

STATE LEGISLATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLITICAL ADVOCACY
INVOLVEMENT OF NONPROFIT HUMAN
SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

Advocacy has long been a central tenant of the social work profession. From its inception, the profession of social work has considered itself a vehicle for social change by providing a voice for those who have been traditionally oppressed, marginalized and underrepresented in the decision making processes that impact their lives. As a result, social workers, the majority of which are employed within the nonprofit sector, have a unique opportunity and a professional obligation to leverage their knowledge and skills with the resources and reach of their organizations to advance the interests and increase the well-being of those they serve through political advocacy. Yet, despite their importance in the delivery of social services, the current body of literature suggests that there is not a corresponding level of political engagement among social workers, and consequently by nonprofit human service organizations (NHSOs).

In order to better understand the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs, a pragmatic qualitative approach was employed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 state legislators, in order to answer the research question, “How do state legislators perceive the political advocacy involvement of nonprofit human service organizations in the policymaking process?” Thematic analysis of the data yielded five themes: that perceived advocacy involvement by NHSOs was mixed, that legislators saw a clear opportunity for NHSOs to influence policy decisions, that NHSOs often lack an understanding of the political process, that legislators recognized capacity issues create challenges for some NHSOs interested in advocacy, and that legislators perceived relationships to be the most valuable political currency for NHSOs.

These findings not only provide something of a snapshot of the current state of nonprofit political advocacy, but also provide novel and important insights into the perceived participation and the impact of NHSOs in the policymaking process at the state level. Furthermore, these findings also have important implications for social work practice and social work education. These implications, as well as some preliminary strategies to increase the advocacy participation and effectiveness of advocacy efforts of NHSOs, are presented.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSW	Bachelor of Social Work
CSWE	Council of Social Work Education
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
MSW	Master of Social Work
NHSO	Nonprofit Human Service Organization
NHSOs	Nonprofit Human Service Organizations

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Advocacy has long been a central tenant of the social work profession. From its inception, the profession of social work has considered itself a vehicle for social change by providing a voice for those who have been traditionally oppressed, marginalized and underrepresented in the decision making processes that impact their lives (Schneider & Netting, 1999). Hoefler (2006) broadly defines advocacy as, “that part of social work practice where the social worker takes action in a systematic and purposeful way to defend, represent, or otherwise advance the cause of one or more clients at the individual, group, organizational or community level, in order to promote social justice” (p. 8). Social workers, whether serving as an advocate for the rights of a single individual or pursuing remedies to social injustices that affect entire populations, share a common charge: to stand for, and to ideally stand along side, those that who otherwise go unheard. Advocacy can take many forms; however, legislative advocacy holds unique potential to elicit social change because it the ability to target the underlying causes of social injustices and, and in doing so, to create fundamental change at systemic levels.

Article six of The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics includes a mandate for social workers to, “facilitate informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions” as well as “engage in social and political action to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully” (NASW, 2008a). It is important to note that the NASW does not relegate political advocacy to a subset of social workers who fill

specific roles or work in particular settings, but requires all practicing social workers to recognize and act on opportunities to influence the political process on behalf of their clients. Yet, if the profession of social work is to make good on its goal of influencing political decisions and shaping public policy, it is imperative that practicing social workers possess the requisite knowledge and skills to do so. Since the profession's inception, there has been an ongoing ideological rift within social work between macro and micro that raises important questions about the profession's readiness to engage in effective political advocacy (Specht & Courtney, 1994; Stoesz, Karger, & Carillo, 2010). This rift is evident when comparing the proportion of self-identified micro social workers to macro social workers. According to the NASW (2008b), 68% of social workers report that their work is micro in nature, while only 14% practice at the macro level. Even more telling is the finding that social workers reported spending only one percent of their time being involved in policy or legislation development and another one percent of their time engaging in community organizing (NASW, 2008b).

This shift towards a clinical focus has long been a topic of great debate within the profession with some even arguing that the move away from macro practice is an abandonment of social work's fundamental principles (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Others like Richard Hoefler (2006) take a less forceful approach, but still extoll the value of advocacy practice. He states, "Social workers must be involved in advocacy practice if clients' situations are to improve. If social workers do not act as advocates, their policy ideas and, even more importantly, their values will not be well represented in policy-making circles. (p. 21)." By neglecting to engage in political advocacy efforts, not only are social workers failing to represent the interests of their clients in the political process, but they are also allowing other interests, including those with

opposing ideologies, to advance their own ideals at the expense of the very populations that social workers strive to serve (Nicholson-Crotty, 2001; Taliaferro, 2013).

Therefore, social workers, the majority of which are employed by the nonprofit sector, have a unique opportunity and responsibility to leverage their knowledge and skills with the resources and reach of their organizations to advance the interests of those they serve through political advocacy (NASW, 2008a). Because nonprofit human service organizations have frequent and direct access to individuals and groups who are acutely impacted by social issues, social policy decisions, and social programs, these organizations are, “central to the representation of community and client needs to the broader community and policymakers at the state and local level” (Smith, 2010, p. 623).

This proximity to the client creates its own set of opportunities. First, nonprofits possess valuable information about the structure, implementation and effectiveness of the social programs they administer. Additionally, these organizations have the opportunity to serve as clearinghouses of quantitative and qualitative data that can be used to better understand social problems and how individuals, families, and communities are impacted by these problems. Finally, nonprofit human service organizations have the ability to utilize and mobilize their various types of human capital (employees, Board of Directors, volunteers, clients, etc.) to influence the policymaking process in a way that can have a far greater impact than any single individual. By using their insight, expertise, and human capital, these organizations can educate the public and policymakers on social issues, develop informed policy solutions, and serve as an authoritative voice in the policymaking process (Jackson-Elmore, 2005).

Rationale for Study

Mellinger and Kolomer (2013) state that nonprofit human service organizations serve as, “a channel for the profession to fulfill its core values of championing the cause of the disadvantaged and the oppressed through service and advocacy” (p. 88). Berry (2005) also speaks to the central role that nonprofit human service organizations should play in furthering the mission of social work by stating that they, “must mobilize and represent the poor and disadvantaged in society if they are to have a voice in the political system” (p. 568). Therefore, social workers interested in macro level interventions to erase iniquities and ameliorate injustices can, and should, view nonprofit human service organizations as an important vehicle for social change. Fortunately for social workers within nonprofit human service organizations, the opportunity to influence the political process has never been more conducive. In recent decades, nonprofit organizations have assumed an unprecedented role in delivering critical social services, and consequently, have become increasingly influential political actors (Leroux & Goerdel, 2009; Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013). The increasingly central role that nonprofits play in the delivery of services has caused the nonprofit sector to be described as, “nothing less than the administrative arm of the welfare state” (Berry, 2005, p. 569). Declining federal revenues and increasing devolution of social programs to the states, and ultimately to nonprofit organizations, means that the role of nonprofits will only continue to grow. This coalescence of mission and opportunity requires that that social workers, particularly those working in the context of NHSOs, understand how to actively and effectively engage in the legislative process.

Statement of the Problem

Despite their growing importance in the delivery of social services, the current body of literature suggests that there is not a corresponding increase in political engagement among

social workers, and consequently by NHSOs. By examining the rates of political participation of NHSOs, one begins to see a disturbing, and somewhat perplexing, trend. In a national survey of more than 1,200 social workers, Rome and Hoechstetter (2010) found that while 78% of respondents felt that the link between social action and social work practice was well established during their social work education, less than half (42%) felt they had adequate knowledge of how to impact the political process. Furthermore, another 43% felt they lacked adequate guidance on how to incorporate political advocacy into their professional role. At the organizational level, while a majority of NHSOs report engaging in political advocacy activities (Mosley, 2010; Mosley, 2011; Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013; Mellinger, 2014), only a small percentage, as few as four percent, do so at a high level (Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013).

There is a case to be made that political and legislative advocacy has become an afterthought for NHSOs. Mellinger and Kolomer (2013) state, “It could be argued that within human service organizations, the emphasis placed on direct and clinical services has left advocacy as a reactionary intervention only used when issues arise”(p. 92). In this era of unprecedented opportunity, far too many NHSOs are failing to leverage their increasing influence to shape social policies and advance the interests of the populations they serve.

What is clear from the current body of research is that organizational capacity plays a central role in an organization’s ability or willingness to participate in political advocacy (Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; Donaldson, 2007; Leroux & Goerdel, 2009; MacIndoe & Whalen, 2013; Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013; Mosley, 2010; Mosley, 2011; Salamon, 2002). This evidence strongly suggests that organizations with greater capacity are more likely to advocate. Therefore, strategies to increase and maximize organizational advocacy capacity, as well as strategies to mitigate the deleterious effects of limited capacity, are likely needed in order for more nonprofit

human service organizations to become politically active. Therefore, it makes sense to decrease the learning curve by identifying best practices. One efficient way to do this is to reach out to the advocacy targets themselves and seek their perspectives on what tactics are most effective. Surprisingly, little is known about how responsive elected officials are towards the political advocacy efforts of nonprofit human service organizations. Elected officials play an essential role in the policymaking process thereby making them a prime, and inexplicably untapped, source of information that can help guide the advocacy efforts of nonprofit organizations. Clearly, further study is needed to determine how nonprofit human service organizations can use their growing influence to represent the interests of those they serve in the political arena, and ultimately, shape public policy.

Research Question

This study was designed to create a better understanding of how state legislators view the legislative advocacy involvement of NHSOs. Therefore, the research question driving this study was, “How do state legislators perceive the political advocacy involvement of nonprofit human service organizations in the policymaking process?” By tapping into the unique insight and experiences of state legislators, strengths and weaknesses of NHSO advocacy efforts were assessed, and subsequently, strategies were created to maximize the participation and influence of these organizations in the policymaking process.

Rationale for Qualitative Methods

In order to answer these research questions, I utilized a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods are well suited to answer questions where there is very little existing information and when a deeper understanding of a phenomenon is desired. Padgett (2008) states that qualitative research is preferred when one seeks to capture, “the complex worlds of respondents in a

holistic, on-the-ground manner” (p. 2). Additionally, there is little in-depth knowledge about how nonprofit human service organizations effectively work with state legislators to influence public policy at the state level. Qualitative methods provided the best opportunity to take an initial step towards formulating an understanding of how state legislators perceived the policy-advocacy work of NHSOs. As a result, I was able to uncover valuable insights that can be used inform the advocacy practice of social work practitioners and those within NHSOs.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction that orients the reader to the topic of political advocacy, and more specifically political advocacy by nonprofit human service organizations, provides definitions of key concepts, presents the research question, and provides the rationale for the study. In the second chapter, I provide a comprehensive review of the extant literature on the political advocacy of nonprofit human service organizations as well as an overview of the theoretical framework influencing the study. I begin the third chapter by laying the methodological foundation by presenting the research approach as well as providing a statement of my stance and positionality within the research context. I then provide details about the sampling procedures, the study participants, ethical considerations, the theoretical framework underlying the study, the research context itself, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. I conclude the third chapter by presenting the strategies employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. In the fourth chapter, I discuss the major findings of the study by presenting the five themes that were developed from the data. In the final chapter, I provide a brief overview of the findings and their place within the literature, discuss the study limitations, and offer the practical, educational and theoretical implications of the findings. Finally, I conclude with a discussion about opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the potential impact of political advocacy and the advantageous climate for nonprofits to influence the political process, the political advocacy involvement of nonprofit human service organizations is a worthwhile area of study within the field of social work. However, prior to any discussion about the political advocacy of NHSOs and political advocacy, it is necessary to first distinguish NHSOs from other types of nonprofit organizations as well as delineate political advocacy from other forms of advocacy. Once these foundational definitions are in place, the next step is to understand the opportunities available to NHSOs in the political context, examine the extent to which NHSOs are actually engaging in the policymaking process, and identify the factors influencing their response. Finally, once each aspect has been fully considered, the major findings in the literature will be identified and the opportunity for further study discussed.

Defining Nonprofit Human Service Organizations

From the early voluntary associations of the 1800's, to the rise in philanthropic foundations during the 1900's, to the highly professionalized nonprofit sector of the new millennium, nonprofit organizations, in one form or another, have been a part of the American social fabric since the Colonial era, and have become a fixture of American society (Arnsberger, Ludlum, Riley & Stanton, 2008). Today, the nonprofit sector employs approximately 10% of American workers, making it the country's third largest employment sector behind only retail and manufacturing (McKeever, 2015). In addition to the impact nonprofits have on employment,

they also have a sizable impact on the economy as a whole. At present, the nonprofit sector accounts for 5.4% of America's total gross domestic product. Nonprofit organizations also have a considerable social impact. In a typical year, more than a quarter of all adults in the United States volunteer their time to nonprofit organizations. These figures provide a glimpse into the current scope and the potential impact of the modern nonprofit sector (McKeever, 2015).

Within the universe of nonprofit organizations, a more specific type of organization exists with an expressly charitable purpose. Nonprofit human service organizations, or organizations established under Section 501(c)3 of the tax code, one of 29 such codes, represent the largest group of tax-exempt organizations in the United States. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) distinguishes these organization based on their expressed charitable purposes including, "relief of the poor, the distressed, or the underprivileged," as well as "eliminating prejudice and discrimination," and "defending human and civil rights secured by law" (IRS, 2014). The National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute (2013) reports that of the nearly 1.5 million tax-exempt organizations in the United States, approximately one million of these organizations are registered as 501(c)3 public charities, and this number is growing at a rapid rate. While the nonprofit sector as a whole grew by eight and half percent between 2003 and 2013, the number of 501(c)3 public charities rose by 29.7% over the same period of time (Urban Institute, 2013).

Just as 501(c)3 charitable organizations make up the largest percentage of all tax exempt organizations, human service organizations make up the largest percentage of 501(c)3 organizations. Currently more than 100,000 organizations are registered with the IRS. (Urban Institute, 2015). Kimberlin (2010) further differentiates human service nonprofits by dividing them between core advocacy organizations and direct service agencies. It is important to note

that this is not an official distinction captured by any of the major classification systems (The National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities, The North American Industry Classification System, or the Internal Revenue Service), meaning that no reliable data exists on the precise number of core advocacy organizations or direct service organizations. According to Kimberlin (2010), core advocacy organizations are typically guided by an explicit mission to engage in advocacy whereas direct service agencies are often driven by a mission to provide services to individuals, families, and communities. Examples of direct service agencies include homeless shelters, counseling centers, food banks, legal services, and other organizations that directly provide social services. While direct service organizations are not beholden to an advocacy-specific mission like core advocacy organizations, they can, and should, still engage in political advocacy. In fact, it is this service provision role that provides nonprofit human service organizations a potentially authoritative voice in political matters and what makes these organizations worthy of further study. For this reason, this study will focus on direct service, 501(c)3 nonprofit human service organizations.

Defining Political Advocacy

Advocacy has long been a part of the social work tradition. Despite its ubiquity in social work discourse and its historical place in social work practice, nonprofit advocacy has proven to be difficult to conceptualize. Pekkanen, Smith and Tsujinaka (2014) cite three reasons for this: the inability to accurately operationalize and measure advocacy, the challenge of determining causality between advocacy outputs and outcomes, and the multiple natures of advocacy including direct advocacy and grassroots advocacy. Therefore, the study of political advocacy among nonprofit organizations presents as many challenges as it does opportunities.

There is not one, universally accepted definition of political advocacy in the current body of literature, rather there are a number of studies that define and operationalize the term differently. Hoefler (2006) broadly defines advocacy as, “that part of social work practice where the social worker takes action in a systematic and purposeful way to defend, represent, or otherwise advance the cause of one or more clients at the individual, group, organizational or community level, in order to promote social justice” (p. 8). Generally speaking, political advocacy is any effort that aims to influence the decisions and actions of policymakers or other political actors on behalf of individuals, groups or populations. Advocacy targets may include elected officials, legislators, legislative staff, or other key decision makers at the local, state and national levels. As a result, it is imperative that social workers not only understand and navigate the political structures and processes that govern the systems they are seeking to change, but know how to influence them as well.

