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Collaboration within the Sport-Based Youth Development Non-Profit Network in Austin, TX

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This qualitative study assessed collaboration within the sport-based youth development non-profit network in Austin, TX. Network, capital, resource sharing and collaboration theories were used as lenses for this research project. Qualitative methods applied were surveys and follow-up interviews. Surveys were sent to 13 identified non-profit organizations in Austin, TX that use sports programming for youth development in order to gain insight into their structure and organization, including collaboration and partnerships. Follow-up interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed. Findings uncovered that there is no collaboration between the organizations participating in the study, but that their respective cross-sectoral collaboration networks are of vital importance to the organizations' existence and programming. Recommendations were made on future collaborations within the network and possible benefits of forming a coalition were discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Reduced availability of youth sports programs due to budget cuts in public schools and widening income inequality over the past decade has caused concerns about the youth in the U.S., especially from low socioeconomic families, having access to sports and physical activity. Data from a recent research study by Up2Us Sports (2015) suggests that there is a financial crisis facing youth sports programs in the public schools in the U.S. with \$3.5 billion cut from sports athletic programs from 2009-2011. By the year 2020, it is projected that 27% of public schools will not be offering any kind of sports programs. Yet, 71% of American youth do not satisfy requirements for physical activity deemed to lead a healthy life.

This alarming information shows that in the coming years there might be an even greater need to secure additional sports opportunities for school aged youth. Especially in low income areas with school districts deficient in funding. In societies such as the U.S. government and business sectors can simply not fulfill all societal needs, especially the ones of the less privileged. While this might be another area where non-profit organizations (NPOs) that already use sport based youth development programming can step in to fill in the gap, it is important to note that sports programming administered by the NPOs in the study has so far been focused on out-of-school activities only.

Over the past several years there has been a significant increase in the number and activity of NPOs. According to national data from the IRS as was reported by McKeever (2015), the number of NPOs rose by 2.3% from 2012 to 2013 including their revenues (3.5%), expenses (2.3%) and assets (6.2%). Considering that the operation of NPOs mirrors the overall trends in

the economy, there is reason to assume, even without the most current data to support it, that the upward trend continued through 2015.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to present the current picture of the network between NPOs in Austin whose programming is based on the model of development of youth through sport. The conclusions drawn from the qualitative method of data analysis point to the practical applications for the future of the network functioning and how collaboration can help increase efficiencies through resource sharing (Hardy, Phillips & Lawrence 2003; Osula & Ng, 2014; Provan et al., 2005; Vail, 1994).

Considering there were no literature sources available on the specific situation of NPOs that use sports programming for youth development in Austin, I am looking to uncover the existence of a possible network. Four non-profit organizations (NPO) that use sports programming for youth development in the greater Austin area were interviewed for data collection. Through lens of collaboration theories, examined are differences and similarities in the strategies the NPOs employ, the impact they produce, the partners they collaborate with and the resources they possess and share. This data will show their current state of development and the potential of their programming for future application. The importance of NPOs in delivering programs for youth development through sport cannot be overstated, especially if the grim projections for large scale reduction and elimination of sport offerings in public school become a reality.

Furthermore, the possibilities for future collaborations within the network and the potential benefits for all actors in creation of a coalition among the NPOs were discussed. While competition has been one of the most commonly cited reasons for lack of collaboration among

them, NPOs that use sports programming for youth development might benefit greatly by focusing their efforts in uniting forces together in improving the entire landscape they work within. As a result, this would increase the impact of their programming and enable NPOs to offer more services and opportunities as public funding for sports programs decrease.

Figure 1: General Network of NPOs using sports programming for youth development in Austin, TX

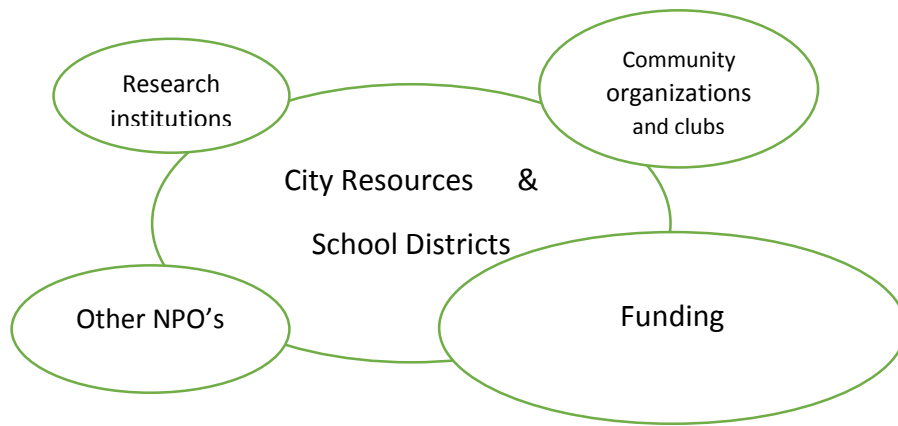


Figure 1 indicates that NPOs in the study have established cross-sectoral collaborations with the City of Austin as well as with at least one school district in the Greater Austin area. The reasons for this type of collaboration is that all parties involved realize the potential benefits from collaborative partnerships with the main goal of affecting change on a greater level. The following are greater societal problems attempted to be helped solved from the NPOs in the study:

1. Development of life skills through sports for children from underserved families.
2. Increase in children's physical activity and creation of healthy eating habits.
3. Academic tutoring and mentoring for children in need.

