

3

Methodology

In pursuing the major aim of this study—the delineation of factors which are associated with the implementation of program change in a grouping of community welfare agencies—the following procedure was adopted.

The Study Group

The final study group consisted of forty-two welfare agencies which hold membership in both the United Fund and Community Council of Houston and Harris County. These agencies represent the total of the *local* United Fund membership with the exceptions of two agencies which do not maintain full-time executive directors and two other national agencies for which budgeting and personnel data could not easily be obtained. A listing of the agencies along with selective descriptive data are presented in Appendix L. Appendix M contains a brief description of the community setting.

The agencies in the study group are similar in that they are all administered by full-time executive directors, have local boards of directors, and are funded from similar sources. The size of the study group was sufficiently large to justify statistical comparisons and yet manageable enough to permit, given the time and resources at our disposal, intensive data collection. While this group of agencies constitutes a significant portion of the community's agencies that are capable of effecting the implementation of program change at the local level, we cannot justify the generalization of our findings to other welfare agencies (even with the aforementioned characteristics) since the latter do not necessarily hold membership in the United Fund and Community Council of Houston and Harris County. Such membership might have a profound effect upon the rate of implementation of program change.

The United Fund and Community Council of Houston and Harris County are functionally interrelated, operating under the same charter and engaged in activities which are cooperative and complementary. However, each organization has a separate and distinct set of by-laws and an independent Board of Directors. The Executive Director of the United Fund and the Executive Secretary of the Community Council is each responsible to his respective Board, and through the Board to the community at large.

The Community Council has a membership of more than 180 organizations and hundreds of individual civic and professional leaders. Member groups include: (1) voluntary organizations, such as the Lighthouse for the Blind and the Jewish Home for the Aged; (2) tax-supported organizations such as the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, the State Department of Public Welfare, and the Veterans Administration Hospital; and (3) civic and professional groups, including the Junior League of Houston and the Harris County Medical Society. The Council achieves its objectives of coordination and planning through numerous committees and three planning sections, staffed by professional "Community Planning Associates." The Council also provides three central services: Health and Welfare Information Services, Personnel Administration Consultation Service, and a Research Bureau.

The United Fund supports in whole or in part 65 agencies and their branches. This includes a number of agencies affiliated with state or national organizations which are supported through a state-wide Texas United Fund, which do not necessarily have offices or Boards in the local community. An essential function of the United Fund is the pre-campaign *budgeting* of member agencies. This function is handled by a citizens budget committee of 36 lay persons representing a variety of professions, business, labor, and homemakers, and staffed by the Executive Secretary of the Community Council and his staff. A National Agency Committee handles the requests of state and national agencies. Their respective findings are presented to the United Fund Executive Committee and Board who make the decisions concerning the United Fund Campaign Goal.

Primary Sources of Data

The major sources of data for each agency were separate interviews with the executive director and a board member who was nominated by the executive director as having "the *most* influence with other board members concerning agency business." Two similar instruments were devised. The version developed for interviews with the executive director was more inclusive and consisted of 44 pages. A somewhat shorter version was administered to the board members, consisting of 32 pages. The questionnaires consisted of a number of open-ended questions, replies to which were recorded by the interviewer, as well as a number of structured instruments which were self-administered by the respondent.

The interviewing procedure and questionnaires were pre-tested in the field by the project director. With certain minor exceptions the original instruments were found to be satisfactory. The interviewing assignment was then contracted to a local marketing research firm. A group of five professional

interviewers with extensive experience in open-ended, in-depth interviewing were selected to administer the instrument. The project staff trained and oriented this group of interviewers in the use of the specific instruments. As far as possible, all responses were recorded verbatim. Additional training and periodic re-training of the interviewers was provided by the contract firm in order to maintain a uniformly high quality of interviewing and motivation. The appointments were so arranged that no interviewer was scheduled to interview both the executive director and the board member of the same agency. All completed questionnaires were then edited and additional call-backs and corrections were made as necessary before the questionnaires were forwarded to the project staff.

The executive director interviews ranged in duration from three to fourteen hours, averaging six and one-third hours per completed interview. The completion of the interview was generally attained only after two or three visits. The interviews took place in the respondents' offices. Occasionally the self-administered portions of the questionnaire were left for the respondent to complete and return at a later time. In all but two instances, the interviewers characterized the executive director as both cooperative and candid.

The board member interviews ranged from one and three-quarters hours to eight hours in duration, averaging three and one quarter hours per completed interview. In most cases the interviews required one or two separate visits. The interviews were arranged with the board member who "has the *most* influence with the other board members concerning agency business," as nominated by the executive director of the agency. In the few instances in which the executive director declined to nominate a board member, the current chairman of the board was interviewed. In all but one instance the interviewers rated the respondent as both cooperative and candid. In nine cases interviews were arranged with secondary nomination when, after repeated attempts, interviews could not be arranged with the initial nominee. Most of the respondents who were nominated and subsequently interviewed held official positions on the board. Thirty-one of the interviewees were board chairmen, two were vice-chairmen, and one was the treasurer. In eight cases the board member respondent did not currently hold office.

The content of the questionnaire was the end-product of a comprehensive review of the literature in several related areas including: organizational structure and dynamics; decision-making; role theory; social change; leadership; small groups; the community organization of welfare services; and organizational change.

Organizational Innovation

Studies of Program Change in Community Agencies

Kaplan, H.B.; Poole, M.S.

2003, IX, 239 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-306-47726-3