Extent of the Political Advocacy Involvement of Social Workers

Given the importance that the profession of social work places on policy practice and political engagement, it would be expected that social workers, regardless of their professional context and role, would be politically active. This is not necessarily the case. A survey of 396 social workers across 11 states (Ritter, 2007) found that while social workers were more likely to engage in a number of political activities such as voting in a presidential election, persuading someone to vote for a political party or candidate, and contributing to a political party than the general public, the rates at which social workers incorporated political action into their professional roles were much lower. For example, of those surveyed, only 23% worked to pass a piece of legislation as a part of their job and only five percent reported testifying at a public hearing. Perhaps the most surprising finding from the study was that more than half, or 54%, of

social workers were found to be politically inactive. Of these, 41% were considered somewhat inactive, and the other 13% were labeled as very inactive. As for the other 46%, only eight percent of these social workers were considered very active. These figures indicate a startling trend of political inactivity among practicing social workers.

Another study by Rocha, Poe, and Thomas (2010) seeks to explain the possible reasons behind social workers' limited political engagement within their professional roles. This study identifies a number of barriers that social workers face when engaging in political advocacy efforts including a lack of efficacious political education, underdeveloped political skills, and an overall lack of understanding, or lack of interest to understand, laws related to permissible political activities. While these barriers contribute to the limited political involvement of practicing social workers, they do not excuse it. The authors state:

“The bottom line is that social workers, in organizations and individually, can advocate politically much more than they realize. As one of the few professions that understand the issues of disenfranchised communities and oppressed populations, it is incumbent upon social workers to communicate their vast knowledge to decision makers who may not understand what policies actually enhance the lives of the people social workers serve” (p. 324).

The findings from Ritter (2007) and Rocha, Poe and Thomas (2010) tell a troubling story. At a minimum, professional social workers are failing to uphold their mandate to engage in political and social action, and in doing so, are failing to advance the mission of the profession as well as the interests of those they serve. Because individual social workers are failing to engage in political advocacy efforts within their professional roles, it is reasonable, then, to also examine how this inaction translates to, and ultimately impacts, the political advocacy involvement of the organizations that typically employ social workers.

Extent of the Political Advocacy Involvement of NHSOs

The increasingly important role of NHSOs in the delivery of social services and the opportunity for nonprofit human service organizations to shape the policymaking process suggest that there is not only a clear path for political and legislative advocacy, but also an organizational and professional incentive to do so. Yet, this nexus of opportunity and influence has not led to concerted move towards legislative and political advocacy by NHSOs.

A number of researchers have attempted to determine the overall rate at which nonprofit organizations actually engage in political advocacy and the findings provide an unclear view of political advocacy participation. Only a small number of these studies have specifically examined rates of political advocacy by NHSOs. Mosley (2010) found that 57% of human service nonprofits participate in political advocacy, and in a separate study, Mosley (2011) found that even fewer, or just 50% of surveyed NHSOs, reported engaging in any form of political advocacy. According to Mosley, the most common forms of involvement were participation in coalitions with the intent to influence policy, attempting to shape regulations, and educating the public on policy issues. Mellinger and Kolomer (2013) found that 65% of organizations surveyed do participate in some form of political advocacy. However, this number is quite misleading when looking at the reported frequency of advocacy efforts at each level of government. Only six percent of nonprofit human service organizations reported high levels of advocacy at the federal level, four percent reported high levels of advocacy at the state level and four percent reported high levels of political advocacy at the local level. In contrast, 73% reported never or rarely advocating at the federal level, 60% never or rarely advocating at the state level, and 57% reported never or rarely advocating at the local level. These numbers demonstrate a stark difference between overall advocacy participation rates and the frequency of advocacy

participation of nonprofit human service organizations. In another study, Mellinger (2014) found that 54% of organizations reported either no participation or extremely low participation in legislative advocacy and 42% reported little or no participation in non-legislative advocacy. Further still, according to Berry and Aarons (2005), despite the fact that a majority of NHSOs believed that government officials were interested in hearing from them, less than 30% of NHSOs reported meeting frequently with such officials. These findings indicate that political advocacy is not a widely adopted activity within many nonprofit human service organizations despite the potential impact that it could have on improving the quality of life for those they serve.

Others have examined the political participation of nonprofit human service organizations within the larger universe of 501(c)3 charitable nonprofits. MacIndoe and Whelan (2013) found that 49% of charitable nonprofits engage in political advocacy, a rate similar to those who focused specifically on nonprofit human service organizations. Others have found considerably lower rates of participation. A study by Buffardi, Pekkanen and Rathgeb-Smith (2015) found that of 1,227 nonprofits surveyed, only 373, or 30%, reported ever making a direct advocacy request to the government at any level. Child and Gronjberg (2007) found that only 23% of charitable nonprofits engaged in political advocacy, and Salamon (2002) found even fewer, or just 18%, reported participation in political advocacy.

The Challenge of Measuring Political Advocacy

Within the literature, data on political advocacy is collected in one of two primary ways. For some, advocacy is constructed as a single, dichotomous variable presented in the form of a question such as, “Is your organization involved in advocating or promoting solutions for broad scale social problems evident in your community, and in the interest of certain group of people?”

(Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013, p. 95) or “Does your organization engage in policy advocacy by officially supporting certain positions on policy issues or on issues related to the interests of certain groups.” (MacIndoe & Whelan, 2013, p. 130). Others ask organizations to choose from a list of activities in which they participate, all deemed by the author to represent various forms of political advocacy. For example, Mellinger (2014) identifies 11 activities that constitute political advocacy behavior, nine of which focus on shaping legislation: political advocacy as monitoring legislative process, testifying in legislative hearings, working with legislators or local officials through the legislative process, contacting elected officials, providing testimony in committee hearings or meetings, meeting with public agency staff to advocate, meeting with public administrators to influence policy, coordinating public awareness events, and meeting with community leaders to advocate. Similarly, Mosley (2011) uses eight organizational behaviors to describe political advocacy with six referring specifically to legislative advocacy: participation in coalitions to influence policy, educating the public on policy issues, participation in government committees, providing testimony, writing media pieces, and issuing policy reports. The use of both broad definitions and the detailed lists of advocacy behaviors illustrate the difficulty of capturing the true nature and scope of legislative advocacy.

There are several methodological explanations for the variation in advocacy rates. The first, which has already been discussed, is that there is not a single, agreed upon definition of political advocacy. Each study utilizes a unique definition of political advocacy, and as a result, reported participation rates may be a function of how narrowly or broadly researchers define political advocacy. Another explanation for the variation has to do with the types of organizations included in the sample. The universe of charitable nonprofit organizations is both large and diverse; therefore, the inclusion and exclusion criteria used can have a notable impact

on final results. Additionally, because these studies are specifically interested in advocacy behaviors, there is the possibility of social desirability bias causing respondents to overstate their participation in advocacy. The challenges of defining and determining advocacy participation coupled with the wide variation of participation rates in the literature indicate a clear need for additional research in order to accurately and reliably determine how often nonprofit organizations engage in political advocacy.

Factors Influencing the Political Advocacy Involvement of NHSOs

To understand why organizations are and are not engaging in advocacy efforts, researchers have focused their attention on the organizational and environmental factors that either facilitate or inhibit advocacy behaviors. Numerous factors have been examined and found to have a significant impact on advocacy behavior. These factors and characteristics can be aggregated into four main categories: mission, funding, human resources, and organizational operations. While these factors provide an inexact means of predicting advocacy behaviors, they do provide some preliminary clues as to why the commitment to actively engage in legislative advocacy among nonprofit human service organizations is tepid, at best.

A number of researchers have examined how agency mission impacts advocacy participation. The nature of an organization's work and the field in which an organization operates has been found to impact the rate at which it advocates. Organizations delivering direct services to the public are more likely to advocate than those that focus on educational or environmental causes (Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; MacIndoe & Whelan, 2013). Additionally, organizations with missions that pertain to serving specific populations are also more likely to advocate on behalf of those populations than organizations with missions to serve the general public (MacIndoe & Whelan, 2013; Salamon, 2002).

Another frequently examined set of characteristics relates to an organization's level and structure of funding. Not surprisingly, organizations with greater financial resources are more likely to engage in political advocacy behaviors (Donaldson, 2007; MacIndoe & Whelan, 2013; Mosley, 2010; Mosley, 2011). Research has also shown that as government funding becomes a larger percentage of an organization's overall funding, the likelihood of political advocacy also increases (Chaves, 2004; Donaldson, 2007; LeRoux & Goerdel, 2009; MacIndoe & Whelan, 2013; Mosley, 2010; Salamon, 2002). Private funding (Salamon, 2002) and restricted funding (Mellinger, 2013) are also significant, positive predictors of political advocacy participation. Finally, organizations that frequently interact with their funders have been found to engage in political advocacy more than those with less frequent interaction. (Leroux & Goerdel, 2009).

Human resources within an organization have also been found to have a considerable impact on political advocacy participation. Research has shown that as the number of full-time staff increases, so too does advocacy participation (Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; Donaldson, 2007; MacIndoe & Whelan, 2013). Similarly, others have found that as the number of volunteers within an organization increases, advocacy participation also increases (Mosley, 2011; Salamon, 2002). In addition to the number of staff and volunteers, researchers have examined the role of organizational leadership. A positive relationship exists between the level of professionalism of agency leadership and advocacy behavior (MacIndoe & Whelan, 2013; Mosley, 2010; Mosley, 2011). In addition to having professionalized leadership, organizations with leaders who value and encourage advocacy also increase the likelihood of advocacy participation. Finally, organizations that have individuals with lobbying skills on their boards of directors also advocate at higher levels than those without individuals with such skills (Leroux & Goerdel, 2009).

Other factors that have been studied pertain to the way in which charitable nonprofit organizations operate. One significant predictor of political advocacy is competition for resources. As competition increases, nonprofits engage in political advocacy at higher rates in order to procure resources to sustain the organization and to ensure the delivery of service to those they serve (LeRoux & Goerdel, 2009; MacIndoe & Whelan, 2013). Another variable that has drawn strong interest is collaboration. Organizations that regularly collaborate with other agencies on other, non-advocacy related efforts routinely advocate at higher rates (LeRoux & Goerdel, 2009; Mosley, 2010; Mosley, 2011). Political networking between organizational leadership and elected officials is also an important predictor of advocacy (Johansen & LeRoux, 2012). Not only is communication between entities important to advocacy participation, but so too is communication within an organization. Organizations that utilize information technology, such as email, to communicate with stakeholders are more likely to advocate than those without such capabilities. Finally, organizations that choose to take the “h” election and implement processes to track and report lobbying activities are significantly more active in political advocacy than those who do not choose the h election (Berry, 2005; Berry & Aarons, 2005; MacIndoe & Whelan, 2013).

The above organizational characteristics and environmental factors all have a significant, positive relationship to political advocacy involvement by nonprofits. However, there are also several unexpected factors that inhibit advocacy behavior. One surprising finding in the research is that as an organization’s knowledge of the lobbying law increases, advocacy participation decreases (Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013). Another interesting finding is that organizations that provide a greater percentage of professionalized services are less likely to advocate (Salamon, 2002). Finally, and perhaps most perplexing given the political expertise and access such an

arrangement might afford, is the finding that organizations with an elected official serving on the board of directors are less likely to engage in political advocacy (LeRoux & Goerdel, 2009). The reasons why each of these variables has a significant, negative relationship to political advocacy behavior are unknown and warrant further study.

Related qualitative research by Donaldson (2007) has identified several additional barriers to nonprofit advocacy participation. Interviews with nonprofit administrators yielded a list of perceived barriers to political advocacy involvement with the three most frequently identified barriers a lack of time, a lack of resources, and a lack of advocacy skills. Other barriers mentioned were having a mission that did not encompass advocacy, limited reward for advocacy efforts, insufficient knowledge, IRS restrictions, and fear of losing funding. Donaldson's work provides valuable qualitative corroboration for many of the same factors examined using quantitative methods. Taliaferro and Rugginao (2013) add to the body of literature by finding that nonprofit administrators are hesitant to engage in lobbying activities based on the pervasive, negative perception of lobbying by the public. For those that do understand and engage in lobbying, administrators often refer to their actions as "advocacy" or "education" in an effort to distance their organizations from the negative connotations often associated with lobbying. These findings indicate that rather than seeing lobbying as a necessary and impactful function of nonprofits, there is some level of misunderstanding among agency administrators and the public as to what is allowed under the law, what constitutes lobbying, and what the true intent of lobbying efforts.

Theoretical Framework

Savin-Baden and Major (2013) define a theoretical framework as "a structure that is intended as a guide for thinking about the research subject and as an interpretive lens through

which to view data” (p. 134). The theoretical underpinning of this study is based on the work of John Kingdon (2003) and his multiple streams theory. It is important to note that this study was not intended to serve as an empirical test of Kingdon’s multiple streams theory, but rather Kingdon’s work was used to inform various aspects of the study and as a means to understand, analyze and interpret the data that was collected. In Chapter 5, I discuss, in detail, how the findings fit within this framework.

Policymaking is much more than an orderly sequence of events with a set beginning and a certain end. It is something much more complicated, less structured, and more unpredictable (Colebatch, 2006). In fact, the policymaking process has been compared to a game where, “policy actors must utilize rational strategies to maximize their interests,” and must, “understand the rules and culture of the policy environment” (Theodoulou & Cahn, 1995, p. 333). Despite the challenges of capturing all of the complexity within the policymaking process, researchers have spent the past five decades creating and refining theoretical models to do just that. Of these theories, few have received as much attention as John Kingdon’s multiple streams theory. Kingdon’s (2003) multiple streams theory is comprised of three, largely independent, but simultaneously occurring “streams”: a problem stream, a policy stream and a politics stream. According to Kingdon, policymaking is the net result of what happens within, and between, these three streams.

The problem stream is influenced by events both old and new as policy actors work to redefine existing problems according to their own purposes and characterize new problems as they arise. Within the problem stream, there are several mechanisms that bring attention to problem. Indicators are largely quantitative measurements or qualitative designations that communicate the scale and scope of a problem. Whereas changes in indicators over time

typically draw attention to an issue, there are instances where attention can coalesce around an issue rather quickly. Kingdon calls such instances “focusing events,” and by nature, these events are largely unpredictable and can have a profound impact on the way a problem is understood or communicated. The problem stream also consists of feedback from other programs in order to determine what possible solutions already exist (Kingdon, 2003).

In the policy stream, policy entrepreneurs and advocates work to create policy proposals and alternatives that support their respective positions on their chosen problems. This pool of ideas is constantly changing as new alternatives are created, existing alternatives are modified, and others are abandoned. The available and viable policy options that are constructed and considered by those within the policy stream at any given time is often a function of which policy actors are involved in the policy stream and which are not actively involved. Proposals that are feasible and those that fit the values of policymakers have the greatest likelihood of adoption (Kingdon, 2003).

The politics stream is made up of dynamic factors related to the broader political context including the composition of the legislature, public opinion, and the advocacy climate. For example, the composition of the legislature can impact how problems are identified, defined, and remedied as well as who will be sought to inform their policy decisions (Kingdon, 2003).

Policymakers, particularly those interested in representing their constituencies and those seeking to maintain their political position, must constantly assess what issues resonate with the public, and many do so by gauging the attitudes of various interest groups (Sabatier, 2007).

At times, two or more of these streams intersect and create a “policy window” where interested parties have the opportunity to pursue their policy objectives (Kingdon, 2003). Within a policy window, significant, non-incremental, policy change is possible as public attention is

drawn to a particular problem by a focusing event that either creates or highlights a problem, changes in certain indicators, or by reframing, redefining or reclassifying an existing problem. This allows those in the policy stream the opportunity to make their voices heard as they propose their respective policy alternatives. The political stream then must determine the feasibility and consequences of selecting a particular alternative to pursue. If a problem arises and there are policy alternatives that address the problem in a politically advantageous manner, “coupling” occurs which can result in an opportunity for policy actors to introduce bold new policies or dramatic policy reforms (Kingdon, 2003).