Through cross-sectoral collaborative efforts such as partnerships with school districts and other entities already created, sports programming developed by NPOs might prove useful to filling in additional gaps created by budget cuts and provide children with athletic opportunities that would otherwise not exist. By mirroring the business world of increased efficiencies through collaborations, NPOs have followed suit.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the proliferation of NPOs shows no signs of slowing down the research has taken many different perspectives in explaining the world of NPOs. Research on NPOs from variety of fields including sociology (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990; Tzasis, 2009), psychology (Alexander, 1998; Cook, 2005), economics (Murphy, Arenas & Batista 2014; Nowell & Foster-Fisherman, Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008; 2011; Wood & Gray, 1991), capital (Lin 1999; Lin 2008; Skinner et al., 2007), politics (Austin, 2010; Linden 2003), business (Linden, 2003; Parker & Selsky 2004) and networks (Foster-Fisherman, 2001; Grannovetter, 1983; Lin, 2008; Selsky & Parker, 2010) has helped contribute to an improved understanding of NPOs. Network and collaboration theories provide a particularly useful lens to understand NPO behavior. Second, theories of social capital creation and resource sharing are also important as the result of primary conditions.

The web of interconnectedness among non-profit, commercial and governmental agencies is constantly increasing (Parker & Selsky, 2004; Rowley, 1997). The rationale behind collaboration is that the impact can be far reaching with two or more organizations coming together to provide their resources in order to deliver a product or a service that neither one of the organizations could deliver by themselves (Bryson et al., 2006; Glowacki-Dudka & Murray, 2015; Murphy et al., 2014). In addition, the new services delivered are deemed to be even more essential if they provide additional opportunities for the underserved populations that government agencies and business cannot fulfill on their own.

In the world of growing institutional alliances most successful organizations have existed within their networks of operation and by collaborating with others (Kanter, 1994; Parker &

Selsky, 2004). The analyses of these networks have shown the strengths and weaknesses of the relationships within the network and provide insight as to how to improve their functioning. Since the same forces at work in the for-profit arena are relevant to the domain of NPOs, similar conclusions can be drawn (Parker & Selsky, 2004). As it pertains to NPOs that tackle complex societal problems creations of efficient networks will likely increase the efficacy of their contributions. Provan et al. (2005) stated that the value in network analysis is such that the information obtained “could be used by communities and their leaders to build community capacity through the development of a stronger network of collaborating organizations.” (p. 2).

In his work, Lin (1999) pointed to the importance of combining network and resource theories in describing the path to reaching the goal of increased social capital. Lin’s work relied heavily on Granovetter’s (1983) theory on the strength of weak ties. Granovetter’s work provides a groundbreaking theory on the number and the usage of individual/organization weak ties that extend beyond our (NPOs’) close-knit network with the goal of personal/organizational advancement. In his opinion, these are the types of ties that provide additional opportunities in creating action and expanding opportunities for action across “cliques”. An example of such a tie as it pertains to NPOs could be “a board member sitting on the board of two organizations” (p. 27). This arrangement could provide a loose connection with a possibility of making contributions with new ideas and solutions to problems. Burt (2004) identified a similar phenomenon of “structural holes” within organizations and networks. He emphasized the importance of brokerage between the holes in order to produce good ideas. Lin’s (2008) later work extended this notion of resources being embedded in the network and that access to those resources depends on members’ “connection with the “outer layers” of the

collectivity's networks, the richness of the accessed resources and the relationship between the connections" (p. 16).

In their explanation of behavior and collaboration among NPOs Guo, Chao and Acar (2005) combined resource dependency, institutional, and network perspectives. They defined non-profit collaboration "as what occurs when different nonprofit organizations work together to address problems through joint effort, resources, and decision making and share ownership of the final product or service" (p. 4). When NPOs make choices on their collaborative strategies and partnerships a newly created environment emerges with shifts in degrees of dependency and autonomy for all partners. This type of tension between the costs and benefits of collaboration can influence decisions that NPOs make on collaborations (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990; Cook 2005).

Within the realm of examining collaboration between the NPOs, of particular interest is the level of collaboration of network members with organizations outside the network in what is called cross-sectoral collaboration. There are many possible combinations of cross-sectoral collaborations such as involving any combination of commercial entities, government agencies, non-profits and coalitions (Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Provan et al., 2005; Selsky & Parker, 2010). In addition to sharing of the resources there are many more potential benefits to all of the parties involved (Burt, 2004; Kanter, 1994; Lin, 2008). For an example, an NPO partnering with the school district can provide additional programming that the school district didn't have the funding to provide. The city can benefit from services offered by an NPO by its fields and facilities being used for programs like sports programs, mentoring or tutoring, all of which can greatly benefit its residents, but were previously non-existent. As a consequence of cross-

sectoral collaboration where NPOs are collaborating with organizations that tend to adapt to environmental changes more rapidly, the NPOs will most likely follow suit as a collaborating unit of the group. The examples of other entities adjusting to each other would be government agencies adapting to political pressures and business that are governed by ever-changing market conditions.

There is an extensive literature on challenges presented by collaborations among organizations. Selsky and Parker (2010) pointed out that cross-sector social partnerships will likely not provide a quick fix or be proclaimed a holy grail in solving complex societal problems. After all, complex societal problems generally encompass large numbers of people and action by one or two or more collaborating agents could possibly positively affect some members of the underprivileged class affected by the said problem, but likely not all. Bryson et al. (2006) agreed and added that collaboration is necessary, yet difficult. Each organization within a collaborative group might have a slightly, if not largely, different perspective on the problems at hand and the proposed solutions when compared to other collaborating members. Different leadership styles can sometimes get in the way of good collaboration, along with the issues of trust and power. Glowacki-Dudka and Murray (2015) and Parker & Selsky (2004) offered a comprehensive set of steps to follow and situations to recognize in order for a collaborative partnership to become, develop and continue changing with the times. The capacity of individual NPOs to increase social capital increases when in a well-maintained partnership. Foster-Fisherman et al. (2001) research showed that “a coalition’s ability to affect change is (a) dynamic, changing with shifts in coalition membership, focus, and developmental stage (b) adjustable, enhanced by technical assistance and capacity building efforts and transferable,

allowing the capacity developed within one coalition experience to carry over to other community-based efforts” (p. 2).

