Organizational Forms for Community Collaboration to Confront Homelessness

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Homelessness is a complex social problem that touches many different sectors of a community—not only housing, but also healthcare, education, criminal justice, workforce, and more. Because of these complex interrelationships, homelessness as a social problem lends itself to collaborative governance where service providers across sectors come together to address the problem. This research examines homeless service provision as an example of how local government, nonprofit organizations, community funders, and other stakeholders collaborate and what knits those networks together. This research project encompasses three major efforts: a comparative case study of six different communities and how they have organized to confront homelessness, a quantitative analysis of data on organizational structure and performance outcomes from 397 collaborative networks across the United States set up to address homelessness in their communities, and an in-depth case study of a single community, including how stakeholders and consumers of services perceive and navigate collaborative governance and provider networks.

The results suggest that whether and how collaboration emerges depends deeply on local context and the local political culture. Further collaboration and its success depend on establishing local norms that collaboration is the way business will be done.
Collaboration also tends to turn inward, even when its intent is to be broad and inclusive: parties focus on establishing shared objectives, building trust and relationships among members, and aligning funding flows with the goals of the collaborative. Evidently, the things that make collaboration work are also the things that tend to make it less democratic. That is, collaboration appears to work best when the group embraces a shared vision and goals—but that might come at the expense of minority voices. Also, collaboration appears to work best when horizontal relationships among members are strong, but this could also create insider relationships that trade off with outsider engagement. Importantly, collaboratives appear to have at least a partial corrective: measurement, accountability, and transparency. At their best, these collaboratives combine a professional focus on measurement, performance tracking, and improvement with a public commitment to openness and transparency.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Housing is a fundamental prerequisite for human development: in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, physical needs such as shelter are the most basic, coming before all other needs (Maslow 1948). Homelessness has serious consequences for all who experience it, ranging from socioemotional stress to economic instability and negative health effects.

Homelessness is an urgent problem in its own right, and it is also a compelling case study to better understand changes in how social safety net programs are administered in the United States. The 1980s saw not only the dismantling of social supports for people in poverty--especially families--but also the dismantling of the state apparatus that had provided those supports. Two consequences of this movement were (1) more people struggling to make ends meet and (2) no single place to go for help (i.e., a government “welfare” office). Instead, a patchwork of private charities developed. This patchwork has replaced services previously provided by the state, but has it done so successfully? What new challenges does this organizational form present? For instance, how do people navigate a decentralized system in order to find and secure the help they need? Who exerts control over the network of providers, and do they do so in the public interest?

Examining homeless services is one way to better understand the consequences of the devolution of safety net programs and the operation of network forms of collaborative governance in the face of the “hollow state” (Milward and Provan 2000). Homelessness is, in some ways, a simple problem with a simple solution: to end homelessness, a
community need only guarantee housing to all. But in practice, homelessness is a complex social problem that touches many different sectors of a community—not only housing, but also healthcare, education, criminal justice, workforce, and more. The relationships among these sectors are not unidirectional but intricately intertwined: people experiencing homelessness face higher hurdles to finding and keeping a job, showing up to school ready to learn, and staying healthy, while people who run into economic, health, or social crises are at increased risk of losing their housing (Desmond 2016; National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty 2017). Because of these complex interrelationships, homelessness as a social problem lends itself to collaborative governance where service providers across sectors come together to address the problem (Burnes and DiLeo 2016). Thus, this dissertation examines homeless service provision as an example of how local government, nonprofit organizations, community funders, and other stakeholders come together and what knits that network together.

CONSEQUENCES OF HOMELESSNESS

The experience of homelessness can have lifelong consequences. For children in particular, safe and stable housing is a key determinant of childhood outcomes; housing instability and poor housing quality are linked to lower school achievement and increased risk of dropping out, poorer social and emotional adjustment, psychological and behavioral problems, illness, and developmental delays (Ziol-Guest and Mckenna 2014). Homeless children also suffer in school: up to half of homeless children have developmental delays (Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, and Peters 2003). Compared to children in families receiving housing assistance, homeless children do worse on
achievement tests and are more likely to repeat grades, and they have lower expectations for their future educational attainment (Rafferty, Shinn, and Weitzman 2004). Indeed, housing quality is one of the most consistent and strongest predictors of emotional and behavioral problems in low-income children.