Kingdon’s multiple streams theory has significant implications for the field of social work and nonprofit human service organizations interested in shaping policy decisions. By understanding how policymaking occurs, nonprofit human service organizations can begin to identify opportunities to significantly impact the policymaking process within each of Kingdon’s three streams. In the problem stream, human service organizations are well positioned to be originators and collectors of problem related indicators without taking away from their service provision mission. This can be achieved by providing accurate, real-time data to legislators derived from organizational reports, conducting needs assessments, and evaluating programs, all of which many human service organizations are already doing (Dodson, Geary & Brownson, 2015). Furthermore, because nonprofits are increasingly tasked with delivering essential social services, they are often responsive to serving the needs of individuals and populations in the wake of focusing events. The direct exposure that nonprofit human service organizations have to the causes and effects of social problems puts them in an authoritative position to not only comment on policy matters, but also to help in the development and implementation of policy alternatives (Cochran, Montgomery & Rubin, 2010). Additionally, it is important that these

organizations make their voices heard in the policy stream so that the interests of the individuals and populations they serve are not ignored in the policymaking process. NHSOs also have an opportunity to influence the policymaking process by becoming or remaining active in the politics stream. They can shape public opinion through advocacy efforts such as organizing and mobilizing their human capital including organizational staff, their board of directors, clients, volunteers, and other stakeholders. Organizational management and staff can also serve as valuable allies to legislators intent on addressing social issues and reforming social programs.

Kingdon's multiple streams theory provides a well established, elegant theoretical framework to not only understand the policymaking process, but also a way to explore which stream, or streams, nonprofit human service organizations can be the most active and where they can have the greatest impact on the policymaking process. A discussion of the study findings and Kingdon's multiple streams theory is presented in Chapter 5.

State of Knowledge, Knowledge Gaps, and the Need for Further Research

There are three primary takeaways from the literature that must be acknowledged when developing a path for future research. The first is that the heavy reliance on self-report survey data provided by organizational leaders has led to a one-sided perspective of the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs within the literature that focuses almost exclusively on organizational characteristics. For our understanding of NHSO political advocacy to move forward, the way in which we study NHSO advocacy must first evolve. This can only be done by expanding our thinking about the factors that facilitate or inhibit advocacy involvement beyond just organizational characteristics and by employing additional methodological approaches that provide more novel and more detailed insights than correlations and logistic regressions can provide.

Second, based on the existing data, organizational capacity seems to play a pivotal role in an organization's ability or willingness to participate in political advocacy. Therefore, there is the need to focus research efforts on identifying strategies to increase and maximize organizational advocacy capacity, as well as strategies to mitigate the deleterious effects of limited capacity. If organizations are to actively engage in political advocacy, they must focus and utilize their often-limited resources in the most efficient manner possible. Therefore, it makes sense to decrease the learning curve by identifying best practices related to political advocacy. To this point, the literature provides no clear indication of how and where NHSOs should develop and allocate their resources, or how to do so in the most efficient manner.

While capacity is a predictor of advocacy involvement, it has not been proven to be a predictor of advocacy success. Almost every researcher who has examined the political advocacy of NHSOs has used quantitative methods to focus on rates of participation, and in doing so, has either implicitly equated participation with impact, or has altogether ignored the need to determine what types of advocacy efforts actually influence policymakers. Therefore, the third, more subtle but equally important, finding that emerges from the literature is that very little is known about how responsive elected officials are towards the legislative advocacy efforts of nonprofit human service organizations. Elected officials play a ubiquitous role in the policymaking process thereby making them a prime, and inexplicably untapped, source of information that can help guide the advocacy efforts of nonprofit organizations.

Today, nonprofit human service organizations have an unprecedented amount of influence given their increasingly important role as providers of critical social services. In order to for these organizations, and more specifically the social workers employed by them, to carry out their professionally mandated responsibility of giving a voice to those they serve in the

political arena, further insight is needed to not only increase the rate at which these organizations engage in legislative advocacy, but also to increase their effectiveness in doing so. Yoshioka (2013) states, “As long as these nonprofits carefully anticipate what their disadvantaged constituents really need and exercise independent judgments about their advocacy, they can contribute to democratic representation by advancing the interests of marginalized groups” (p. 1087). Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps in the knowledge by seeking the perspectives of advocacy targets, in this case state legislators, regarding the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs in the policymaking process in order to determine how these organizations can best use their resources and influence to advance the interests of those they serve, particularly those who have traditionally been underrepresented and marginalized in the policy decisions that affect their lives.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To understand the methodological approach, it is important to revisit the purpose of the study. My primary objective was to understand how state legislators viewed the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs. More specifically, I wanted to find out how these organizations are succeeding, or failing to succeed, in impacting the policymaking process and advancing the interests of those they serve. From there, I planned to identify strategies by which NHSOs can optimize their advocacy efforts in order to further impact the policymaking process. Therefore, I utilized a pragmatic qualitative approach. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) define the pragmatic qualitative approach as one that, “draws on the most sensible and practical methods available in order to answer a given research question” (p. 171). Unlike other qualitative approaches (case study, narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology), pragmatic qualitative research utilizes, “an eclectic but reasonable combination of sampling, and data collection, analysis, and representation techniques” rather than adhering to a single philosophical and methodological approach (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 334). According to Sandelowski (2000), this type of research is, “especially amenable to obtaining straight and largely unadorned answers to questions of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers” (p. 337). Given purpose of this study and its practical implications, this pragmatic approach was ideally suited to answer the research question.

Personal Stance and Position of the Researcher

With any form of qualitative research, questions can arise as to the role and impact of

the researcher and how that role affects various aspects of the project. Because the qualitative researcher is an active agent in all stages of the research study, it is important to fully explicate any and all underlying assumptions and beliefs that may directly or indirectly influence the nature and direction of the research itself. Guba refers to this transparency of assumptions and beliefs as conformability (Guba, 1981, p. 82). Therefore, in order to ensure the greatest degree of conformability possible, I have chosen to include the following statement that clarifies both my stance and my position within the study.

Savin-Baden and Major (2013) define one's personal stance as, "a position taken towards an issue that is derived from a person's beliefs and views about the world" (p. 68). Personally, I believe that social workers have a mandate to advance the interests of those they serve, and that political involvement is not only one way to do so, but is arguably the most impactful and lasting way to do so. Therefore, it is my stance that social workers should not only recognize, but actively seek out, opportunities to shape policy through political action in order to fulfill their professional mission to "enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (NASW, 2008a).

Unfortunately, too often, the modern social worker lacks the knowledge and skills necessary to impact the policymaking process, and therefore, has largely neglected political action in his or her practice. This inaction on the part of social workers, particularly those employed within NHSOs, places the discipline of social work at a considerable disadvantage when engaging in the often crowded, increasingly specialized, and contentious political arena. Therefore, I believe it is imperative that I work to advance the current state of knowledge regarding the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs and develop strategies to help NHSOs

effectively engage in the policymaking process. By doing so, it is my hope that those within the profession of social work will make a conscious decision to no longer concede ground to other professions and interests that are often in direct conflict with the values and mission of the profession. Until social workers understand and recognize this, it is my fear that social work will continue to abandon its professional obligation of advancing the interests of those they serve in the political realm, and in turn, will continue to lose its credibility and standing on issues that impact the lives of those the profession serves.

Whereas stance speaks to the underlying beliefs and assumptions that a researcher brings into a project, positionality refers to the researcher's location in relation to the topic, the participants, and the broader research context (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). My position in relation to the topic stems from my experience in social work practice where I was responsible for developing and implementing a statewide legislative advocacy campaign on behalf of an affordable housing coalition that advanced the interests of low-income individuals and families. In this role, I worked with the coalition's member organizations, many of which were NISOs, to build their advocacy capacity and provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to impact the legislative process. Through this experience, I personally found that many NISOs are not actively engaged in legislative advocacy and that they lack a clear understanding of how to impact the policymaking process.

This experience also provided me with opportunities to engage with state legislators. Throughout the campaign, I was able to work closely with legislators to identify and provide the information and resources they needed to make informed policy decisions. As a result, I was able to communicate and interact with the legislators who participated in this study with a level of understanding and credibility that may have been lacking had I not had such experiences.

Given my experience working with both NHSOs, the subject of this study, and state legislators, the participants in this study, my positionality within the research context placed me beyond simply an outsider looking in, yet not quite an insider with intimate knowledge. It was my intention to use this position as a conduit between the two groups to strengthen the study. It was my hope that this research project would lead to NHSOs more fully and more successfully engaging in the policymaking process, and ultimately, engender an ongoing, productive, and collaborative relationship between NHSOs and state legislators in the policymaking process.

Research Context

At the time of the 2010 census, Alabama had a population of nearly 4.8 million individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Representing those individuals is a bicameral legislative body made up of 105 State Representatives and 35 State Senators who serve simultaneous four-year terms. Each House member represents a district of approximately 40,000 individuals whereas each Senator represents approximately 137,000 individuals within his or her district (Alabama Legislature, n.d.). All legislators serve on a part-time basis, meeting annually for a single legislative session that is not to exceed 30 legislative days over a period of 105 calendar days. In addition to this regular session, the Governor is able to call special sessions throughout the year, if necessary, to address specific issues. These special sessions can last no longer than 12 legislative days within a period of 30 calendar days. The part-time nature of the Alabama legislature is of particular importance to this study because nearly every legislator either has or had a career in something other than politics.

For the most part, legislators in Alabama represent their constituents with very little help from full-time staff. Multiple Representatives typically share a single administrative assistant and each committee has its own, dedicated clerk. Legislators in leadership positions may have a

small staff. For example, the Speaker of the House, arguably the most powerful political position in the state, has a staff of five which is comprised of a Chief of Staff, a Director of Policy and Research, a Communications Director, a Legislative Services Specialist, and an Administrative Assistant. The limited staff assistance in the Alabama legislature creates a scenario where legislators typically rely on various sources to inform their policy decisions including state and national think tanks, lobbyists, professional associations, public agencies and other advocates.

Participants

One of the few constants that all nonprofit human service organizations face when trying to impact the policymaking process is the need to engage with legislators. Given their central role in the policymaking process itself, the perceptions of state legislators represent an important source of information about the efforts of NHSOs and their ability to affect the policymaking process. Therefore, the sample for this study was comprised exclusively of current state legislators, both Senators and Representatives, who have experience working with NHSOs in the policymaking process. For feasibility, the sample included legislators only from the state of Alabama. Given the highly relational and close-knit nature of the Alabama Legislature, purposive, snowball sampling was used in order to recruit state legislators for participation in this study.

Starting with legislators that I had a preexisting, personal relationship with, I reached out to potential participants via an initial email that provided a brief introduction, preliminary information about the purpose and procedures of the study, the researcher's contact information, and a copy of the study consent form so that individuals could ask questions or get additional information about the study prior to agreeing to participate.

A total of 27 legislators (15 Representatives and 12 Senators) were contacted about participating in the study. Of these, 10 of the 15 Representatives contacted (67%) and three of the 12 Senators contacted (25%) agreed to participate for a total of 13 participants, representing 48% of those contacted.

The sample size is reflective of two important considerations. First, the nature of the research question and the inclusion criteria necessarily limited the number of potential participants. Given the findings in the literature suggesting that only a small percentage of NHSOs actively engage in legislative advocacy, it was reasonable to expect that only a small percentage of legislators would have the requisite experience working with such organizations. Second, because I was interested in obtaining rich data from interviewees, and conducting all of the interviews myself, it was practical to include 10-15 participants.

Demographic Information

Six demographic variables were collected from participants: race, gender, education level, political affiliation, legislative chamber and legislative tenure. Of the thirteen participants, two were African Americans and eleven were Caucasians. In terms of gender, the sample included three women and ten men. Nine of the thirteen participants held graduate degrees with the other 4 each holding a bachelor's degree. Three of the participants were Democrats and the other ten were Republicans. Likewise, three of the participants were currently serving in the Senate and ten were serving in the House of Representatives. Finally, four of the participants were serving in their first term in the legislature while the others has each served at least one previous term. Three individuals within the sample had served multiple terms in both the House and the Senate. It is also worth noting that the respective legislative districts of the participants included a mix of both largely urban areas as well as predominantly rural areas of the state.

Ethical Considerations and Protection of Human Subjects

According to university guidelines, research involving interview procedures with elected or appointed public officials is eligible for exempt status. Since all participants were publicly elected officials and all questions were related to the public process of policymaking, the researcher requested, and was granted, exempt status from the IRB. All participants were presented with information about the study prior to any data being collected, were allowed to discontinue their involvement at any point, and were informed that there would be no identifiable information presented in the final report. While every effort has been made to maintain the confidentiality of all participants, it was not possible to guarantee complete confidentiality. Participants were made aware of this at the time of recruitment and prior to any participation in the study. Upon agreeing to participate, each participant signed two copies of the consent form, one for their own records and one to be kept by the researcher in a secure location. A copy of the Institutional Review Board approval is provided in Appendix A.

Data Collection

Data was collected through in person, semi-structured, interviews. Individual, semi-structured interviews allowed respondents to provide detailed and personal accounts of their experiences working with, and their perceptions of, NHSOs in the policymaking process. Each interview followed an interview guide that consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit the perspectives of legislators in regards to the political advocacy efforts of NHSOs (See Appendix B for the initial interview guide). Following the third interview, the interview guide was slightly revised and two additional questions were added to more fully capture the perceptions of the participating legislators (See Appendix C for the Revised Interview Guide).

All interviews were conducted over a five-month period from while legislators were in their respective districts. Interviews were held at times and locations that were convenient for both the participants and the researcher. Every effort was made to ensure that interview locations provided the participants with an environment that they felt comfortable speaking freely and candidly. Interview recordings averaged 38:34 minutes in length with a range from 24:54 minutes up to 54:15 minutes. In total, the interviews yielded a total of more than eight hours of audio recordings. All but one interview was audio recorded and subsequently transcribed using a transcription service. For the interview in which the participant requested not to be audio recorded, the researcher took copious notes during the interview and these notes were included in the total body of data.

In addition to the interview transcripts, field notes and memos were generated during course of the study to further enhance the data gathered from participants and potentially shape decisions related to the data collection process itself. These notes and memos were created over the course of the project and captured the thoughts, ideas, and realizations of the researcher in real time. Data from the field notes and memo were also included in the overall data corpus for analysis.

Data Analysis

As was the case in the data collection process, the pragmatic qualitative research approach calls for the most appropriate data analysis methods to be used to answer the research question (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Similarly, the purpose of the study guided the data analysis process as well. For the analysis, I employed a six step, thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that was designed to capture and represent the main themes relating to the legislative advocacy of NHSO based on the experiences and perspectives of the state

legislators. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight several attributes of thematic analysis including its flexibility, its ability to synthesize a large, detail-rich data set, the potential to yield unexpected themes and insights, and its accessibility to public. It is for these reasons that thematic analysis was chosen as the best means to analyze the data for this exploratory study.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the six phases of thematic analysis are familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, revising themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. They note these phases may not necessarily represent a linear process, but one that can develop over the course of the research project as necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.16). However, during my analytic process, I largely adhered to the sequential order of the steps.

First, interview transcripts were uploaded into Nvivo 11, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program. Then, in order to familiarize myself with the data, I listened to each interview recording as well as read each transcript prior to any coding of the data in order to “immerse” myself in the data and become, “familiar with the depth and breadth of the content” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 16).

Next, upon my third review of the data, I began to develop a list of initial codes using the first of a two-part coding process. Holistic coding was chosen as the First Cycle method of coding. Saldana (2013) defines holistic coding as, “a preparatory approach to a unit of data before a more detailed coding or categorization process through First or Second Cycle methods (p. 142). Also, Saldana notes that holistic coding is, “applicable when the researcher already has a general idea of what to investigate in the data” (p. 142). Given the topical nature of the interview guide, holistic coding provided an efficient means to organize the data and generate an initial set of codes. For example, the passage:

I want to hear from those front line charities. I want you to tell me about the facts. Tell me what you do. And I appreciate the good work you do, and what you see, and why you see it as a problem.

was assigned the holistic code *Educating Legislators*.

Because holistic coding is merely the first step before a more detailed approach to coding the data, I then employed a second cycle coding process of subcoding. Subcoding is defined as, “a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich an entry” (Saldana, 2013, p. 77) and when there are, “particular emergent qualities or interrelationships” within the data (p. 78). While not all holistic codes warranted further demarcation, many could be broken down further to provide greater detail. Consequently, the passage above was that was initially assigned the holistic code *Educating Legislators* was later subcoded as *Educating Legislators-Complexity of Issues*. Three additional subcodes were also developed from this same holistic code: *Educating Legislators-Impact on Individuals*, *Educating Legislators-Systemic Changes Needed*, and *Educating Legislators-Unintended Consequences*.

