarantee you different perspectives on a problem” (p. 30).

Koestler found that “most people usually think and work along the lines of a single frame of reference” (as cited in Hargrove, 1998, p. 5). When involved in a collaboration, however, differing viewpoints and perspectives can help individuals better understand each other. Individuals reach goals, solve problems, or resolve conflicts through their own personal lenses. Consequently, it may be easy for one to be unaware of how arbitrary their thinking and understanding may be. In collaboration, there is a need for open, honest dialogue in which people construct a shared understanding of the problem, its root causes, the solution, and actions to take. This shared understanding and new knowledge can lead to fresh approaches, new ideas, and innovative solutions.

Chrislip (2002) believes that constructively engaging a diverse group of stakeholders in a collaboration can pose great challenges and at the same time add great value. “People with different experiences, knowledge, and perspectives make more creative and better decisions” (p. 1).

Page (2007) attempted to redefine the way we understand ourselves in relation to one another and discussed how we think in groups. He addressed how our collective wisdom exceeds the sum of its parts by focusing on diversity. Teams of people, he claimed, find better solutions than brilliant individuals working independently. “The best group decisions and predictions are those that draw upon the very qualities that make each of us unique” (Dreifus, 2008).

The Alexandrian Greeks apparently would have agreed with Dreifus and knew the power of collaboration as a tool. According to Tapscott and Williams (2008), “the Alexandrian Greeks were inspired by a simple but powerful idea: Collect all the books, all the histories, all of the great literature, all of the plays, all of the mathematical and

scientific treatises of the age and store them in one building” (p. 151). Essentially, they attempted to collect all of mankind’s knowledge to date so it could be used to improve and expand upon the current works of science, the arts, wealth, and the economy.

As early as the 17th century during the period of Enlightenment, societies again began to create, accumulate, collaborate, and harness diverse knowledge in new and different ways. Engineers, mechanics, chemists, physicians, and philosophers “formed circles” in which access to collaborative knowledge was the primary objective (Tapscott & Williams, 2008, p. 155).

The collaborative knowledge revolution continued into the 18th and throughout the 19th centuries, expanding knowledge and discovering new ideas. In addition, there was societal emphasis on cheaper access to knowledge and scientific tools. The industrial enlightenment was a period of significant advances in collaborative knowledge which carried momentum into the 21st century (Tapscott & Williams, 2008).

Austin (2000) predicts that collaborative knowledge in the 21st century between and among NGOs and between NGOs and corporations will grow in frequency and strategic importance. However, “as economic imperatives call for rationalization in the nonprofit industry, many nonprofits, not their for-profit counterparts, will need to restructure and downsize in order to remain viable” (p. 8).

According to Hargrove (1998), there is a profound shift taking place in the 21st century from the individualistic to the collaborative model due to many factors, such as change and complexity in the world we live in. Thus, people are beginning to reinterpret history in a new light. An example Hargrove gives addresses the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson is commonly thought to have written the document

mainly by himself. However, research by Pauline Maier (1997), a Massachusetts Institute of Technology historian, revealed that the “Declaration is not just a product of one extraordinary mind but is more a collective intelligence of ordinary people throughout the thirteen colonies” (p. 10). Maier’s research example runs counter to centuries of history based on the Great Man theory or individualistic mode. This theory is described as a mental model that acts much like a filter – information is filtered in that fits the model and information that does not is filtered out. Collaborative thinking has countered this theory and opened up avenues of research previously left aside.

Collaborative thinking creates shared and understood goals which allow “smart people with big egos to subordinate their egos while contributing to something significant and lasting. It also creates a clearing that pulls people across different professional fields and allows them to create a common language” (Hargrove, 1998, p. 4). The attraction to collaborate comes from people and NGOs realizing their goal as significant and as something they cannot achieve individually. The attraction to practice collaboration is strong, so strong in fact that Schrage (1989) recommends that “one of the primary tasks of management is to learn how to frame goals and problems in a way that inspires people to collaborate as opposed to doing their own thing or defending their own turf” (p. 129).

According to Chrislip (2002), collaboration works because it “engages stakeholders as peers using skillful means to facilitate dialogue, mutual learning, shared responsibility, and action” (p. 1). Collaboration provides a powerful transforming experience, it allows stakeholders to engage and act together to address mutual concerns. Stakeholders converse as equals, rather than as representatives of provincial interests. “Collaboration confronts and changes basic perceptions about others by recognizing

community and conversation as the only means for creating a society of tolerance, justice, responsibility, and caring. When it works, it satisfies fundamental human needs” (p. 1). Chrislip emphasizes the importance of collaboration by stating that it “is not just another strategy or tactic for addressing public concerns. It is a means for building social capital, sustaining a democratic society, and transforming the civic culture of a community or region” (p. 5).

Putnam (1993) also addresses collaborations as a part of civic practices necessary to build and sustain a “civil society.” He conducted research on the necessity of a relationship between civic community and the performance of governing institutions. He discovered that trust, reciprocity, and civic engagement permeate the social fabric of a community, and that these factors, not measures of prosperity such as wealth, level of education, or access to natural resources, determine the relative success or failure of a community.

Chrislip and Larson (1994) agree on this premise of collaboration. “If you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization or community” (p. 14).

Chrislip (2002) found that collaboration emerged as a strategy for addressing environmental and natural resource disputes as early as the 1970s. Since then, however, its use has extended to a wide range of issues at state, regional, community, and neighborhood levels. Some of these issues include economic development, urban sprawl, neighborhood empowerment, education, transportation, health care, and governance. Collaboration entails a profound shift in the premises Americans hold for how public

issues should be addressed. “Instead of advocacy, collaboration demands engagement, dialogue instead of debate, inclusion instead of exclusion, shared power instead of domination and control, and mutual learning instead of rigid adherence to mutually exclusive positions” (p. 41).

Credibility and influence are often gained through collaborative efforts such as ensuring inclusiveness, managing a constructive learning engagement, providing information necessary for making good decisions, building the coherence of the organization, and helping negotiate agreements that lead to action. These informal recommending organizations that are involved in public policy making rely on their collective credibility to provide a credible and influential resource with legislative bodies and administrative agencies. Chrislip (2002) cautions, however, that organizations engaging in collaboration will not find it necessarily easy. He found that would-be participants must have an incentive to invest the necessary time and energy in a collaborative effort. “There are many examples of collaboration that began as reactive responses to difficult and challenging situations. Unfortunately, the impetus to collaborate comes more often from futility or crisis rather than from proactive, visionary leadership” (p. 50). La Piana and Kohm (2003) would add to this the issues of complexities as well.

La Piana and Kohm (2003) contend that all of these issues have contributed to NGOs being forced into collaborations. Devolution has brought economic pressures to bear, competition from the other two sectors – business and government – all have contributed to more NGOs competing for funds. In addition, an aging population of experienced NGO managers and staff members could prompt NGOs to seek “strategic

restructuring,” a form of collaboration that can be described as including formal and informal collaborations, mergers, back-office consolidations, and joint ventures. The motivating reasons for NGOs to adopt and practice a form of collaboration were (1) to maintain funders’ support, (2) to save money, (3) to capitalize on partner organizations’ leadership, and (4) to preserve or enhance their organization’s reputation.

Another issue influencing NGO collaborations is funders themselves. Funders are increasingly concerned about efficiency and expediency of the NGOs they support. For example, public agencies are looking for ways to reduce the cost of contracting with NGOs by limiting the number of contractors. Private funders are also encouraging NGOs to work together in order to reduce the number of fund seekers who provide similar or duplicative services (La Piana & Kohm, 2003).

Collaboration and partnership have long been a part of NGO culture. However, La Piana and Hayes (2005) discovered a more recent phenomenon that is increasing the openness of NGOs to partnerships that go beyond conferences, joint programming, or shared administrative services. NGOs are increasingly undertaking partnerships that involve more formal and long-term integration of operations and governance structure, such as joint ventures and mergers.

La Piana and Kohm (2003) also found in their research that an interest in sharing staff is a strong motivation in several of the collaborations studied. When organizations have difficulty finding or cannot afford staff members (particularly senior staff) with the experience, connections, and skills that they need, one option is to take advantage of the leadership of another organization. “This interest arose, in some cases, from a sense that skilled, experienced nonprofit executives are in short supply” (p. 17).

Gazley and Brudney (2007) found collaboration to be a desirable behavior that may even be required or expected by influential actors such as regulators and donors. Some NGOs want to demonstrate, often to their funders, that they are creative, collaborative, and efficient by forming a type of collaboration in hopes of boosting their organizational reputation. In some collaborations, “organizational leaders hoped that some of their [collaborative] partner’s positive reputation would ‘rub off’ on them” (La Piana & Kohm, 2003, p. 17).

Collaborations seem to be less about alliances among organizations than ties among people. “Often partnerships rely on the vision and diplomacy of only one or two individuals. When more people are involved in and committed to a partnership, the relationship may be more durable” (La Piana & Kohm, 2003, p. 19). Organizations that keep staff informed about their collaborations and work to gain their support and input, may have a better chance of seeing such collaborations endure.

In collaborations, people can experience cultural differences and clashes between organizations. “Cultural differences” is defined by La Piana and Khom (2003) as:

a catchall term referring to a variety of problems. An organization’s culture is some combination of policies and procedures, professional philosophies, employee dress, meeting frequency and attendance, and the types of relationships that exist between and among management and staff. However, for most people, the most important aspect of culture is the way in which decisions are made (p. 20).

Another challenge in collaborations is the issue of identity. Becoming involved in a collaboration can be, and often is, a counterintuitive step for NGOs that spend much of

their energy and time focused on maintaining their identity. Collaborative consolidations require stakeholders to transfer their loyalty to a new entity. This identity challenge relates to, but can transcend, cultural issues. Culture is mostly an internal organization concern. However, organizational identity is considered an asset in the external world. An organization's identity attracts staff, board members, clients, and funders. In the business sector, the power of organizational identity is referred to as "brand loyalty." "The most visible symbol of an organization's identity is its name, and often the most heated battles in... [collaborations]...occur over name changes" (La Piana & Khom, 2003, p. 20).

Another challenge faced not only by NGOs, but in business and government as well, are the employees driving performance by collaborating with peers across organizational boundaries using blogs, wikis, chat rooms, and personal broadcasting. Tapscott and Williams (2008) suggest that smart organizations are encouraging, rather than fighting, the heaving growth of massive online communities. They also contend that in the past, collaborations were done mostly on a small scale. It was something that took place among associates, relatives, and friends, in households, communities, and workplaces. It was rare for collaboration to amass scale. Mass collaboration was mainly in short bursts of political action. However, times have changed. Never before have individuals and organizations had the power or opportunity to connect in loose networks of peers using the Internet. "Our society is now in an age of participation. From low-cost collaborative infrastructures – from free Internet telephony to open source software to global outsourcing platforms – allow thousands upon thousands of individuals..." (p. 11) to give rise to new collaborative capabilities in all three sectors.

Tapscott and Williams (2008) view collaboration as a worldwide movement. They believe a power shift is underway and a tough new engagement rule is emerging: “Harness the new collaboration or perish” (p. 12). These changes, among others, are ushering the world toward collaborative knowledge, power, and productive capability which promises to be more dispersed than at any time in history. They caution that those who fail to grasp this momentum will “find themselves ever more isolated – cut off from the networks that are sharing, adapting, and updating knowledge to create value” (p. 12). The rationale for their statement stems from the new mass collaboration of collective knowledge, capability, and resources which are embodied within broad horizontal networks of participants and can be mobilized to accomplish much more than one individual, team, group, or firm acting alone.

This new mass collaboration is changing how the three sectors harness knowledge and capability. A new kind of global ethos is emerging in which the power of mass collaboration opens doors to the world, co-innovates with everyone, and shares resources that were previously closely guarded. Mass collaboration is a product of the Internet.

If there is one overarching principle that defines the new Web, it’s that we are building this thing together – one blog post, podcast, and mash-up after another. The Web is no longer about idly surfing and passively reading, listening, or watching. It’s about peering: sharing, socializing, collaborating, and, most of all, creating within loosely connected communities (Tapscott & Williams, 2008, p. 45).

Tapscott (1997) believes the new generation of youngsters that have grown up online are the demographic engine of collaboration. This new generation is bringing a

new ethic of openness, participation, and interactivity to workplaces, communities, and markets. They are the first generation to grow up in the digital age, and that makes them a force for collaboration. “Unlike their parents in the United States, who watched twenty-four hours of television per week, these youngsters are growing up interacting. The Internet makes life ongoing, massive collaboration, and this generation loves it” (p. 47). They are the authorities on the digital revolution that is affecting every institution in society. Consequently, collaborations will grow in volume, intensity, and sophistication.

Theories Related to Collaboration

As the literature review shows, there have been extensive experiences with collaboration, however, relatively few studies and little in the way of reliable theory exist. “What is known about collaboration tends to come from anecdotal evidence rather than from discipline and rigorous research” (Chrislip, 2002, p. 246). The first section of this chapter briefly addressed the history of collaboration, including various definitions. According to Wood and Gray (1991), definitions are crucial to theory building. “A general theory of collaboration must begin with a definition of the phenomena that encompasses all observable forms and excludes irrelevant issues” (p. 143). Wood and Gray “found a welter of definitions, each having something to offer and none being entirely satisfactory by itself” (p. 143).

As previously stated in Chapter 1, page 5, a review of the literature for this research project discovered no widely accepted general theory of collaboration. In addition, O’Neill (2002) found that there is no “grand unified theory” of the nonprofit sector either. Although he asserts that the situation has improved over the past 30 years,

there still is “no grand, all encompassing, and generally accepted theory” (p. 52) of nonprofit organization existence and behavior. However, there are many theoretical approaches that several researchers have taken. Most researchers examined collaboration from the perspective of organization theory and proposed changes to the traditional model of interorganizational relations that dominates the literature (Gray, 1989).

Gray (1989) advances a theory of collaboration as an emergent interorganizational process. She examined this more fully within the context of negotiated order theory. Collaboration is conceptualized as a mechanism by which a new negotiated order emerges among a set of stakeholders. Other research of interorganizational networks characterize them as being either transactional, that is, focusing on the exchange of resources between members (Fombrun, 1982; Galaskiewicz, 1979; Levin & White, 1961), or being attribute networks, such as industry groups linked by similar characteristics (Fombrun, 1982). These perspectives according to Gray, emphasize the objective and instrumental, rather than the cognitive and expressive character of these relations. “Viewing collaborations as negotiated orders emphasizes instead the cognitive and expressive character of these relations” (p. 228).

Negotiated order theorists are focused on social processes by which intra-organizational order is negotiated. In this social context, negotiated order theory proposes that relationships are negotiated and renegotiated. The social order itself is shaped through the self-conscious interactions of participants (Day & Day, 1977; Goffman, 1983; Strauss, 1978).

Conceptualizing collaborations as negotiated interorganizational orders stresses the following points: First, collaborations involve strategies collectively constructed by

the stakeholders to address existing environmental pressures. Second, this conceptualization captures the unknown, evolving, exploratory, developmental character of these interorganizational arrangements. Informal collaborations are dynamic negotiations that perhaps may ultimately lead to some form of formal, institutionalized agreement. Third, collaborations serve as a quasi-institutional tool in addressing differing interests within groups and for coordinating interorganizational relations. Collaborations perform a rather norm-setting function at the domain level. Accordingly, they represent a promising institutional form whose credibility and authority as an institution is still being negotiated. Fourth, collaborations serve as a strategic approach for learning by doing (Morgan & Ramirez, 1984; Ramirez, 1983).

“A theory of collaborations as negotiated orders emphasizes the temporary and dynamic character of these interorganizational interactions. While most collaborations are temporary and exploratory ventures, they often produce lasting normative agreements among the stakeholders, and some even evolve into more enduring institutional forms. Therefore, consideration of the institutional aspects of collaborations is also warranted” (Gray, 1989, p. 235).

Consequently, negotiated order theory has been used by researchers to explain the internal dynamics of groups and organizations. According to this theory, collaborations are viewed as negotiated interorganizational orders created by the stakeholders (Gray, 1989).

Jensen (2000) found in the classical theory of the firm that owners are simply the suppliers of capital, value maximizing and homogeneously risk averse. They do not give special consideration to the importance of governance mechanisms that ensure the

efficient use of resources and distribution of wealth. An oft-missed point in modern day discussions of the firm, Jensen contends, is that in order to build a complete theory of the firm, it should include corporate responsibility and shareholder wealth maximization, considering them to be interconnected and recognizing different risk preferences. In addition, the model should include corporations and shareholders having conflicts over what business strategy best serves the company because each party is self-interested.

In applying this concept to NGO collaborations, member organizations are self-interested – they have separate missions and have different member constituencies and, consequently, may have different risk preferences. These risk preferences may come into play when NGOs discuss the governing structure and mode of operation of the collaboration. The model that is developed should take into account Jensen's concern for self-interest and possible conflicts in strategies that best serve not only the collaborative entity, but also the individual NGOs as well.

Guo and Acar (2005) found in their research that a limitation associated with the emerging literature focusing on NGO collaboration lies with the theoretical frameworks that guide the majority of the scholarly work (Alter & Hage, 1993; Arsenault, 1998; D'Aunno & Zuckerman, 1987; Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Galaskiewicz & Shatin, 1981; Gray, 1989; Mulroy & Shay, 1997; Provan & Milward, 1995). The two theories that are referenced most often in the study of collaboration are resource dependence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1975, 1985, 1991).

Resource dependence theory, when applied to collaboration, proposes a strategy that will result in an organization's attempt to obtain the necessary resources to continue their existence. This theory addresses the tension between an organization's desire to be

stable and reduce environmental uncertainty by collaborating with another and the threat to autonomy and independence that occurs when entering into a relationship (Dickson & Weaver, 1997; Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Gray & Wood, 1991; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Consequently, resource scarcity is more likely to support collaboration than it is to increase competition (Aiken & Hage, 1968; Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Molnar, 1978).

Transaction cost theory proposes that interorganizational alliances and collaborations are attractive because they provide an opportunity to reduce transaction costs and thereby maximize economic or psychological benefits. Perhaps the most important question for an individual NGO is how it can achieve maximum efficiency through transactions with others (Dickson & Weaver, 1997; Foster & Menhard, 2002; Gray & Wood, 1991; Williamson, 1975, 1985, 1991). The theory suggests that a collaborative strategy is the result of organizational efforts to manage external dependencies and uncertainties in their resource environment (Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Sharfman, Gray, & Yan, 1991).

Guo and Acar (2005) found that despite their explanatory power, the theoretical perspectives on collaboration have been criticized for their insufficient attention to those constraints on strategic choice that are embedded in an organization's institutional setting (Galaskiewicz, 1985; Oliver, 1990), its structural context (Baum & Dutton, 1996; Galaskiewicz, 1985), as well as other contextual and organizational process factors (Cigler, 1999). Moreover, such oversight becomes more problematic in the NGO collaboration context because, as research has shown, a considerable number of interorganizational relations are mandated by law, and cooperation among certain types

of NGOs, such as human service organizations, is often explained primarily by these mandates (Bailey & Koney, 1996; Galaskiewicz, 1985).

Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld (1998) suggested the complementarity of resource dependence, institutional, and network theories in explaining the growth and decline of NGOs. Guo and Acar (2005) used these same theories to identify the factors associated with the extent of formality of the collaborative resources, and decision making and shared ownership of the final product or service.