Poor housing quality directly and indirectly affects children: It is directly associated with negative but preventable health outcomes (e.g., asthma, lead poisoning, respiratory distress, and accidental injury or death) (Currie and Yelowitz 2000). Its indirect effects on emotional and behavioral problems are mediated by parental stress and parenting behaviors (Levine Coley et al. 2013). Nationally, homelessness is the reason for foster placement for 3 in 10 children in foster care, and between 10 and 36% of youth become homeless after aging out of foster care (Harburger and White 2004; Choca et al. 2004). In order to thrive, children need the stability and routine that comes with having a secure residence (Samuels, Shinns, and Buckner 2010).

The causes of homelessness are complex and diverse, but in general, individuals and families who are unable to find affordable housing are at risk of homelessness (Desmond 2016). Ultimately, households that struggle to find and pay for affordable housing face stress and instability, which may negatively affect careers and employment, relationships and parenting, or the ability to find housing in the future, especially if missed rent leads to eviction.

Eviction has serious deleterious effects on outcomes across the life course, and especially for children, whose education and emotional and social stability are interrupted by the cycle of instability that eviction launches (Desmond and Kimbro 2015). Eviction can be incredibly damaging for families. Families who are evicted are more likely to
experience material hardship following the eviction, and parents are more likely to suffer depression and parenting stress. The eviction process itself can be a source of stress, costing tenants time and focus as they deal with conflict with a landlord, possible court appearances, and the chaos and uncertainty of impending eviction and forced removal. Parents undergoing the stress of eviction are less affirming and supportive and more likely to act punitively or erratically toward their children.

Stress also affects employment: the likelihood of losing a job increases 11 to 15 percentage points after an eviction or involuntary move. Further, evicted families carry a mark on their rental history that can make it significantly more difficult to find housing in the future or make them ineligible for certain types of housing assistance (Desmond and Kimbro 2015).

Families with children face unique housing challenges, and stable housing is a key determinant of childhood outcomes, including social and emotional wellbeing, educational achievement, and physical and mental health. Families struggling to find affordable housing may be forced to live in poorer quality housing in disadvantaged neighborhoods. They often take on housing cost burdens that trade off with other expenses, including healthcare and food, and they face increased risk of eviction, residential mobility, and homelessness. Among very low-income households, those with children are more likely than households without children to miss rent payments, receive notice of utility shut off, or feel under threat of eviction. Not only do these conditions directly affect children’s wellbeing; they also negatively impact parental wellbeing and parenting, which in turn has consequences for children.
Not only do children suffer the effects of insecure housing, but families with children are at elevated risk of many housing problems. Low-income mothers in particular are at high risk of eviction, in part because children can cause problems for landlords (e.g., noise complaints) (Desmond and Kimbro 2015). Additionally, analysis by Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies finds that, among very low-income households (less than 50% MFI) with severe cost burdens (paying more than 50% of income for housing), households with children are more likely than households without children to miss rent payments, receive notice of utility shut off, or feel under threat of eviction (Lew 2016).

Housing and homelessness are intertwined with other basic needs. Lack of affordable housing can cause a cycle of economic instability. Parents without stable housing may prioritize finding housing over finding or maintaining a job. If they are employed, the chaos of insecure housing can affect work performance and absenteeism, possibly leading to unemployment. Prolonged residential instability tends to increase economic instability, which in turn makes it more difficult for families to find and secure affordable housing (Desmond and Kimbro 2015; Desmond, Gershenson, and Kiviat 2015). In an attempt to stave off homelessness or to escape the effects of poor housing or neighborhood quality—or simply due to a lack of affordable housing—families may incur a cost burden, paying more than they can afford for a place to live. Housing cost burden increases parental stress and reduces parents’ involvement in children’s lives (Conger et al. 1992; Conger et al. 1994; Elder et al. 1995; Elder et al. 1992). When housing costs are very high, they may trade off with basic necessities, such as food, school supplies, transportation, medication, and healthcare (Diaz McConnell 2012;
Newman and Holupka 2014). A 2012 analysis of household spending found cost
burdened households spend less on food and healthcare, and another study found that
increased average rents are correlated with increased rates of food insecurity for families
with children (Maqbool, Viveiros, and Ault 2015). A study of low-income children in
Worcester, Massachusetts found that more than 50% experienced moderate to severe
hunger (Samuels, Shinn, and Buckner 2010). Further research finds that children in
families behind on rent are at increased risk of developmental delay (Weiss et al. 2012).