This process yielded a list of 33 inductively created, holistic codes and 80 additional subcodes across the 12 interview transcripts. In addition to these inductively created codes, I also included three a priori codes derived from Kingdon’s theoretical framework: *Problems*, *Policies* and *Politics* in order to help identify in which stream, or streams, legislators believe NHSOs best fit. This resulted in a total of 116 unique codes. The full list of codes is provided in Appendix D.

For the third phase of the analysis, I began to look for patterns across the data and so that I could begin to develop potential or “candidate” themes. To do this, I first reviewed the data in Nvivo to see which codes had the most corresponding passages as well as looked for passages and codes that related to ideas and insights that legislators places particular emphasis on during the interviews. I then began to group similar codes and passages together in order to create larger

themes across the entire data set. To help organize these ideas and develop themes during this phase, I constructed an initial thematic map (see Appendix E) that would be further refined in the subsequent phases. This process yielded seven candidate themes that incorporated a number of similar codes and ideas. These candidate themes were given a one-word title that related to the broader topic under which they were organized. The candidate themes that resulted from this phase of analysis were: Involvement, Relationships, Opportunity, Communication, Process, Tactics, and Capacity.

Phase four required that candidate themes be further reviewed and refined. Upon review of the seven candidate themes, it became apparent that there was a need to combine and reorganize these themes. For example, upon further examination of the data, the candidate themes of Tactics and Communication were determined to not be viable stand-alone themes. Where appropriate, some of the passages from these themes were incorporated into other themes. As a result of this refinement, a new thematic map was generated (see Appendix F) and the following five themes remained: Involvement, Opportunity, Process, Capacity, and Relationships.

The fifth phase of thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) required one final review of the themes to ensure that they were not only individually viable, but also that they collectively told the broader story of the data. After finalizing the themes, each theme was named and summarized using the corresponding data from the interviews as well as the interpretive analysis of that data by the researcher.

The creation of the final report is the sixth, and final, step in the thematic analysis model. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that the purpose of phase is to, “tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and the validity of your analysis” (p. 23). I

attempted to do this by providing ample, verbatim excerpts and examples from the interviews that best reflect the perceptions of legislators and help to answer the research question.

Measures Taken to Ensure the Trustworthiness of the Study

To promote trustworthiness and transparency, I took great care with the collection and the analysis of the study data. However, in an effort to maximize the trustworthiness of the study, I looked to the work of Egon Guba (1981) who identifies four criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria serve two purposes in that they provide the researcher with a set of tactics or considerations to enhance his or her research as well as provide the reader with a more complete understanding of the research process from the underlying assumptions shaping the fundamental research question to what to make of the findings. The tactics used to ensure trustworthiness are discussed below.

According to Guba (1981) credibility in qualitative research relates to the extent in which the interpretation of the data and the corresponding results are deemed accurate by the source(s) of the data itself. Given the active involvement by the researcher in the development of codes and themes as prescribed by the analytic model used, there is the distinct possibility that interpretations of the data made by the researcher may have led to a misrepresentation of the true meaning of the ideas and comments offered by participants. Therefore, in order to ensure credibility, I implemented a process of member checking. Guba (1981) states that, “The process of member checking is the single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion” (p. 85). For this study, credibility was ensured by sending an email to each participant, asking him or her to review a document (See Appendix G) that listed and described the preliminary themes developed during the fifth phase of the data analysis process.

Participants were specifically instructed to read over each theme, and its corresponding description, in order to ensure that I had not misrepresented our conversations in any way or failed to fully capture or illuminate a particular idea. I received a response from four of the 13 participants (30%). Three of the four respondents said that the themes were accurate as presented, while the fourth also agreed with the themes, but encouraged me to also include a particular point that was communicated during our interview. I responded by reassuring this individual that even though that particular point was not included in the brief description and explanation of the themes in the document, it would be included in the final report.

This study was designed to examine a specific phenomenon (legislator experiences and perspectives from working with NHSOs in the policymaking process) in a specific context (a southern, politically conservative state). These, and likely other, unique factors undoubtedly influenced the study findings. Therefore, in order to determine how the findings from this study may apply to another, different context, one must consider the extent to which the two contexts are similar or dissimilar. Guba (1981) defines this concept as transferability (p. 81). The extent to which transferability can be determined is dependent on the level of thick description elicited and provided by the researcher. Recognizing this, I worked diligently and intentionally throughout the research project to solicit, and subsequently provide, thick description and ample detail so that others can make a clear and reasonable assessment of transferability. One way of doing this was providing readers with a detailed description of the research context. Another way that transferability was addressed in this study was the inclusion of demographic characteristics of the study participants in order to illustrate how the findings could potentially be more reflective of the perceptions of white, male, southern Republican state legislators than to others.

Guba (1981) also explains that there is a need for qualitative researcher to provide sufficient information about the process by which data is collected and analyzed in order for other individuals to clearly understand the decision-making processes utilized in the research. This third potential threat to trustworthiness relates to subjectivity caused by the active role that the researcher plays throughout the project and the potential inability for another researcher to achieve the same results. This concept, which he terms dependability (p. 81), helps to demystify how the qualitative researcher moves from data collection, to analysis, to interpretation. For this study, the issue of dependability was addressed by utilizing a formal analytic process and by detailing the actions taken in each phase of that process. Also, the inclusion of the code list and the two iterations of the thematic maps in the appendix provide further information as to the process by which the data was analyzed.

The final potential threat to trustworthiness in this study is that the individual assumptions, beliefs and biases of the researcher may have influenced key aspects of the study, and in turn, influenced the study outcomes and findings. Guba refers to the degree to which the influence of the researcher can be traced to the study outcomes as confirmability (p. 82). Guba recommends that the researcher document and present his or her own assumptions and introspections, as well as any changes in either, over the life of the research project as a means to assist the reader in determining the overall impact of the researcher. This was accomplished by including a candid and detailed positionality statement earlier in this chapter so that readers would not only have a greater understanding of my underlying assumptions and beliefs, but so they could also have a better understanding of how these assumptions and beliefs may have influenced the findings from the study.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY FINDINGS

To understand the findings, it is wise to once again revisit the overall purpose of the study. This study was influenced by the analytic framework of John Kingdon's multiple streams theory and was designed to elicit the perspectives of state legislators as to the political advocacy participation of nonprofit human service organizations in the policymaking process. Using a pragmatic qualitative design, I conducted interviews with 13 state legislators from the state of Alabama in an attempt to answer the research question, "How do state legislators perceive the legislative advocacy involvement of nonprofit human service organizations in the policymaking process?" The data from these interviews, along with field notes and researcher memos, were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step Thematic Analysis model. From the data obtained in the 13 interviews, field notes, and researcher memos, five key themes were developed. Each theme speaks directly to how state legislators perceived various aspects of the political advocacy involvement of nonprofit human service organizations. In this chapter, each theme is discussed in detail and is supported with direct quotes and accounts from the study participants. The educational, professional and theoretical implications of these themes are discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Theme 1: Legislator Perspectives on the Political Advocacy Involvement of Nonprofit Human Service Organizations in the Policymaking Process Were Mixed

As stated previously, much of the existing data pertaining to the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs is derived from self-report surveys asking those within nonprofit

organizations what types of advocacy activities they have engaged in, and the frequency of these activities, over a specified period of time. Findings from these studies vary dramatically, thus they provide an unclear and inexact account of the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs in the policymaking process. Additionally, these studies do nothing to determine the actual impact that these advocacy efforts are having on policy decisions. Therefore, in order to advance the current state of knowledge related to advocacy participation, and to fill this gap pertaining to advocacy impact, each legislator was asked about the frequency of his or her interactions with NHSOs, the nature of those interactions, and the extent to which NHSOs have been a resource in his or her policy decisions.

In terms of working with NHSOs in the policymaking process, responses varied from legislator to legislator ranging from regular, frequent interaction to very limited interaction. Interestingly, three of the four legislators that reported more frequent interactions with NHSOs, had either worked for, or closely worked with, nonprofit organizations prior to their role as a legislator. This suggests that there may be certain characteristics among legislators, such as preexisting relationships with nonprofit groups, which may be a predictor of future interaction between NHSOs and policymakers.

While all had some previous experience interacting with NHSOs, the majority of legislators did not have frequent interactions with NHSOs. One first-term legislator even responded to the question about the frequency of interactions with NHSOs with a noticeable sense of incredulity:

Somewhat, probably not as much as I expected that to happen this first term. I'm just getting my feet wet with the whole process and people getting comfortable, becoming familiar with different opportunities and challenges. I would say some, but not much.

Legislators' perception that NHSOs are only minimally involved in the policymaking process is consistent with the self-reports in the current body of literature, yet the above response indicates that this limited interaction has not gone unnoticed by policymakers.

In order to more fully understand the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs, it was important that this study also inquired about the nature of these interactions when they did occur. During the interviews, legislators identified five types of interactions that took place between themselves and NHSOs. Two of these were viewed as more preferable and more effective than the other three. In addition to the previously mentioned type of interaction that resulted from ongoing, preexisting relationships, the other ideal type of interaction identified was when someone representing an organization reached out to legislators in an effort to build a relationship. One legislator described this type of interaction by saying, "They'll come by and we'll go have lunch, not even talking about an issue, but it's just building friendship, relationship, opening up the line of communications." The common element between these two types of interactions was the highly personal nature of each. For NHSOs interested in shaping public policy, the importance of building personal relationships cannot be understated, a point that will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

More commonly, however, legislators said that they often received communications from organizations with which they had little or no personal connection. Legislators viewed these types of interactions far less favorably and impactful. The third type of interaction discussed was where organizations reached out to a legislator only when a specific organizational need arose. One legislator described this type of interaction, and his feelings about such interactions. in this way:

Most of the time when, just to be frank, when I hear from organizations like that [NHSOs] they come out with their hand out, looking for dollars. I can't blame them.

They're providing a service to the public and to constituents in my district, but at the same time I think there needs to be more interaction than just, 'Can you help us out financially?'

The fourth type of interaction mentioned occurred when legislators would hear from organizations only when policy issues pertinent to those organizations were to be acted upon.

The exchange below described this type of interaction:

(Legislator): Like I say, when they are in Montgomery and they want or need something, they're down there constantly, but now other than that, they must be happy because you don't hear from them.

(Interviewer): In your experience, you haven't had a lot of contact with these organizations in the non-legislative session while you're in the district? You don't get a lot of interaction at that point?

(Legislator): No, not at all.

(Interviewer): Okay...

(Legislator): Like I said, the only time I have contact with them is when they want something and while we're in session.

The final type of interaction occurred when legislators, in need of information about an issue, reached out to NHSOs because the organizations themselves had made no effort to connect.

After thinking about it for a moment, one legislator could not recall a single relationship with a NHSO that she did not initiate in one way or another.

Knowing that NHSOs are participating in political advocacy efforts at variable rates, and for a variety of reasons, it was not surprising to learn that legislators also had varying views on the extent to which these organizations had been a resource in their legislative work. For example, the individual who had the most frequent interactions with NHSOs stated that these organizations had been, "a great resource to me...I rely on them a lot for information and guidance on legislation." In contrast, another legislator with less interaction said:

For the most part, I think that these particular organizations mean well, but I do not think they have the actual staff to dig deeper into the issue. Often times, they don't bring you legislation that has actually been tested from other areas. They are passionate about an issue.

Interestingly, this second legislator went on to say later in the interview, “I do not think these groups have been effective with providing all the information that you need. Do I think they can be? Absolutely...” indicating that, even though these organizations had not served as a resource to that point, this legislator was still willing to work with NHSOs and that there was still an opportunity for them to become a trusted resource in policy decisions.

What was clear from the participants in this study was that the perceived political advocacy involvement and impact of NHSOs was inconsistent across individual legislators. While some reported regular, ongoing interactions, the majority of those interviewed had infrequent and irregular contact with NHSOs. Furthermore, these limited interactions were often impersonal and reactive in nature as organizations reached out in times of organizational or political need. However, despite their limited involvement, legislators universally agreed that these organizations could be an asset in their political decision-making.

Theme 2: Despite Their Limited Involvement in the Policymaking Process, Legislators Saw a Clear Opportunity for NHSOs to Influence Public Policy

In order to understand the opportunity that legislators believed NHSOs have in influencing policy decisions, it is important to first understand the role that legislators perceived NHSOs played in their communities. Two separate lawmakers used the term “gap fillers” to describe the work of NHSOs, meaning that these organizations met the needs of individuals and families by filling in the service gaps between the public and private sectors. Another legislator viewed these organizations as working on the “front lines,” a nod to their role as direct service providers. Similarly, a fourth legislator referred to individuals working within NHSOs as “ground troops.” Though they were conceptualized differently across the sample, the predominant perception that legislators held of NHSOs was that these organizations had valuable information and unique

insight resulting from their experience providing direct services within the community. Essentially, NHSOs were viewed as brokers of information.

This is particularly noteworthy in that legislators not only recognized that these organizations have information and insight, but that legislators viewed this information and insight as a potential asset to their legislative decision-making. Though differences exist from state to state, Alabama's utilization of a part-time legislature and limited employment of legislative staff, place these organizations in a prime position to help inform policy decisions, particularly on issues that legislators are unfamiliar with. Multiple legislators commented on how they must often make important policy decisions on topics they are not intimately familiar with; therefore, NHSOs can play a significant role providing education on issues and policy matters. One legislator described this role as a broker of information in the following way:

They give you a first hand account of stuff that I normally wouldn't be involved in. I am a [profession], so I know [profession specific] issues, but I don't understand how the intricacies of a food bank work or a center that counsels fathers and son types. By doing it on a direct basis, they are able to educate me as to what they actually do.

This same legislator went on to say, "You can read about it on paper, but unless you've talked to somebody who does it, you just don't know. We all have areas of specialty, and it's just not mine." Legislators were candid about the fact that they often lack information on issues outside of their educational and professional training, yet they also expressed a genuine desire to make the most well informed decisions possible.

While speaking with another legislator, I asked what he would do if a bill pertaining to a social policy issue he had little prior knowledge of came across his desk. He said that he would do the following:

(Legislator) I would go to them [NHSOs]. I wouldn't wait for them to come to me because that's the thing that I don't have experience with. I want to reach out and become

knowledgeable on the issue. They'd be the first ones that I would call. As far as what kind of information, it depends on what the issue is.

(Interviewer) That's good. You can see these kinds of organizations being beneficial, assuming that there's a piece of legislation, or an issue that relates to them in some way. You would see them as a valuable source of information?

(Legislator) Absolutely. Absolutely.

This perceived role as a broker of information, combined with the reality that legislators are often hungry for information about pending legislation, creates a clear opportunity for NHSOs to educate and inform legislators on issues and policies of which they do not have first-hand knowledge.

For NHSOs that forego advocacy efforts because they fear that their voice will have less impact than other, more organized, better-funded interests in the policymaking process, legislators consistently stressed that this is simply not the case. Referring to NHSOs, one legislator said:

These organizations are just as important to me as any other organization. People will tell you about me, a lobbyist don't control my view. A party leader don't control my view. My view is controlled and determined based upon what I feel is the best thing for my area, and this is the way it is.

Another legislator had this to say about information from grassroots advocates and how it is viewed in comparison to information from paid lobbyists:

But that said, if I get a call from a local organization, I'm going to talk to them, I'm going to get their perspective and I'm not going to consider what a lobbyist tells me any more important than what they're reaching out and telling me.

And yet a third legislator, one with a leadership role on one of the most influential committees within the legislature, said this about how he considers the sources of information he receives when making policy decisions: "I don't know. I'm just more sensitive to people like that [individuals involved with NHSOs] than I would be to somebody that's a hired gun, so to speak."

Perhaps the most poignant comment made in regards to the opportunity these organizations have to shape policy in an often-crowded political arena came in this exchange:

(Interviewer) I think that one of the things that I feel like these organizations do is they say, "We're not organized. We're not paying the lobbyists. We're not able to be down there every day and make those connections ...

(Legislator) ...But they get to vote, and those lobbyists don't.