The start of the process of assessment of a network is to identify the network location with all of its actors and their resources (Lin, 2008). Provan et al. (2005) add that management and coordination of network activities becomes increasingly complex as the number of links increases and that “maintaining many relationships may be time consuming and costly for individual network organizations” (p. 9). Especially, as “(sports) organizations face increasing pressures to partner with multiple organizations across different sectors (public, nonprofit, and commercial” (Babiak and Thibault, 2009, p. 2).

METHODS

The goal of this research was to study and describe the inner workings of NPOs operating in the Greater Austin Area that utilize youth development through sport programming. In addition, their respective approaches towards collaboration were examined and the development of their collaborative networks both within and outside of the network were analyzed.

Data Collection

The identification of organizations that utilized sports for youth development were conducted via internet searches, literature review and non-profit websites. Methods used for data collection were the initial survey (Appendix A) and an in-person follow-up interview (Appendix B). The survey, consisting of ten closed-ended questions was sent to the executives of 13 identified NPOs and applied through Qualtrics. Data from the survey further helped identify the inner workings of the network through collaboration among non-profits belonging to it. Furthermore, it provided data on organizational, structural and leadership domains within each of the NPOs. Survey results disqualified NPOs that did not have the component of development of life skills in addition to utilizing sports programming. This important distinction separated NPOs that use sports solely for competition purposes versus using sports as a “hook” in order to provide children with potentially life-long benefits that transcend competition. Survey answers were not coded, but were used in the creation of the interview protocol (Appendix 2) as part of the second step of data collection.

The follow-up in person interviews were semi-structured. The initial profile of the NPOs obtained through surveys was used in the interview process in order to identify candidates and conduct interviews with the most relevant questions to each of the non-profit executives interviewed. Topics in the interview included: strategy, impact, resource and resource sharing, collaboration within and outside of the network, goals and aspirations for the future and relationships within the network. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded. The interpretation and organization of data was achieved through two separate types of coding; “in vivo” and “descriptive” coding. In vivo coding was used to capture the exact words and terms used by the subjects interviewed in order to provide the most exact use of language. Considering the volume of data collected, descriptive coding was also used to summarize sections of the interviews. Codes from both sets of coded data were compared and combined with the end result of creation of themes. The analysis of data collected provided meaningful insights, better understanding of the environment with the potential to constructing practical applications for future use by the data uncovered.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings will explore differences and similarities of the 4 NPOs in the study by examining their structure, strategies, measurable impact, resources they utilize and how all of those factors influence the extent and use of their respective collaboration networks.

Table 1: General Profiles of 4 NPOs

	NPO 1	NPO 2	NPO 3	NPO 4
Age	5	7	17	21
Type of NPO	Local Chapter	Local	Local Chapter	HQ in Austin, TX
Area Served	Austin	East Austin	Greater Austin	National
Population	Underserved, All	Underserved	All	All
Collaborations	City of Austin AISD NPOs	City of Austin AISD	City of Austin Manor, RR ISD NPOs - light	City of Austin ISD's Nationally NPOs - heavy
	SBYD NPOs - light	N/A	N/A	SBYD NPOs - heavy
	Clubs	N/A	Clubs - heavy	Clubs - heavy

Notes. SBYD is an abbreviation for Sport Based Youth Development

Strategy and Structure

The strategies of the 4 NPOs interviewed for this study varied greatly as it pertains to their philosophies of program administration, structure of organization, use of research, use of technology and growth goals. NPO1 and NPO3 are local chapters of national NPOs, therefore their geographic area of focus is on the Greater Austin area only. NPO2 was formed by a local businesswoman with the demographic focus on children from low socioeconomic families in East Austin. NPO4 is headquartered in Austin with their efforts to scale nationally well

underway. The differences in geographic and demographic focus among the 4 NPOs affect their respective strategies to a large degree and therefore, the decisions made about collaborations and partnerships. This section will examine the similarities and differences in operation of NPOs that use sports programming for youth development and how those differences can influence collaboration.

One of the major similarities among the NPOs in the study is that three NPOs possess a higher degree of sophistication, judged by their knowledge on the environment they operate within, use of research to improve their programming and use of technology to expand their reach and inform their decisions, compared to the one that does not. Data shows that the strategies of the more sophisticated NPOs resemble the commonly used ones by for-profit businesses. They are guided by a clear mission statement with vision that steers the NPOs towards achieving goals of producing a positive impact in the community. The mission of NPO1 as stated by its executive director “is to engage and develop inner city youth athletically, academically and spiritually.” The executive of NPO3 explained that a big part of her job is communicating the mission consistently to the outside world and expects “all 25 board members would know what the mission is.” They also have clearly defined short and long term goals. NPO4 has set their “short term goal on keeping their focus on expanding with a long-term goal of their program being administered in all 50 states.” In their pursuits of improving the impact of their programming the NPOs from the study have found similar ground with other entities inside and outside of their sector to collaborate with through unified mission, beliefs and managerial values (Babiak & Thibault, 2009). The seemingly least sophisticated NPO from the study (NPO2), showed correlation between small number of collaborators with looser

obligations to the guiding principles initially outlined in its mission and vision statements.

Considering that this study is most concerned with the approach of NPOs to collaboration and creation of partnerships, perception of other organizations will naturally affect desire to collaborate with one another.