Families who cannot afford housing may double up with other families or choose
smaller units, resulting in overcrowded conditions. Among elementary school children,
overcrowding has also been linked with psychological problems, including social
withdrawal, aggression, psychological distress, behavioral problems at school, and lower
social and cognitive competency (Evans 2006; Evans, Saegert, and Harris 2001).
Children do better in school when they have a safe and quiet space to do homework, but
finding study space can be more difficult for children living in small or overcrowded
homes (Eamon 2000; Evans, Saegert, and Harris 2001). Living in overcrowded housing
also increases children’s risk of health problems, including respiratory and stomach
illness (Currie and Yelowitz 2000). Overcrowding is also associated with greater conflict
between parents and children: parents in crowded homes spend less time talking to
children and are more likely to resort to punitive parenting (Evans et al. 1998; Saegert
1982; Samuels, Shinn, and Buckner 2010).

Even brief homelessness and residential instability impairs the psychological
stability necessary for people to become emotionally invested in their homes,
relationships, and community, resulting in overall weaker bonds among neighbors and
less investment in neighborhoods. In other words, frequent moves disrupt social networks as families and children leave friends behind. For children, residential mobility is associated with smaller social networks, less popularity, and less familiarity among parents with their children’s friendship networks, plus diminished connections between children, parents, schools, and community (South and Haynie 2004; Pribesh and Downey 1999).

Due perhaps to the broken social networks and difficult social adjustment it causes, residential mobility is associated with behavioral problems in children and adolescents, including aggression and property offenses (Ziol-Guest and McKenna 2014). Residential instability also negatively affects mental and physical wellbeing. Children without stable housing often lack regular healthcare providers and are therefore more likely to use the emergency room. Young children who experience frequent moves have lower weight for age and greater risk of developmental problems. For adolescents, frequent moves are significantly associated with early use of illicit drugs (Maqbool, Viveiros, and Ault 2015).

Mobility also negatively affects educational outcomes (Desmond and Kimbro 2015; Oishi 2010; Temple and Reynolds 1999; Sampson 2012). Residential instability early in life can have long-term consequences. One study found that children who moved three or more times in early childhood were less likely to graduate from high school (71% graduation rate versus 86% for those who moved less) (Ziol-Guest and McKenna 2014; Haveman, Wolfe, and Spaulding 1991). For young children, mobility is associated with lower school readiness (Samuels, Shinn, and Buckner 2010; Hertzman 2010). Residential mobility negatively affects learning even if children remain in the same
school. The stress and disruption caused by moving can lead to loss of friends, disrupted social networks, and increased absenteeism. When it comes to education, residential mobility affects both mobile students and the non-mobile students who share their classrooms. When teachers have highly mobile students in their classes, they tend to focus less on new material and more on review (Agnew, n.d.). A study in Chicago found teachers of highly mobile students slowed the curriculum, so that in schools with high proportions of highly mobile students, the fifth-grade curriculum was a full year behind that in more stable schools (Building Resilient Regions 2011).

Of course, not all moves are bad. Residential mobility may yield positive outcomes for families if the move is to better housing in a better neighborhood. Comparative research also suggests that residential mobility does not have harmful effects for moderate or high-income families. But without intervention, data shows, low-income families rarely have the opportunity to move to better conditions. More often, research suggests, low-income families experience housing mobility for negative reasons (Ziol-Guest and McKenna 2014; Coulton, Theodos, and Turner 2009; Crowley 2003; Holupka and Newman 2011; Hango 2006; Clark 2010; Cohen and Wardrip 2011).

By providing housing stability, affordable housing helps children build supportive social networks and access the resources they need to thrive. Children and families with greater residential stability have better knowledge of and access to community resources and social support networks (Galster 2003). Children in quality, affordable housing are better prepared to enter school and more likely to succeed.