According to Foster and Meinhard (2002), there are a number of theories that seek to describe the preconditions, processes, and outcomes of alliances and collaborations. However, they point out that Gray and Wood (1991) assert that there is no single theory that covers all of these issues in an all-inclusive fashion. Although resource dependence, microeconomics, and strategic management theories are effective in articulating the preconditions and outcomes of collaborations, these theories are weak in explaining the process. Conversely, political, institutional economics, and negotiated order theories focus on the process, but are criticized as giving inadequate attention to determinants and outcomes of collaborations.

NGOs, Collaboration, and Advocacy

The purpose of this section is not to review what has been written on the political involvement of nonprofits, but rather to glean from the literature an understanding of nonprofits' role in public policy making. By focusing on the role of nonprofits as advocates, the researcher is attempting to emphasize how political involvement through collaboration by nonprofits affects public policy decisions.

NGOs have impacted American society since the beginning of the colonies with the Statute of Charitable Uses and the Elizabethan Poor Law. These laws set the precedent for NGOs and their relationship to government and continued in effect throughout the colonial period and – four centuries later – are still influencing both legislation and judiciary decisions (Hammack, 1998).

De Tocqueville (2000) viewed NGOs as a valuable training ground for effective participation in American democracy. In both civil and political associations, people learn how to administer meetings, organize others for action, write letters, give speeches, analyze arguments, debate, and fashion compromise solutions – skills necessary for effective action in a free society (O’Neill, 2002). Through NGOs, people interact, build organizational skills, and create networks of trust and affiliation that enable them to work together to solve community problems, promote causes, and seek redress or change through the policy process (Salamon, 2002).

NGOs play an important, but perhaps underestimated, role in the development of public policy. Discussions of the role of NGOs in public policy making are often confined to their activities in policy implementation, where nonprofits play a substantial role (Salamon, 1987).

According to Berry (2003), there is relatively little work on how NGOs represent – or fail to represent – their constituents in the political process. Moreover, “there does not appear to be any particular scholarly interest in the political behavior of nonprofits” (p. 28). A more cogent explanation for this lack of attention, he asserts, is that the most influential interest group literature has concentrated on is the Washington political culture and not state-level politics.

Hopkins (1992) defines advocacy as “the act of pleading for or against a cause, as well as supporting or recommending a position... Advocacy is active espousal of a position, a point of view, or a course of action” (p. 32). Jenkins (1987) defines policy advocacy as “a specific form of advocacy that seeks to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest” (p. 297).

Salamon (2002) found the advocacy role of NGOs to be a complex and multifaceted area with little empirical data. “Scholars, observers, and journalists consequently come to different conclusions about whether nonprofit advocacy is flourishing, challenged, or in crisis” (p. 300). O’Neill (2002) found that NGOs do play a significant role in the interactions and power exchanges of political and governmental systems at the local, state, and federal levels. “In general advocacy organizations play an important societal role by providing critical feedback on policies and actions of government, business, and other nonprofits. However, the net societal benefit of advocacy organizations and social movements is ultimately a matter of opinion” (O’Neill, 2002, p.142).

NGOs can do unlimited research, education, and dissemination of information about problems they view as being pertinent to them. They can send their information, analyses, and recommended solutions to the general public and to public policy makers. These activities form the core of public policy advocacy for many NGOs (Salamon, 2002).

The fact that there are advocacy organizations on both sides of many issues illustrates the complexity of government, business, and NGOs. Nonprofit advocacy is a subset of the general effort to influence public policy and legislation. Lobbyists and the

institutions they represent are a major part of the American political power system at every level of government. This political power system is dominated by large corporations, large unions, and professional groups. Advocacy organizations are part of this political power system; they interact with and to some extent counterbalance their for-profit colleagues in this system. It is shortsighted to view NGO public policy advocacy as something totally separate from the general phenomenon of lobbying by corporate and other groups (Salamon, 2002).

Although one of the smallest components of the NGO sector in revenue, employment, and number of organizations, “advocacy has profoundly affected American society by changing laws, organizational policies, and public attitudes. Advocacy, like religion, is distinctively a nonprofit function” (O’Neill, 2002, p. 149).

NGOs are neither part of government nor part of the private sector and are consequently referred to in the literature as “the third sector.” The traditional literature on interest groups has always included lobbying organizations as interest groups. “The general rule of thumb among scholars is that if it lobbies, it’s an interest group” (Berry, 2003, p. 7). However, this logic among scholars makes for rather vague definitions of the interest group universe in the literature. According to Berry, “this is the messy reality of American politics; just about every type of organization does, in fact, lobby government. The very structure of government invites lobbying, and the political system is remarkably open to advocacy by interest groups” (p. 27). Moreover, Berry contends, there is every incentive to lobby since government freely negotiates with interest groups, and any one organization’s competitors will likely be pushing policy makers toward its point of view. “For most groups it is dangerous not to lobby” (p. 27).

By any definition of political science, an interest group is an organization that speaks for, acts for, and looks after the interests of constituents when it interacts with government. Clearly, many NGOs see this as an important, if not a primary task, of its mission (Berry, 2003).

“Advocacy is a vital, traditional role of nonprofit organizations” (Salamon, 2002, p. 299). “NGO advocacy organizations have had a major impact on society in spite of severe limitations in financial resources and number of organizations and paid staff” (O’Neill, 2002, p. 135). Individuals have worked together in nonprofit associations throughout U.S. history, voicing their concerns in attempts to shape public policy. “Name a difficult national or international problem since World War II, and the nonprofit sector has played a role in addressing it, whether through its research, innovation, entrepreneurial spirit, or advocacy” (Light, 2004, p. 13).

There are numerous examples of the influence of NGOs on the country’s political, economic, and cultural landscape. Women’s suffrage and child labor laws promoted by nonprofit women’s organizations had a far-reaching affect on political and social reforms. The legal and social structures of racial segregation were torn down by nonprofit civil rights organizations. Environmental protection, family values, tax reform, human rights, and many other causes promoted by NGOs have significantly affected public policy, sometimes in collaboration with each other, among the three sectors – business, government, nonprofit – and sometimes in conflict with them (Salamon, 2002). By any measure, the cumulative effect of NGO public policy advocacy work on American society has been enormous. “Following the major social movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.... the latter half of the twentieth century has not only

continued this tradition but has, in the opinion of some, been a new ‘golden age’ of advocacy” (O’Neill, 2002, p. 141).

The health and continual renewal of American democracy depend on the civic participation of individuals in local, state, and national affairs and on the NGOs that facilitate it. It may be because of this NGO dependency that freedoms of speech and association are constitutionally protected. Conversely, however, it should be pointed out that nonprofit advocacy can cause polarization of attitudes, leading to various conflicts that fracture communities. Such advocacy can be judged as undesirable for society. In addition, some advocacy groups contribute to information overload, especially through issues advocacy at election times (Salamon, 2002).

NGOs are also increasingly involved in advocacy and policy work in an effort to influence the behavior and policies of consumers, corporations, governments, and international organizations. It was not until NGOs gained higher profiles through their efforts to influence the policies of international organizations that a variety of questions began to be asked about NGOs and their advocacy efforts (Hudson, 2002).

Advocacy has a wide range of meanings for NGOs. “Confusion about the meanings of advocacy arise from the fact that its central meaning is often confused with the range of approaches to advocacy, the mixture of activities that can be part of advocacy” (Hudson, 2002, p. 402), and the variety and type of target groups that advocacy can involve. The advocacy activities of NGOs are based upon policy analysis, research, and the channeling of information. “On these bases, they engage in a range of activities from awareness raising, through development education, networking, capacity building, lobbying, and campaigning to, in a few cases, direct action” (p. 407).

Legally, nonprofit organizations can engage in most types of advocacy and civic action without limit. However, some activities are prohibited or subject to restrictions (Salamon, 2002). According to O'Neill (2002), as NGOs continue to grow and expand in influence, it is puzzling that government so lightly regulates such a large part of the U.S. economy. "The IRS devotes relatively little staff time and other resources to this task, and IRS oversight of NGOs may be decreasing, even as the number of NGOs and the amount of NGO assets and revenue continue to grow" (p. 246). Conversely, however, Salamon (2002) does not necessarily agree with O'Neill's findings. The resulting increase in NGO collaborations, Salamon claims, has seemed to be met with unintended consequences. With the increased growth in NGO advocacy and coalition building, he points out that various attempts have been made by the U.S. government to tighten the regulatory environment that shapes NGO advocacy. "In an era of deregulation, it is noteworthy that nonprofit advocacy has been subjected to attempts at increased regulation" (Salamon, 2002, p. 311).

Although legislative advocacy is not prohibited, almost all tax-deductible nonprofits fall under a regulatory standard that restricts them from doing any "substantial" amount of lobbying. "Nonprofit" is a relatively elastic term, as it covers a significantly wide range of organizations in America (Berry, 2003). Under section 501(c) of the IRS code, there are 26 different types of nonprofits, and the only thing they have in common is that they are tax-exempt. They pay no taxes on income related to their exempt purposes. However, only one type of the 501(c) nonprofits can offer donors a tax deduction for their contributions. Section 501(c)(3) designated nonprofits are considered to be public charities, such as religious organizations and educational institutions. It is

these organizations, the 501(c)(3)s, that scholars normally are referring to when nonprofits are discussed. In this study, however, the population and thus the focus of the research is mainly on 501(c)(6) organizations.

IRS Reg. 1.501(c)(6)-1 defines a business league as an association of persons having a common business interest, whose purpose is to promote the common business interest and not to engage in a regular business of a kind ordinarily carried on for profit. Its activities are directed to the improvement of business conditions of one or more lines of business rather than the performance of particular services for individual persons (Reilly, Hull, & Allen, 2003).

Lobbying is a type of advocacy. Although data on nonprofit advocacy is difficult to find, somewhat more accessible is data on nonprofit lobbying (Salamon, 2002). In its broadest sense, lobbying is “an attempt to influence the public policy of an issue-making function of a regulatory, administrative, or legislative body” (Hopkins, 1992). Nearly all nonprofit organizations are permitted to lobby, but for nonprofits that receive tax-deductible contributions – 501(c)(3) public charities – lobbying to influence specific legislation cannot be their main activity, and private foundations may only lobby to protect their own interests (Salamon, 2002).

Approaches to advocacy – whether the NGO engages in quiet lobbying, awareness raising, or direct action – are shaped by understandings of what advocacy is, by the size and resources of the NGO, and by the issue and target group in question (Hudson, 2002, p. 407). According to Pitkin (1972), “people in government represent their constituents and their job is to speak for, act for, and look after the interests of their respective groups. Similarly, nonprofits speak for, act for, and look after the interests of

those they are concerned about” (p. 116). O’Neill (2002) found that most NGOs have their principal effect on the people they directly serve. “Their purpose is to change the policies and practices of government agencies, corporations, and other large organizations, including some nonprofit institutions” (p. 140). NGOs are widely involved in efforts to influence the public policies affecting them and those they serve (John Hopkins University Nonprofit Listening Post Project, 2008).

As NGOs push themselves to confront their own role in shaping the future, they tend to focus on advocacy, example, and legacy (Light, 2004). NGOs often join with other like-minded groups to address advocacy issues. They may form coalitions to shield them from unwanted exposure, leverage scarce resources, and mobilize significant sector constituencies. It is not uncommon for NGOs to structure their coalitions using all three sectors of society – business, government, and other nonprofits. Collaborations, however, require organizing skills and financial resources that not all participants have (Salamon, 2002).

As Vernis et al. (2006) argue, it is imperative that sustainable collaborations require participants in the beginning to overcome management issues in the collaborative process, as well as acknowledge their recognition of incentives for participation. The single organization is no longer the appropriate unit of analysis in a collaborative context where a number of participants are interdependent.

According to Hudson (2002), NGOs are motivated to work together in their advocacy to establish responsibilities, avoid duplication, and share the workload. A second motivation is to take advantage of the strengths or comparative advantages of different NGOs. A third, and perhaps most important reason, is the collective weight that

such collaboration can provide. As well as providing greater weight to an advocacy message, when NGOs work together they often present a common front to public policy decision makers.

In recent years, NGOs are increasingly forming various types of alliances, partnerships, and collaborations both within and across sectors to achieve important public policy purposes. According to Guo and Acar (2005), a growing number of studies are addressing issues involved in forming and maintaining NGO collaboration, such as the works of: Abramson and Rosenthal; Alter and Hage; Austin, Connor, Tara-Kadel, and Vinokur-Kaplan; Milne, Iyer, and Gooding-Williams; O'Regan and Oster; Saidel and Harlan.

According to La Piana (1998):

The nonprofit sector is highly interdependent. Nonprofit organizations join trade associations and coalitions. They form shared purchasing clubs and insurance cooperatives. Professional staff members belong to guilds and advocacy organizations. This associative process builds indefinitely, creating a web of inter-relationships throughout the sector. Virtually all of the organizations with which nonprofits affiliate are themselves nonprofits. No nonprofit organization can long survive and succeed in advancing its mission while living independent of other nonprofits. Nonprofits gain information, political power, and personal and professional support from and in concert with other nonprofits. Thus, close working relationships, partnerships, and even joint ventures between nonprofit organizations are a fairly natural occurrence (p. 5).

“What we call mergers and alliances are really just a part of the innovation that the nonprofit sector must deliver over the next two or three decades” (McLaughlin, 1998, p. xxii). The bulk of that innovation will take place not in programs and services, but in management. Moreover, the thrust of that innovation will be toward greater collaboration between NGOs and all others carrying out similar missions.

NGOs may attempt to educate and inform the public in order to mold opinions and attitudes or change behavior and influence public policy. They may represent interests and values in the political system – for example, by lobbying for or against legislation and by litigating in the courts. Some NGOs are involved in both nonpartisan and partisan efforts to influence elections. According to Salamon (2002), all of these activities can be considered advocacy activities – organized efforts to shape public policy.

NGOs have grown rapidly in the past two decades, hiring staff and professional fundraisers and improving their administrative and advocacy operations in the process. Such changes have been necessary to reflect the growing complexity and global nature of many issues and the extensive expertise and significant resources required to compete with well-financed corporate or government advocates. Professionalization of public policy advocacy can lead to efficiency gains, but may also have a negative impact on NGO membership involvement and thus on the legitimacy of the organization. “Building organizational capacity, mastering new technologies, learning how to make use of coalitions, and finding suitable organizational structures are all manifestations of this challenge” (Salamon, 2002, p. 309).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Of major importance to this study is collaboration, what it is, when, how, and why it is used by NGOs. In addition, the study explores the role of NGOs as advocates in the public policy process. Finally, the study examines how NGOs use collaborative strategies to pursue advocacy goals. Chapter I explains how collaboration and advocacy have long been considered central functions of America's NGOs. Yet, the existing research stops short of explaining why NGOs develop certain forms of collaborations instead of others. Chapter II addresses the previous research and theoretical writings about the research topic. The literature review revealed a gap in the general use of collaborations – few studies addressed the use of collaborations and advocacy by NGOs. An attempt was made to “discuss major theoretical and empirical literatures and use them to place important boundaries around the study” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The purpose of Chapter III is to present an explanation of the methods, materials, and procedures that are used to obtain and analyze the necessary data for the study. The chapter concludes with the section on reliability.

Methodological Rationale

“The research methods of a study are the specific tools for undertaking a systematic exploration of the phenomenon of interest” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 56). In describing the use of theory as a strategy for handling data in research, Glaser and Strauss stated that theory should both fit the circumstances being investigated and work when put to use. “The [theoretical] categories,” they continued, “must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data . . . they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Yinger (1979) shared a similar point, suggesting that a primary data source for building theories should be the day-to-day occurrences and interactions of the real world.

“One of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory; not much has been written about the topic or population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to informants and to build a picture based on their ideas” (Creswell, 1994, p. 21). “In grounded theory, case studies, and phenomenological studies, literature will be less used to set the stage for the study” (Creswell, 1994, p. 21).

Merriam (1988) seemingly agrees with Creswell’s approach. Merriam addresses six assumptions for a qualitative study: 1) the researcher is concerned primarily with process, rather than outcomes or products; 2) the researcher is interested in meaning – how people make sense of what they do, their experiences, and their structures of the world; 3) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (i.e., data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines); 4) the research involves fieldwork (i.e., the researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe or record behavior in

its natural setting); 5) the research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures; and, 6) the process of the research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details.

This qualitative study was designed within the context of inductive reasoning based on grounded theory. The process of generating grounded theory involves the systematic collection of data through field observations, interviews, and document examination. As Wolcott (1992) puts it, “watching, asking, or examining.” The observed facts will be used to generate a theory consistent with those facts. “In some senses, all data are qualitative; they refer to essences of people, objects, and situations” (Berg, 1989, p. 9). Information for this study was gathered about collaborative types and processes used by NGOs as they occur in the practice of advocacy to influence public policy. Relatively little is known about NGO collaborations and the role NGO collaborations play in advocacy. Therefore, an effort has been made to discover the relationships that might exist between the types of collaboration and strategies used in advocacy practices. With NGOs becoming more involved in advocacy and public policy influence, they are increasingly being asked questions about their effectiveness, legitimacy, accountability, and governance. In an effort to contribute to these debates and to inform NGO thinking, this study provides an overview of the advocacy activities of the education NGOs in Virginia’s nonprofit sector.

This study incorporates observations, in-depth interviews and a review of written documents. The following information was requested from each NGO:

1. Corporate history of each NGO
 - a. Articles of Incorporation
 - b. Bylaws
 - c. IRS designation letter
 - d. Mission Statement
 - e. Vision Statement
 - f. Strategy
 - g. Goals
 - h. Minutes (in particular, minutes over the past five (5) years that address the organization's use of collaboration and advocacy)
 - i. Membership recruitment brochures
2. Officer Titles and Job Responsibilities
 - a. Job descriptions of officers
 - b. Job descriptions of key employees (e.g., executive director, director of government relations, and lobbyist)
 - c. NGO experience of officers and employees (e.g., brief bios of officers and key employees)
3. Committee Structure
 - a. Names and responsibilities of board-appointed committees (i.e., those that would be involved with collaborations and advocacy)
 - b. Names and responsibilities of president-appointed committees (i.e., those that would be involved with collaborations and advocacy)

4. Advocacy Initiatives
 - a. A list of advocacy issues believed to be important to the NGO
 - b. A list of strategies used to address specific advocacy issues
 - c. Actions taken to influence issues (e.g., communications with regulatory boards, other state administrative agencies, the governor's office, and legislative assembly)
5. Resolution Statements issued by the NGO (within the past five (5) years regarding collaboration and/or advocacy)
 - a. Policy resolutions for internal governance
 - b. Official board position statements
 - c. Resolutions debated by the NGO membership

Research Design and Procedures

“Traditionally, methodologists have noted four possible purposes for research: to explore, explain, describe, or predict” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 128). Keeping these purposes in mind, the researcher's goal in this qualitative study was to determine the how and the why of collaboration and its use in advocacy as reflected by the perceptions of NGO executive directors and presidents.

Qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). According to Vernis et al. (2006), the greatest asset of nonprofit organizations lies in their people. “They find their key to success in a prepared and committed human team” (p. 127). Human actions are significantly influenced by the setting in which they occur; therefore, one should study

that behavior in those real-life situations. Vision, mission, goals, strategies, and objectives are all vital to the success of NGOs. How these elements interplay among NGO leaders in collaboration and advocacy are crucial aspects of the environment.