Both local chapter NPOs showed excellent awareness of the landscape they operate within including the programming of other NPOs in the Austin area, history and current trends. This aspect of awareness also parallels their for-profit counterparts. They have invested the time and effort into understanding their environment, their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Before ever starting their operation the executive of NPO1 was aware of already existing programs in East Austin and their program was intentionally built so that the gaps in needs were filled, but without “stepping on anyone’s toes”. This type of knowledge gives useful and necessary information about potential partnerships that could be formed among the like-minded NPOs. The guiding thought for this executive was that “we actually want to work with the existing groups and not compete against them”, which led to NPO1 forming numerous collaborations with partners that could’ve perceived NPO1 as a potential threat upon their entry onto Austin non-profit scene.

Some of the examples of strengths that the interviewed executives emphasized as the “difference makers” and “game changers” for them include things such as NPO’s own program curriculum, mission resonating with a large number of volunteers and research supported data on their own programs. Literature on collaboration points to the difficulty caused by the power (im)balance due to sharing of resources in collaborative alliances and, while at the same time, maintaining the degree of autonomy necessary (Austin, 2010; Kanter, 1994; Guo et al., 2005;

Selsky & Parker, 2010). The sharing of the strengths mentioned above can mean relinquishing some of the power contained within those valuable resources if sharing of such resources occurs.

Above all, all of the NPO executives indicated the importance and value in having an effective Board of Directors. The main role of the board is to keep the staff accountable for effectively accomplishing the tasks prescribed. They monitor the implementation of programs, results achieved and determine the course of actions for the future. This includes the identification of potential partners. Throughout all of the interviews, the competence of the board of directors was claimed to be one of the main reasons for the success of the entire organization. One of the executives interviewed gave the following statement on its board of directors: "...they bring the leadership to oversee what we are doing and they bring the experience, influence and wisdom we wouldn't have otherwise." In addition to having the capacity to influence the decisions made, active board of directors can provide the organization with many outside connections that make partnerships and collaborations possible. From the organizational perspective Granovetter's (1983) theory on potential benefits of strength of weak ties can be applied to board members providing loose ties to individuals and organizations that could be potential partners. Consequent creation of a network of entities that work alongside the NPO indicates an existence of a philosophical orientation and strategic planning in forming meaningful partnerships that benefit all partners involved. The connections provided by board members range from forming connections with the community, relationships with city and state agencies, local and national businesses, donors and foundations.

Another important aspect that can affect NPOs future trajectory in forming of partnerships with others is determining the ways in which technology can be used to advance their mission. The executive of NPO4 was eager to point out that on staff “they have a Chief Technology Officer, which is a huge resource compared to other NPOs.” Use of technology can be of particular value to NPOs that have scaling in size and increased impact in mind. Particularly as it pertains to technology making their program more accessible and user friendly for potential collaborators. In the case of NPO4 technology will be used “to make the whole process of registering a club simpler or maybe it even gives parents the access to go online and register their child, instead of the coach having to reach out”. Alongside technology, the importance of use of research to support the programming and future planning was used by two NPOs in the study. One of the organizations has a Scientific Advisory Committee as part of their board of directors. They are entrusted with conducting research, measuring outcomes and determining collaborations for future research purposes. Both aspects of use of technology and research seem to separate the NPOs on the ladder of sophistication that seem to directly correlate to the extent of their collaborative networks.

The weaknesses identified are generally based in the limited resources NPOs have access to. Two of the most common limitations mentioned include shortage in funding, which directly affects size of staff on payroll and quality of programming, and not having a permanent facility to house the offices and be used for program administration. Improvements in both of these areas would lead to higher quality of programs administered. Across the board, all executives have stated that collaboration is of the essence in gaining access to resources they are missing. Two of the executives indicated that creation of collaborative partnerships has

been one of the weaknesses that will be given more of their time and effort in the future. As was indicated in numerous studies, while collaboration is often seen as a positive phenomenon it does not occur naturally. Collaborative efforts should be well thought out and strategically pursued in order to improve the mission of both/all organizations involved (Guo et al., 2005; Hardy et al, 2003; Kanter 1994; Osula & Ng, 2014).

Many of the NPO's strategic decisions are influenced by limited resources and the numbers of paid staff employees. It becomes of critical importance to be able to hire the most capable staff and recognize the ways in which their skills can be utilized to the fullest. It is a well-known fact that executive directors of start-up NPOs have to wear many hats. Usually as the lone employee, one person can be charged with everything from running the programs, recruiting volunteers, recruiting children, outreach, marketing, partnerships, fundraising and many more. Staffing decisions are also based in strategy and pursuit of goals that an NPO is striving towards. NPO1 executive stated that "having staff and leadership that are from the community and representing the community, is also huge." Among the NPO executives interviewed for this study, there appear to be two different models as it pertains to assignment of duties to employees; a national and a local model, as can be seen from Table 2. The national model is based on a larger investment into the paid staff members who are tasked with raising awareness of the organizational cause and promoting the programming by acquiring more volunteers nationwide to run their program across the country. The importance of collaborative efforts cannot be overstated when the success of scaling of the program depends on partners nationwide seeing the value and adopting the program created by the NPO. The local model is based on lower employee numbers where the primary driving force for administering programs

lies within local volunteers. Both models rely almost exclusively on volunteers running their programs and are greatly dependent on cross-collaboration with multiple entities in securing additional resources in facilities and staff.

Table 2: Information obtained from IRS 990 Filings for year 2013 and NPO websites

	NPO1	NPO2	NPO3	NPO4
Paid Staff	4	3	9	21
Volunteers	190	10	80	2,225
Net Assets 2013	N/A	1,239	73,981	2,005,344
Net Assets 2009	N/A	19,022	- 69,991	1,082,886
Program Expenses	81,624	10,184	953,355	1,331,402
Funding	Donors	Donors	Donors	Donors - light
	Foundations - light			Foundations - heavy
	Grants		Grants - light	Grants - heavy
Sponsors & Partners	MLB, Astros, KPMG, Frost Bank			Nike, HEB, BCBS, WF, St. David's, Dell

The effectiveness of the program administration by volunteers directly affects the number of children reached and the quality of the program, whether it be locally or nationally administered. This leads to the strategic implementation of programming of each NPO. For successful administration of the program logistics and procedures must be clearly defined in order for volunteers to be properly trained for the task at hand. All of the NPOs in the study have at least one paid staff member in charge of volunteer recruitment and training.