These examples provide strong evidence that should assuage fears that NHSOs may have that their advocacy efforts to advance the interests of those they serve will ultimately fall on deaf ears. In fact, every legislator interviewed was interested, if not eager, to hear from NHSOs in his or her respective districts regardless of their party affiliation, their tenure in the legislature, or the composition of their constituency.

Legislators expressed that taking advantage of this information broker role represented the single best opportunity that NHSOs have to influence public policy. This opportunity is even greater when NHSOs reach out to, and inform, the legislators that represent their service areas. This was made abundantly clear when one legislator said, "I mean, most legislators don't care what your opinion is if you don't vote for me, or don't live in my district, you know? It's nice. I respect your opinion. But hey, I don't represent you." The importance and impact of constituency was one of the most frequently discussed topics across the interviews despite not being a topic included in the interview guide.

Not only did legislators have illuminating thoughts about the opportunity NHSOs have to influence policy decisions, they also had some important insights into what NHSOs are missing out on when they choose not to engage in political advocacy efforts. Legislators identified four possible consequences. First, there are organizational consequences. Several legislators stated that organizations that do not engage with policymakers miss out on obtaining resources, financial and otherwise, to which the policymakers may be privy. Grant opportunities, personal

connections, and other types of support can be directed to these organizations when an active, ongoing relationship is in place. Another legislator indicated that by failing to engage policymakers, organizations missed out on the possibility of creating a strong legislative champion that could be the driving force behind legislative actions for years to come. A third outcome that multiple legislators identified was that inaction by a NHSO all but guarantees that the issues important to the organization will become lost in the midst of all of the other legislative priorities at the time. The fourth, and possibly the most harmful, consequence that was discussed was that organizations that fail to use their voice to shape policy decisions have run the risk of being dictated to by other, potentially competing, interests. Here is how one legislator responded to the question of missed opportunities:

If you don't engage, you'll never get that opportunity [to shape policy]. You'll never get it. When everything is over with, the only thing that's left for you at that point is to complain. If you don't engage it at the beginning and you don't get involved when it's at the genesis of it, its embryonic stages, you're going to be left with a policy that may not work for what you're trying to do.

This same legislator also said, “I say this all the time, if you're not at the table, you're on the menu.” The reality, as legislators see it, is that active and ongoing engagement in the political process is the only way for NHSOs to ensure that their voice is heard and that the interests of those they serve are represented. While it is not guaranteed that advocacy efforts by NHSOs will yield desired policy outcomes, it is all but guaranteed that inaction will, at a minimum, perpetuate the status quo and possibly even lead to further disenfranchisement and disempowerment of the individuals and populations these organizations serve.

On the whole, legislators saw NHSOs as an important and valued source of information regarding social issues and community needs. This perceived role as broker of information not only brought with it a level of inherent credibility given their perception as “ground troops”

working on the “front lines” in their communities, but it also provides NHSOs with access to legislators and input in political decisions. However, one legislator cautioned NHSOs against abandoning their service provision role and becoming overly political. This legislator stated,

Nobody disagrees with feeding people, the poor. What we disagree with is when you start getting on the political in the legislature on the laws that are passed, and you start taking positions. That's my first thing that came to mind that might be a little bit, maybe, going against maybe the theory of people getting more politically involved who are charities. Maybe it's human services organizations, however you want to call that, that have a core mission of doing something good, but when you get political, to me you risk that. You risk getting away from your core mission, and blurring the lines.

The legislator continued, “What we really need from you is not to get so political, just tell us the facts. Tell us what's happening with you. It is very impactful.” While not a direct contradiction to other legislators who saw value in NHSOs engaging in political matters, this individual felt that it was important to understand that NHSOs can damage relationships with legislators by moving beyond the role of an information broker and becoming a political actor. Undoubtedly, this means walking a fine line, but it is worth considering for NHSOs who want to maintain positive and productive relationships with policymakers.

From the data, it is important that NHSOs recognize and embrace their perceived role as a broker of information and use this role to educate and inform the legislators representing their districts. When they do so, they can begin to take advantage of the clear opportunity to shape the policymaking process and advance the interests of those they serve.

Theme 3: Legislators Have Found that NHSOs Often Lack a Clear Understanding of the Political Process

Study participants expressed that many of the individuals and interests that they have come into contact with in their role as a legislator lack a clear understanding of the political process. One legislator stated it this way: “The man on the street has no clue how a bill becomes law...” This lack of understanding was also found to be a common element in legislators’

interactions with NHSOs. Legislators stressed that the ability to navigate the political process is essential for any organization trying to shape public policy. When asked what organizations need to bring to the table when partnering with legislators on a policy matter, one policymaker said:

And understand the process. You can't understand all the different rules and stuff, but understand a little bit about how that process works, just a bill on Capitol Hill type knowledge. Just the basic, it goes to committee then it goes here, then it goes here, then it goes here.

This is just one example of the numerous instances when legislators expressed their belief that organizations that do not understand the political process are at a significant disadvantage.

One of the most profound effects of not understanding the process is that organizations are unlikely to know at what points in that process they can have the greatest impact. For example, legislators consistently spoke of the critical role of committees in the legislative process. One stressed their importance by saying, “Your committees are where everything happens at.” Another said:

If I were to take a group of people to Montgomery to say, ‘I want to show you how the legislative process works,’ and we're in session on Tuesdays and Thursdays and we have committee days on Wednesday, I'd take them to Wednesday every single time because that is where real decisions are made. That's where a bill is really debated.

Practically speaking, it only makes sense that organizations interested in political advocacy take the time and make the effort to become educated on the political process in order to engage in, and ultimately impact, that process.

Legislators also identified two additional, but related, consequences of not understanding the political process. First, this lack of understanding has, at times, led to unrealistic expectations. One legislator described a scenario that he has seen time and time again in regards to organizations seeking state funds:

Now if you come in saying, "Out of the 1.8 billion I want 1.5 million, you got, it depends on the size of the ask. Oftentimes that's where [name of a NHSO] falls short, because

they go, 'We're getting 23 million now but we've got a waiting list of so many, we want to double our budget.' Well, you're not going to get that. It depends on the amount.

This legislator viewed this interaction as being indicative of not understanding the broader budgetary or political context. Another legislator expressed the same sentiment this way:

Have a broader view of everything that's going on and how every component; social work, roads, police, state troopers, law enforcement. Be educated and have a broader view on how it all fits together, and then tailor the request to the broader picture. I wouldn't anticipate anybody coming in and asking for something just outlandish, but have that broader view. That's one of my criticisms of state agencies and of associations, is they don't tend to educate themselves on everything else that's going on. Have a broad view of everything that's going on. If we gave everybody what they were asking for, we would have to probably quadruple our budget because there is not a lot of realism in the requests that we get. As you can imagine, the vast majority of the requests that we get 'Can you do this?' or 'Can you do that?' have to do with money. 'Can you fund us?' Being realistic and having a realistic approach to what is possible would be very, very helpful.

For the most part, legislators viewed themselves in a unique position where they are willing, and at times able, to help NHSOs advance the interests of those they serve; however, when organizations have unrealistic goals, it places legislators in an uncomfortable position because they know that, despite their best intentions and their best efforts, they will never be able to meet these expectations.

Four separate legislators discussed the second possible consequence of not understanding the political process. Not only has this lack of knowledge about the process led to unrealistic expectations about the policy action they were seeking, it has often led to impatience and frustration with the process itself. When referring to individuals and organizations interested in policy change, one legislator made this direct connection when he said, "They don't have a lot of trust or confidence in the legislature. A lot of it is because they don't understand the difficulties of the system." One of the "difficulties," that has caused frequent frustration for organizations engaged in advocacy is the necessity for legislators to prioritize only the most pressing and most

politically feasible bills during the short legislative session. The odds of survival for any piece of sponsored legislation are very low. The longest tenured legislator in the study stated:

They think you come to Montgomery and pass a bill in one day, but it's a long, slow process. And I told them, I said, 'We probably had 1,000 bills introduced during the last session in the House and the Senate. Only 200 and something of those bills passed, and a lot of them were local bills.' In fact, 28 percent of all the bills that were introduced became law. You might say 'Well dadgum, that's not a very good batting average, 28 percent.' We aren't sitting down there just to pass a whole bunch of bills, we're sitting there to defeat bad legislation and weed through them and pick out the good ones and discard the bad ones. That's typical. Twenty-something percent of all bills introduced ever become a statute. That's a good thing.

Organizations willing to invest the time and resources in advocacy efforts must understand and accept that the system is, by design, inefficient and cumbersome.

Another inherent challenge of the legislative process is that policy change takes time.

While progress is slow, one legislator stressed the importance of recognizing that, "little wins are still wins." This same legislator provided the following example of how organizations often fail to recognize the fact that policy change typically comes in the form of small, incremental steps:

At first, the [name of an interest group] lost a couple years because they said, 'Well, that's not what we want, we want ... this.' And you say, 'Yeah, but this moves you a little closer to that.' It's an education from our side to them too, saying, 'You're not going to get everything you want, but if we can move you down the field, that's better.' As legislators, we have to communicate too that it's ... it's slow. A lot of providers don't understand that because in their mind what happens is: They're doing a good for the community, and they probably are, but in their mind, 'We're doing good, how can you all not see this? How do you not understand this?' Politics is a very, very patient profession. You've got to be very patient. This year you'll do this, next year you'll do this, and the provider's like, 'I don't want to wait that long. I don't want to wait 3 years. I want something now, but it's..., or it's...' That's an element that has to be taken into account.

According to legislators, it is almost unheard of for a non-budget related bill to be passed in fewer than three or four legislative sessions.

Organizations must understand the challenges of the political system as well as what these challenges mean for their strategic planning, staff and board development, fundraising,

budgeting, programming, and the overall well-being of their clients. Therefore, it is imperative that organizations learn not only how the process works, but also at what points in the process they can have the most influence (problem identification, committee testimony, etc.) and focus their limited resources on those opportunities.

Theme 4: Legislators Recognized that Many NHSOs Interested in Political Advocacy Face Various Challenges Due to Limited Organizational Capacity

Many legislators recognized that NHSOs often lack three primary forms of capacity necessary to develop and sustain large-scale advocacy campaigns. The three areas identified were financial resources, human resources, and organizational knowledge. However, this lack of capacity was, in no way, viewed as something that could not be mitigated or something that would preclude NHSOs from engaging in effective advocacy efforts.

There was a general perception among the participants that nonprofits, almost by default, are operating on tight financial margins and that concerns about financial sustainability often inhibit an organization's desire or ability to devote resources to advocacy. One legislator said:

The non-profits often operate on very thin financial ground so they don't have a lot of time, resources or otherwise to focus on what is House Bill 20, and they're trying to figure how to get a coat to a homeless person because it's cold. They're trying to figure how to help care for an adult in need of services, not what's in the conference committee report on Senate Bill 14.

Legislators understood that, in such cases, organizations must make strategic choices about how best to allocate their limited resources. Therefore, it makes sense to policymakers that many organizations choose to devote their financial resources to providing direct services to clients rather than investing in advocacy efforts that offer no guarantee of success.

Along with limited financial resources, legislators recognized that NHSOs also struggle with issues related to human resources. Perhaps the most debilitating human resource deficiency is leadership that is unwilling to engage with legislators. One legislator made this impassioned

plea in reference to the idea that some individuals within NHSOs are too intimidated to reach out to public officials:

I know that, (referencing that some individuals are hesitant to reach out to legislators) and that's the biggest obstacle to advocacy there is. People are intimidated by their elected officials. First thing you need to learn is, they work for you. They want your vote. If they don't respond to you, then that should tell you something, you know? You've got to change that mindset.

One personal observation from conducting these interviews with legislators was that every individual I interacted with was exceptionally approachable and exceedingly gracious with his or her time. While I believe that this was likely attributable to the individual personalities of those with whom I interacted, there is also a political incentive for politicians to, at a minimum, listen to their constituents and show them deference when interacting. For this reason, and the accompanying fact that legislators expressed a genuine interest in hearing from NHSOs within their districts, individuals representing NHSOs need not be intimidated to speak with state legislators.

Another capacity limitation related to human resources that was raised by several legislators was the issue of high staff turnover within NHSOs. In addition to creating organizational instability, high rates of turnover, particularly within leadership positions has, at times, made it difficult for legislators to remain engaged with organizations and issues over time. With each new Executive Director, the relationship between the legislator and the organization has had to be reestablished, a process that can take considerable time and potentially nullify any prior gains made towards a desired policy outcome.

In keeping with the capacity challenges related to human resources, one legislator made the observation that the very reason some individuals choose to serve in the nonprofit sector can also inhibit advocacy efforts. This individual said, “Well, I think just the lack of resources, and

that any volunteers they have really want to work on front line delivery, service delivery, not engaged in the advocacy work.” Others suggested that this same premium some individuals placed on providing direct services was also true of some organizations. Two separate legislators discussed how, in their experience, organizations with an expressly service-focused mission were less likely to engage in advocacy because doing so fell outside of their mission.

Another area where NHSOs were perceived to have limited capacity pertained to their collective organizational knowledge. One prominent example of this from the interviews was that many within NHSOs lacked understanding of the federal and state laws governing political advocacy. The importance of understanding the Internal Revenue Service guidelines on nonprofit political advocacy was discussed by one legislator who said, “But many of these groups, in my opinion, don't see the benefit or know how to do effective advocacy work. Or they think they're restricted from doing it by IRS.” This legislator went on to say, “I think getting training on what the IRS regs say and how to be effective advocates would be good.” Similarly, there was the perception that not having a clear understanding of the state’s ethics laws governing the behavior of public officials caused some organizations to abandon advocacy efforts altogether as a calculated move to avoid potential conflicts or violations.

Another perceived area in which NHSOs lacked organizational knowledge was in the selection and implementation of effective advocacy tactics. In each interview, legislators were asked to briefly discuss the advocacy tactics that are commonly employed by NHSOs and their respective levels of effectiveness. Legislators discussed a number of what they called “cookie cutter” tactics including form letters, email blasts, and petitions and expressed their disdain for these largely impersonal and wholly ineffective tactics. Despite their common use, legislators

were clear that such tactics were not even worth the effort, and therefore, should be avoided by NHSOs.

In terms of effective tactics, legislators routinely mentioned how invitations to visit organizations were often the most informative and, and at times even transformative, ways to understand a problem and its impact on the lives of individuals. In fact, this type of outreach was often the preferred type of interaction as evidenced in this excerpt:

I think inviting them to see what's going on. One thing I do a lot, I do 7:30 coffee meetings because once my day starts it's hard for me to stop, but at 7:30 in the morning I can sit down with the group before my day has started over a cup of coffee. I have a 7:30 coffee tomorrow, Thursday and Friday, so I do that a lot. Others host a lunch at [organization] and have some of the kids there or have some parents there. [Organization] does a good job of having a dinner and they bring the families in, so you can meet the parents and the child where early intervention services are engaged and that's very powerful. Those are the kind of outreach things that are better than a form letter or whatever the case may be.

When asked if he would have become such strong of a political advocate for a particular organization had he not been personally invited to their facility, another legislator said:

It would be very difficult, but I've been on the ground over there half a dozen times along with other Senators and House members, and I know exactly what they do, and they do it well. Not having the opportunity to visit, I wouldn't know what [organization] was all about.

It is important to note that when this second legislator was first invited, he knew nothing of the work of the organization. In the years since that first visit, this legislator has helped to secure state funding for the organization's programs, which in turn, has helped the organization provide services to even more individuals and families in need. Building on his previous comment, He continued:

It takes it to a whole other level when they have a lunch and invite me and [fellow legislator] and [fellow legislator] and some of the others in leadership, and we see firsthand the good work they're doing. They're keeping these people healthy. They have a medical facility. They're letting them do menial work for [company], and working in the greenhouse. It was impressive.

It was clear that the positive, ongoing relationship was the direct result of that initial invitation, suggesting that even the simplest of advocacy efforts can have a significant impact.

Legislators were mindful of the importance of organizational capacity and its relation to political advocacy involvement. However, discussions about specific advocacy tactics revealed that the most effective tactics are often more personal than they are expensive or elaborate.

While organizational capacity often impacts advocacy efforts, organizations of any capacity level can still impact policy.