Certain groups, including people with criminal backgrounds, have an especially difficult time securing affordable housing. Over the past decade and a half, a body of
research has emerged documenting the housing challenges facing reentering prisoners. Federally subsidized housing has strict eligibility guidelines and requires a criminal background check. Tax credit properties and many private landlords participate in the Crime-Free Housing program, which makes it more difficult for those with a criminal background to find housing. For registered sex offenders, finding housing can be even more difficult: in addition to facing criminal background checks, sex offenders are restricted to living in areas at least 500 feet from Community Safe Zones, which include schools, playgrounds, parks, and pools (Wakefield and Uggen 2010; Beckett and Herbert 2008; Beckett and Herbert 2010; Travis and Visher 2005). In April of 2016, HUD issued new guidance regarding the use of criminal background checks in housing decisions. The new guidelines advise that criminal history cannot be used to automatically refuse an application or lease renewal, but they do not prohibit landlords or property managers from screening based on criminal background. The revised guidelines’ effect on housing access remains to be seen.

HOMELESSNESS AND THE WELFARE STATE IN THE UNITED STATES

Changes in the federal government’s approach to housing and homelessness have devolved the administration of safety net programs related to homelessness and have also mandated collaborative, networked governance. Major federal funding sources for housing are the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, both of which are administered at the state and municipal level. The federal government also funds two grant programs focused on addressing homelessness: the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program and the
Continuum of Care (CoC) Program. These are likewise received and administered by states, counties, and municipalities. In the case of the CoC program, the grant is in fact made to a collaborative body of service providers called the Continuum of Care (Miskey 2016).

Homelessness is also important to study because of the substantive, practical importance of finding effective ways to confront and end homelessness in communities. Thus, this dissertation aims not only to explore how better understanding homelessness can inform theoretical understandings of collaborative governance but also how sociological understandings of organizational forms could help improve service delivery to end homelessness.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

The following chapter presents a review of the literature on the development of the welfare state in the United States, particularly policy and funding changes that have, over the last four decades, hollowed out federal safety net programs, devolving administration to the state and local level and to collaborative networks of public and private providers.

Chapter three reviews sociological theories of nonprofit organizations and collaborative governance. As safety net programs have been devolved to state and local actors, safety net services have been contracted out to private providers, often networks of nonprofit organizations. The sociological theories presented in chapter three argue that relying on nonprofits to provide public services may have consequences for civil society and democracy, particularly with regard to minority representation and influence.
Sociological theories of collaborative governance suggest that successful networks must balance inclusivity in membership versus leaner structures, internal legitimacy versus external legitimacy, and flexibility versus stability. These theoretical lessons may help inform collaborative efforts to address homelessness at the community level.

Chapter four describes the methods used in this dissertation. This research project encompasses three major efforts: a comparative case study of six different communities and how they have organized to confront homelessness, a quantitative analysis of organizational and performance outcome data from nearly 400 collaborative networks across the United States set up to address homelessness in their communities, and an in-depth case study of a single community, including how stakeholders and consumers of services perceive and navigate collaborative governance and provider networks.

Chapter five presents the findings from the three major projects. It gives a description of the collaborative structure and current efforts to address homelessness in six communities, presents a summary of the data from the nearly 400 collaborative networks, and describes the history, evolution, and current state of collaborative governance around homelessness in the community that is the subject of the in-depth case study.

Finally, chapter six discusses the findings from all three projects in light of the current literature and theory about homelessness and organizations. It draws conclusions based on the findings about how the devolution of safety net services has shaped efforts to confront homelessness, how communities approach that organizational work, and the consequences of different organizational forms. It also offers suggestions for making collaboration successful in confronting and reducing homelessness.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WELFARE STATE IN THE UNITED STATES

Though popular imagination traces the origins of U.S. welfare programs to the New Deal and the 1960s War on Poverty, in fact, government-funded institutions to address poverty date back at least a century earlier. In the 1830s, poorhouses and poor farms, or so-called “indoor relief,” emerged to house individuals or families in deep poverty. These state-funded institutions were an alternative to existing “outdoor relief,” short-term help provided by charities. The new indoor relief model, which was in vogue from approximately 1830 to 1900, was intended to provide longer term help. In the 1830s, new state laws mandated counties set up poor farms or poorhouses to care for and house the poor. Though often state-funded, poorhouses and poor farms were typically administered by counties, which in many places remain responsible to this day for caring for the indigent (Iceland 2006:12, 120; Katz 1986).