Impact

The major difference between commercial and non-profit organizations is the way in which the main outcome, or the bottom line of the operation is measured. While primary measure of a successful business is profitability, NPOs measure their bottom line with the impact they make with their programming. As was previously noted, one of the primary goals of NPO4 is scaling to the national level where their programming would be administered in every state in the U.S. The approximate number of children reached in this case would be measured in hundreds of thousands. On another side of the spectrum, NPO2 may have, intentionally or unintentionally, limited their operation to administering programming to only three elementary school within the Austin Independent School District by exclusively targeting underserved children. The number of children they reach is around 100 per year. This difference in geographical span and philosophical approach to programming indicates difference in scale, and therefore, could affect potential for collaboration (Austin, 2010; Nowell & Foster-Fisherman, 2011).

The most common example of how interviewed NPOs measure impact is through simple statistic of the number of participants in the program. Over time numbers can fluctuate depending on retention rates and the recruitment of new participants. This type of statistic is the easiest and cheapest way to gain insight into the programming numbers, and it can be indicative of many aspects of the program. Indirectly, it can give insight into participant satisfaction, ease of program administration, recruitment of new children participants through outreach and collaborations and expansion of capacity in acquiring more volunteers to run the programs. NPO1, NPO3 and NPO4 rely heavily on volunteer participation, as can be seen from

table 2. All of the above aspects of the program point to the overall quality of the program. A more intangible measure often used is gauging satisfaction levels among children and parents. Some of the ways indicated by the interviewees to measure satisfaction is through administering occasional surveys of parents, children and volunteers. However, for NPO3 it is the feedback provided on an ongoing basis through regular communication with children and parents that is used most often. This type of instant feedback provides immediate information that could be used for program improvements and can be used in assessing strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspectives of the ones the program was created for. Nature of instant feedback is such that it can lead to quick improvements if organizations are open to listening and are flexible in making the necessary adjustments. The executive from NPO3 emphasized the attention they paid to the instant feedback in order to tailor their programming to achieve specific results. It was identified that retention of teenagers needed to be improved. The appropriate programmatic adjustments were made by “starting some programs that are more attractive to these kids” as well as promotion of the program to potential partners with already established access to teenagers.

More sophisticated measures of the effect produced by the NPOs include conducting research in order to most accurately assess the impact of their programming. NPO4 refers to data and findings of such studies as “evidence based research”, that in turn informs evidence based practices. Some of the aspects measured are specific effects and behaviors the NPOs have as a goal to influence. For example, some quantitative and qualitative characteristics measured include levels of children activity, levels of fruit and vegetable consumption, athletic self-perception and how to effectively involve the parents to support the mission of the NPO. In

short, what was measured was the effectiveness of the programming by establishing a positive correlation between the practices employed and the results achieved. This type of action in obtaining data on part of NPOs to inquire about the effectiveness of programs can have multiple benefits. It provides measures of value of the program and it gives it credibility. This type of data can make it easier for the NPO to attract attention of funders, sponsors and other potential partners. It was assessed by the executive of NPO4 that enough research had been done in the past few years confirming the high impact of their programming. The goal for the organization going forward is to “use those results in promoting the program nationally and making it more accessible.” This is an example of how research can provide data that informs future direction of growth potential and expansion in reach through partnerships and programming content.

In addition to the NPO programming influencing children, most of the NPOs in the study have managed to positively impact the people administering the programming, including its staff and volunteers. As an example, NPO4 has been working on developing an online training module for potential volunteer program administrators called “Leadership Academy.” Interestingly, the benefits of this training module are not limited to only the easier access and method of training of volunteers online. In addition to the volunteers gaining valuable knowledge about the program they will run, they also acquire leadership training that might benefit them beyond the program. This kind of a strategic decision in programming extension to go beyond serving only the children to providing benefits to volunteers, has multiple positive consequences for growth of the program as a whole. The easier the access of this valuable programming resource is to the volunteers, the potential to expand the volunteer base

increases and the number of children reached. By the same token, children benefit by volunteers being better trained. In addition, such use of a technological platform to extend the reach of the non-profit and make services of critical importance (such as volunteer training) accessible to the masses is another testament to NPO4 creatively using multiple avenues in order to grow. As it pertains to collaboration, this type of an asset in programming is making this NPO even more attractive to potential partners.

NPO1 has implemented training of volunteers in ways that can advance their professional careers. For example, the volunteers administering programming can get trained in refereeing the sports administered, coaching, mentoring, turf management and other ancillary jobs that help with program administration. Most of the NPOs in the study either already have implemented internship programs or are planning to implement them in the future. These examples indicate that some of the NPOs have made it part of their mission to expand the impact of their programming beyond just the children in order to benefit the staff, interns and volunteers involved. This speaks to the philosophy, creativity and strategy of NPOs and its leadership to explore and use their capacities to increase overall impact. Considering that there is potential for everyone involved with the program to benefit this type of an arrangement between the organization and volunteers could also be seen as collaboration.