Theme 5: Legislators Universally Recognized that Personal Relationships are the Most Valuable Political Currency for NHSOs

This final theme is best described as meta-theme, because while it stands on its own, it is also largely derived from the data comprising the other four themes. The previous four themes each addressed perceptions regarding specific aspects of the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs: overall participation, the opportunity to influence policy, knowledge of the political process, and organizational capacity. This final theme relates to the broader perception of what legislators believed NHSOs needed to do in order to establish a meaningful presence in the political arena.

The most powerful theme developed from the interview data was that every legislator interviewed believed that NHSOs needed to build active, personal relationships with legislators if they are to have any impact on the policymaking process. While it seems rather intuitive that such relationships would prove useful in influencing policy decisions, the degree to which legislators consistently emphasized the critical nature of relationships suggested that they felt the importance and the magnitude of establishing effective relationships has not yet been fully realized by organizations interested in shaping policy.

This begs the question of what legislators believe constitutes an effective relationship with a NHSO. Just as the relationship between a legislator and his or her constituents is largely based on trust, so too is the relationship between a legislator and the entities that he or she relies upon to inform his or her political decision-making. Therefore, several legislators were quick to explain how important honest communication and maintaining trust was in their relationships with organizations interested in advocacy. One legislator said:

When I make speeches to lobbying organizations, I say ‘This is not a threat, but if any of you ever tell me a half truth or an outright not truth, you might as well go get another profession, because we can't deal with half truths in Montgomery when we're voting on issues that affect the lives of a lot of people. We rely on you telling us the truth’...It's just an understanding that we have to have. Nobody lies to the other one.

This passage underscores the gravity of policymaking: that the lives of individuals and populations are impacted by the policy decisions that are made on their behalf. Consequently, this legislator was adamant that the information used to inform his policy decisions be accurate and given in good faith so that he can properly weigh the potential outcomes of his decisions.

Another legislator shared this sentiment about what happens when trust is broken, saying:

You only get one time. Legislators talk, and if you have one issue, and you mislead or not tell the truth about that issue, and that legislator takes your word and they vote for it, your credibility is killed. Your organization's credibility is dead after that.

Clearly, there are not only personal consequences of dishonesty and distrust for constituents and populations, but there are also political consequences for NHSOs. From these passages, it is evident that any NHSO-legislator relationship be built on trust, and that maintaining that trust is an important, ongoing priority for any organization interested in establishing a longstanding presence in the policymaking process.

The importance of relationships can be seen in all four of the other themes. A lack of relationships between legislators and NHSOs can account for the predominant perception that

NHSOs are not actively or consistently engaged in advocacy efforts at the state level. Also, legislators largely believed that the best opportunity for impacting the political process was for NHSOs to serve as information brokers to policymakers regarding social issues, a role largely predicated on personal relationships. Likewise, the lack of knowledge about the political process among NHSOs could quite easily be attributed to their lack of interaction with legislators. Finally, it was evident that legislators believed that personal relationships could mitigate many of the advocacy related challenges associated with limited organizational capacity. With each subsequent interview, it became increasingly clear that only within the context of personal relationships could NHSOs begin to give a voice to those they serve in the political arena.

The centrality of relationships in the policymaking process is a function of the access they provide. Without access, any organization engaging in advocacy faces an almost impossible task. Conversely, as relationships are built and access to individuals and information increases, so too does an organization's ability to influence the political process. This is why every legislator interviewed said that NHSOs need to find, or make, opportunities to personally and regularly interact with the legislators that represent the district(s) in which they serve.

Once an organization gains access to policymakers, it needs to be prepared to tell its story in a way that is easily understood yet compelling. Legislators routinely indicated that they want to know what these organizations are doing and how they are serving their communities. One legislator said, it is as simple as the organization reaching out to a legislator saying, "This is what we do. This is what we're providing. This is how we're helping." Ultimately, legislators want to know basic details such as, "How many people are you serving? Are you serving three or are you serving 300? Are you getting your best bang for the dollar? How do you raise your money?" According to one legislator, organizations should not feel pressured to do anything more than

clearly and effectively educate policymakers about their mission, their work, and the impact that the organization is having. This was made evident in the following statement:

Like I said, education. And that doesn't mean that they have to go out and spend a thousand dollars on something to make it look pretty, but just getting facts, statistics, how they are integrated within the community and how they are effecting people's lives.

Combining data from programs and personal accounts of how those programs have benefited individuals, families and communities can have a profound impact on legislators. One legislator said, "How powerful to have someone that's benefited saying 'I couldn't have moved forward without this benefit.'" While simple and inexpensive, this type of information can be very impactful as long as it is being shared with legislators. It is important to note that legislators strongly preferred that these initial interactions not be used to solicit assistance or demand a specific policy action, but rather as an opportunity to build a mutually beneficial relationship.

When organizations have forged and fostered relationships with legislators, it not only provided the organizations with access to those individual legislators, but it often opened up a network of other legislators with whom those individual legislators have close ties. One legislator described a situation where an organization approached him about a particular issue that he had little involvement with, but was able to direct that organization to a fellow legislator with a seat on the committee that dealt with that issue. In many ways, getting one's foot in the door, so to speak, was the primary challenge for the organization, but once a relationship was formed, it opened up a myriad of opportunities to make further connections.

Access to information was another important benefit that came with building relationships with legislators. In addition to providing knowledge about the legislative process as previously discussed in this chapter, within the context of the NHSO-legislator relationship, legislators said that they have been able to provide information to organizations about pending

issues and legislation that would either help or hinder their ability to serve its clients, offer helpful insights into the nature and extent of political opposition a group would face, and identify opportunities to come away with something by reaching compromises with opposing groups. This type of information is essential to any advocacy effort, and would likely be unobtainable if the relationships did not exist.

In addition to the access to individuals and information that the NHSO-legislator relationship provides, these relationships can also provide access to opportunity. Personal, ongoing relationships provide the unparalleled opportunity to sit down with a legislator, one on one, explain an issue, and make a case for a policy action. One legislator said it best when he said, “It’s hard for somebody to say no when you’re sitting there in front of their face. You know what I mean?” Similarly, the existence of a relationship can mean the difference between a legislator’s good intentions and his or her willingness to act upon those intentions. One legislator said, “It is one thing to have the support of a legislator. It is another thing to have the attention of a legislator.” As mentioned previously, these legislators are inundated with more than 1,000 bills each legislative session making it extremely difficult for any one bill to make it through a committee and onto the floor for a vote. As a result, it is not uncommon for a legislator to express support for an idea, but not carry through with introducing a bill or not help move a bill through the legislative process. However, when a legislator feels a personal obligation to help an organization or cause that he or she has a strong connection to, the best intentions can turn into actions.

This study was designed to advance the current state of knowledge regarding the political advocacy involvement of nonprofit human service organizations. While the idea of relationships was not explicitly included in the questions on the interview guide, each legislator, to some

extent, discussed the critically important role of relationships in the policymaking process. In fact, the words “relationship” and “relationships” were used a collective 139 times in the 12 transcribed interviews. While speaking with one legislator about what NHSOs ultimately needed to do to impact the policymaking process, he said, “They’ve got to build the relationship with their local legislators so that when the times comes, and the need is there, they can penetrate and not be subordinate to the other bigger, more organized, special interests.” Without question, relationships are at the heart of political advocacy. Because of the access and opportunities that they provide, legislators universally recognized relationships as the most valuable political currency available to NHSOs interested in political advocacy.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The findings from this study not only provide something of a snapshot of the current state of political advocacy by NHSOs, but also reveal important implications for social work practice and social work education moving forward. In this chapter, I first summarize the findings and discuss their place within the literature, revisit the theoretical framework on which this study is based, and discuss how the findings fit within Kingdon's multiple streams theory. Next, I provide recommendations for social work practitioners and social work educators that have the potential to improve the ability of social workers to represent and advance the interests of those they serve in the political arena. Finally, I provide recommendations for future research on the political advocacy involvement of nonprofit human service organizations.

Study Findings and Their Place Within the Literature

Theme 1: Legislator perspectives on the political advocacy involvement of nonprofit human service organizations in the policymaking process were mixed.

This finding is consistent with much of the existing literature (Mellinger, 2014; Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013; Mosley, 2010; Mosley, 2011) and further illustrates the need for NHSOs to more actively and consistently engage in the policymaking process. Previous research has relied almost exclusively on self-report surveys, often from those in positions of leadership within nonprofit organizations. This study is unique in that it moves the state of knowledge forward by offering a different, richer perspective: that of state legislators. This is the first study to explore how policymakers perceive the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs at the state level. As a

result, new and important insights have been uncovered, and from these insights, I have developed six recommendations that have the potential to increase the political advocacy participation and impact of NHSOs in the policymaking process. These recommendations are discussed later in this chapter.

Theme 2: Despite their limited involvement in the policymaking process, legislators saw a clear opportunity for NHSOs to influence public policy.

One of the most glaring omissions within previous studies on the political advocacy of NHSOs was the perspective of advocacy targets. The emphasis placed on determining rates of advocacy participation by previous researchers served a useful starting point to understand nonprofit advocacy; however, it did nothing to assess how policymakers perceived this participation, as limited as it is. Participation, even universal participation, would amount to very little if policymakers did not see NHSOs as a valuable resource in their political decision-making or if they did not see an opportunity for them to influence policy. Yet, this study found that legislators not only agreed that these organizations have a unique and valuable perspective that can help to inform their individual policy decisions, they also believed that this perspective gave them a potentially powerful and impactful voice in the political arena. Curiously, NHSOs were ignored in a study conducted by Jackson-Elmore (2005) that examined the sources of information that state legislators used to inform their policy decisions. It is worth noting that legislators in the current study routinely spoke more positively about the role of NHSOs in the policymaking process than they did a number of information sources explored in Jackson-Elmore's study including lobbyists and statewide interest groups.

Theme 3: Legislators have found that NHSOs often lack a clear understanding of the political process.

Being able to navigate the political process is essential for any organization trying to shape public policy. Therefore, legislators stressed the need for NHSOs to not only know how the process works, but also locate points in the process where they can have the most influence. While several studies have looked at knowledge of lobbying laws as an indicator of advocacy involvement, this study is the first to identify knowledge of the political process as a potentially meaningful factor in understanding political advocacy involvement among NHSOs.

Whether failure to understand the political process is a cause of limited advocacy involvement or a function of it, legislators routinely identified this lack of understanding as a significant disadvantage for groups that engage, or desire to engage, in political advocacy. Previous studies (Ritter, 2007; Rocha, Poe & Thomas, 2010; Rome & Hoechstetter, 2010) have indicated that social workers feel largely unprepared and ill-equipped to engage in political advocacy and the current study provides further evidence of this unwillingness, or inability, to advocate.

Theme 4: Legislators recognized that many NHSOs interested in political advocacy face various challenges due to limited organizational capacity.

Many of the studies that make up the current body of literature examine specific organizational characteristics and how these characteristics either promote or inhibit political advocacy participation (Child & Gronbjerg, 2007; Donaldson, 2007; Leroux & Goerdel, 2009; MacIndoe & Whalen, 2013; Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013; Mosley, 2010; Mosley, 2011; Salamon, 2002). While these studies help to define specific areas of advocacy capacity, they also overstate the importance of capacity in an organization's ability to shape public policy. Legislators in the current study recognized that many NHSOs have limited capacity, yet they did

not believe that this lack of capacity necessarily precluded them from shaping policy. In fact, many of the advocacy tactics legislators identified as being the most effective (personal contacts, organizational visits/tours, etc.) require very little investment of organizational resources. This study provides new evidence that organizations with any degree of capacity can have an impact on political decisions.

Theme 5: Legislators universally recognized that personal relationships are the most valuable political currency for NHSOs.

The most common and powerful theme from the current study is that personal relationships are the key to having an impact in the policymaking process. By forging and fostering personal relationships with legislators, particularly those representing their district, NHSOs are in a much stronger position to inform and influence policy decisions than they would be in the absence of such a relationship. By taking the time to develop and maintain these relationships, NHSOs can mitigate many of the factors that would otherwise reduce their influence such as limited organizational capacity, limited access to information and individuals, and having to compete with lobbyists and other highly organized interests. To my knowledge, this is one of only a few studies (Johansen & LeRoux, 2010; Ruggiano, Taliaferro, Dillon, Granger & Scher, 2014; Ruggiano, Taliaferro, Dillon, Granger & Scher, 2015) to identify the central role that relationships play in an organization's ability to influence policymakers and their decisions. The strong emphasis that legislators placed on the NHSO-legislator relationship suggests that this is an understudied and undervalued aspect of effective political advocacy.

Study Findings and Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory

For this study, I used John Kingdon's multiple streams theory as a theoretical framework due to its ability to inform and explain phenomena within the policymaking process. It is important at this point to reiterate that this study was not intended to test Kingdon's theory or

develop a new theory. Instead, Kingdon's three streams (problems, policies, and politics) provided a way to organize data and understand the perceived roles and opportunities that exist for NHSOs in the policymaking process.

As previously stated, in addition to the deductively created codes, three a priori codes from Kingdon's theory were developed and included in the thematic analysis: *Problems*, *Policies*, and *Politics*. Legislator statements that referred to NHSOs identifying problems or providing education about social issues were assigned the problems code. Passages that related to NHSOs developing policy proposals were assigned the policies code, and passages that pertained to NHSOs organizing, mobilizing, or taking other political action were assigned the politics code. In a number of instances, individual passages were assigned both a deductive code as well as an inductive code.

Responses to questions about the most impactful roles that NHSOs played, or can play, in the policymaking process were most commonly assigned the problems code. This is not surprising given that legislators widely viewed NHSOs to be brokers of information. This perceived role suggests that legislators believe that NHSOs have the greatest impact in the policymaking process by operating within the problems stream and by bringing attention to problems as well as educating legislators on their impact. According to Kingdon, the primary functions within the problems stream is to demonstrate that a problem actually exists by developing and providing information about such problems in an effort to advance desired policy alternatives or block unwanted policy alternatives. This is most often accomplished by using three tools that are unique to the problem stream: indicators, focusing events, and feedback.

Kingdon explains that indicators serve two purposes. Indicators provide opportunities to initially assess the extent of a problem as well as track changes in the nature or magnitude of a

problem over time. As direct service providers, NHSOs routinely collect data on the services they provide whether for their own purposes or in order to fulfill reporting mandates from funders or state and federal agencies. These reports, and other service-related data collected by NHSOs, are ready-made indicators that organizations can use to inform legislators about problems without adding any additional tasks or responsibilities to staff. Focusing events help to bring a problem to the attention of a large group of people. Because of their direct interaction with clients, NHSOs are often the first to recognize and respond to focusing events. For example, in the wake of a severe economic downturn, food banks may see a spike in demand and homeless shelters may see an influx of families. When such events do occur, the demand for services invariably increases, and by extension, so too does the need to communicate with legislators about the problem and its consequences on individuals, families, and communities. Finally, the third way in which NHSOs can operate within the problems stream is by providing feedback about the functionality and efficacy of programs designed to address problems. Kingdon identifies four types of feedback that groups can provide in the problem stream: assessing how well programs are implemented, determining how well programs are meeting stated goals, tracking the costs of programs, and communicating unintended consequences associated with programs. Given their expanding role implementing, operating, and evaluating social programs, NHSOs are arguably the most authoritative and insightful providers of feedback available to policymakers.

Study Limitations

This study is not without several notable limitations. First, while the snowball sampling method used to identify and recruit participants was successful in penetrating a group that can, at times, be difficult to access, the same relationships that facilitated subsequent interviews may

have also impacted the data that was collected. Because each legislator that participated was referred by another legislator who they had an existing relationship with, there is the possibility that the responses provided in the interviews did not represent the full range of possible responses because these existing relationships may have been born out of shared perspectives, values, or ideas. This may account for the lack of political and demographic diversity among participants and the relatively high degree of agreement among participants on a number of topics discussed in the interviews.

Next, because participants were only interviewed one time, there is the possibility that subsequent interviews would have allowed for not only more data to be collected, but also more detailed data related to specific topics, potentially resulting in different findings. Also, because the interviews were conducted at a single point in time, the responses provided by participants may have been influenced, to some extent, by the particular political and social conditions that existed at the time.