Conditions in poorhouses were typically “harsh”; the purpose of these institutions was not to coddle the poor but “to deter all but the most desperate from applying for help.” Residents were expected to work. Work was not only a condition of staying but part of the poorhouse’s rehabilitative mission. Work was “a form of punishment, moral training, education, and reform” all in one (Iceland 2006:12). Over time, as it became apparent that poorhouses and poor farms did not solve poverty and instead actually contributed to family instability, they were broken up. States and counties began dismantling these institutions beginning in the twentieth century (Iceland 2006:120).
A new approach to welfare emerged with the Great Depression and the New Deal Programs that followed. Primary among the new social welfare initiatives was the Society Security Act of 1935, which launched three new programs: Social Security, a social insurance program that provides financial support in retirement; Unemployment Insurance, a social insurance program for workers; and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), which later became known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and subsequently Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Unlike social insurance programs, which are available to all regardless of income, Aid to Dependent Children served a specific segment of the population based on need. ADC, like AFDC and TANF after it, was a means-tested program intended to support poor families, particularly poor families headed by a single parent where the primary earner was disabled or absent (Moffitt 2015). That narrowly circumscribed group reflected prevailing notions of who constituted the “deserving” poor (Katz 1989).

Social safety net programs were expanded in the 1960s, under Johnson’s War on Poverty. However, unlike ADC, which provided direct financial assistance to families in need, War on Poverty programs largely focused on training and in-kind support. They embodied a philosophy of “a hand up, not a hand out.” War on Poverty programs included things like Head Start, Food Stamps, School Breakfast and School Lunch, Medicare, and Medicaid.

Support for further expanding social support programs appeared to wane in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1980s, welfare reform focused on dismantling cash welfare for families. In place of direct monetary transfers, reforms shifted benefits toward in-kind supports (e.g., food). These reforms tried to address the tension between providing a
safety net while encouraging work, under the assumptions that cash welfare programs led families to become dependent on welfare; reforms were justified by the belief that reducing, eliminating, or fundamentally transforming welfare programs was necessary to motivate recipients to seek work and become financially independent (Currie 2006:11). Meanwhile, proponents of reform argued, in-kind safety net programs would meet basic needs for food, shelter, and the like. In this spirit, in 1996, President Clinton signed a reform bill that imposed work requirements on AFDC recipients and capped the maximum time people could receive benefits under the program, which was renamed TANF. As a result, the number of families served by the program plummeted by 63 percent within 10 years. With shrinking rolls, spending on AFDC/TANF was lower in 2007 than it had been in 1970.

While traditional “welfare” shrank, new forms of financial support have grown: The War on Poverty programs, Medicaid in particular, have increased in enrollment and spending. New tax credits—the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC)—have emerged as major sources of support. On the whole, aggregate spending on social safety net programs actually continued to increase into the twenty-first century. However, the beneficiaries of those programs have changed. The EITC and CTC only benefit families with earnings and who file taxes. Other programs only benefit people with certain disabilities or only offer limited forms of in-kind support (e.g., Food Stamps/SNAP). As a consequence, increases have accrued most markedly to programs that support people with disabilities and the aged, while support has increased more slowly—or even decreased—for single mothers and their children (Moffitt 2015).
In general, compared to the 1960s, more financial support now flows to families with higher incomes, whereas support to those with the lowest incomes has decreased. By one estimate, based on Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data collected from the series inception in 1983 to 2004, benefit transfers to single parent families fell 20 percent while those to married parent families rose by 68 percent, with negligible change in benefits to individuals or families without children. And, across household types, those with incomes less than 50 percent of the poverty level saw benefit transfers decrease, while other income groups saw benefits increase (Moffitt 2015). In other words, the very poor lost while the working poor gained. This pattern was driven, in large part, by the shrinking AFDC/TANF program and growing tax-credit-based safety net. As an example, in 1983, 57 percent of single-mother families with private incomes below 50 percent of poverty received benefits from AFDC/TANF; in 2004, only 20 percent did. At the same time, receipt of Food Stamps among this group declined from 73 percent to 54 percent (AFDC recipients were automatically eligible for Food Stamps. As AFDC enrollment declined, so did Food Stamp receipt.). In essence, safety net benefits were redistributed up the income ladder, away from the poorest of the poor and to the working poor (Moffitt 2015).