According to Maxwell (2005), in qualitative research, any component of the design – assessing the implications of the goals, theories, research questions, methods, and validity threats for one or another – “may need to be reconsidered or modified during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other component” (p. 2). Consequently, field decisions may be made that might result in modifications to the study’s design.

Yin (2003), Marshall and Rossman (2006), and Creswell (2009) are in agreement on eight important sources of evidence for a case study. They are: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, physical artifacts, and audio and visual materials. This study used in-depth interviews, participant-observation, document review and audio and visual materials.

The research design for this study involves detailed discussions with participants in the study, examination of their artifacts and visits to their organizations’ offices, their “natural settings,” to find answers to the research questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). “Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 39).

The qualitative tradition of case study was used in the design of this research because it is an exploration of a case or multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Stake, 1995; Creswell,

1998). This collective study examines 12 cases. According to Patton, qualitative findings emerge from “three kinds of data collection: a) in-depth, open-ended interviews; b) direct observation; and c) written documents” (2002, p. 4). All three kinds of data were obtained for this study.

According to Creswell (2009, p.13), “case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time.” Yin (2003) addressed how a single study may contain more than a single case. When this occurs the study has used a multiple case design, and such designs have increased in frequency in recent years.

“The idea of qualitative research is to purposefully select informants... that will best answer the research question” (Creswell, 1994, p. 148). In this study, NGOs that are identified as education organizations who collaborate through advocacy in the Commonwealth of Virginia were chosen to be the case study. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), “studies focusing on society and culture in a group, a program, or an organization typically espouse some form of case study as a strategy. This entails immersion in the setting and rests on both the researcher’s and the participants’ worldviews” (p. 55). The methodology includes a multiple case design – each organization selected is considered a case, and the series of cases are treated as experiments. The level of analysis on each organization concentrates on the perceptions of the executive director or president or the designated staff or governing board person responsible for advocacy. This approach of interviewing NGO executive directors or

presidents was modeled after Eisenhardt's study on the concept of power centralization in organizations (1989) and the suggestions made by Mason (2002).

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in two sources of evidence. One is a review of the theoretical literature and a systemic analysis of multiple definitions of collaboration across multiple disciplines. The other is field research that investigates the use of collaboration by organizations and how it is used in public policy.

As traditional case study research, applied ethnography – the earliest distinct tradition of qualitative inquiry – is used. “Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). In this study, the unit of analysis is a formal coalition of organizations. When the unit of analysis is an organization, qualitative methods involve observations and descriptions focused directly on that unity; the organization becomes the case study focus in those settings (Patton, 2002). Bernard (1995) seemingly concurs with Patton “in an ethnographic case study, there is exactly one unit of analysis – the community or village or tribe” (p. 35-36). The unit of analysis for this research study is the 12 nonprofit organizations in the Virginia Education Coalition.

Four aspects of participant selection in a case study identified by Miles and Huberman (1994) were used for the study. They are: the setting – where the research will take place, the actors – who will be observed or interviewed, the events – what the actors will be observed or interviewed doing, and the process – the evolving nature of events undertaken by the actors within the setting. For this study the setting was most often the offices of the selected NGOs, the actors were the executive directors or presidents of the NGOs and their individual roles, as well as their organizations' roles in collaboration and

advocacy. The process was how they and their organizations have changed their approach to collaboration and advocacy.

The initial step in this research was to review the written documents of the organizations. According to Patton (2002, p. 294), “documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing.” Documentation may refer to “slice of life” of an organization and is a source of evidence in support of a position or point of view (Patton, 2002).

“Ethnographers begin to construct members’ meanings by looking closely at what members say and do... paying particular attention to the words, phrases, and categories that members use in their everyday interactions” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 112). Following the review of documents, an in-depth personal interview was conducted with each executive director or president of the member organizations of VEC. Information obtained from the interviews was compared and contrasted for similarity and differences.

An interview guide was used for the interviews. The guide facilitated the data gathering, coding, and analysis. The guide listed the questions or issues that were explored in the course of the interview. The advantage of using an interview guide is that it helps ensure that the appropriate questions for the study will be asked in the time available for each interview. In addition to the guide, the researcher used a conversational strategy within the interview guide approach. This combined strategy permits the researcher flexibility in probing and in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth (Patton, 2002). The interview questions are

listed in Appendix B with the Interview Protocol for Participants and includes the probes and follow-up sequences.

In the interview process, the researcher attempted to understand the “holistic worldview” of a group of organizations. The probes and follow-up sequences listed with the interview questions were designed to deepen the responses to the questions, increase the richness and depth of the responses, and simply give cues to the interviewee about the level of response desired. The researcher used the probes and follow-up sequences where necessary. The probes and follow-up sequences are listed for the reader to understand what the researcher was looking for in the interview. They were not used to bias or frame answers. The sequences were used if necessary after carefully listening to what was said and what was not said in the interview, and being sensitive to the feedback needs of the person being interviewed. The sequences provided guidance for the interviewee and a method for the researcher to maintain control of the flow of the interview. Every effort was made by the researcher to ensure that interviewees could respond comfortably, accurately, and honestly to the interview questions. “The purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view” (Patton, 2002, p. 21) through preselected choice categories. The researcher’s task as interviewer was to find out what was on someone else’s mind by making it possible for the interviewee to allow him to enter into his or her perspective (Patton, 2002).

Data Collection Procedures

Respondents for this study were the 12 member organizations of the Virginia Education Coalition (VEC). The VEC was contacted and a presentation about this study was made with a request to obtain the Coalition's endorsement. The VEC chair sent a letter of endorsement for the study to the researcher. A letter was sent by the researcher's dissertation director to each of the NGO executive directors explaining the purposes of the study, the need for interviews and document examination, and encouraging the organizations to participate (see Appendix A).

Following the initial letter and after an appropriate amount of time had passed, the researcher followed-up with phone calls and/or e-mails to the executive director of each VEC member organization to obtain copies of the organization's corporate history and other requested materials for the study. In this same phone call or e-mail, the researcher requested an interview date and time to meet with the executive director or president or the designated staff or board designee responsible for advocacy within the next 30 days. Where possible, attempts were made to schedule two interviews each day for the convenience of the researcher and to keep momentum for the study. On the day of the interview, an attempt was made by the researcher to gather any remaining organization documents to be reviewed for the study.

All interviews were taped and transcribed, and the names of the participants were coded for privacy reasons. The coding of the interview data was done to ensure that the original source of the data was not lost. The researcher initially engaged in holistic coding of the interview data using five themes developed from the literature. The data was eventually analyzed line by line using colored highlighting pens for identifying

patterns and concepts and any emerging themes. Several readings of the data were necessary before the interviews, field observation notes, and documents were completely coded and indexed.

The coding of the data began a creation of a chain of evidence. The researcher developed a case study database to manage and code all the study data. Portions of the interview transcripts or the researcher's perceptions about the interview were only shared with the interviewee if the researcher had questions regarding accuracy.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher engaged reflexivity to ensure the integrity of the study. This was imperative because the researcher is a NGO executive director and registered lobbyist in one of the organizations that is a member of the VEC. As explained by Heidegger (1962), the process of investigation is itself reconstitutive of meaning. "The practical application is that researchers must of necessity approach their work from some viewpoint that is of their being" (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p. 8).

As the primary data collection instrument, the researcher must identify his personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study (Creswell, 1994; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000; Patton, 2002). The perceptions of nonprofit collaborations and advocacy have been shaped by the researcher's personal experiences. For over 30 years the researcher has been an executive director/chief executive officer (ED/CEO) of a nonprofit professional education association in Virginia. In addition, the researcher has been the president of a foundation that was developed to enhance the needs and services of that association. During the researcher's three decades as ED/CEO, he has been a

registered state lobbyist, served as a national chairman of 50 state association executive directors, and served as chairman of the Virginia Education Coalition. VEC members are the population for this study. This understanding of the context and role enhances the researcher's awareness, knowledge and sensitivity to many of the challenges, decisions and issues encountered by NGOs and was an asset in assisting him in working with the informants in this study. The researcher brings knowledge of both the structure of nonprofit associations and the role of ED/CEO in initiating collaborations and advocacy.

Due to previous experiences working closely with NGOs, the researcher also brings certain biases to this study. Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity, these biases may have shaped the researcher's view and understanding of the data collected and the way he interpreted his experiences.

Population Used in the Study for Analysis

The study involved all Virginia statewide education associations that primarily represent public school teachers, school counselors, supervisors, principals, superintendents, school boards, and teacher-educator professors. The population was nonprofit member organizations of the VEC. The VEC is an advocacy coalition founded in 1999 by kindergarten through 12th grade nonprofit advocacy education associations based throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. Original founding organizations of the VEC are: the Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the Virginia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals, the Virginia Association of School Superintendents, the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals, the Virginia Congress of Parents

and Teachers, the Virginia Counselors Association, the Virginia Education Association, the Virginia Middle School Association, the Virginia Professors of Educational Leadership, the Virginia School Boards Association, and the Virginia School Counselor Association. The mission of the VEC is to advocate for a) programs that help children achieve their highest potential, b) comprehensive plans to attract and retain quality teachers, counselors, administrators, professional and support staff, c) an accountability system that is fair and comprehensive, d) funding to provide students with an equitable and quality program of instruction, e) levels of public education governance that adhere to their respective roles and responsibilities, f) adequate funding to meet technological and infrastructural needs of school divisions, and g) programs that assist families and communities to participate more fully in public education.

Methods for Development of Questionnaire and Collection of Data

In the review of the literature, data instruments used in Illinois and Indiana for nonprofit research were discovered. One particular data instrument that was examined was the Indiana Nonprofits: Impact of Community and Policy Changes Survey (Gronbjerg & Childs, 2004). The survey instrument was used on a variety of nonprofit organizations to help determine how they are impacted by community and policy changes and the extent to which they engage in advocacy activities. Another survey instrument discovered in the literature review was used by the Institute for Policy Studies at Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society Studies (Salamon, 2008). The data instrument was designed to help fill the gap in knowledge regarding the factors that affect the willingness of nonprofit organizations to engage in lobbying and advocacy, or what

forms their involvement takes. Questions for this research were adopted from these two studies. In preparing the questions for the interview, the researcher was careful about the clarity of the questions – to “find out what special terms are commonly used by people in the setting” (Patton, 2002, p. 361). In addition, questions were arranged with the intention of taking each participant through the same sequences with the same questions using the same words (Patton, 2002). An interview protocol was developed so the “same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The generated questions were nondirectional and did not imply cause and effect or suggest measurement (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher strived to achieve a balance between the standardization of the questions and the use of “flexibility that is a hallmark of qualitative methods” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 134). All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Yin recommends the following principles of data collection: (a) use multiple sources of evidence, (b) create a case study database, and (c) maintain a chain of evidence (2003). The primary strategy to collect data in this study was the interviews. A secondary source of data collection was the written documents.

The researcher conducted standard open-ended interviews with the 12 participants in the study. An interview protocol (see Appendix B) was used and the researcher was willing to accept respondents’ suggestions of other persons to interview, as well as other sources of evidence.

As a preparation for data collection – developing the interview questions and the types of documents to review – the researcher conducted a pilot study to help buttress the argument and rationale for the study approach. According to Sampson (2004), pilots can

be used to refine research instruments such as questionnaires and interview schedules – having greater use in ethnographic approaches to data collection.

The inquiry for the pilot case was much broader and less focused than the ultimate data collection plan. The pilot sites provided the researcher with information about relevant field questions and about the logistics of the field inquiry (Yin, 2003). Selection criteria of the pilot cases were in general, convenience, access, and geographic proximity to the researcher. “This will allow for less structured and more prolonged relationship to develop between the interviewees and the case study investigator than might occur in the ‘real’ case study sites” (Yin, 2003, p. 79). The study involved four pilot cases selected from NGO members in the Virginia Society of Association Executives.

Informed Consent and Permission Procedures

Federal regulations require universities to have established policies to police research and to ensure human subjects are not being hurt. Researchers are required to demonstrate that their study participants will not be harmed. The researcher followed the guidelines of the Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board (VCU-IRB) for this study. According to the VCU-IRB policies and procedures, the research qualified for exemption according to Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46.101(b).

As a result of the pilot study, minor modifications were made to the research questionnaire. The interview guideline questions were not changed. Changes were only made to the probes and follow-ups. The research protocol was resubmitted to VCU-IRB, and it was again approved through the Expedited Review Process.

“Gaining the informed consent of participants is crucial for the ethical conduct of research.... This means that the participants are not deceived about the study and that their participation is voluntary” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, pp. 74-75). In the initial letter of contact with the NGO executive directors, they were informed that their participation in the interview would remain completely confidential. The researcher reiterated this in his initial phone call or e-mail to them. On the day of the interview the researcher reviewed with the interviewee the informed consent form approved by the Virginia Commonwealth University Internal Review Board. The interviewee was asked if she or he had any questions and to sign and date the form. A copy of the form was left with the interviewee. At the conclusion of the study, letters were sent to each interviewee thanking them for their participation.

Data Analysis

The questions guiding the study that were presented in Chapter I to direct the data analysis procedures are reiterated below:

1. What is a collaboration, and when, how, and why is it used by non-government organizations to pursue advocacy goals?
2. What advocacy roles do nongovernment organizations play in public policy?
3. What collaborative strategies are used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

The questions focus on perceptions of the executive directors or presidents or designated staff or board member responsible for advocacy for each NGO. The subset of questions used in the interview were designed to refine the general questions listed above

that are guiding the study. For the purposes of this study, the following questions were used in the interview protocol for the personal interviews (see Appendix B for the complete interview guide):

1. What year was your NGO founded?
2. Is your annual operating budget more or less than \$100,000?
3. Is your NGO affiliated with any other organization?
4. Who is your primary constituency/membership base? How many members does your NGO represent?
5. How would your organization define collaboration?
6. Is collaboration important to your organization? Why or why not?
7. Who in your NGO sets the tone for the type and extent of collaboration that your organization engages in?
8. What resources does your NGO turn to for ideas and best practices on the use of collaboration?
9. Is your organization currently involved in collaborations other than the Virginia Education Coalition? If so, are these collaborations formal or informal networks, or are you working together with organizations in other ways?
10. Does your organization currently compete with other nonprofits, for-profits or government agencies?
11. To what extent do issues of trust and competition play a role in influencing collaboration in your NGO?

12. What is your NGO's primary motivation for becoming involved in collaboration?
13. How does your NGO benefit from collaborating with other organizations?
Were the benefits from the collaboration what your NGO anticipated prior to the collaboration?
14. What are your NGO's challenges of collaborating with other organizations?
15. Were the costs of collaboration what you anticipated prior to the collaboration?
16. Does involvement in collaborations or networks in general make it easier or harder to maintain key organizational capacities?
17. During the past five years, how has your organization attempted to influence national, state, or local legislation, other than membership in VEC, including any attempt to influence public opinion on a legislative matter?
18. Does your organization have a specific budget amount it allocates each year toward influencing public policy? If so, would you consider this budget amount adequate to do the job successfully? Are the funds devoted to lobbying specifically or to advocacy activities in general?
19. What is the principal target of your organization's policy activity – local, state, or federal? Do you think this is the most effective target for your organization?
20. How does your NGO use collaboration to pursue its advocacy goals?
21. If your NGO did not engage in lobbying or advocacy in the past year, what are the reasons?

22. Are there times when your NGO would be better off working independently when attempting to influence public policy? If so, can you provide an example?
23. What lessons has your NGO learned from its past (or present) collaboration(s) that will be helpful to your organization moving forward?

Validity and Reliability

“Validity does not carry the same connotations in qualitative research as it does in quantitative research, nor is it a companion of reliability (examining stability or consistency of responses) or generalizability (the external validity of applying results to new settings, people, or samples)” (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). In addressing qualitative validity the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Gibbs, 2007).

In order to determine if a researcher’s approaches are consistent or reliable, Yin (2003) and Creswell (2009) suggest that qualitative researchers should not only document the procedures of their case studies, but should also document as many of the steps of the procedures as possible. They also recommend setting up a detailed case study protocol and database.

“Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research, and it is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account. (...) Terms abound in the qualitative literature

that speak to this idea, such as trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility” (Creswell & Miller, as cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 191).

Internal Validity

For the purposes of this study, internal validity was achieved through the researcher triangulating different data sources of information and using the data to build coherent justification for the findings. According to Creswell (2009, p. 191) “if themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding validity to the study.”

According to Padgett (1998), there are six strategies for enhancing the rigor of the research: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing and support, member checking, negative case analysis and auditing. In this study, the researcher employed no less than five of those strategies. In addition, the researcher also clarified the bias that he brings to the study. According to Creswell (2009, p. 192) “good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background.”

Finally, the researcher followed the advice of Miles and Huberman (1994) – in the belief that the first and basic audience for good documentation is the self – by using such devices as a “methodological diary, ‘reflexivity journal,’ recording changes in design and associated thoughts, ‘data analysis chronologies,’ or running diary to strengthen the study as it goes” (p. 282).

External Validity

According to Graveter and Forzano (2006), “In considering external validity researchers are usually concerned about generalizing in one or more of three different ways. These are (1) generalizing from a sample to a larger population, (2) generalizing from one research situation or study to another, and (3) generalizing from a research study to a real-world situation” (p. 12).

External validity – also referred to as generalizability – addresses the problem of knowing whether a study’s findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study (Yin, 2003, p. 37). “External validity has been a major barrier in doing case studies, because single cases offer a poor basis for generalizing.” However, for this study a multi-case study design was used relying on analytical generalization. The researcher in this study attempted to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory. According to Yin, the analytic benefits from having two or more cases are substantial because of the possibility of direct replication (Yin, 2003). The researcher for this collective study used replication logic by carefully selecting executive directors or presidents from organizations who participated in the study. Using Yin’s explanation, if under varied circumstances the researcher can find common conclusions from all cases in the study, then he has expanded the external generalizability of the findings compared to those of a single case alone (2003).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), by referring to the carefully designed, original theoretical framework to show how data collection and analysis will be guided by concepts and models, the researcher for this study can counter the challenges to the study’s transferability or generalizability to other settings. This information allows

others to make policy or design research studies within those same – or sufficiently similar – parameters and determine whether the cases can be transferable. Consequently, “the reader or user of specific research can see how research ties into a body of theory” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.202).

Reliability

In establishing reliability for a study, Yin (2003, p. 37) states that “The objective is to be sure that if a later investigator followed the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator and conducted the same case study all over again, the later investigator should arrive at the same findings and conclusions.” In discussing the traditional properties of rigor – objectivity, internal and external validity, and reliability – Lincoln and Guba (1985) reconceptualized the terms as confirmability, credibility, transferability, and dependability. From this they coined the term the “truth value” of research (p. 7). In establishing the true value of research or truthfulness of a study, the researcher needs to ensure that minimal errors are made and bias is limited as much as possible. To help strengthen reliability in this study, the researcher’s dissertation committee members examined the study design and the methods used to carry out the research. An audit trail was maintained by the researcher. This will help to ensure that the proceedings and developments in the research process can be chronicled, thus establishing a chain of evidence (Yin, 2003). This chain of evidence can be useful in examining the data produced by the research in terms of transcript accuracy and levels of saturation in document collection (Flick, 2002; McNabb, 2008; Yin, 2003).