Another limitation of this study is that less than half of the legislators contacted agreed to participate in the study. Of those who did not participate, three expressed interest, but were unable to find the time to participate. The other 11 simply did not respond to the request to participate making it unclear as to why they did not participate. This raises the possibility that certain characteristics existed among the individuals who did choose participate such as an increased interest in nonprofit organizations, a greater responsiveness to those requesting a meeting, or possibly even a greater appreciation for empirical research.

Additionally, in an effort to walk a line between cynicism and naivety, I would be remiss to not acknowledge that another limitation of this study relates to the potential of the data being influenced by social desirability response bias. It is possible that the participants' role as

publically elected officials created a sense of pressure to answer interview questions in a calculated, politically advantageous manner. Additionally, because this study relied exclusively on self-reports, there was no mechanism in place to triangulate the data with other, more objective sources. However, with this said, I genuinely believe that each of the legislators that I spoke with responded to the interview questions honestly and candidly.

Also, the type, quality, and quantity of data collected was largely the result of the study design. For example, had the study been designed as a case study that focused on a particular piece of legislation and asked legislators about the advocacy efforts of NHSOs either for or against that specific piece of legislation, the data collected would have likely looked quite differently. Another example of how specific methodological choices impacted the data is that the use of unstructured interviews, rather than semi-structured interviews, may have elicited additional insights that were not gathered because the interview guide used did not account for them or did not allow for them to be addressed during the interviews. Without question, the pragmatic qualitative design of this study and each of the methodological decisions made in the collection and analysis of the study data contributed to the final corpus of data, and therefore, the findings developed from the data.

Finally, I must recognize my relative inexperience conducting qualitative research. Because I played an active role in both the collection and the analysis of the data in this study, it is likely that my inexperience influenced both aspects of the study. For example, more interview experience and further probing during the interviews may have yielded richer data and may have allowed the data collected to move beyond simply what the questions asked. Likewise, a more seasoned qualitative researcher may have been able to tease out other, more nuanced findings

from the data. This may have resulted in additional evidence for the themes created, and perhaps, even additional themes.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings from this study have important implications for social work practice. In this section, I provide three recommendations that social workers and leaders within NHSOs should strongly consider implementing in order to lay the groundwork or an active and impactful advocacy agenda or to strengthen and expand current advocacy efforts. These recommendations were developed in direct response to the study findings and reflect specific points of emphasis made by legislators.

Recommendation 1: Accept advocacy as practice.

Given that state legislators recognized the opportunity for NHSOs to impact the policymaking process, it is time that these organizations also recognize that same opportunity. Perhaps, the first thing that any NHSO must do to become a change agent through political advocacy involvement is simply accept that advocacy is, in fact, social work practice. The consistent finding that the majority of NHSOs are not engaging in political advocacy efforts indicates that many social workers, program managers, executive directors, and presidents of the board of directors within NHSOs have failed to seize the opportunity to impact the policymaking process.

There are no accidental advocates. Advocacy requires an intentional decision and a willful effort. Therefore, organizations that are truly committed to improving the quality of life of their clients must lead by example by first accepting and embracing their role as an advocate and then by making advocacy an important organizational priority. Doing so may require that the organization not only revisit and revise its overall mission statement, but also change its

organizational culture. Certainly, the individual circumstances of each organization will dictate the steps needed to place the organization in a position to influence the policymaking process. However, in every case, recognizing and capitalizing on this opportunity to shape public policy begins with a conscious decision to give a voice to individuals and populations that have long been excluded from the decision making processes that often have a profound impact on their ability to reach their full potential.

Recommendation 2: Become educated.

Perhaps the most inexcusable reason that several legislators identified as to why they believed NHSOs choose not to engage in the political process is that they simply do not know what they are, and are not, allowed to do under the IRS guidelines on lobbying and their respective state ethics laws. As stated previously, NHSOs actually have a great deal of latitude as to what they can do in regards to political advocacy. Therefore, it is incumbent upon individual social workers and those in position of leadership within NHSOs to educate themselves about what their organizations can lawfully do to advocate on behalf of those they serve.

Organizations that fail to do this run two different, but equally significant risks. First, organizations that choose not to engage in political advocacy due to their lack of knowledge are complicit in perpetuating the vulnerability of the very clients and populations they serve. In terms of the end result, it is difficult to differentiate between those that silence groups by withholding their influence and those that actively use to their influence to silence groups. Second, organizations that choose to advocate, but lack knowledge of permissible activities, risk losing their tax-exempt status. Doing so risks their very existence, not to mention jeopardizes their clients' overall health, well-being, and opportunity to live up to their full potential. In light of these risks, it is inexcusable that any social worker or individual in a leadership role within a

NHSO would not use all available resources to educate himself or herself on all applicable guidelines to not only protect the organization, but also protect those they serve.

In addition to the regulations regarding lobbying, another area where practicing social workers would benefit from additional education is the legislative process. As stated in the previous chapter, failing to understand the legislative process places social workers and NHSOs at a significant disadvantage in the political arena. Consequently, social workers need to seek out opportunities to enhance their knowledge of the political process if they are to effectively navigate and impact the policymaking process. One of the most promising opportunities to do this is through continuing education offerings. Most practicing social workers are required to complete a particular number of continuing education hours over a given period of time in order to maintain their license. Individual state social work boards largely dictate what constitutes acceptable continuing education; therefore, it is essential that these boards recognize the need for such education and approve continuing education content that helps social workers better understand the legislative process. Without such recognition and action on the part of state social work boards, it is likely that social workers will continue to be outclassed by other, more educated and more savvy professionals in the policymaking process.

The third way social workers and NHSOs should become educated is by conducting research on legislators. The reality is that no two legislators are alike. Consequently, learning about a legislator's professional background, committee appointments, standing within his or her party, level of community engagement, and personal interests can prove to be a valuable investment of time and resources when this information leads to a connection between an organization and a legislator. While constituency alone may be enough to get in front of one's own legislator, it will likely take something more, like a shared passion, a mutual contact, or an

opportunity to collaborate to secure meaningful time with a legislator from another district. Therefore, it is important that organizations do their homework on individual legislators in an effort to develop meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with policymakers.

Recommendation 3: Get in position.

Once an organization embraces its responsibility and opportunity to shape public policy through political advocacy and obtains the necessary education to ensure compliance with federal, state, or even local laws and regulations pertaining to advocacy, the organization can then begin to find ways to incorporate political advocacy into its overall strategic plan. Issues of particular importance include the allocation of financial resources, securing or developing human resources, and increasing organizational knowledge related to political advocacy.

Individual organizations must examine their own situations to determine how best to allocate financial resources for advocacy. Organizations that rely heavily on grant funding may need to have conversations about ways to develop and utilize unrestricted funds for advocacy. For organizations that use a fee-for-service model, it might be necessary to reconfigure rates in order to generate additional funds to cover time spent on advocacy that would otherwise serve as billable hours. Whatever the situation, organizations need to assess their resources, determine what is needed to be effective advocates, and develop a plan to reconcile the two.

In terms of human resources, organizations can go about building their advocacy capacity in various ways. One way to do so is to intentionally seek out job candidates with advocacy related knowledge and skills in addition to those required for the position. Another way organizations can enhance human resources is to utilize contract staff. Individuals working on short-term, task-specific assignments, such as researching an issue or existing legislation, may provide much needed support or expertise when a full time employee is unneeded or unfeasible.

A third way to build an organization's advocacy capacity is through board development with an emphasis on advocacy. While the board of directors plays an important role in the governance of nonprofits, it also provides opportunities to bring in individuals who are passionate about the work of the organization and have skills and expertise in areas that can greatly benefit the organization at little or no cost. For NHSOs interested in advocacy, there is a real benefit to including individuals with legal and political experience on their boards of directors. Attorneys, lobbyists, and even publicly elected officials can provide an organization with much needed insight into how the political process works and how the organization can begin to establish a presence in the political arena. In addition to their knowledge and skills, these individuals may even bring valuable connections that can facilitate relationships between the organization and legislators or legislative staff.

Bringing on staff and board members with advocacy experience and insight will do a great deal to increase organizational knowledge related to advocacy. However, even with such individuals in place, there may still be a need to enhance an organization's knowledge and ability to carry out an effective advocacy effort. One way to do this is to utilize consultants. Whether for assistance in developing an advocacy strategy, grant writing, or demonstrating value through program evaluation, consultants can help to fill in knowledge gaps, and ideally, help individuals within the organization further develop their own advocacy skills. While consultants often represent a significant investment, the knowledge and skills gained from them can outweigh the up front costs. Finally, an often overlooked and underutilized strategy to develop organizational knowledge is simply learning from similar, likeminded organizations that have more extensive advocacy experience.

One last way that organizations can get in position to influence political decisions is to ensure that their organizational structure is conducive to meeting the demands of advocacy involvement. One way to do this is to have all advocacy-related correspondence flow through a single individual within the organization, such as the executive director. This is not to say that others in the organization are not involved in advocacy related decisions or efforts, but in order to control the content and the flow of advocacy related communications between the legislator and the organization, or between the organization and the public, there needs to be a single, consistent voice. There are two benefits of doing this. First, it simplifies things for partnering legislators by reducing any ambiguity about who to contact when he or she needs information or a decision. Second, it benefits the organization by ensuring that its advocacy goals are not obscured or obstructed by multiple voices that may have differing amounts of information and may be unaware of what the others are doing.

By taking these actions, organizations will be in a much stronger position to advocate on behalf of those they serve. Ideally, organizations that take these steps will serve as catalysts for a broader shift in thinking among NISOs; one that embraces the advocate role and leads to meaningful and lasting changes which significantly improve the lives of the marginalized, underrepresented and disenfranchised in society. Opportunities for advocacy are omnipresent; therefore, social workers and NISOs must accept advocacy as practice, become educated, and get in position if they are to uphold their professional obligation to shape policy and impact lives.

Recommendations for Social Work Education

In many ways, the current state of social work practice can be explained by the current state of social work education. Therefore, in order to understand and address the current lack of policy practice, it is worth examining social work's current approach to policy education.

Therefore, in this section I provide three recommendations for social work education related to faculty mandates, program content, and course outputs. These recommendations have the potential to remedy the persistent finding that social workers within NHSOs are rarely, and often ineffectively, engaging in political advocacy. Quite honestly, this is nothing less than an indictment of the inability of social work education to equip and empower students to engage in effective policy practice despite the Council of Social Work Education's (CSWE) insistence that policy practice is a core competency of professional social workers.

Recommendation 1: Create consistency.

According to the 2015 CSWE Educational and Policy Accreditation Standard 3.2.2, accredited programs must utilize faculty with a minimum of two years post-masters practice experience to instruct practice courses (CSWE, 2015). This requirement is reasonable in that it ensures a level of familiarity, and ideally a level of expertise, with the course content. However, while this standard has been established for practice courses, policy instruction is not held to the same standard, thus allowing faculty from any area of social work practice to instruct policy courses.

This is an issue of particular relevance for many Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs and smaller Master of Social Work (MSW) programs. Programs with faculty numbers closer to the CSWE's minimum requirements (two for BSW programs and six for MSW programs) must place a premium on individuals who can teach across the curriculum. Because practice classes constitute a substantial portion of the curriculum, such programs necessarily deemphasize the importance of policy knowledge and experience in order to remain in compliance by hiring individuals with a clinical focus. While it is logical to expect that one teaching content on mental health, for example, would have prior knowledge and experience

recognizing maladaptive behaviors, conducting mental health assessments, and employing a number of therapeutic techniques with clients, why would it not be equally important that an individual instructing a policy class have prior knowledge and personal experience navigating the political process, informing legislators about social issues, and developing legislation?

This inconsistency suggests that the profession has either made a conscious decision to prioritize direct practice over policy practice, or it has simply failed to recognize the unique mix of knowledge and skills needed to shape public policy. While the two-year practice experience mandate has increased the likelihood that students will receive informed practice instruction regardless of what program they attend, it has done nothing to ensure the quality of policy instruction across programs. If political participation among social workers is going to increase, it is time to consider a similar two-year policy practice mandate for those instructing policy courses.

Recommendation 2: Lay the groundwork.

Simply stated, social work students are not receiving adequate education about the political process, a reality that legislators conveyed. Given the CSWE's stated emphasis on policy practice, it is counterintuitive that such an emphasis would exist, yet no mechanism be put in place to ensure that social workers have even a foundational understanding of the political process. Asking social workers to engage in policy practice without ensuring they have the knowledge to do so is no different than mandating social workers utilize best practices, yet provide no course content about what those practices are. Just as one would not want social work practitioners to discover what the best practices are by their own trial and error while on the job, so too should we not leave social workers to learn about the political process on their own.

Social work programs can help to fill this knowledge gap in one of three ways. First, programs can require that students take at least an introductory course in state and local government, public administration, or public policy. This would provide students with not only a cursory overview of the political process, but by doing so, give social work students some initial insights into where they may have the greatest opportunity to impact the policymaking process. Second, in lieu of a formal requirement, social work programs can allow students interested in policy practice to choose courses in government, public administration, or public policy to fill elective requirements that count towards their social work degree. Finally, if it is not feasible to mandate or allow for students to take a government, public administration, or public policy course, instructors of social work policy courses have an obligation to include course content that provides students with a working knowledge of the political process.

Again, without such content, it is reasonable to expect that social workers will continue their tradition of inaction and ineffectiveness in policy matters because they continue to be outclassed and outmaneuvered by individuals from other disciplines who have a far greater understanding of how to influence the process.

Recommendation 3: Educate to equip.

One thing that is evident from the findings of this study is that there is something of an art to communicating with legislators. Similarly, the ways in which social workers, and those within NHSOs, can build political will for policy change also require a unique skill set. Therefore, if social work educators intend to develop strong political advocates, there is a pressing need to develop course outputs that will allow students to confidently and effectively engage various actors in the political arena. This means that within social work education, policy-related courses need to be more than a historical review of public policies from previous

eras or simply an exercise in using formulaic frameworks to conduct an analysis of legislation. Ideally, a student should leave his or her policy course(s) with more than just a research paper and a grade.

While there is value in understanding how policy changes in accordance with the predominant values of the time, policy education must be forward facing. Students need to be encouraged to find opportunities to affect real change in their communities. To do this, they need to be able to identify an issue in need of policy action, analyze the full range of policy alternatives, assess the implications of a potential policy action, and be able to communicate the details of that policy action to a diverse audience. Possible course outputs may include developing a fact sheet for a local organization about a proposed policy action to inform advocates and policymakers, hosting an advocacy fair where local organizations and groups of similarly interested students provide information about issues and corresponding policy needs, meeting with local and state officials to discuss a topic of interest, developing an advocacy plan for an organization interested in political advocacy, and volunteering with an organization already engaged in an advocacy effort. There are also nearly unlimited opportunities to incorporate advocacy practice into one's field placement. These types of experiences, and the resulting knowledge and skills, will place future social workers in a much stronger position to advocate on behalf of their clients and communities when they enter into their professional practice. Therefore, it is critical is that social work educators are intentional about creating opportunities for students to not only gain the skills they need to be effective advocates, but also create opportunities to practice and hone those skills in real world settings.

Changes in social work education are likely to result in changes in social work practice. The recommendations provided here can guide social work educators on ways to develop social

work programs that equip and empower advocates who can return the profession to its historical roots of creating systemic change.

Opportunities for Further Research

While this study fills a significant gap in the literature and advances the current state of knowledge by capturing the perspectives of state legislators in regards to the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs, there is still much to learn about the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs. Future research needs to build on the findings from the current study by focusing on two primary areas: advocacy targets and advocacy contexts.

Additional information is needed to more fully understand how legislative advocacy targets, from the local to the national level, perceive the political advocacy of NHSOs. It is possible that different advocacy targets will have a different perspective due to their proximity to respective NHSOs and their different roles and responsibilities in the policymaking process. For example, city council members are likely to have a different perspective than U.S. Senators, yet both would likely provide valuable information about how NHSOs can impact policy decisions. Like state legislators, these advocacy targets play a ubiquitous role in policy formation; therefore, their perspectives and insights would undoubtedly further inform the political advocacy efforts of NHSOs. Replicating the current study at both the local and national level would create the opportunity to answer the question of, “How do perceptions of political advocacy by NHSOs differ between local, state and federal policymakers?” By exploring and identifying any similarities and differences that may exist, NHSOs interested in advocacy can make more fully informed decisions about their advocacy efforts at all three levels of government.