Resources

In general, limited resources are one of the main obstacles NPOs face. A large opus of research exists on resource dependency theory and its relationship to forming of collaborative partnerships (Austin, 2000; Guo et al., 2005; Wood & Gray, 1991). As was mentioned earlier,

the sharing of resources through collaboration often increases dependency of the partner organizations, reduces autonomy in decision making and therefore requires careful assessment of costs and benefits. In general, one must know the totality of its resources so that important strategic decision such as the hiring of personnel, establishing short and long term goals, growth plans and future programming, can be informed. All of the 4 NPOs examined in this study were limited with resources in ways that are essential to functioning of the NPO. As can be seen from Table 2, the number of paid staff in the four NPOs interviewed was influenced by funding limitations and ranged from 3 to 21 employees. In addition, the IRS 990 filings show that NPOs in the study own very little in a way of resources. Over 95% of what each of the NPOs own are the funds largely acquired through donations, grants, business sponsorships and other fundraising efforts. A negligibly small portion in the amount of less than 8% of organizational revenues can be attributed to charging of minimal fees to the participants. After all, these organizations are NPOs whose programming costs amount to a lot more than an affordable participation fee could ever cover. The main reason stated for charging any kind of a fee is in order to keep people accountable. “We always want to charge something because then they will show up” is how one of the executives explained the reason for charging a minimal fee. Free clinics were not deemed as valuable or appreciated appropriately. Most of the experiences related to providing free programming was positively correlated with absenteeism and not enough of a buy-in from participants.

IRS 990 filings also confirmed that none of the NPOs in the study own facilities. The office space, as well as the space used for programming was either leased or agreed to be used through collaborative efforts with organizations that owned the facilities. The aspect of owning

property is becoming an increasingly important topic in the city of Austin for a lot of NPOs. Due to skyrocketing property prices, increased rent and repurposing of properties previously designated for non-residential use into residential properties, many NPOs are feeling the strain of increased overhead costs. Selsky and Parker (2010) point to the fact that collaboration within NPOs for community services contributed to the acquisition of essential assets at significantly reduced costs. Currently, all of the NPOs in the study have secured the spaces they operate out of through collaboration, but all aspire to having an organization owned facility they can call home.

Resources deemed to be the most valuable to the three out of the four NPOs examined are the people involved with their organization. This includes staff members, volunteers, board members and everyone who is helping in their mission. The value placed on staff and their skills is great, as the entire programming is dependent on the quality of their work in many areas such as outreach, recruitment and volunteer training. Volunteers are participating because they feel a calling to help in the mission of making a difference for no monetary compensation. One of the executives exclaimed: “We have 200-plus volunteers not getting paid. So clearly, there is a calling here.”

One of the local chapter NPO executives indicated that the most valuable resource to them is the curriculum they use to administer their programs. It is a resource that took a long time to develop and that sets this NPO apart from all others. The curriculum consists of levels in both athletic and life skills that a participant progresses through by taking practical and written tests. This gives children a sense of accomplishment and perhaps a path with an end goal in sight that keeps them motivated as they learn their sport and life skills. It is important to note

that the executive of this NPO suggested the possibility of sharing this valuable resource with other interested parties that would want to collaborate. This could potentially provide a significant benefit to the partner organization and therefore, increase the likelihood of collaborating.

A part of working with limited resources is devising plans for expanding them. How does an NPO grow if those limited resources do not? In addition to the most valuable resources indicated above there is a plethora of other types of resources that an NPO needs in order to improve the quality of their programs. The first is an increase in financial resources that allow them to exist and grow. With quality programming and subsequent growth in participation NPOs can gain in credibility and get attention of private funders, as well as sponsors and other business partners. Second is physical space from where they operate their programs. Most run their programs from facilities they use through collaborative efforts.

Collaboration

As the main topic discussed and examined in this study, collaboration has proven to be a complex social phenomenon that has been widely studied and examined from many different theoretical perspectives. The research dating back to the early 90's has predicted the trend in which collaboration will increase and become strategically important (Austin, 2000). More recent studies, such as the one produced by Bryson, et al. (2006) have concluded that in order to "tackle tough social problems and achieve beneficial community outcomes that multiple sectors of the democratic society must collaborate to deal effectively and humanely with the challenges" (1).

As was previously mentioned, the operations conducted by the 4 NPOs interviewed is bounded by their limited resources. Therefore, they are tasked, among other things, with finding ways to acquire what they are lacking through partnerships and collaboration. It was mentioned earlier, that it is important from a strategic standpoint for an NPO to understand its SWOT position and make plans to adjust accordingly to the environment they exist in. One of the most critically important strategic decisions that an NPO can make is their philosophy of how to successfully collaborate with entities that can help provide what they are needing, by mutually providing a greater good. From the study, a clear link can be established between a mutually beneficial collaboration of an NPO with another entity and the overall increase in impact produced. The executive from NPO1 emphasized the role of collaboration in their operation by saying that “it is the foundation of how we operate. Collaborations with other organizations have allowed us to scale and also to provide year-round opportunities for the kids”.

There are a multitude of benefits created for all of the parties participating in these collaborative efforts as well as to the society as a whole. Selsky and Parker (2010) point to the fact that benefits to cross-sectoral partnerships can be on “individual, organizational, sectoral and societal levels” (p. 1). Also, others have pointed out that it is expected that the need to fulfill the basic services for the underprivileged will undoubtedly require larger and more effective cross-collaborative efforts in the future as budget cuts in public sectors become more impactful (Enfield & Owens, 2009; Hardy et al., 2003; Nowell & Foster-Fisherman, 2011). On the individual level, the NPOs are getting an easy access to children and already existing public facilities to conduct programs at. In some cases, NPOs have gone as far as to educate the staff

employed by other entities who already have pre-established relationships with the children (teachers) to implement the programming. Specifically, NPO2, whose programming is being administered in three AISD schools in East Austin, has trained physical education teachers on the “life skills development” portion of their program. On the other hand, by collaborating with an NPO that uses sport programming for youth development, partner organizations are increasing children’s access to sports and are reinforcing life and athletic skills development. Also, it is in the interest of the city that the residents are utilizing public facilities and sporting fields that are provided for their recreational activities. At last, the children and the parents, especially the underserved, might be getting an opportunity to participate in sports and life skills education, mentorship and other side programming that neither the city nor the school district would be able to provide on their own. In this type of collaboration everyone is benefiting from activities that were previously non-existent.