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings of this study were generated through a) in-depth, open-ended interviews; b) direct observation; and c) written documents. The importance of acceptable standards of scientific inquiry were paramount in this study. Consequently, the need for rigorous data collection and analytic methods were carefully addressed through checks and balances. According to Padgett (1998), there are six strategies for enhancing the rigor of the research: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing and support, member checking, negative case analysis and auditing. In this study, the researcher employed no less than five of those strategies. The member checking strategy was not deployed as consistently as the other strategies used in this study, because of the researcher's prolonged engagement (30 plus years) with the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and their leaders. The researcher had a strong rapport with the study participants and was comfortable that he was able to obtain honest and open responses in the collection of data. During interviews the researcher often restated and summarized information to determine participant accuracy. However, the researcher did conduct follow-ups with study participants when it was necessary to determine accuracy of information. Emphasis was placed on triangulation, employing various methods and examining a mixture of sources for data.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with key informants – presidents or executive directors – of 12 NGOs. Twenty-three questions and related probes and follow-ups developed around five themes derived from the literature were used to guide the interviews and to gain insight into three research questions: a) What is a collaboration, and when, how, and why is it used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals? b) What advocacy role do nongovernment organizations play in public policy? c) What collaborative strategies are used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

Description of the Population

The population for this study is all of the NGOs that belong to the Virginia Education Coalition (VEC). The VEC is composed of 12 statewide Virginia associations representing public school teachers, counselors, supervisors, principals, superintendents, school boards, and teacher-educator professors, and parents of school aged children. The VEC is an advocacy coalition founded in 1999 by kindergarten through 12th grade nonprofit advocacy education associations based throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. For many years education associations met informally from time to time, mainly during sessions of the Virginia General Assembly. Typically attending these meetings were organizations representing teachers, principals, superintendents, local school boards, and parents of school-aged children. In 2000 a formal regular meeting structure was attempted so these education associations could share their knowledge about various public policy issues affecting public school education. They named their group the Virginia Education Coalition and within a few months drafted a governing

document that was titled “Rules of Operation.” An important component of the rules of operation was a provision that all decisions of the VEC would be based on consensus. Member organizations of the Coalition have a strong common frame – their purpose is to improve the teaching and learning of students. The mission of the VEC is to advocate for a) programs that help children achieve their highest potential, b) comprehensive plans to attract and retain quality teachers, counselors, administrators, professional and support staff, c) an accountability system that is fair and comprehensive, d) funding to provide students with an equitable and quality program of instruction, e) levels of public education governance that adhere to their respective roles and responsibilities, f) adequate funding to meet technological and infrastructural needs of school divisions, and g) programs that assist families and communities to participate more fully in public education.

Each member organization of the VEC was treated as a case study. All respondents answered all the questions presented. More informative about the process, however, are the responses the study participants gave as a result of the probes and follow-ups.

Findings of this study are reported with details that support and explain each finding. “Thick description” (Denzin, 2001) was used to assist the researcher to document a broad range of experiences, and thereby provide an opportunity for the reader to glean from this study a better understanding of the reality of the research participants. Illustrative quotations are used from the interview transcripts to depict multiple participant perspectives where possible and to capture some of the richness and complexity of the subject matter.

A Description of the NGOs

The following is a brief descriptive profile of each of the NGOs discussed for this study. The protocol required the executive director, president or the designated staff or governing board person responsible for advocacy from these organizations to participate in the study or to lead the researcher to someone else they felt was best suited to answer the interview questions for their organization. Each participant signed a consent form allowing the researcher to use the answers given by the participants, provided their personal names were not disclosed. An interview guide approach, complete with probes and follow-up questions, was used with each organization's representative. Five of the interviews occurred in the organization's respective offices, two occurred in the personal offices of the organizations' current or former presidents, and five occurred in other locations of the participants' choosing. Six of the study participants – either executive directors or presidents – were once members of the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP). Two of these individuals served on the VASSP board of directors. The VASSP executive director is the research instrument for this study.

The researcher substantiated from written documents that all organizations have structured bylaws, written policies, but only eight (66%) are incorporated in Virginia. Incorporation protects a NGO's officers, directors and members from personal liability for corporate obligations and any liability if corporate officers, directors or staff violate the law in working on behalf of the organization. Incorporation is psychologically desirable because individuals, firms and NGOs are accustomed to dealing with corporations. They regard incorporated NGOs as more formally structured, more stable and more businesslike than unincorporated ones (Herman, 1994). Three (25%)

organizations in the population are not incorporated and one (8%) organization is classified as an instrumentality of Virginia political subdivisions authorized by state law. For purposes of this study, however, that particular organization was considered a NGO.

The participating organizations are briefly presented in alphabetical order below:

The Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (VASCD) was founded in 1948 and is not incorporated. The NGO has no permanent housing and official records (e.g., bylaws, corporate documents, minutes) of the association reside with the part-time executive director. Its primary individual membership constituency base is teachers, principals, assistant principals, supervisors, superintendents, assistant superintendents and other school system central office personnel. The national affiliate is the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

The Virginia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (VACTE) was founded in 1968 and is not incorporated. The association has no permanent housing and its official records reside with the current president or another officer from year to year. The NGO does not employ an executive director. Its primary institutional membership constituency base is the colleges or schools of education from Virginia's public and private colleges and universities. The national affiliate is the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE).

The Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals (VAESP) was believed to be founded in 1909 and is housed with a full-time executive director at a building it owns in Richmond, Virginia. It is incorporated. The association's individual primary

constituency base is elementary school principals and assistant principals. The national affiliate is the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).

The Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) traces its founding to 1885 and is permanently housed in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. The incorporated association has a part-time executive director and reports that it has 100% of Virginia school division superintendents as individual members. The national affiliate is the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

The Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP) is incorporated, was founded in 1906, and is housed in a building it owns in Richmond, Virginia. Its primary individual membership constituency base is middle level and high school principals and assistant principals. It employs a full-time executive director. The national affiliate is the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

The Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers (VAPTA) was founded in 1921. The incorporated association has a full-time executive director and is housed in a building it owns in Richmond, Virginia. Its primary membership constituency base is parents of school-aged children and teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools affiliated in member chapters throughout Virginia. The national affiliate is the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NPTA).

The Virginia Counselors Association (VCA) was founded in 1965. It has no permanent office location and current records of the association are housed with the part-time executive director who is shared with the Virginia School Counselors Association. It is incorporated. VCA's primary membership constituency base is individuals who hold a master's degree or higher in counseling or a closely related field from a college or

university accredited by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, and who actively engage in (or are interested in) counseling. The national affiliate is the National Counselors Association (NCA).

The Virginia Education Association (VEA) was founded in 1863 and is housed in a building it owns in Richmond, Virginia. The incorporated association has a full-time executive director and a full-time elected president. Its primary individual membership constituency base is school teachers in grades pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. The national affiliate is the National Education Association (NEA).

The Virginia Middle School Association (VMSA) has a founding date of 1985, as determined by the researcher after calling the organizations' national affiliate. Their records on file indicated that the VMSA was established as a result of the merger of the Virginia Middle School Forum and the Virginia Association of Middle School Administrators. The interviewee was unable to provide founding dates for either of the two merged organizations, nor were these dates found in the organization's documents. VMSA has no permanent housing and current records of the association reside with a part-time executive director. Its primary institutional membership constituency base is middle schools. The association is incorporated. The national affiliate is the National Middle School Association (NMSA).

The Virginia Professors of Educational Leadership (VPEL) was founded in 1995. It is not incorporated, has no permanent office location, and current records of the association are housed with the organization's elected president. The NGO does not employ an executive director. Its primary individual membership constituency base is professors of educational leadership in each of the 16 Virginia institutions of higher

education that have Virginia Department of Education-approved programs to prepare public school administrators and supervisors at master's, educational specialist and doctorate levels. The national affiliate is the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA).

The Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) was founded in 1906 and is classified as an instrumentality of Virginia political subdivisions authorized by state law. It has a full-time executive director and is housed in a building it owns in Charlottesville, Virginia. The association reports that it has 100% of Virginia's local school boards as institutional members. The national affiliate is the National School Boards Association (NSBA).

The Virginia School Counselor Association (VSCA) was founded in 1962. It is incorporated, has no permanent housing, and current records of the association reside with the part-time executive director who is shared with the Virginia Counselors Association. VSCA is a division of VCA. Its primary individual membership constituency base is school counselors and counselor educators. The national affiliate is the American School Counselor Association (ASCA).

A Descriptive Summary of the Interview Questions

The participants of this study were cooperative and devoted the appropriate time for the interview. Each of the 23 questions and related probes and follow-ups were answered by all study participants, with the single exception of the individual who could not determine her organization's founding date. The questions focused on five general themes derived from the literature review and pilot study (Appendix B). The pilot study

was used to review the themes, test the researcher's data collection methods and explore their implications for the study.

The following discussion presents a descriptive summary of all responses given for each of the interview questions and the related probes and follow-ups. Direct quotes given by the participants are used to exemplify and signify the typical descriptions of the findings. Pseudonyms were assigned to each association to protect the privacy of the study participants. Each quote selected is followed by the pseudonym assigned to the interviewee to whom the quote is attributed and designated as such with a dash and the page number of that interviewee's transcript.

Theme #1: Characteristics of NGOs Involved in Collaboration

Question 1.1: What year was your NGO founded?

The average age of the 12 member organizations of the Virginia Education Coalition (VEC) was 73 years. The oldest organization was founded in 1863, the newest organization was founded in 1995. The VEC contains a wide and diverse network of well organized NGOs, of which eight (66%) are registered corporate entities in Virginia.

Question 1.2: Is your annual operating budget more or less than \$100,000?

Of the 12 member organizations, four (33%) reported operating budgets of less than \$100,000, including two organizations who did not have established budgets. The organizations without budgets were the two newest NGOs in Virginia. One organization had their members' meeting and conference expenses generally covered by the institutions where they were employed and saw no need for an organization budget. The

other NGO has been struggling financially in recent years and was not operating with a board-approved budget, but rather on a “pay as you go” plan. Board members covered their own travel expenses, but the executive director was paid a salary and reimbursed for personal expenses.

NGO annual budgets ranged from \$30,000 to \$12.4 million. Six (50%) organizations that had an average established age of 102 years were generally housed in office buildings that they owned. NGOs with no permanent offices (50%) had an average age of 39 years and operated out of their part-time executive directors’ homes or the homes of the current, presiding, elected president.

Question 1.3: Is your NGO affiliated with any other organization?

Without exception, all 12 study participants reported their NGOs had a formal relationship with a national affiliate organization. However, when study participants were probed on their affiliated relationship, it was found that not all of these formal relationships required strict adherence to regulations and/or policies of the national affiliate. In fact, over half (58%) of the NGOs indicated their affiliations were “loose,” with just a memorandum of understanding. The more formal affiliate agreements were found in state organizations that collected the membership dues of the national affiliate.

In the probes and follow-up questions it was found that three (25%) organizations had subsidiary affiliated organizations. These affiliate organizations ranged from an elaborate formal framework of having specific bylaws, policies, officers, budgets and staff, to a much less formal network where local affiliates might or might not have bylaws, policies, officers, budgets and staff.

In the researcher's view, one NGO notably had the most organized affiliated network in the researcher's view. Their affiliate organizations were well established, with a written structure that addressed their office operations, employment practices, responsibilities, budgets, and program evaluations. Four other organizations stated that they had formal, subsidiary affiliates in the state, now or in the past, but upon examination of written documents the researcher found no substantive evidence of other organizations with current affiliations. The following quotes are reflective of the responses:

We are affiliated with our national association and in some ways it's fairly loose in that regard. They are not themselves an oversight organization. It's mainly a professional support organization at the national level. They have a great journal, newsletters, advocacy initiatives, several conferences and so on. So they provide that kind of professional service and advocacy, but not direct oversight. (NGO#1 - 2,3)

Yes we are affiliated with our national group. There is no agreement or contract or anything like that. (NGO#7 - 1)

Our policies and bylaws reflect the national's, and there is a letter of agreement signed by both organizations. (NGO#6 - 1)

Our affiliation agreement is in writing and is subject to renewal every five years, or earlier if either the national or state associations wish to do so. We have a unified dues agreement that requires membership in both the state and national associations. There are no restrictions regarding policy, regulations, or bylaws... other than how national dues are collected and paid to them. (NGO#4 - 2)

They ask that our bylaws be consistent with their bylaws in structure, [but] the commitment is mostly about us providing representation to their leadership council and that's for a period of three years... [the representatives] are committed to attending [national] leadership council meetings... Things like that.

(NGO#10 - 2)

Question 1.4: Who is your primary constituency/ membership base?

Nine (75%) study participants reported to have individuals as their NGOs' primary membership base and three (25%) organizations reported to be institutional membership associations. Of the nine organizations with individual members, membership estimates ranged from less than 20 to over 60,000. The institutional membership organizations had estimated member ranges from 40 to 134. Among the VEC member organizations, the following core education professionals were represented: teachers, principals or assistant principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels; division superintendents; curriculum and instruction supervisors; counselors; school board personnel; and teacher-educator professors. In addition, the state's largest organization of parent supporters with affiliated organizations based in schools throughout the state is included.

Some NGOs attract members that are eligible for membership in other organizations in the Coalition. For example, VASCD attracts teachers, principals, assistant principals, school counselors, and superintendents. Consequently, this one organization alone reports a diverse membership potentially drawing from 10 other member organizations in the Coalition. This multiple type membership eligibility is not

applicable to any other NGO in the study. VEA's primary membership is based on elementary, middle level and high school teachers. However, they do accept memberships from principals and assistant principals from all school levels. They also target school support staff as members. VASS, on the other hand, is strictly a superintendents' association. They have a finite number of 132 members – the exact number of school division superintendents in Virginia.

Theme #2: NGO Understanding of Collaboration

Question 2.1: How would your organization define collaboration?

Participants generally defined collaboration as working together around common purposes and sharing resources, talents and skills. It is a process involving shared norms, interacting through formal and informal negotiation, and jointly establishing governing parameters for making decisions. Also, it is a process where questions can be clarified, arguments fine tuned and strategies determined. The following quotes provide an illumination of the meanings defined by the participants:

When you can mutually benefit from combining resources. For [our organization], collaboration is having a common goal and using our organization's resources to benefit each other. (NGO#5 - 6)

We collaborate with other educational associations, as well as state agencies and legislative committees and commissions in efforts that advance the progress and mission of K-12 public education...Not just secondary education. Such groups collaborate and work together to educate colleagues, public employees and legislators alike in order to maintain a public system of quality education that has

as its goal learning success for the students of the Commonwealth. Joining forces with other education organizations is necessary in order to secure funding.

Collaboration requires a sharing of experience and expertise in order to achieve success. (NGO#4 - 2)

Our definition of collaboration is where two or more entities, whether it's individuals or groups, are working towards the mission of advancing excellence in teaching, learning and leadership. (NGO#10 - 2)

Whenever we work with a group with a similar mission or focus to affect a change in some form, be it legislation or policy or a way of thinking. If we're working with a group to help educate parents, teachers, administrators, legislators or whomever on something, we're collaborating. (NGO#3 - 6)

What we have done with the Virginia Education Coalition probably demonstrates the best example of collaboration. We also have another collaborative group of political organizations we work with on issues that we hold in common. So, we meet periodically, we share information, we strategize as to how we might be able to work together for the common good – all in some type of agreed upon framework. (NGO#11 - 2)

Question 2.2: Is collaboration important to your organization? Why or why not?

When participants described their answers to this question, they generally showed passion in the delivery of their answers. They were enthusiastic and positive in reporting that their organizations felt collaboration was very important. They stressed the

importance of the current economic condition in the state and the pressure for their NGOs to do more with each other, especially in the area of advocacy. The majority said that if it were not for their collaborative activities with other NGOs, they could not do all that they need to do. When probed for additional thoughts on the significance of collaboration, the respondents reported that collaboration was a major tool in accomplishing the missions of their respective NGOs. Three (25%) organizations have individuals on their boards of directors who are specifically responsible for collaborations. In one of the organizations, a person with responsibility for collaboration is appointed by the association's president. In the other two organizations, the person is chair of a committee responsible for association collaborations. Another organization includes the importance of the role of collaboration in their bylaws. This collaborative emphasis was added by that NGO within the past three years. Overall, these positions are relatively new to the organizations and did not exist just 10 years ago. The quotes below reflect examples of the responses received:

Collaboration is the most important part of our organization. I think that is why people choose to join or not. It's for the idea of sharing talents, information, skills, strategies, and so on... resources. So yes, it probably is the primary reason ... the collaboration. It is what we need to do and should be doing. (NGO#1 – 3,4)

You have a better chance with a larger group saying the same thing to get things accomplished in a big way, rather than individually acting on one's own behalf. It is just that simple. (NGO#7 - 5)

I do not think we would be as successful as we are without respecting and seeking the counsel and assistance of other educational organizations. The Department of Education, for example, is a major collaborator with us and assists the Association in its continuing efforts to seek the highest training and continuing education for its members. (NGO#4 -2,3)

It may sound trite, but I think everybody would agree that it takes a village concept and collaboration is pretty powerful in terms of advocating for public education and influencing public policy. (NGO#10 - 2)

Vital! We couldn't exist without collaboration. I think we would die... completely. Because one group cannot have all the answers. One person, especially when you're dealing with our organization because we are all volunteer base. We aren't professionally drawn into our organization, we're drawn into our organization out of a more (I hate to say) altruistic reason than professional reason. (NGO#3 - 6)

Absolutely! Absolutely. Yes. It involves everything we do. (NGO#11 - 2)

I don't think any nonprofit organization is strong enough that it can exist on its own... not in this day and age. (NGO#12 - 3)

Collaboration was considered by all the NGOs to be a major tool for accomplishing the organizations' established missions. They viewed NGO collaboration as being as important in public advocacy as in the teaching and learning process. Many of the study participants said they were comfortable with collaboration, and some felt being a collaborator was a hallmark of educators. They realize that schools cannot do the hard work of educating children on their own and consider themselves to always have

been collaborating with each other – teacher to teacher, teacher to principal, principal to principal, principal to superintendent and so on – and the businesses and community organizations all working together with schools to improve student learning.

Question 2.3: Who in your NGO sets the tone for the type and extent of collaboration that your organization engages in?

The answers to this question were generally focused on the executive director and president as the individuals setting the tone for collaborations in NGOs. The probe to this question offered seven possible answers that included: a committee, board, executive director, president, director of government relations, lobbyist, and other.

The older NGOs typically answered that their executive director or president set the tone for the type and extent of collaboration. They were sure to say that although these individuals set the tone, it was either the executive committee and/or board of directors who eventually approved any collaborations. The NGO's executive director or president served basically as the initial filter for any discussion the executive committee or board of directors might have on establishing a collaboration. Three (25%) study participants reported that their professional lobbyist had a say in any collaboration. They relied on their lobbyists for their counsel to the president and executive director when collaborative decisions were being discussed. It was clear from the interviews that the president and executive director of the organizations filtered any initial offer from other organizations to engage in a collaboration. Often the decision whether to move forward in a collaboration was determined, at least initially, by the organization's president or

executive director. The following quotes are reflective of the descriptions often provided:

I'd say currently, at least it's been my experience, that it's been the president in conjunction with the various departments that are in charge. For example, as far as our collaboration and the other political collaborations that we do, that's pretty much through [the director of government relations]. (NGO#11 - 3)

We have an elected executive board that meets regularly and they would lay the groundwork as far as strategic planning for the upcoming year and distribute tasks and so on around the different initiatives that we're going to undertake. So, an executive board does most of that. (NGO#1 - 4)

It starts with the executive director, obviously. ... But then it is the consent and agreement from the board. (NGO#7 - 6)

I would say that the executive director sets the tone based on input and ultimate direction from the board, as well as input from the director of government relations. (NGO#4 - 3)

Probably the executive director in collaboration with the board president. And then the two of us in collaboration with committee chairs, that sort of structure, then we would involve other board members as well. So, I mean, it's not a hierarchy, so much, it's just the way things get done. (NGO#10 - 4)

I think it's the executive committee led by the president. Usually it's the president people make the connections with. The initial connections, and the president is kind of a, has a filter so that if you can't get it, sell it to the president,

you may not ever get it past the executive committee. ... So, I really think it's the president that acts as the filter first. (NGO#3 - 8)

Question 2.4: What resources does your NGO turn to for ideas and best practices on the use of collaboration?