Like advocacy targets, advocacy contexts present another potentially fertile area of study. It is quite possible that certain contextual factors have a meaningful impact on the political advocacy participation of NHSOs and their ability to shape policy. Research should aim to understand the extent to which specific political, social, and economic factors increase or decrease participation rates. This can be done through case studies that focus on individual contexts, using quantitative methods to compare variables across multiple contexts, or by employing mixed method designs. This line of research also provides opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration between social workers, political scientists, economists, sociologists, educators, and public administrators, among others. Possible questions that could be answered include, “To what extent does the political composition of state legislatures influence the rate at which NHSOs engage in state-level political advocacy?” and, “What is the relationship between rates of political advocacy by NHSOs and community factors such as poverty, homelessness, and hunger?”

Conclusion

Social workers within nonprofit human service organizations have the opportunity and the obligation to advance the interests of the individuals, families, and communities they serve in the policymaking process. Yet, the preponderance of evidence strongly indicates that they are not doing so. The current study not only provides further evidence of this, but also advances the current state of knowledge by capturing the perspectives of state legislators regarding various aspects of NHSO political advocacy involvement. Previously, little was known about the extent to which advocacy targets recognized, much less responded to, the advocacy efforts to NHSOs. However, this study provides new insights about what NHSOs can do to become a more regular and more impactful voice in the political decisions that significantly impact the lives of those

they serve. It is now abundantly clear that NHSOs have the opportunity and insight to shape policy. However, to do so, NHSOs must embrace their role as an advocate, be able to navigate the political process, and forge and foster active, ongoing relationships with policymakers. Only then, will NHSOs be able not only achieve their individual organizational missions, but also the mission of social work.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

ALABAMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

May 16, 2016

Matthew Knierim
School of Social Work
The University of Alabama
Box 870314

Re: IRB # EX-16-CM-047 "State Legislator Perceptions of the Political Advocacy Involvement of Nonprofit Human Service Organizations"

Dear Mr. Knierim:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your protocol has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46.101(b)(3) as outlined below:

(3) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if:
(i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or
(ii) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

Your application will expire on May 15, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance

APPENDIX B: INITIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

- To what extent do you see non-profit human service organizations as a resource in the policymaking process?
- What qualities or characteristics are you looking for in a partnership with a NHSO?
 - What qualities or characteristics did you find appealing/beneficial when deciding to partner with (insert organization) when you worked on (insert issue/bill)?
- In what ways have NHSOs helped to inform your policy decisions or facilitate your policy action?
 - Probe: In what specific ways did (insert organization) help inform your policy decision/facilitate your policy action when you worked on (issue/bill)?
- What types of knowledge and skills do NHSOs need to be effective in their political advocacy efforts?
 - Probe: What type of knowledge and skills did (insert organization) bring to the table when you worked on (insert issue/bill)?
- What do you believe to be the most impactful role for NHSOs in the policymaking process?
- What do you see as the primary limitations of non-profit human service organization's advocacy efforts?
- How could NHSOs modify/improve their political advocacy involvement in order to increase their effectiveness in shaping the policymaking process?

APPENDIX C: REVISED INTERVIEW GUIDE

- To what extent do you see non-profit human service organizations as a resource in the policymaking process?
- How does the political advocacy involvement of NHSOs compare to the advocacy participation of other groups?
- What qualities or characteristics are you looking for in a partnership with a NHSO?
 - What qualities or characteristics did you find appealing/beneficial when deciding to partner with (insert organization) when you worked on (insert issue/bill)?
- What factors influence your decision whether or not to work with a NHSO on a policy issue?
- In what ways have NHSOs helped to educate you about a particular policy issue, assisted with the development of a specific piece of legislation, and/or helped you achieve a political victory?
- What do you believe to be the most impactful role(s) for NHSOs in the policymaking process?
- What opportunities might NHSOs be missing by not engaging in political advocacy efforts?
- From your perspective, how could NHSOs modify/improve their political advocacy involvement in order to increase their effectiveness in shaping the policymaking process?
- Are there other legislators that you know of that have experience working with NHSOs and who might be willing to share their insights with me?

APPENDIX D: CODE LIST

BoD Involvement

Capturing Legislator Attention

Crossing the Political Line

- Can Create Lasting Conflict
- Departure from Organizational Mission

Differences Among Individual Legislators

- Approach to Policymaking
- Personal Interests and Causes
- Presence in the Community
- Responsiveness to Constituents

Educating Legislators

- Complexity of Issues
- Impact on Individuals
- Systemic Changes Needed
- Unintended Consequences

Effective Tactics

- Advocacy Days
- Board of Directors Engaged in Advocacy
- Collaboration
- Communicating in District
- Doing the Legislative Legwork
- Establishing a Single Point of Contact
- Focusing on Ideas Not Personalities
- Maintaining Ongoing Relationships
- Messaging
- Organizational Tours and Visits
- Organizing
- Personalized Contact
- Proactively Offering Help on Issues
- Using Political Capital of Collaborating Groups

Exposure to Issues

External Communications

- Need for Accessible Language

History of Advocacy Success

Importance of Constituency

Importance of Honest Communication

Importance of Personal Relationships

Importance of Realistic Expectations

Importance of NHSO Voice

Ineffective Tactics

- Attacking and Threatening Legislators
- Demanding Budget Increases

- Effusive Communications
- Form Letters
- Petitions
- Scripted Language

Knowing Who to Contact

- Legislators

Limits on Organizational Capacity

- Disbelief that Advocacy Will be Effective
- High Organizational Turnover
- Human Capital
- Ignorance of IRS Guidelines
- Ignorance of State Ethics Laws
- Inability to Effectively Message
- Intimidation to Engage Legislators
- Lack of Research and Data
- Limited Financial Resources
- Organizational Mission

Making a Compelling Case

- Community Impact
- Data
- Value

Memorable Quotes

Missed Opportunities

- Being Dictated To
- Boost in Public Relations
- Creation of Legislative Advocate
- Issue Becomes Lost
- Potential for Future Financial Resources

Nature of Interaction

- Budget Focused
- Legislator to Organization
- Mixed
- Need Based
- Organization to Legislator
- Seeking Donations
- Uninvolved

Nature of Relationships with Legislators

- Issue Driven Relationships
- Ongoing Relationships
- Preexisting Relationships

Need for Compromise

Need for Patience

Need to Understand the Process

- Importance of Committee Calendar
- Roles of Committees
- Volume of Bills per Session

NHSOs as a Resource

- Current Resource
- Potential Resource

Perceived Role of Lobbyists

Diminished Role in Policymaking
Keeping the Attention of Legislators
Paid to Be Interested
Representing an Interest

Perceived Role of NHSOs

Front Lines
Gap Fillers
Ground Troops
Information Brokers

***Policies**

Political Differences

Courage to Break Ranks
Not a Barrier to Collaboration

***Politics**

***Problems**

Role of Third Parties

Connect NHSOs to Legislators
Monitor Policymaking
Mouthpiece for Member Organizations

Telling Their Story

Meeting Unmet Needs
Personal Accounts

Threshold to Take Notice

Understanding Political Opposition

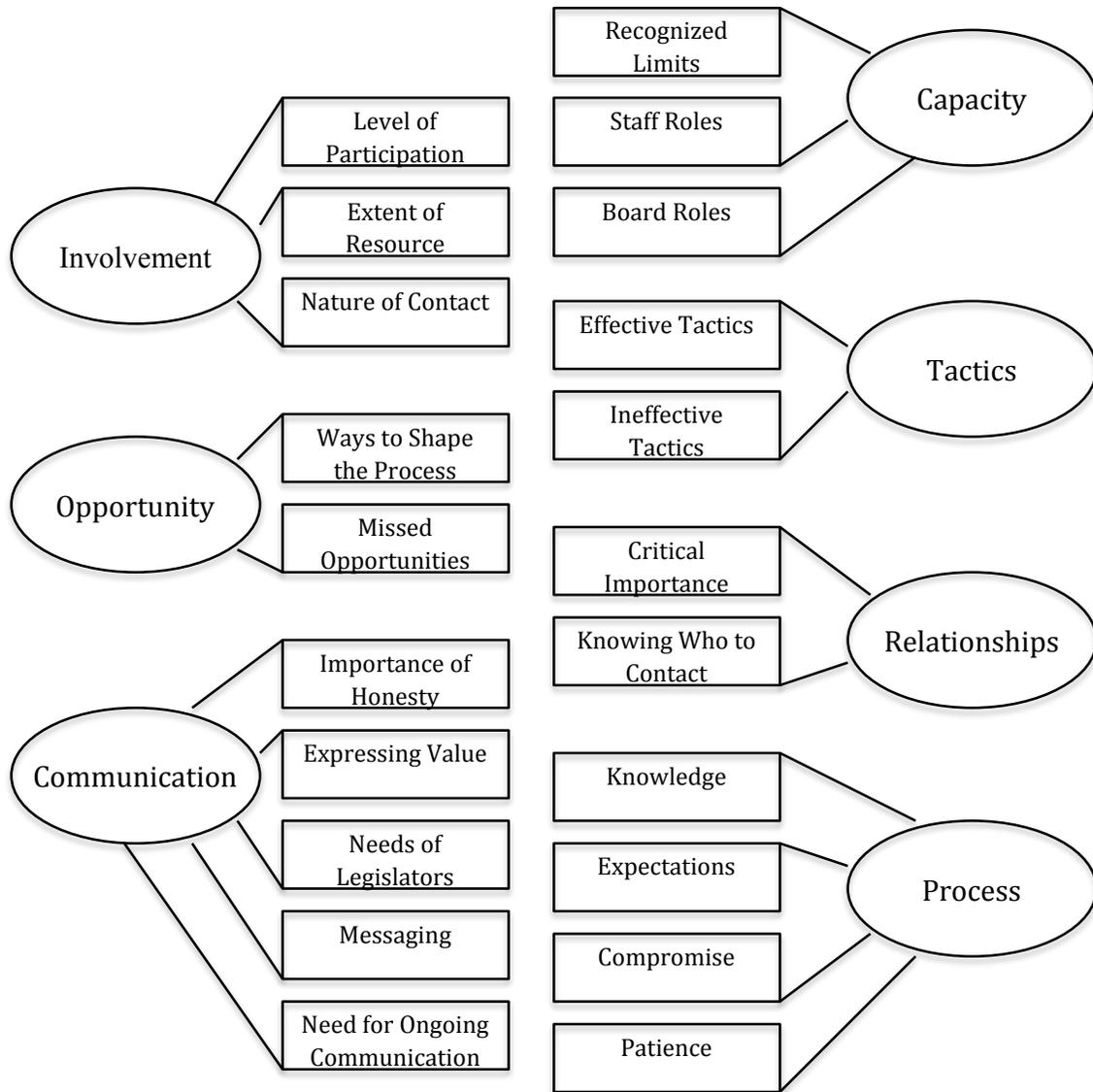
*Deductive Codes From Kingdon's Multiple Streams

Holistic Codes in Bold (36)

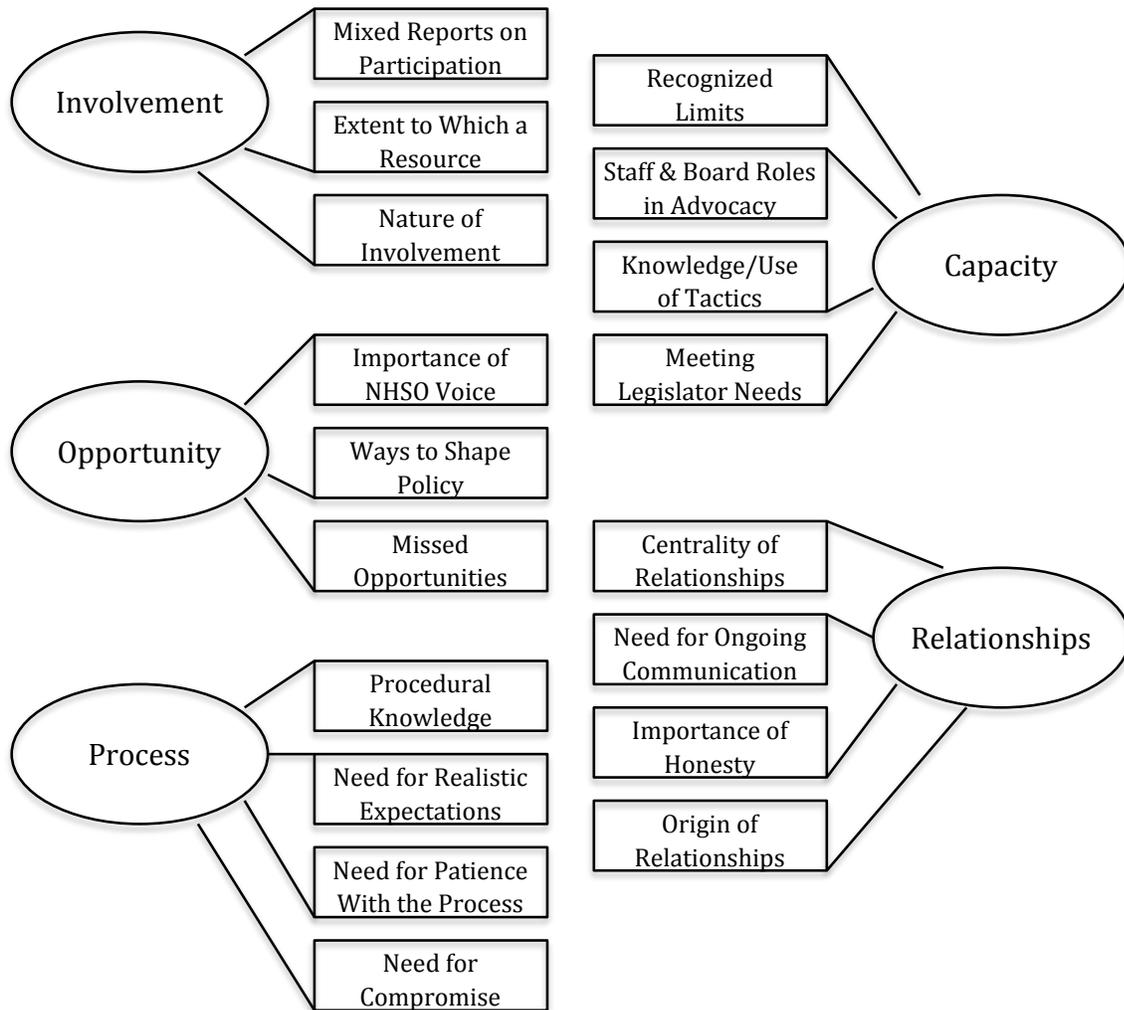
Subcodes (80)

Total Codes: 1

APPENDIX E: INITIAL THEMATIC MAP



APPENDIX F: REVISED THEMATIC MAP



APPENDIX G: EMAIL LANGUAGE FOR MEMBER CHECK REQUEST

Good afternoon _____,

First, I want to thank you again for taking the time to share your insights with me as I work to better understand how state legislators view the political advocacy involvement of nonprofit human service organizations (NHSOs). Ultimately, it is my hope that I am able to use the information that you provided me to empower and equip such organizations to become a valued and trusted resource to you in the policymaking process.

Attached, you will find a preliminary list of the major themes that have emerged from the interviews I conducted with you and your fellow legislators. Again, these are the major topics and themes that emerged and some further refinement will take place as I move through the analysis. However, prior to that, I wanted to get your feedback related to the themes. For example, if something seems to misrepresent our conversation(s) or if something fails to fully capture or illuminate a particular idea, please feel free to send along your thoughts and ideas. Conversely, if you think that the themes accurately reflect our conversation(s) and will prove useful to NHSOs, I would greatly appreciate that feedback as well.

Again, I really appreciate your willingness to help with this project and for allowing me the opportunity to sit down with you and learn from your experiences. Please don't hesitate to let me know if I can be a resource to you in any way. I am happy to help however I can. Feel free to email or call me directly at XXX.XXX.XXXX.

Thanks again, and I look forward to your feedback,

Matthew Knierim