NPO4 has been able to form extensive cross-sectoral collaboration with school districts across the country with its presence in 43 states. The team of 4 national managers for outreach have been successful in increasing the application of their program well beyond their headquarters in Austin, TX. The partnerships formed include some of the largest school districts in the country, including New York City and Los Angeles school districts. The goal of NPO4 is to keep expanding their presence to more states, more school districts and more clubs and organizations. The collaboration extends to partnerships with other NPOs that are well connected throughout school districts nationwide in order to spread awareness. The collaborative effort exemplified here reflects the strategic decision made by the board of directors to “go national.” The process was explained in very simple terms. First, it was decided

that the programming had the platform to scale nationally and be applied everywhere. Second, it was necessary to structure and hire the staff that would be in charge of the national effort. Third, devising of the strategy for collaboration and identifying potential collaborators was of extreme importance. A well ran collaborative initiative of scaling to national levels was well implemented and executed by the staff considering the grand expansion of the reach of this NPO that went from 5 to 43 states over the past couple of years.

On the other hand, there are 2 NPOs in this study that are a local chapters of 2 national NPOs. Their scope and influence is geographically limited to the local area of the city of Austin and surrounding areas. This kind of a narrower scope allows for greater focus on collaborations on a local, city and state level, but naturally produces a smaller number of volunteers as compared to NPO4 with national scope orientation. In the battle for more resources and access to children and facilities, the efforts of local chapters are focused on their influence and impact locally. It was already mentioned that cross-sectoral collaborations with the city and school districts seems to be a standard collaborative approach for all 4 NPOs interviewed. Other areas to which collaboration extends to are other NPOs that do not use sports in their programming offerings for youth development. This includes large national non-profit entities such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, Girl Scouts and Girls and Boys Clubs that can provide additional connection and access to children in need locally.

Collaborations can extend beyond the realm of other NPOs and the standard city offices such as Sports and Recreation Departments. NPO3 is working with the City of Austin in two areas that are not automatically thought of in connection with the operation of an NPO. One such collaboration is working with the City on reducing costs of maintaining fields/courses by

lowering, or eliminating the cost of water. This type of relief would significantly lower operating costs for this NPO. The other potential partnership is a collaboration with the City of Austin Libraries in potentially housing a city library within the building that the NPO will soon start building as their home. This is another example of uniting the missions of an NPO and the city (government offices) in serving the needs of people living in underserved neighborhoods. The benefits of this type of cross-sectoral collaborative effort would undoubtedly positively impact the community as a whole and would extend well beyond the mission of the NPO and the City alone.

While collaborations seem vital for the programming success of the NPOs in the study, there was not much in a way of collaboration found between the NPOs that use sports programming for youth development. There might be a plethora of reasons for that state of affairs. Competition for children and resources in general was the number one cited reason for the lack of collaboration among NPOs. One of the executives stated that particularly “in the youth sports world there are a lot of competitors, because, you know, in sports you compete”. This is precisely why NPOs that solely focused on sports without having additional life skills component to their programming were excluded from the interview process of this study. As an example, NPO1 went into operation by intentionally avoiding competition with others because they came to the realization that “if you compete (against others), you are going to lose together”. Furthermore, all executives in the study communicated the importance of having the philosophy of sharing with each other. As a side note, this may have contributed to them participating in the study in the first place and sharing their experience and knowledge.

In addition, it might be that all 4 NPOs have too similar of missions in advancing life and athletic skills of children, that the collaboration among them simply wouldn't add enough of a benefit to either of their causes. After all, it takes time for children to participate in after and out-of-school activities such are the ones offered by the NPOs in the study. Besides, if they like the sport and are benefiting from the life skills component, there would be no reason to change or enter another program simultaneously. Another reason cited for lack of intranetwork collaboration was the sense that some of the smaller local NPOs are not at the same level of organizational sophistication where collaborative efforts could result in positive outcomes. General disorganization, lack of focus and effort on part of smaller NPOs were also mentioned as contributing to lack of desire to collaborate.

The sense is that the NPOs in the study are generally very well run with its capable staff and are focused on achieving measurable and impactful results for the people in the communities they serve. A closer view into the challenges ahead for the 4 NPOs have to do with the overpopulated non-profit landscape in the city of Austin. This is especially true in East Austin where most of the NPOs conduct their programming due to the lower socioeconomic status of much of the population. One of the executives mentioned the sentiments from the community members as some NPOs being a source of "frustration for the East Austin community...the non-profits that are seeking to do something that maybe isn't in line with the community." The main issue seems to be the discrepancy of what and how some NPOs want to do their programming and the community not wanting it. The advice given by the same executive is that the main goal of an NPO should be "To do it WITH the community, as opposed to FOR community." The battle that this particular NPO executive has been fighting is proving

to the city of Austin and to the East Austin community members that his NPO conducts a meaningful operation with the intent to keep contributing to the positive transformation of lives in East Austin for a very long time. He believes that he is fighting against the “less-than-stellar reputation tens of NPOs have left” with the people in the community, community leaders, city officials and council personnel who are entrusted with future development of communities, including the collaboration on projects with NPOs.