Without exception, all respondents reported that they relied heavily on the expertise of their national affiliates for ideas, best practices, and general guidance on the use of collaboration. Most noted their national affiliates' involvement in a wide variety of collaborations, including public policy advocacy.

When probed further, two study participants said they looked not only to their national affiliate, but also to other state organizations for their collaborative practices. One study participant reported spending considerable time surfing the Internet looking at other Virginia associations, other state organizations around the country and national associations for ideas and best practices on collaboration.

With further probing, none of the study participants specifically referenced books, articles, or other publications for ideas and best practices on collaboration.

Some study participants reported that they turned to colleagues for their expertise in the areas of collaboration. Typically the references were made to colleagues in NGOs that have held consistent leadership for several years. The following responses provide an illustration of what the interviewees reported:

I think we just groped our way into it based on needing to react to whatever the circumstances were. (NGO#11 - 4)

Constant reading, surfing the Internet. Each month I check out each Web site of the 49 state associations for ideas. Our execs meet three times a year and we share successes and failures and we steal good ideas from each other. (NGO#12 - 6)

I do a lot of research on the Web... from other associations. We look at what [our national office] does. We look at what the associations in Virginia do...The restraint of time and issues that needed immediate attention and resources have a big impact on collaboration. (NGO#6 - 3)

First and foremost [our national affiliate]. I think, you know, in a lot of cases it's the expertise of our own board members that are our best resources for collaboration. (NGO#10 - 5)

I would probably say [our national affiliate]...would certainly be a source for that. However, we do a whole lot better job at it than they do, because of our advocacy experience at the state level. (NGO#7 - 8)

Theme #3: NGO Collaborative Relationship with other Organizations

Question 3.1: Is your organization currently involved in collaborations other than the Virginia Education Coalition? If so, are these collaborations formal or informal networks, or are you working together with organizations in other ways?

The answer to this query resulted in considerably different responses ranging from “none” to “many.” The collaborations were largely described as being informal or simple networks. The organization with the most elaborate collaborations had formal

agreements ranging from its vast internal, affiliated network to agreements, both informal and formal, with corporate and NGO entities. Another NGO appeared to be the most strategic in their working relationships with county and municipal government organizations. In addition, two NGOs have strong collaborative influences on education spending priorities with tax governing authorities. These two NGOs are among the three oldest NGOs in the state and have as their members the chief education policy makers and chief education administrators at the local government levels.

When study participants were probed on formal and information collaborations, they reported that a majority of their collaborations were informal – that is no written agreement. According to the study participants, they considered their collaboration with the VEC to be their “most formal” agreement, although the Coalition does not require any type of written agreement. The study participants felt a professional allegiance to the VEC and what the Coalition was attempting to do.

In continuing to probe this question, participants in the study reported that organizations they felt most important to their organization were – in order – nonprofit advocacy organizations, business or other nonprofit organizations, and government agencies.

In further probes, the researcher discovered that a majority of the study participants (66%) considered long-term collaborative relations (more than five years) – resembling a type of partnership – to be the most important type of collaboration to their NGO. They considered this type of collaboration for the organization to pursue numerous advocacy goals. Two (17%) participants considered short-term collaborative relationships to be their NGO’s most important. Two (17%) reported “one time deals”

used to focus on one particular advocacy goal to be their most important collaborative relationships.

Finally, after additional probing, study participants reported their collaborations typically lasted greater than five years. The following quotes describe the responses regarding other collaborations:

Where the VEC is a long-term, I think the VEC is our only like long-term broad spectrum covers so much of what we do collaboration, we do these little individual collaborations when we have an issue... We collaborate with other groups to partner with them to help educate, affect legislation, whatever it is we are trying to do with that issue. (NGO#3 - 13)

I would want to say “no”...no other than the VEC. We do get many inquiries from others who would like us to collaborate, but if there is not a compelling service to our members or to our mission, then we do not participate. (NGO#5 - 10)

I do not know that we would have anything that would be characterized as “formal.” If you do not consider VEC to be formal, I think that’s about as formal as it gets. [We have a lot of informal networks] and that gives us a lot of flexibility too because we do not have to go to each...you know, if we were in a formal relationship with a group, we would be caught in the position of having to check back with that group before creating a new relationship. And we need to be more flexible. (NGO#11 - 5)

Question 3.2: Does your organization currently compete with other nonprofits, for-profits or government agencies?

Four (33%) NGO study participants considered themselves to be in competition with other nonprofits and for-profits. These respondents perceived their NGOs to be in competition for obtaining financial resources and delivering programs and services. None of the study respondents stated their organizations competed for recruiting staff and volunteers, recruiting board members or attracting members.

No study participant considered their organization to be in competition with state agencies. Three (25%) study participants reported to have a member of the Virginia Department of Education on their board of directors. One organization in particular reported that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction was a member of their board of directors.

There was a general feeling among the study participants that their organizations do face competition from for-profit companies who do various educational training. However, none of the participants felt such competition was significant or would consider it a threat to their NGOs. The following are examples of the responses received:

For the same group of members? Yes. (NGO#11 - 7)

There is competition out there, but we are not competition to them. Every once in a while you will have some college or university professors or groups who want to offer the same services we do. But we do not compete against them. They are competing against us. And I have always had the notion to tell my board if any college or university or other organization can offer the services that we offer better than we do, the school board ought to go to them. [We don't] try to do

anything that we're not capable of doing better than anyone else. I can't think of a single service that we offer that we took away from somebody else or competed with somebody for. (NGO#12 - 10,11)

Probably...Not intentionally, but we probably do. Yeah, I mean, you know, like any time you are putting on professional development for the purpose of revenue, you are competing with other people that are doing the same thing. (NGO#10 - 9)

I do not think we do. I think we are a...unique niche. If you are gonna be an active participant in an organization for your profession, it is going to be [ours]. There is not like four or five others. (NGO#8 - 9)

Question 3.3: To what extent do issues of trust and competition play a role in influencing collaboration in your NGO?

According to the study participants, trust played a larger role in influencing collaboration than competition. Although some competition was evident as previously discussed, trust was a significant factor in whether their organizations engaged in collaboration.

Eleven (92%) study participants reported that they felt complete trust as members of the VEC. There is mutual respect and value among the VEC members. Most respondents attributed their trust to all member associations having mission statements that aspire to improve public school education and generally to the stability of the older organizations having continuity in their leadership structure. This typically meant that half of the organizations not only appreciated the apparent success and longevity of the

larger and older organizations, but also the consistent familiarity with their leaders. The quotes below reflect examples of these roles:

I can honestly say trust and competition plays a big role. There are those who are more willing to share than others. Our whole society is based on trust. If it has not been in your experiences, then you're going to be more prone to not trust. The best collaborators are more trusting with their feelings and with their actions. It's what you do when no one is looking. Do you do the same thing when people are looking in at your organization? Transparency goes a long way. (NGO#2 – 22,23)

Among our board there has just been ultimate trust. I would say one of the strengths. The people there believe in what they're doing. They believe in why they're there, and nobody ever questions anybody or thinks they have ulterior motives. I think trust and competition play a role in influencing collaboration, but I don't see it as a negative thing for our association... There is trust among ourselves first; therefore, I think this enables us to want to trust others in a collaboration. I am sure competition is a factor, but I don't see it. (NGO#9 - 13,14)

We have to collaborate and connect in order to best serve our students. If we pull away from the organization, then we are essentially alone.... And I believe we lose a great deal by doing that. That's one piece. The second piece is yes, we need to trust one another if we are to succeed in a collaboration. (NGO#8 - 11)

It's really paramount. You can't have effective outcomes from collaboration if you don't have trust. You're not going to be forthcoming with either your

position on things or the sharing of ideas and the sharing of effort participation in shared projects. If you don't have an open, trusting relationship, you can't call it a collaboration. (NGO#11 - 8)

You simply have got to trust one another and remember that collaboration does not replace competition. (NGO#12 - 12)

Question 3.4: What is your NGO's primary motivation for becoming involved in collaboration?

The interview responses to this question focused on the need to improve education. NGOs historically developed among the roles various individuals and institutions had in the education of children. Study respondents reported that they wanted to collaborate with "like minded" organizations representing individuals who wanted to improve the quality of education in Virginia.

A few study participants were more direct by stating their motivation was to influence the Virginia General Assembly and Virginia Board of Education in a unified way to address issues of importance, such as the state and local financing of public school education. There was overwhelming response to the question that addressed the need for organizations to support each other and speak as one voice in matters of public policy advocacy. A majority of the study participants commented on how state legislators typically like to "play organizations against another" and that how collaboration – the forming of the VEC in particular – has all but eliminated that political strategy. This alone was viewed by the study participants as a worthy cause to collaborate. The following quotes are an illustration of those views:

We have maybe two reasons. It is one of the reasons that attracted us to the VEC...the welfare of schools, school systems, students and school professionals and the enhancement of the educational enterprise in the Commonwealth. But maybe secondary – and it is the secondary part that sometimes we need to be sure we recognize as secondary rather than primary – is to enhance the preparation of educators... professional educators. (NGO#1 - 8)

To improve and enhance the teaching-learning process as a result of whatever it is we are lobbying for or promoting or whatever. (NGO#12 - 13)

To get the job done. To get more funding for education. To have adequate policies that are not unrealistic. And of course, the ongoing legislative process. (NGO#7 - 14)

Advancing our mission which is quality teaching, learning and leadership. So, if you apply that to the VEC, it is basically collaborating for public policy for legislation that we all can support. (NGO#10 - 10)

It is sort of the same philosophy that I have about why people need to belong. Individually, we can not accomplish nearly as much as we can when we work collectively. When there is more than one voice singing off the same page, the folks who are listening tend to listen a little more intently. If we are the only ones out there pushing for a particular issue and the members of the General Assembly know we are the only ones, they will turn to our competitor groups and say, “Well, tell us why you do not support that,” and they may be swayed by that argument. But if we can work together in tandem and support one another on the

various things that are important to each other, it makes it more difficult for them to not listen. (NGO#11 - 10)

To provide the best services we can for our membership...for advocacy services for our membership and the children that they serve. And, of course, in order to do that, we have to exist. So we draw on the strength of numbers devoted to the same cause. We collaborate with parts of various organizations like [NGO#11]. If there is something political going on that I want to know straight up front what is going on, then [NGO#11] will share it with me. I'll call [NGO#4] or some other organization... because I feel like I can trust them, you know. (NGO#6 - 8)

Theme #4: Opportunities and Challenges of NGO Collaboration

Question 4.1: How does your NGO benefit from collaborating with other organizations? Were the benefits from the collaboration what your NGO anticipated prior to the collaboration?

In responding to this question study participants enthusiastically answered that knowledge and its use in advocacy toward achieving public policy goals at the state level was the major benefit. With 140 members in the General Assembly, many bills are introduced each session and most were considered by the study participants to be “bad for public education.” It was found that study participants perceived collaboration to be a highly effective advocacy tool. By collaborating with each other, study participants felt their organizations spoke with a stronger voice in the public advocacy arena.

In further probing this question, a wide range of answers including “same,” “lower,” and “higher” were the responses to whether benefits from collaborations were

what they anticipated prior to the collaboration. Study participants from older organizations generally felt that the benefits from collaborations were about what they expected (the same) prior to entering the collaboration. Participants from newer organizations felt that the benefits they received from participating in the collaboration were more than they expected. One study participant reported that his NGO sometimes actually spends money to work with larger groups for collaborative purposes. The following quotes illuminate collaboration benefits:

I think [our organization] can grow from collaborations. We can get new ideas. We can expand our knowledge base. Sometimes maybe even we have something to share ourselves. (NGO#9 - 15)

Oh gosh... many, many ways. We garner a tremendous amount of knowledge from organizations related to... funding related to advocacy at the General Assembly, membership drives, membership retention, programs that are good for children, training programs that are good for the principals in the school districts... you know, just dialoguing... It is the sharing of experiences and information. (NGO#6 - 8,9)

VEC is probably where we actually operate collaboratively more often. An example of another collaborative effort was last year when we invited the Chamber of Commerce to a dinner. It was for a tax and economic funding initiative that the [national association] is promoting nationally for the purpose of trying to explain the importance of investing in our schools long-term and the significance of this taxing initiative that our state has, and the long-term loss of keeping taxes so low that you do not properly invest in the infrastructure of the

schools or in instructional personnel. And the focus of that activity was to try to bring in business people so that they would begin to understand the need to support some of the positions. (NGO#11 - 10)

I think when a thousand members say to the legislature, ‘We need financial resources to provide counseling to students because we have so many more troubled students than ever before, okay?’ When you have a thousand members say that that is one thing, but when you have 12 organizations representing tens of thousands more members say, ‘Yeah, we agree with them.’ That has impact! We are stronger together than we are separate. (NGO#8 - 12)

I will give you a percentage. Probably about 50% of our collaborations have worked out much better and been more beneficial to us than we really anticipated. VEC is a big, big piece of what I would say that has been much more beneficial than we ever foresaw when we first started that. Some have been exactly what we anticipated. Probably about, maybe 30% are exactly what we anticipated – we got what we thought we were going to get. And then I would say there are about 20% of them have been... oh, why did we dial this number? (NGO#3 - 23)

Question 4.2: What are your NGO’s challenges of collaborating with other organizations?

Study participants indicated that the challenges of collaborating mainly focused on convincing other organizations to support their various advocacy needs. Although their organizations were independent and had no binding commitment to VEC as their major collaborative activity, they still wanted member organizations of the Coalition to

support their legislative agendas. VEC does have as an understanding among the member organizations that they only endorse members' legislative positions if everyone in the Coalition supports it. Without a one hundred percent vote of members accounted for and present at any one meeting of the VEC, no member organization can move forward with their legislative agenda with collective support. However, they are of course free to move forward as an individual organization.

Some study participants indicated that being able to attend collaborative meetings was a major challenge. They reported vast issues of staff and volunteer time and commitment from elected officers in their organizations. This was a challenge typically cited by smaller and younger NGOs and was not a response from most of the older organizations.

Participants were probed to determine whether they viewed collaboration as a cost-cutting strategy in their advocacy efforts. Organizations without lobbyist representation at the state legislature reported that they did view it as a cost-cutting strategy, because it allowed them to allocate resources to other priorities rather than funding a lobbyist. Further probing resulted in all participants stating that their organizations did not experience a reduction in needed staff or volunteers as a result of collaboration. The following quotes illustrate some of the challenges of collaboration:

The biggest challenge is trust. As a matter of fact, I think that until we have built trust with the organizations – and I am thinking about all nonprofits, I am not just talking about [our organization] and members of the Virginia Education Coalition – there are other nonprofit agencies that say they have children in their best interest out there that are trying to get us to collaborate and I do not know and

from what I can find out about a lot of them, they are not really interested in helping children as much as they are sometimes lining their own resumes and that kind of thing. We do not have people to send everywhere. Every time we get a request from some group that wants somebody to sit on their organization for a particular project or event, we just do not have the people to do it. So those would be the biggest factors. (NGO#6 - 9)

I do not know that collaborating [with other organizations] has been a challenge for us. (NGO#7 - 15)

I think the main thing is finding it necessary to compromise, and by compromising, maybe threatening some deeply held values...not so much beliefs. I think our beliefs are broad enough that we do have some strongly held values that do get threatened by collaboration. The biggest challenge...just realizing that you are not going to get it all, and you are certainly not going to get it all all the time. And we have members who are always asking, 'Well, why not?' and well, we are not fighting hard enough. And those people, you know, they are not there, yet. They are not where they need to be, yet. (NGO#1 - 10)

The biggest challenge is just finding where the common ground is. We are all in education so we know it's there, but it can takes time sometimes. (NGO#10 - 12)

Time is the biggest challenge.... (NGO#8 - 14)

Question 4.3: Were the costs of collaboration what you anticipated prior to the collaboration?

Most of the persons interviewed for this study consistently indicated that other than travel expenses to collaborative meetings, they did not experience any other actual costs. They considered the costs of collaboration to be what they anticipated prior to the collaboration. Two study participants considered their NGOs' membership in the VEC collaboration to decrease some of their operating costs.

Further probing found the study participants' expectations of the intangible costs of staff and volunteer time to be what was anticipated. A majority of the participants said that their organizations' reputations were enhanced by being a member of the VEC. The quotes below reflect the responses regarding collaboration costs:

For the most part they are. I think that the benefit of what we get is very well worth the volunteer hours that are put in to collaborate. It is very well worth it.
(NGO#3 - 25,26)

The financial costs were what we anticipated...Our reputation has been enhanced by our willingness to cooperate and collaborate with other education associations, state organizations and national organizations. (NGO#4 - 12,13)

Yes, which is so minimal anyway. (NGO#5 - 18)

I think collaboration has decreased [our organization's] cost of operations.
(NGO#6 - 10)

We do not pay, I do not think, anywhere near what is commensurate with the value that we get out of collaboration. To put it another way, it is such a value right now for what we are expending in the effort in terms of what we are getting

back that it is maybe one of the few really bright cost-effective things on our radar screen right now is how much we get out of the collaboration that we have for so little that we spend on it. (NGO#1 - 11)

Question 4.4: Does involvement in collaborations or networks in general make it easier or harder to maintain key organizational capacities?

Respondents to this question stated that involvement in collaborations or networks made it easier to maintain key organizational capacities. They often noted their organizations' enhanced reputation by being a part of the VEC as an example. They saw the collective goals of the collaboration to be successful in policy advocacy in increasing or at least protecting the state allocation of funds to public school education, defeating "bad legislation," and passing "good legislation" during General Assembly sessions.

Upon further probing of this question, study participants did not see their involvement in collaborations as being specifically beneficial to them in attracting organizational funding or recruiting and keeping staff and volunteers. Additional probing resulted in study participants indicating that collaborations – especially the VEC – helped them meet members' needs in the areas of public policy advocacy, and it did help their organizations' visibility and reputation to be associated with the VEC. The following quotes provide insight into the aforementioned:

Collaboration helps a lot in this respect because we have people, members, institutions who would not be here, who would not be a part of us if we were not a part of some larger collaboration. They join not to run with us, but to then hook

into the larger organizations that we were collaborating with. Yes, easier. It is easier. (NGO#1 - 11,12)

Easier. I can give an example where it has helped because of the VEC advocacy efforts [helped] secure [a] grant from [our national organization]. (NGO#10 - 14)

The only area that any of those things count would be the visibility. I do not think there are any impacts on the others. (NGO#11 - 14)

It is definitely a positive in all of those. We use our collaborative efforts all the time to promote ourselves. So, it is a PR tool for us that we collaborate with these other groups to promote the benefit of being a part of the [national association]... being a part of the [national association] you are in collaboration with all these other organizations. (NGO#3 - 26)

Easier... pretty much. (NGO#2 - 29)

Theme #5: NGOs, Collaboration, and Advocacy Activities

Question 5.1: During the past five years, how has your organization attempted to influence national, state, or local legislation, other than membership in VEC, including any attempt to influence public opinion on a legislative matter? [If NO, skip to question 5.4.]