Currently, there is an effort underway to use large open spaces in East Austin owned by the City of Austin by local non-profits that use sports programming for youth development. The vast space was designated by the city for sport and recreation purposes, but has never been turned into a usable space for any use. There are a lot of interested parties bidding for the use of this space, some commercial, some non-profit. Perhaps, this could be the space that could be used by some of the NPOs from this study, and others, that are desperately needing a facility and a place that they would call home. So, the battle continues for the resources, for the children, for the donor monies and for the reputation of effective NPOs. It is not uncommon that the NPOs with common goals to come together as a united front to form a coalition in order to make a change on a larger scale. In the complex world of bureaucracy a larger coalition of organizations can generate more political power and can likely affected change more easily than one organization could on its own. According to Foster-Fisherman et al. (2001) an effective coalition takes time to build and requires a plethora of skills and knowledge from all the partners.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While NPOs in this study whose programming is based on using sport for youth development in Austin, TX, have extensive partnership and cross-collaboration networks developed, they do not have well-established within-sector collaborative relationships. The reasons cited for such conditions from the executives of all of the 4 NPOs interviewed range from competition, diverging collaboration strategies, misalignment of missions, absence of collaborative effort, lack of awareness of others that operate within the same sphere and lack of resources. Academic research on within-sector alliances confirms that these findings are a common occurrence due to the often contentious collaborative and competitive nature of such partnerships (Austin, 2000; Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Provan et al., 2005). However, that doesn't mean that collaboration within the group could not be established. As was mentioned in the discussion section as well as in the literature review, there might be yet unforeseen benefits in creating a united front of NPO in order to secure more resources for themselves as a group that is using sports programming for youth development. Particularly, as it pertains to the desire from all of them to achieve higher organizational goals that go beyond competition itself, such as obtaining a place for permanent facilities. This type of an attainment would without a shadow of a doubt in the minds of executives interviewed, improve their programming, brand recognition and impact. Just like most of the NPOs in the study have exemplified their ability to make adjustments to their programming and functioning over the years in order to grow their organizations and improve results, perhaps strategic modifications and knowledge on effective collaboration can be improved so that the benefits reaped from action within the coalition can

make a change not only on individual levels, but on organizational, sectoral and societal levels (Selsky & Parker, 2010).

As was previously noted, the intent of this study was to assess the nature of collaborations and consequent results of such networks, but also to find obstacles that are preventing a more united and effective network of NPOs that use sports programming for youth development. Considering that the feedback gathered consistently pointed to the problems within this community of NPOs I will provide some recommendations.

There seems to be a need for additional resources to all of the NPOs and their leaders in areas that would increase their awareness of other NPOs that operate in the same geographic and context area. All of the executives in the study expressed their eagerness to learn more about how they and the organizations they lead can become better. Furthermore, all of them viewed collaboration as something that has been essential for the success of their programming. The fact is that there are a lot of small NPOs that do not have the luxury of time to devote to learning about the environments they operate in. Providing the resources that raise awareness and highlight benefits of collaboration might be a step in the right direction in order to give access to knowledge and increased efficiency to all. This knowledge resource can take shape of an online network of organizations that brings all of the like NPOs together in order to share knowledge, experiences, mentorship and guidance. Or, it could simply be an informational resource in a shape of a manual made exclusively for the NPOs that use sports for youth development.

Second, there could be an organization in the Austin Region (e.g. Central Texas) that is a virtual gathering place for all organizations connected with sports, including the NPOs. Greater

Austin area is an economically rapidly developing region with growing needs and offerings needed for the underprivileged. In cities with more professional sports organizations community outreach is part of missions of professional sports organizations. Austin does not have a professional sports team at the top level of any professional league and therefore, is lacking in such sports related non-profit efforts. Having a non-profit extension of an already well-connected entity in the world of sports could be an asset in way of providing a wider reach to children, increased visibility of the importance of healthy lifestyles, attraction of children to sports and physical activity, sharing of resources and collaborating. Perhaps this type of an organization could help provide a platform for NPOs of similar purpose an opportunity to unite and advocate for resources that they are currently lacking.

Appendix A
Survey Questions

1. What is your first and last name?
2. What is your non-profit organization name and your title?
3. How long has your non-profit organization been in existence?
4. How many employees does your non-profit organization employ?
5. How many volunteers are registered with this non-profit organization?
6. How many children are served by the work of the non-profit organization per year?
7. Does your non-profit charge for services provided?
8. Does your non-profit provide free of charge programming?
9. Have you collaborated with any entities that fall within categories listed below?

Other non-profit organizations, for-profit business, city/state/federal entities,
professional sports team/leagues, private persons, other.
10. If YES to answer 9, identify organizations/persons you collaborated with.

Appendix B
Interview Questions

1. Questions about the interviewee

- a. Can you give an overall description of the work your non-profit does?
- b. Can you explain the work you do in your non-profit?
- c. Can you describe the children you serve (neighborhoods)?

2. Questions about location

- a. What part of Austin is the non-profit located in?
- b. What part of Austin do you conduct your non-profit activities in?
- c. What facilities are you using in order to administer your program?

3. Questions about collaboration

- a. To what extent do you collaborate with other non-profits in or out of town? If no collaboration are there efforts made for future collaboration?
- b. How many sports based non-profit organizations do you collaborate with in the Austin area?
- c. What are the barriers or roadblocks that impede collaborations between you and other non-profits?

4. Questions about partners

- a. Who are your partners?
- b. What role do your partners play in advancing your non-profits mission?
- c. Do your board members serve on boards of other non-profit organizations?

5. Questions about resources

- a. What are the resources available to your organization?
- b. In your opinion, what are your most valuable resources?
- c. What resources do you utilize or are available from those organizations you collaborate with?
- d. Is there any future plan in securing additional resources and how you would go about it?
- e. To what extent do you rely on resources from local, regional, state and federal agencies?

6. Questions about impact

- a. What are the ways your organization measures impact on people you serve through the administration of your programming?
- b. In what ways do you measure this impact?
- c. How does your organization, moving forward, increase or improve the impact of your programming?
- d. How have collaboration with other non-profits lead to significant impact in your non-profit programming?
- e. In what way could collaboration among non-profits be improved?

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