The study participants indicated that they attempted to influence national and state legislation during the past five years. No study participant reported that their organization attempts to influence legislation on public policy issues at the local level.

Most participants stated that they engaged in national legislative issues only at the direction of their national affiliate. This involvement included the dissemination of form letters to board members and the membership in general encouraging them to sign the letters and mail them to their respective elected representative to Congress.

When participants of the study were probed on how often their organization engages in public policy issues, they indicated a wide range of responses from once per year to twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The majority of the study participants (7/58%) indicated that their NGOs were engaged in public policy 24/7. The others reported being engaged quarterly or once per month. The following reflects the typical responses received:

Yes to national. Yes to state. We don't really deal with local stuff, because we are all from different localities. (NGO#10- 15)

On key issues with federal legislation, you know, IDEA reauthorization, No Child Left Behind... [Our national organization] is somewhat our lead in terms of that and then we get calls from them to have superintendents come to meet with some Congressmen from Virginia and send letters...All the other pieces of the legislation... most of it is to try to defeat the bad legislation. The ratio of supporting legislation that has been promoted to that that needs to be killed is probably 97% to 3%. (NGO#7 - 17,18)

Yes to all. [Our association] monitors legislative issues and meetings throughout the year and maintains a full-time presence during legislative sessions. We are represented on numerous commissions, committees and subcommittees and

provide expertise and assistance to state [agencies], legislators, the administration and others. (NGO#4 - 14)

Question 5.2: Does your organization have a specific budget amount it allocates each year toward influencing public policy? If so, would you consider this budget amount adequate to do the job successfully? Are the funds devoted to lobbying specifically or to advocacy activities in general?

Half of the study participants indicated that their organization had a specific budget amount allocated to influencing public policy. This budgeted amount was used primarily to cover the cost of lobbying at the state legislature and related expenses required to support members/witnesses to come to the State Capitol to testify on legislation that they deemed to be good or bad. Study participants from the other half reported that their organization could not sustain the expense of a lobbyist or supporting a volunteer to be at the State Capitol on a regular basis during the General Assembly Session.

Of the six study participants from organizations that had a specific budgeted amount for influencing public policy, only three reported that they felt the allocated amount was adequate to do the job successfully.

When these participants were probed further, they reported the average percentage of their overall NGO budget dedicated to influencing public policy to be between five and seven percent. This percentage, however, is applicable only to direct lobbying expenses, and did not include the executive director's time, associated NGO

personnel, or travel expenses used to bring in members for testimonies. The following quotes provide the descriptive responses to the question:

No we don't. If I pulled up my budget I wouldn't have something that you would say "Here's how much they spend on advocating," because a portion of the president's budget is used for advocacy efforts. A portion of our printing budget is used for advocacy efforts. Part of our mailings are used for advocacy efforts. We of course have a Legislative Committee, an Education Committee, and a Capital Committee. You know, that is all advocacy. But then we have attending conferences and, you know...we have a line item for attending conferences or conventions. That's collaborating, that's advocacy, you know. (NGO#3 - 27)

It is not much. We would like to have much more. (NGO#10 - 15,16)

We have a budget category called "Legislative" where we pay our lobbyist and pay for training materials and pay their travel and expenses, and so on. I have the association represented at meetings of the National Governors Association, Education Commission of the States, and Southern Regional Education Board. One of the things you do is be sure that every state legislator and Governor from Virginia sees you there, so they can ask you questions there about these crazy ideas for legislation. You can kill it down there instead of in Richmond. (NGO#12 - 20)

We have funds devoted to lobbying specifically and advocacy activities in general. Members of [our organization] can contribute money that will be used directly for lobbying and/or contribute to political campaigns. Anything that is

specific to a political campaign comes out of those Political Action Committee funds. (NGO#11 - 16)

Question 5.3: What is the principal target of your organization's policy activity – local, state, or federal? Do you think this is the most effective target for your organization?

Eleven of the 12 participants in the study responded that their organizations targeted the state for their policy activities. Only one participant indicated that they solely targeted federal policy activity. The reason for this is that they had no presence at the state legislature with the exception of what gets accomplished through the VEC. The respondent for this organization also said that they were most recently involved in federal legislation issues because of a request made by their national affiliate. This same respondent said that federal policy activities were not the appropriate target and felt that the state should be. The other 11 study participants reported that state policy activities, especially involving legislation at the Virginia General Assembly and policies and regulations entertained by the Virginia Board of Education, were their most appropriate targets. However, most study participants indicated that they occasionally targeted federal policy activities when they thought it may affect Virginia education issues or when urged by their national affiliates. The following quotes provide an illumination of the responses received:

Our membership is really not interested in national. They can be, but they're sending their money to be protected at the state level. They're looking at making

sure that their state jobs are kept. We try to keep it all at the state level. (NGO#5 - 21)

With our staff limitation, yes, state is the most effective target, because we get the federal from the national perspective. They help us with that. (NGO#6 - 13)

Our focus is on local legislators in order to influence state policy. (NGO#8 - 19)

State government is the focus of our policy activity. We devote a full-time director of government relations who is also our lead lobbyist to the task. Our national affiliate stays on top of federal issues. We rarely get involved in local – county or city – advocacy issues. (NGO#4 - 16)

Question 5.4: How does your NGO use collaboration to pursue its advocacy goals?

Most study participants cited their NGOs' involvement with the VEC and their particular advocacy strategies to answer this question. They consider it a major strategy in pursuing their advocacy goals to have membership in the VEC. As a VEC member organization, they routinely meet monthly – September through June – with other member organizations of the VEC to discuss current policy issues, whether they be likely legislation issues before the next session of the General Assembly or current policies and regulations before the Virginia Board of Education. In the fall of each year, VEC member organizations are asked to bring with them to a meeting their organizations' list of legislative priorities and any position statements they may have developed. VEC members decide to agree or disagree to support each state organization's advocacy priorities. An advocacy strategy that developed over the VEC's 10 year existence has

been to advocate a particular position collectively and take credit as a whole, rather than insist on individual praise for a successful outcome. Study participants indicated that they were willing to seek the counsel of others in the VEC and to collaborate in order to be successful in their advocacy goals.

Another collaborative strategy indicated by the study participants was to have their NGO's lobbyists to regularly confer with each other, assist in representing their organizations at VEC meetings and share their knowledge about what was occurring in General Assembly sessions and Virginia Board of Education meetings with their boards of directors. This strategy was an outgrowth of "The Ducks." The Duck strategy has been used in Virginia by education NGOs for several decades.

The Ducks originated in the early 1980s and can be traced to Frank E. Barham, executive director, Virginia School Boards Association, when he was their lobbyist at the Virginia General Assembly. At that time, Mary Simmons was the lobbyist for the Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers Association, Jay Jacobs was the lobbyist for Fairfax County Public School Division, and there were about 10 to 12 other staff lobbyists or policy monitors from local school divisions representing Loudoun, Arlington, Falls Church, Alexandria, Prince William, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Henrico, Richmond City, Chesapeake, Chesterfield, and Hanover. All of these individuals agreed that when the noon convening of the State Senate and House of Delegates began they would meet and discuss what they had heard at Senate and House committee meetings and share notes from conversations they had while walking the halls lobbying individual legislators, staff members, etc. They met daily in a conference room provided by State Superintendent of Public Instruction S. John Davis located on the 9th floor of the Virginia

Department of Education when it was located at the old 9th Street Office Building. All of the individuals would share and compare their information and go to lunch together afterwards every day. When they left the conference room, Dr. Barham would be in front, followed by Mary Simmons or vice versa and, in single file, all the others.

On one particular day, as they were walking out of the conference room, Harry Smith, special assistant to Superintendent Davis (and served all state superintendents in that capacity for 47 years beginning with State Superintendent Davis Y. Paschall in 1959, Woodrow Wilkerson in the 1960s, and State Superintendents Eugene Campbell in the 1970s, S. John Davis in the 1980s, in the 1990s, Joseph Spagnola, William C. Bosher, Jr., Richard T. LaPointe, Paul Stapleton, and beginning in 2000 for the next six years with Jo Lynne DeMary), remarked that "you all look like Daddy and Momma Duck and all the little ducklings" marching out of the conference room. From that day on the group was known as "the Ducks" and Mary Simmons and Frank Barham were known as "Momma and Daddy Duck." In Dr. Barham's VSBA offices in Charlottesville you can see various collections of mementoes, including several duck carvings and other memorabilia presented to him from his days as "Daddy Duck."

The current practice for The Ducks is to meet at least once weekly during the General Assembly session to share knowledge of conversations with various legislators and their aides, discuss bills and positions their organizations have taken, and share strategies for the defeat or passage of bills. The Ducks typically take an annual retreat to collaborate on advocacy goals prior to the General Assembly sessions.

The official name for the loosely organized group of education liaisons representing school boards and school administrators is the Virginia Education

Legislative Liaisons (VELL), which was coined in 2006. It was decided that since the “members” are well recognized and influential, both individually and as a group, a more professional name was necessary. The group does not elect a chair or president, rather chooses a volunteer to organize and run meetings and disseminate information. VELL members represent school administrators and school boards and include all major education organizations that represent such. Each group represented operates autonomously and is not held to a set of priorities or principles espoused by any organization other than its own. As a group, however, VELL works together when a common goal is identified, and that is where VELL is most effective – working together, for example, to influence the outcome of a piece of legislation. VELL members meet on a regular basis during the General Assembly sessions and several other times during the year formally and informally. Sharing of information is a hallmark of this group and helps everyone. An informed member is a more productive member, both to the group and to the organization each one represents.

Another collaborative strategy cited by several study participants was their involvement in “legislative day.” This event is sponsored annually by most NGOs during the General Assembly Session and held at the State Capitol for their members to meet and confer with legislatures. All NGOs emphasized the need to educate their own members, as well as legislators and the public at-large on their advocacy goals.

NGO#7 holds an annual legislative conference for their members to discuss legislation and policy needs and invites members of the state legislature and various state agency administrators to attend and participate.

A strategy that VEC perhaps relies on the most for major advocacy goals because it has been successful in the past is a multistage approach outlined as follows:

1) Once the VEC has decided on an important advocacy priority as determined collectively by member NGOs, the collaborative strategy it uses necessitates a certain course of action. It must determine the specific activities that will help it to pursue that course of action most effectively. The activities may or may not include all members of the VEC. It might require representatives from two or three NGOs and a few key legislators to meet and discuss particular areas of concern.

2) If this strategy is not successful, then increasingly more NGOs and their representatives and more members of the legislature are asked to become involved. At this stage, an increase in NGO-initiated letter writing campaigns, phone calling, personal visits, e-mails, committee testimonies, etc. may occur to help persuade legislators.

3) Finally, if the first two tactics don't have the desired results, the NGOs will conduct a media campaign and inform the general public about their legislative concerns and advocacy goals and encourage their involvement in the VEC advocacy goal. The VEC would provide written rationales for their positions and identify a few key spokespersons from various NGO member organizations and from supportive members of the state legislature.

When study participants were probed on whether they attempted to have other VEC member organizations adopt their own advocacy goals, throughout most of the discussions, the need to share their advocacy goals was emphasized over any attempt to have other organizations or the VEC in general actually adopt their goals. The study

participants felt comfortable knowing that the collective decision of the VEC of what was strategically important for public school education as a whole took precedence over their own organizations' advocacy goals. The following responses provide an illustration of what interviewees reported:

Primarily through the Virginia Education Coalition. Really... because that's the one constant where we can come and state what the issues are, listen to other issues, and work collaboratively to that common goal. (NGO#8 - 20)

We use it as often as we need to. I mean, we do a lot of stuff on our own including work with several other collaborations. (NGO#12 - 21)

We pick and chose those legislators that we want to educate and give them an opportunity to hear from [our members]. And, it's not just legislative. For instance, this year I would have to say one of the most important people we invited to any conference is [representative from] the Virginia Retirement System.

We are constantly cultivating and communicating year-round. (NGO#7 - 27)

We find out, you know, where are those areas that we can agree and where we need to part ways, and work together from that. (NGO#11 - 17)

Question 5.5: If your NGO did not engage in lobbying or advocacy within the past year, what are the reasons?

The study participants from three NGOs (25%) indicated that they did not have the funds to retain a lobbyist and had difficulty in committing the appropriate time for paid staff or volunteers to be in Richmond during meetings of the state legislature.

When participants were probed to determine if the lack of staff skills, worries about violating laws or regulations, or concerns about losing any public funding were reasons for not lobbying within the past year, it was found that none of them thought these to be a reason. They further emphasized the lack of budgets and limited staff and volunteer time.

Further probing found that eight (67%) study participants indicated that they employed either full-time or part-time lobbyists to look after their interests during sessions of the state legislature. Two study participants said their executive director generally did their lobbying activity. Two organizations had no one to lobby the General Assembly. The following describe the reasons for not engaging in lobbying or advocacy within the past year:

Money. Lack of staff time. (NGO#9 - 22)

Lack of an identifiable issue that we needed to address. (NGO#2 - 35)

Question 5.6: Are there times when your NGO would be better off working independently when attempting to influence public policy? If so, can you provide an example?

Generally, the study participants believed that collaboration works best when their organizations' principles are not compromised. Study participants felt an overarching need to address public policy issues that were of a collective concern for VEC members, rather than attempt to "go it alone" on single issues.

One study participant discussed how her organization worked independently on a single item issue that was important for the members, but the results were unsuccessful.

The organization met resistance on the message of their legislation from members of the General Assembly, because the organization did not have the backing of other education organizations. This strategy was seemingly used to defeat the legislation. However, the following year new legislation was introduced that addressed the same concern, but met with favorable results because the organization had the backing of the VEC and was able to speak with a unified education association voice, rather than as a single outlying organization. The following quotes provide insights into this question:

Yes. When there are issues that are not enhanced... that would not benefit the other members of the Coalition... or another group. Many times there are just issues that we need to use our national [organization] to collaborate, this could be difficult level to work with other state organizations in collaborating. (NGO#5 - 22)

I don't think so. [Our association] might not have answered that way a few years ago, but not now. I don't think we can do without it. I don't think any of us can be an island anymore. (NGO#6 - 15)

I don't think so because what we are about has such a broad impact, that I think it would be myopic of us to consider that what we're doing is not touching not only on what other organizations are doing, but what society at large is up to. (NGO#11 - 18)

I can't think of an issue that would be. (NGO#7 - 22)

I don't think so. I can't imagine that working for us. (NGO#1 - 14)

No. Never. There's strength in numbers. Politicians... see votes. (NGO#12 - 23)

Closing Question: What lessons has your NGO learned from its past (or present) collaboration(s) that will be helpful to your organization moving forward?

Study participants indicated a need to continue to collaborate, recognizing that collaboration needs to be a priority in all organizations. Concerns were cited on how one organization alone cannot address the major policy issues confronting the education profession, including the constant barrage of seemingly negative attacks against public school education. Examples were cited on how the current economy necessitates that education organizations in particular have to work even closer and be better coordinated in order to influence policy makers to obtain adequate funding and to lead them on identifying the areas where possible cutbacks in education programs and services might be necessary.

An overwhelming majority of the study participants indicated a concern that their respective members were not as aware of the importance of their organizations' collaborations as they should be. They expressed concern that outside of their organization's leadership, a better job needs to be done of informing their dues-paying members of how vital collaboration is in the pursuit of advocacy goals.

In addition, participants emphasized how critical it was for them to keep board members educated and current on the issues and focused on the fact that everything the organization does must contribute to the improvement of the teaching-learning process.

Further probing found some organizations concerned about their own lack of institutional knowledge and how important it was to not only maintain that internally, but to use it when discussing how their organizations have evolved through collaborating

with other organizations over the many years. They believed their history of how collaborations achieved collective public policy goals in the past was as important as collaborating on current goals.

Another finding expressed by a few study participants was that their NGOs want others to support their causes, but did not necessarily do as good of a job about jumping onboard collaboratively to help other organizations.

In probing about the biggest challenges NGOs see in the next few years, all study participants referenced the poor economy, struggles with membership recruitment and retention, and the need to build an even stronger collaboration to speak with one unifying voice regarding state funding for public school education.

Upon further probing to determine how the biggest challenge will affect future collaborations, all study participants indicated that their organizations will need to rely on collaborations – especially their VEC collaboration – more than ever. They emphasized how important unification of goals with a united front strategy would be paramount in the months and years ahead. The following quotes are examples of the descriptions provided:

We would spend more time in our board meetings understanding our role and we would spend more time making sure that those people, those key people that need to spread the word and get the word out understand what all the issues are.

(NGO#8 - 23)

It's strange, but the one service that creates the image with your members of what you're all about is lobbying and legislating. ... I think the most important thing that we do are these meetings and conferences where we train board members and

keep them updated. You've got to keep your board members educated and current on the issues and focused on that fact. (NGO#12 - 24)

So much of our collaboration has formed what [our organization] is today. So much of what we do, and where we fight, and how we fight or... have grown out of our collaborations. It has had a tremendous impact on shaping our organization. (NGO#3 - 29)

For the immediate future, and long-range future, by far the biggest issue is going to be funding – federal funding, state funding, and local funding as a result of the economy and all three sources of [education] income. [There is] going to have to be a lot of contact to get the local governing boards – boards of supervisors, city councils – to step up to the plate on education funding in the state. (...) We have got [to work] even closer and be more coordinated in terms of determining... what we need to do to influence policy makers and to get adequate funding in education. (NGO#7 - 24)

Summary

This chapter presented the findings discovered in this study. Findings were organized according to the research questions and related probes and follow-ups using five themes generated from the literature. Data from individual interviews, documents, and observations revealed research participants' perceptions about their organizations to gain insight into three research questions: a) What is a collaboration, and when, how, and why is it used by non-government organizations to pursue advocacy goals? b) What advocacy role do non-government organizations play in public policy? and c) What

collaborative strategies are used by non-government organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

The findings of this study were generated through face-to-face, ethnographic interviews with 12 key informants representing nongovernmental organizations who hold membership in the Virginia Education Coalition. The VEC was the target population for the study. As is typical of qualitative research, samples of quotations from study participants were included where appropriate in the findings. By using participants' own words, the researcher aimed to build the confidence of the reader by accurately representing the reality of the respondents and situations studied.

The results uncover the nongovernmental organizations' involvement with collaborative efforts as researched in this study and included all 12 member organizations of the Virginia Education Coalition. The member organizations are as follows: the Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the Virginia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals, the Virginia Association of School Superintendents, the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals, the Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Virginia Counselors Association, the Virginia Education Association, the Virginia Middle School Association, the Virginia Professors of Educational Leadership, the Virginia School Boards Association, and the Virginia School Counselor Association. All of the study participants considered the VEC to be their major collaborative effort in public policy advocacy.

Collaboration was typically defined as a process where autonomous entities interact through the exchange of information in formal and informal methods using

jointly agreed upon governing parameters to achieve a common purpose; it is a process of sharing, resulting in mutually beneficial interactions.

The role that NGOs have in VEC policy advocacy is that they have consistently collaborated together for 10 years on issues that they have mutually agreed were for the benefit of all their member organizations. They have pursued legislative advocacy when the target for change has been primarily the state legislature, state school board policy and regulations, or budget allocation. Their nonprofit advocacy role to influence legislation includes lobbying, building effective relationships with state leaders, and public awareness and voter education.

Collaborative strategies that are used by non-government organizations to pursue advocacy goals typically consist of influencing state legislation and state board policy and regulations by state board and legislative monitoring, committee testifying, lobbying, writing position papers, organizing additional specific networks and coalitions, and a variety of other activities.

In Chapter V, the research results are revisited and major questions of the study answered. An interpretation of the findings is stated, conclusions are discussed, and recommendations for further research are presented.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter I explained how collaboration and advocacy have long been considered central functions of America's NGOs. Yet, the existing research stops short of explaining why NGOs develop certain forms of collaborations instead of others. Chapter II addressed the previous research and theoretical writings about the research topic. In the literature review a gap was discovered in the general use of collaborations and few studies addressed the use of collaborations and advocacy by NGOs. The purpose of Chapter III was to present an explanation of the methods, materials, and procedures that were used to obtain and analyze the necessary data for the study. Chapter IV presented the findings of this research study. Chapter V presents a summary of the purpose, design and method, and synthesizes the findings of the research study. Also presented are the conclusions and recommendations for continued research, education, and applications for practitioners.

Purpose of the Study

A qualitative design using a case study approach was used to examine the collaborative strategies and techniques used by selected Virginia nonprofit organizations in pursuit of their advocacy goals in public policy. The general scope and direction of this study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is a collaboration, and when, how, and why is it used by non-government organizations to pursue advocacy goals?
2. What advocacy roles do nongovernment organizations play in public policy?
3. What collaborative strategies are used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

Summary of the Research Approach

This study focused on a single population – NGO members of the Virginia Education Coalition (VEC). Members of the VEC are the Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the Virginia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals, the Virginia Association of School Superintendents, the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals, the Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Virginia Counselors Association, the Virginia Education Association, the Virginia Middle School Association, the Virginia Professors of Educational Leadership, the Virginia School Boards Association, and the Virginia School Counselor Association. Each NGO was treated as a case study. A cross-case analysis was conducted, as well as a negative case analysis. As the primary data collection instrument, the researcher wanted to be sure that equitable attention was given to differing viewpoints, thus avoiding favoritism and lopsided interpretation.

Questions for this research were adopted from studies found in the literature. The data instrument was designed to help fill the gap in knowledge regarding the factors that affect the willingness of NGOs to engage in lobbying and advocacy, and what forms their

involvement takes. This research used naturalistic inquiry to collect qualitative data by conducting in-depth interviews. In preparing the questions for the interview, the researcher was careful about the clarity of the questions – to “find out what special terms are commonly used by people in the setting” (Patton, 2002, p. 361). In addition, questions were arranged with the intention of taking each participant through the same sequences with the same questions using the same words (2002). An interview protocol was developed so the “same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The generated questions were nondirectional and did not imply cause and effect or suggest measurement (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher strived to achieve a balance between the standardization of the questions and the use of “flexibility that is a hallmark of qualitative methods” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 134).

A pilot study was conducted to help buttress the argument and rationale for the study approach. According to Sampson (2004), pilots can be used to refine research instruments such as questionnaires and interview schedules – having greater use in ethnographic approaches to data collection. The inquiry for the pilot case was much broader and less focused than the actual data collection plan. The pilot studies provided the researcher with information about relevant field questions and about the logistics of the field inquiry (Yin, 2003). Four pilot cases were selected from NGO member organizations in the Virginia Society of Association Executives. As a result of the pilot study a few modifications were made to the probes and follow-ups to the interview protocol, but changes to the main questions were not necessary.

The interview guide consisted of 23 questions with probes and follow-ups and was used in face-to-face, ethnographic interviews with 12 key informants – elected presidents or executive directors – representing each NGO in the population. The researcher asked for and received the VEC’s endorsement for the study. The VEC chair sent a letter to each NGO member and encouraged their involvement in the study. The chair of the researcher’s dissertation committee sent out an individual letter to each NGO executive director informing them of the study and encouraging their participation (see Appendix A). Also enclosed in the letter was a list of document materials the researcher was requesting for the study. The researcher followed-up with individual phone calls and e-mails to each executive director or president to request a time and place for an interview with them or whoever they felt best suited to be a part of the study. All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and coded. Transcripts from each interview’s audio-tape recording served as the primary data source for this study. Emphasis, however, was placed on triangulation; employing various methods and examining a mixture of sources for data a) in-depth, open-ended interviews; b) direct observation; and c) written documents. A complete list of interview questions, probes and follow-ups are in Appendix B. Each of the cases was analyzed based on the following research questions:

1. What year was your NGO founded?
2. Is your annual operating budget more or less than \$100,000?
3. Is your NGO affiliated with any other organization?
4. Who is your primary constituency/membership base? How many members does your NGO represent?

5. How would your organization define collaboration?
6. Is collaboration important to your organization? Why or why not?
7. Who in your NGO sets the tone for the type and extent of collaboration that your organization engages in?
8. What resources does your NGO turn to for ideas and best practices on the use of collaboration?
9. Is your organization currently involved in collaborations other than the Virginia Education Coalition? If so, are these collaborations formal or informal networks, or are you working together with organizations in other ways?
10. Does your organization currently compete with other nonprofits, for-profits or government agencies?
11. To what extent do issues of trust and competition play a role in influencing collaboration in your NGO?
12. What is your NGO's primary motivation for becoming involved in collaboration?
13. How does your NGO benefit from collaborating with other organizations?
Were the benefits from the collaboration what your NGO anticipated prior to the collaboration?
14. What are your NGO's challenges of collaborating with other organizations?
15. Were the costs of collaboration what you anticipated prior to the collaboration?

16. Does involvement in collaborations or networks in general make it easier or harder to maintain key organizational capacities?
17. During the past five years, how has your organization attempted to influence national, state, or local legislation, other than membership in VEC, including any attempt to influence public opinion on a legislative matter?
18. Does your organization have a specific budget amount it allocates each year toward influencing public policy? If so, would you consider this budget amount adequate to do the job successfully? Are the funds devoted to lobbying specifically or to advocacy activities in general?
19. What is the principal target of your organization's policy activity – local, state, or federal? Do you think this is the most effective target for your organization?
20. How does your NGO use collaboration to pursue its advocacy goals?
21. If your NGO did not engage in lobbying or advocacy in the past year, what are the reasons?
22. Are there times when your NGO would be better off working independently when attempting to influence public policy? If so, can you provide an example?
23. What lessons has your NGO learned from its past (or present) collaboration(s) that will be helpful to your organization moving forward?

These research questions were largely satisfied by the findings presented in Chapter IV and were designed to answer the overarching research questions addressed in the following section.

Discussion

The findings presented in the previous chapter addressed the specific questions asked in the interview guide during the personal interviews. The findings were examined to identify patterns, themes, common experiences, case experiences and relationships, as well as insights from the researcher based upon the interview experiences, review of the tape-recorded transcripts, NGO records, and observations. The following presents a descriptive analysis of the findings related to the research questions of this study:

What is a collaboration, and when, how, and why is it used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

Based on the review of the literature and the collection of definitions obtained from the study participants, collaboration is the sharing of information, skills and talents for better decision making and the common good. Collaboration is a process in which independent entities interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly developing agreeable rules and a governing structure for their decision making; it is a process involving shared norms, mutually beneficial interactions, and personal relationships to pursue action when commonality among collaborators is achieved.

Nongovernmental organizations enter into collaborations not only when it is mutually beneficial, but also in support of a greater cause. For the VEC, that cause is the improvement of the teaching and learning process. NGO membership in the VEC gives the organizations an opportunity to be a part of the collaborative process in deliberating individual organizational concerns and prioritizing those concerns with others through

negotiations for a greater cause of the VEC as a collective unit. The findings from the study participants also indicate that the organizations use their collaborations to improve mutually agreed upon common goals.

Two major findings in this study were that collaborations seem to exist in larger part because of the personal relationships of NGO representatives and that advocacy positions are pursued when commonality or consensus among collaborators is achieved. Although a variety of factors are necessary for a collaboration to pursue advocacy positions and goals, La Piana (2007) contends that some key indicators are committed leadership, unambiguous goals, clearly defined roles, commitment at multiple levels of the organization, dedicated staff time, and sustainability in the midst of change. Based on the findings from the study, the VEC has similar key indicators. These are the common threads that link the VEC member organizations regardless of the identified need they are responding to or the advocacy goal they are setting out to achieve.

As addressed at the beginning of this section for the definition of collaboration, NGO members of the VEC appear to concur with this definition. VEC members deliberately chose loose governing parameters with a governing document referred to as “rules of operation,” and not bylaws, to bring the organizations together and to keep them together.

According to the literature, collaboration involves the alignment of goals, strategies, agendas, resources, and activities; equitable commitment of investment and capacities; and the sharing of risks, liabilities and benefits (Fosler, 2002). The VEC however, is not incorporated, has no distinctive legal identity and does not require membership dues or any type of financial investment. Although there are occasions

when strategies of the VEC require expenditures, usually the older NGO members pay these expenditures on a volunteer basis. However, there have been occasions when all organizations voluntarily agreed to pay their share of expenses.

The literature review also revealed that collaborations have risks and that individuals must be willing to risk their personal as well as organizational reputations (Snively & Tracey, 2002). The study participants were well aware of this and held a high degree of trust with not only individual members of the collaboration, but with the NGOs as well. They were indeed willing to risk their personal as well as their organizations' reputations for being a part of the VEC.

According to the literature, collaboration takes place out of self-interest and tangible benefits, perhaps in the form of capturing financial resources, including cost savings and economies of scale (Snively & Tracey, 2002). Based on the findings of the study, NGOs collaborate to achieve advocacy goals and make better decisions, but not necessarily to lower costs. Only two study participants mentioned any significant cost reductions as a reason for collaboration, and only when probes and follow-ups were used. This particular cost saving was cited only for lobbying and related advocacy pursuits.

In organizing the VEC, the founding core member organizations that included teachers, principals, superintendents, school boards, teacher-educator professors, and parents of students appeared to have been cognizant of the need to always have key stakeholders as part of the collaboration. Core member organizations realized that diversity of membership is its strength. According to the literature, constructively engaging a diverse group of stakeholders in a collaboration can pose great challenges and at the same time add great value. "People with different experiences, knowledge, and

perspectives make more creative and better decisions” (Chrislip, 2002, p.1). As membership grew in the VEC, the founding NGOs were sure to consider the member factors and the ability to implement the decisions for each organization that petitioned for membership. This seems to concur in the literature as well. According to Gray (1989) and Bingham (1986), when key stakeholders are left out of collaborations the ability to implement the decisions was more often impaired.

According to the literature, NGOs collaborate because it can improve the quality of decisions (Haas, 2005; Hansen, 2009). Study participants seem to agree. Membership in the VEC affords NGOs the opportunity to view solutions to problems from several vantage points, because of the diverse make-up of member organizations.

Also, members in the VEC appear to be mindful of the idea that collaborations – whether they be formal or informal networks – are not necessarily a good thing and can cause one to overlook the fact that collaborations can sometimes undermine performance. Research shows that “‘the more, the merrier’ does not necessarily yield the best results” (Hansen, 2009, p. 120). Collaborations can be costly. It takes time and effort to nurture sustainable relationships.

The VEC did not use a step-by-step process to enter into a collaboration. Although the literature review seemingly agrees with the concept that collaborations do not typically have a step-by-step process, there are, however, fundamental steps necessary to get to the table and to explore, reach, and implement an agreement (Gray, 1989). These fundamental steps were described by Carpenter and Kennedy (1988) and Gray (1989) as 1) problem setting – sitting down to begin a face-to-face dialogue, 2) directional setting – everyone identifies the interests that brought them to the

collaboration, and 3) implementation – carefully crafted agreements through dealing with constituencies, building external support, structuring, and monitoring the agreement and ensuring compliance. The study's interviews, NGO document reviews, and observation bear out this process for the VEC as well.

The findings suggest that the NGOs in the study population demonstrate fairly high levels of joint decision-making, with the executive director or organization president being present at VEC meetings. In addition, NGOs also exhibit administrative capacity, mutuality, and trust in how they collaborate. They also exhibit fairly low levels of tension between self-interest and the collective interests of the collaboration.

Two study participants said their NGOs were most active in the VEC when their members' jobs appeared to be in jeopardy. During this period the NGO representatives had the incentive to invest the necessary time and energy for collaborative efforts. According to the literature, the impetus to collaborate comes more often from futility or crisis, rather than from proactive, visionary leadership (Chrislip, 2002).

A major finding of this study was that the VEC member organizations' need to speak with a single voice far outweighs their desire to push their individual policy advocacy goals. This was a theme repeated throughout all the interviews. Yet, interestingly, the finding is in contrast with the literature review, which seems to suggest that collaboration takes place primarily out of self-interest and expectation of some tangible benefit, perhaps in the form of capturing financial resources including cost savings and economies of scale (Snively & Tracey, 2002).

What advocacy roles do nongovernment organizations play in public policy?

As addressed in Chapters I and II, it is not uncommon for nongovernment organizations to have an advocacy role in public policy. “Advocacy in the most general sense has long been part of the mission of nonprofit organizations” (Urban Institute, 2006, p. 1). In de Tocqueville’s well known study on America’s institutions and culture, *Democracy in America* (2000), he observed that political freedom requires diligent leadership and the right mix of institutions. In applying this concept to civic associations – that is, NGOs, de Tocqueville argued that associations draw citizens outside of themselves and allow them the experience of self-governance on a small scale. Moreover, when opportunities for self-governance are combined with the pursuit of common interests and values, associations can transform themselves into political organizations – groups aimed at actively engaging in public policy and political outcomes (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 2007). Consequently, associations appear to exist in a democratic polity. Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) contends that the capacity of a political system to respond to the preferences of its citizens is central to democratic theory and practice.

VEC member NGOs also have the capacity of a governing political system and are responsible to a constituency – their members. NGOs have structured governance documents (i.e., constitution, bylaws, policies), hold elections, and meet regularly – all self-governance actions – and desire to influence public policy through their advocacy endeavors. Their major role in public policy advocacy is to persuade elected officials to act in a way that is conducive to the interests of the NGO’s constituency membership base. This might include persuading elected officials to vote one way or another on a

piece of legislation, introducing legislation, or amending legislation. It might also involve supplying them with research facts for a particular testimony or speech the elected official might give on a topic of interest to NGOs.

NGOs in the VEC use advocacy as a tool to promote their collective agenda, which focuses on public school education. NGOs in the study routinely address issues of public policy that are of concern to their individual member constituencies and integrate these concerns in their ongoing programs. This approach involves each NGO having their own activities in which specific advocacy priorities are strategized and are incorporated in the planning and implementation stages of achieving their own advocacy goals. They use the VEC to pursue major collective advocacy goals that may or may not be one of their own organization's goals. NGOs see these advocacy practices to be their role – and their duty to their own member constituencies – and integral to accomplishing their missions.

Some NGOs, as individual organizations as well as in their role as members of the VEC, identify and pioneer an advocacy issue or a concept and then undertake the necessary research, analysis, and information dissemination; initiate dialogues, conduct media campaigns and seminars; and participate in consensus-building in relation to a specific issue, with the intention of raising understanding and awareness in the policy arena.

NGOs in this study view their role as interacting closely with their local education communities, as well as government and state agencies. A major role for NGOs is to inform and educate their own members about state policy issues. They do not see their

role to be involved in national issues; however, they will support their national affiliates when called upon to address policy issues of a federal nature.

In his work on funding of nonprofit advocacy, Lester Salamon wrote, "of all the functions of the nonprofit sector, few are more critical than that of advocacy, of representing alternative perspectives and pressing them on public and private decision makers" (Reid, 2000, p. 68). NGOs in the VEC have consistently collaborated together for 10 years on issues that they have mutually agreed were in the best interest of all their member organizations. They have pursued legislative advocacy when the target for change has been primarily the state legislature, state school board policy and regulations, or budget allocation. Their nonprofit advocacy role of influencing legislation may involve legislative monitoring, committee testifying, lobbying, writing position papers, organizing additional specific networks and coalitions, and a variety of other activities.

What collaborative strategies are used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

Researchers have long been interested in the advocacy activity of NGOs because of the substantive effect that such activity often has on politics and policy (Cruz, 2001; DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990; Nicholson-Crotty, 2009). A review of the literature concerning advocacy activities of NGOs is plagued with conflicting findings, not only concerning the extent to which NGOs lobby and the various strategies they may use, but also explanations of the types of collaborative activity.

The findings of this study – and this research question in particular – and what was found in the literature show that the degree of dependence on government resources

had little effect on an organization's decision to pursue advocacy goals (Berry, 2003; Cruz, 2001; Nicholson-Crotty, 2009). The study participants did not seem concerned about the clear relationship between direct lobbying activities and the probability of costly retribution by hostile politicians. None of the study participants expressed concern about reprisals that may include the elimination of grant support funding from legislators or state agency administrators for strategies they pursued to reach advocacy goals. They all seemed to ascribe to the theme "as long as you fight the good fight to improve the teaching learning process in public schools," then you are on the correct side of policy.

Collaborative strategies identified in the literature were also found to exist in practice by NGOs in this study. These strategies typically existed of influencing state legislation and state board policy and regulations by state agencies, legislative monitoring, committee testifying, lobbying, writing position papers, organizing additional specific networks and coalitions, and a variety of other activities (Berry, 2003; La Piana, 1998; La Piana & Kohm, 2003; O'Neill, 2002; Salamon, 2002). As addressed in the previous question regarding advocacy roles, strategies also consist of conducting research, analysis, disseminating information, initiating dialogues, conducting media campaigns, seminars and participating in consensus building in relation to specific goals and objectives. NGOs in the VEC have been involved in all of these strategies during their 10 years as a collaboration.

The findings of the study regarding organizational size as measured by total revenue and the age of the NGOs appears to be positively related to the likelihood of attempting to directly influence legislation to achieve advocacy goals. Issues of staff support and finances appeared not to be significant regarding NGOs' ability to enter into

collaboration and advocacy and actively pursue strategies. This is in contrast to the newer, but not necessarily smaller member organizations in the VEC, who have come to rely on the larger, more experienced Virginia NGOs for their expertise in effective lobbying strategies and sense of institutional history of the VEC and about their individual organizations in general.

A major finding in this study was how NGOs would seemingly forgo the attention and need to collectively pursue advocacy goals directly important to their organizations if the collective wishes of the collaboration were to address goals of an intrinsic and altruistic benefit to the majority of the NGOs in the VEC. The subordination of individual NGO interests to the collective interests of the VEC is an important finding and is in contrast with what is found in the literature. As discussed in Chapter II, page 18, Snaveley and Tracy (2002) found that organizations join collaborations out of self-interest and Huxham (1996) found that NGO's self-interest is a necessary requirement for successful collaborations.

According to O'Leary and Bingham (2009), as a measure of tension between collective interests and self-interest, the positive effects of autonomy may be best explained by de Tocqueville's doctrine of "self-interest properly understood." This doctrine asserts that "man serves himself in serving his fellow-creatures" (de Tocqueville, 2000, p. 643). In fact, VEC (n.d.) governing rules stipulate in Rules of Operation – Article 5, Section 5 that "Decisions of the Virginia Education Coalition are reached by a consensus of members who are present at the meetings. Issues upon which members cannot reach a consensus, are dropped from consideration by the organization" (p. 2). This is in sharp contrast to the findings of Snaveley and Tracey as discussed earlier in

Chapter II, page 17. It appears that in collaboration, both self-interest of the NGO and collective interests of the VEC have the potential to coexist in creative balance. NGOs in the VEC are able to reconcile their individual interests with that of the VEC. The need for NGOs to speak with one voice through the VEC appeared to be a critical strategy when involved in pursuing public policy advocacy goals.

VEC appears to be able in its advocacy strategies to utilize informed debate, generate knowledge and influence policy making through a multi-stakeholder participatory process. These VEC member NGOs attempt to bridge the gap between government and education communities by sensitizing policy makers and state agency administrators to the needs and priorities of the collective VEC member constituencies.

NGO strategies in policy-related areas are operationalized by various means, including knowledge generated through research and analysis, creation of data and information bases, educating their own members through policy awareness raising, symposiums, dialogues, networking, disseminating information, mobilizing public support, and influencing policy at the state level. This is often accomplished by involving policy makers in the dialogue process and by contributing to preparation of state legislation and administrative regulations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A major point discussed in Chapter I was that collaboration and advocacy have long been considered central functions of America's nongovernment organizations. First published in the mid-19th century, one of the best written and most influential books about the United States, *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) wrote:

As soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion or a feeling which they wish to promote in the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found each other out, they combine. ... From that moment they are no longer isolated men, but a power seen from afar, whose actions serve for an example, and whose language is listened to. ... Nothing, in my opinion, is more deserving of our attention than the intellectual and moral associations of America. ... If men are to remain civilized, or to become more so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased (p. 632).

According to the literature, many NGOs consider influencing public policy makers to be their most important goal. The central target of organizational policy activity for NGOs is primarily at the state level. NGO members of the VEC could not agree with this more strongly.

Reduced to its most basic level, effective nongovernmental organization advocacy appears to be about communication and relationships. The member organizations in the VEC have met monthly (nine months a year) for 10 consecutive years. They seem to have learned and grown with each other in the past decade. At least two other attempts were made by the core NGOs during the previous 20 years prior to the successful collaboration that began in 1999. The VEC members have perceptibly learned to work with each other well and understand that as advocates they need to exercise persuasiveness, persistence and patience in representing an issue. Effective achievement of VEC's policy advocacy goals seems to be accomplished by NGO members being resourceful and flexible, willing to compromise, negotiate, build consensus, and prioritize.

Collaboration needs to involve people. According to the literature, collaborations seem to be less about alliances among organizations than ties among people. People who are involved in and committed to collaboration have relationships that are more durable

(La Piana & Kohm, 2003). This holds true for the VEC. Half of the study participants seemed to marvel at the older, more established NGOs in the VEC. Familiarity with individuals representing NGOs and the institutional memory they bring to the VEC, as well as their own NGO, were considered a vital asset. Moreover, the older VEC member organizations appear to keep elected officials and staff informed about their collaborations and consistently work to gain their support and input. According to the literature, this type of action improves the chances of seeing such collaborations endure (Harrigan, 1988). This is an important finding of the study.

The ultimate goal of collaboration is to achieve better results. Collaboration can improve the quality of decisions by incorporating advice from colleagues (Haas, 2005). When organizations come together, it is important that conversations are transparent and difficult issues are addressed. There are many rational and conscious individuals whose views and support may be most helpful in collaboration. Further, it is most important that the affected people – NGO member constituencies – clearly understand the issues and the risks they may be facing. This awareness may be a slow process, but it is an essential step in ensuring successful and sustainable advocacy goals.

According to the literature, organizations engaged in collaboration will not find it necessarily easy. The commitment of the necessary time and energy in a collaborative effort can be daunting (Chrislip, 2002). This appears to be true for NGO members in the VEC as well. Half of the NGO member organizations emphasized the challenges associated with the required commitment of time and manpower to attend meetings and respond to VEC issues.

A theme resonating throughout the interviews that should be repeated here is that half of the study participants expressed a need for institutional knowledge of the VEC. These study participants also discussed a need for their own NGOs to do a better job with establishing institutional knowledge. As an example, three organizations did not have their NGO's founding date in their literature nor were they able to find this information in time for the interview. One had to call their national affiliate to search archival records. The other never reported back to the researcher, even after the researcher had made repeated attempts to obtain the information. One study participant could only guess about the founding date and was never able to confirm.

Presenting the analysis of the findings uncovered additional salient information and themes that bear listing here:

- 10 out of 12 study participants did not cite any resources utilized for best practices on collaboration, and only seemed to rely on their national affiliates for guidance and direction in this area.
- A majority of the study participants reported that their organizations had lost members in recent years, despite their best efforts to recruit and maintain members. This issue might affect future collaborations.
- The more stable and vibrant NGOs with significant operational budgets who were housed in buildings they own were the older core organizations in the VEC.
- Study participants said their NGOs need to do a better job of educating their own members about collaboration, especially with respect to advocacy efforts.

The findings from this study are informative and exploratory in nature because of the limited research done in this area. Results should be helpful to those who are interested in conducting further research regarding collaborations, nongovernmental organizations and public policy advocacy. Although this study is limited to the collaborative nature and experiences of one population, members of the Virginia Education Coalition, the findings of this study are useful at three levels:

1. NGO leaders – to understand: a) how to cultivate collaboration among leaders in other organizations and to unite people to pursue a common goal, b) the advocacy roles NGOs play in public policy, and c) the various strategies used by NGOs to pursue advocacy goals.
2. Virginia Education Coalition – to better understand: a) their own member organizations, b) strengthening collaborative advocacy goals, and c) inciting a common value of teamwork.
3. Coalitions in general – to gain insights into the collaborative process, decision-making, and roles in reaching advocacy goals and influencing public policy.

Virginia Education Coalition, in particular, can benefit from reviewing the responses member organizations gave to the interview questions presented in this study. This could improve VEC's position in future collaborative efforts by deepening the understanding of their members' challenges, issues, and organizational constraints. The VEC could also provide specific training on collaborative development and conduct orientations regularly for new VEC representatives from member NGOs. Several study participants said their NGOs lost continuity whenever they changed representatives to the

VEC. Another area that could be considered by the VEC is a collaborative approach to membership recruitment and retention strategies for the individual member organizations. A majority of study participants cited this as an area of concern and challenge in the years ahead. The VEC could also hold regular forums on high priority policy issues identified by VEC members for their respective constituents. These forums would provide opportunities to disseminate information to large audiences of constituents, while at the same time demonstrating the dynamics of collaborative synergy.

Other research that might be conducted to obtain additional information on this study's subject matter is as follows:

- A study to determine who is accountable in VEC collaborations? Multiple organizations are involved in the decision-making process, which raises an important issue and that is – with so many NGO representatives involved, who is accountable?
- A study to examine how technological advances could, and perhaps should affect, VEC's collaborations. What opportunities and/or challenges exist with the use of online tools for collaboration, such as video-conferencing, social networking, blogging, and others? Is online collaboration a good thing?
- A study to ascertain the reasons the VEC has been successful since 1999 in being a permanent fixture for education collaborators, in spite of at least two failed attempts in the preceding 20 years. For example, could the ascendance of the Republican Party in gaining the governor's mansion in 1995 and eventually controlling both houses of the state legislature just a few years later – after 100 previous years of Democrat Party rule – have played a role?

- A study to identify additional collaborative strategies that might help the VEC address future challenges already identified by member organizations, such as protecting the state allocation of funds to public school education, developing new sources of tangible and intangible support, and positively influencing state and national policy makers given the changing political climate.
- A comparative analysis of education NGOs in other states to identify best practices of collaboration with the intention of using the findings to improve collaborative practices in Virginia. Another study objective may be to assess the viability of multi-state collaborations that would make education advocacy on a national scale more powerful.

Summary

This study involved one population – all 12 nongovernmental organization members of the Virginia Education Coalition. Study participants for each of these NGOs were interviewed. In addition to the interviews, NGO documents were reviewed and observations were noted. Study participants were receptive to the research study, supportive and cooperative in answering all the questions presented. Many expressed eagerness in seeing the results of the final study in hopes of improving their involvement in the VEC and perhaps other future collaborations.

A qualitative design using a case study approach was used to examine the collaborative strategies and techniques used by NGO member organizations of the VEC in pursuit of their advocacy goals in public policy. The study was framed around three

research questions of prime importance: What is a collaboration, and when, how, and why is it used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals? What advocacy roles do nongovernment organizations play in public policy? What collaborative strategies are used by nongovernment organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

The VEC has a central focus and that is to improve public school education in Virginia. For public education to improve in the Commonwealth, it is important that this contemporary democratic, three-sector society of government (public administrators), business (corporations or for-profit companies) and nonprofit (nongovernmental organizations) all work together (see Chapter 1, p. 3). As the world economy and globalization become more prominent, the role of governments and the private sector is likely to assume ever greater importance and NGOs will have more opportunities for public policy advocacy.

This study addresses education NGOs and conclusions drawn are from these NGOs and their involvement in the VEC. As with any qualitative inquiry and analysis, the human factor is both its greatest strength and the basic weakness; hence, the researcher recognizes the findings of this study are subjective. With the long time experience of the researcher as an NGO executive director, he recognizes the possible biases involved in researcher as instrument in analyzing the findings of this study. Toward this end, the researcher conducted cross-case analysis and negative case analysis throughout the data collection and data analysis. This final chapter of the study reflects one researcher's interpretation of the findings. Other researchers might have told a different story.

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APPENDIX A

Introduction Letter for Interview Request and Organization Documentation

[On VCU Letterhead]

Virginia Commonwealth University
College of Humanities and Sciences
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs
Center for Public Policy
Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration
P.O. Box 843061
Richmond, VA 23284-3061

Date

LETTER TO NGO EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Dear _____:

As you are well aware, collaboration and advocacy have become essential functions for influencing state executive offices, legislatures, regulatory boards, and administrative agencies in the Commonwealth. It is becoming more and more difficult for any nonprofit organization to survive and succeed in advancing its mission while operating independent of other nonprofits. Accordingly, I am asking for your involvement in a study of nonprofit organizations and their use of collaborative strategies to pursue advocacy goals in public policy. This study is being conducted by Randy Barrack as part of his doctoral thesis. Full participation of all selected respondents is important, and therefore I hope you will be willing to cooperate.

The study design has been discussed with and endorsed by the Virginia Education Coalition governing board and will incorporate observations, in-depth interviews and a review of written documents. A list of the documents to be reviewed for this study are enclosed. Your responses given in the interview will remain completely confidential with respect to you and the organization you serve.

Randy will be calling you in a few days to schedule an interview appointment for the study and to collect the written materials. Your cooperation will be gratefully appreciated.

Sincerely,

William C. Boshier, Jr., Ed.D.
Distinguished Professor of Public Policy
and Education

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol for Participants

Appendix B

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

Purpose of in-depth interview component of collaboration, NGO, advocacy study

To gather detailed information from NGO respondents in order to understand the perceptions their organizations have about collaboration – what it is, how and why it is used to pursue advocacy goals in public policy – to understand the advocacy roles they play in public policy, and also to understand what collaborative strategies they use to pursue advocacy goals.

Respondents

12 respondents representing the twelve (12) NGOs who are members of the Virginia Education Coalition.

Interviewer

Randy D. Barrack (investigator/researcher)

Time and Duration

Each interview can take up to 2 hours. At a rate of about two per day, the interviews should be completed in 8-10 working days.

Method

The in-depth interviews will be carried out in privacy, with only the interviewer and respondent present. The interviews will be tape recorded, with the respondent's permission, for later transcription.

Privacy, confidentiality, informed consent

Each NGO respondent selected will represent their respective organization and must understand that she or he is free to participate in or decline the interview on behalf of the organization. No NGO respondent will receive any material benefit from his or her participation, nor will he or she be harmed in any way. None of the information will be of a personal nature, but will be coded as the perceptions of the organization they represent. All information will be kept strictly confidential, and no respondent will ever be identified with any comment he or she makes about their organization. If a respondent agrees to the interview, he or she will be asked to sign an appropriate informed consent form.

Main research questions:

1. What is a collaboration, and when, how, and why is it used by non-government organizations to pursue advocacy goals?
2. What advocacy roles do non-government organizations play in public policy?
3. What collaborative strategies are used by non-government organizations to pursue advocacy goals?

Themes and questions for the interviews are as follows:

Theme #1 Characteristics of NGOs Involved in Collaboration

- 1.1 What year was your NGO founded?
- 1.2 Is your annual operating budget more or less than \$100,000?
- 1.3 Is your NGO affiliated with any other organization?
 - Probe/ 1.3.a. Does your NGO have subsidiary affiliated organizations?
 - Follow-up: 1.3.b. Is your NGO bound by regulations and or policies of a national affiliate?
- 1.4 Who is your primary constituency/membership base? How many members does your NGO represent?

Theme #2 NGO understanding of collaboration

- 2.1 How would your organization define collaboration?
- 2.2 Is collaboration important to your organization? Why or why not?
 - Probe/ If so, does your NGO consider collaboration a major tool to accomplish
 - Follow-up: its nonprofit mission?
- 2.3 Who in your NGO sets the tone for the type and extent of collaboration that your organization engages in?
 - Probe/ Is it a committee? Board? Executive Director? President? Director of
 - Follow-up: Government Relations? Lobbyist? Other?
- 2.4 What resources does your NGO turn to for ideas and best practices on the use of collaboration?
 - Probe/ 2.4.a. Did you look at other organizations that were successfully using
 - Follow-up: collaborations?
 - 2.4.b. Are there books, articles, other publications or online resources
 - that your NGO turns to for collaborative ideas and to explore best
 - practices?
 - 2.4.c. Is there a collaborative expert on your staff or do you consult with
 - one?

Theme #3

NGO collaborative relationship with other organizations

- 3.1 Is your organization currently involved in collaborations other than the Virginia Education Coalition? If so, are these collaborations formal or informal networks, or are you working together with organizations in other ways?

Probe/
Follow-up:

3.1.a. If involved in one or more **formal collaborations** with other organizations – such as legal, fiscal, administrative, programmatic exchange, advocacy – please describe briefly the purpose of the one that is most important to your organization.

3.1.b. If involved in one or more **informal networks** with other organizations – such as cooperating, coordinating – please describe briefly the purpose of the one that is most important to your organization.

3.1.c. If involved in **both** formal collaborations and informal networks, are there any types of organizations involved that are most important to your organization?

- Nonprofit advocacy organizations
- Nonprofit mutual benefit organizations
- Business or other for-profit organizations
- Government agencies or authorities

3.1.d. What types of collaborations are most important to your organization?

- “One time deal” used to focus on one particular advocacy goal
- A short term collaborative relationship (2 to 5 years) depending on the advocacy goal
- A long term collaborative relationship (more than 5 years) — that resembles a type of partnership — for the organization to pursue numerous advocacy goals

3.1.e. How long do your NGO collaborations typically last?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to a year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- Greater than 5 years

- 3.2 Does your organization currently compete with other nonprofits, for-profits or government agencies?

Probe/
Follow-up:

Does your organization compete for purposes of

- Obtaining financial resources
- Recruiting staff/volunteers
- Recruiting board members
- Attracting clients/members
- Delivering programs/services

3.3 To what extent do issues of trust and competition play a role in influencing collaboration in your NGO?

3.4 What is your NGO's primary motivation for becoming involved in collaboration?

Theme #4 Opportunities and Challenges of NGO Collaboration

4.1 How does your NGO benefit from collaborating with other organizations? Were the benefits from the collaboration what your NGO anticipated prior to the collaboration?

Probe/

Follow-up:

- Same
- Lower
- Higher

Do the members of your NGO perceive collaboration as an effective advocacy tool?

4.2 What are your NGO's challenges of collaborating with other organizations?

Probe/

Follow-up:

Does your NGO view collaboration as a cost cutting strategy in their advocacy efforts?

Has your NGO experienced a reduction in staff or reduction in needed volunteers as a result of collaboration?

- Increase?
- No change?

4.3 Were the costs of collaboration what you anticipated prior to the collaboration?

Probe/

Follow-up:

4.3.a Were the actual financial costs what you anticipated?

4.3.b What about the intangible costs such as staff time, the NGO's reputation, other?

- 4.4 Does involvement in collaborations or networks in general make it easier or harder to maintain key organizational capacities?

Probe/ Follow-up: How do collaborations or networks impact your organization's capacity to ability to:

- Obtain funding
- Recruit/keep staff
- Recruit/keep volunteers
- Meet client/member needs
- Enhance your visibility/reputation

Theme #5 NGOs, Collaboration, and Advocacy Activities

- 5.1 During the past five years, how has your organization attempted to influence national, state, or local legislation, other than membership in VEC, including any attempt to influence public opinion on a legislative matter? **[If no, skip to question 5.4.]**

Probe/ Follow-up: How frequently would you say your organization engages in public policy issues?

- Quarterly
- Once per month over the previous year
- 24/7

- 5.2 Does your organization have a specific budget amount it allocates each year toward influencing public policy? If so, would you consider this budget amount adequate to do the job successfully? Are the funds devoted to lobbying specifically or to advocacy activities in general?

Probe/ Follow-up: Budget Amount

- Percentage of your budget devoted to either lobbying or advocacy activities

- 5.3 What is the principal target of your organization's policy activity – local, state, or federal? Do you think this is the most effective target for your organization?

- 5.4 How does your NGO use collaboration to pursue its advocacy goals?

Probe/ Follow-up: 5.4.a. Are there any particular collaborative strategies used by your NGO to pursue advocacy goals?

5.4.b. Does your NGO attempt to have other member organizations adopt your NGO's advocacy goals?

5.5 If your NGO did not engage in lobbying or advocacy within the past year, what are the reasons?

- | | |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Probe/ | Reasons |
| Follow-up: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of staff time• Lack of staff skills• Reliance on coalitions• Worries about violating laws or regulations• Concerns about losing public funds• Board opposition• Relied on other NGO members in the collaboration |

5.6 Are there times when your NGO would be better off working independently when attempting to influence public policy? If so, can you provide an example?

- | | |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Probe/ | Does your organization prefer to work independently and not depend on or |
| Follow-up: | be involved in a collaboration? |

Closing Question:

What lessons has your NGO learned from its past (or present) collaboration(s) that will be helpful to your organization moving forward?

- | | |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Probe/ | What would your NGO do differently in the future? |
| Follow-up: | What one area is your NGO's biggest challenge in the next few years? |
| | How will that affect your NGO's collaborations? |

RANDY DEAN BARRACK
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EDUCATION

- Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration. Nongovernmental Organization concentration.
Virginia Commonwealth University, December 2009. Dissertation title: *The Use of Collaboration in Nongovernmental Organization Public Policy Advocacy*.
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- M.Ed. in Administration and Supervision, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, August 1978.
- B.S. in Political Science, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, May 1975.

WORK EXPERIENCE

- Executive Director, Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals, Richmond, Va. June 1979 to present.
President, Virginia Foundation for Educational Leadership, Richmond, Virginia. June 2007 to present. VFEL is the 501(c)(3) foundation of the VASSP.
- Adjunct Professor, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, VCU. Summer 2004 to present. Courses taught Administrative Law, Financial Management.
- Principal, Highland High School, Highland County School Board, Monterey, Va. July 1978 to July 1979
- Teacher – U.S. Government, AP-Political Science, Anthropology, U.S. History, Northumberland High School, Northumberland County School Board, Heathsville, Va. August 1975 to July 1978