The effect of the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s has been to help the working poor at the expense of the very poor. Increasingly, safety net programs are linked to employment and cut off for those in deep poverty with long-term unemployment. This “employment-based safety net” includes programs such as the EITC, which is available only to those who earn income and file taxes, as well as safety net programs that require that recipients be employed or actively seeking work. “The result,” according to
Desmond (2016:350), “is that families just above and below the poverty line receive significantly more help today than they did twenty years ago, but those far below the poverty line receive significantly less. For families living in deep poverty, both income and housing assistance have been scaled back.”

The Welfare State as a Social Institution

At the same time as reforms restricted eligibility and redistributed benefits up the income ladder, changes were instituted in the way safety net programs are organized and administered. One of the more significant changes was to decouple a fairly cohesive package of supportive programs into separate programs, increasing the burden on families to enroll and receive benefits. In the realm of healthcare, for example, Medicaid enrollment was de-linked from AFDC/TANF. As a consequence, many families and children who were formerly automatically eligible for Medicaid lost insurance coverage. Increased hurdles to enrolling in Medicaid were introduced, such as asset tests, requalification, complicated applications, and mandatory waiting periods. Now, for example, applicants not only had to document that their income was low enough to qualify, but also had to show they did not own significant assets (e.g., savings, property, investments). Rather than navigate the complicated path to enrolling, many families chose to forego Medicaid until a medical emergency, when hospitals (or their hired firms) would aggressively assist families with the enrollment process in order to ensure the hospital received Medicaid reimbursement dollars (Currie 2006:48-9). In essence, the administrative de-linking of AFDC/TANF and Medicaid led to a new organizational
form, in which the work of Medicaid enrollment has been outsourced from a government benefits office to hospitals.

As a consequence of administrative and organizational change, certain types of healthcare were privileged, while others were neglected. Many health problems are caused by underlying factors in a person’s environment--factors that could be changed or prevented (e.g., mold under a sink exacerbating asthma). But as institutions, hospitals have had little incentive to provide public health outreach, connect with housing advocates, or otherwise try to affect social determinants of health outside the hospital walls. Instead, hospitals treat individuals’ conditions once they reach emergency levels, or they medically manage chronic conditions but do not help patients and their families identify and address underlying causes, even when doing so would be less expensive and more effective than more intense medical intervention (Currie 2006:54).

In this way, the history of welfare reform and changes in the administration of Medicaid demonstrate how organizational changes do more than change how programs are administered. As work in new institutionalism in sociology argues, institutions shape and are shaped by social life; the norms, networks, and beliefs encapsulated in institutions make them rich sites for sociological analysis (Powell and Colyvas 2008). As institutions, hospitals direct focus toward medical problems and medical solutions, whereas welfare offices focus on individuals receiving welfare and their circumstances. As programs such as Medicaid were decoupled from the welfare package, organizational separation threatened a new institutional order in which the sum of the separate components could not realize the same value has the more cohesive welfare package the components replaced.
Devolution and Network Forms of Organization

The history of Medicaid reveals another facet of safety net programs: to successfully support the people who need them, safety net programs must address complex, interrelated problems. To be successful, a range of targeted programs must work together to meet these needs and co-produce a variety of benefits. A person without a safe place to live will struggle to stay healthy; someone who is struggling with their health will not easily maintain employment; a family facing past-due rent may choose to pay their rent over buying groceries, choosing shelter over food. No single program addresses the whole. Hospitals cannot be expected to house the homeless or provide job training services, nor should landlords be expected to feed tenants. Though they produce distinct benefits, safety net programs cannot successfully operate independently; when safety net programs do not simultaneously work together to meet interconnected needs, they face an uphill battle to meet any single need alone. Like the problems they address, safety net programs and their effects are interwoven (Currie 2006:9).

The significance of this interconnectedness has become more apparent with the devolution of safety net programs. At the same time that more comprehensive benefits packages, such as AFDC, were being restricted or teased apart, the administration of safety net programs was being devolved to the states, with increased use of block grants as a funding mechanism. On the one hand, devolution has been lauded as an opportunity for innovation to suit local circumstances, as in Justice Louis Brandeis’s “laboratories of democracy” metaphor used in his decision in New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann (285 U.S. 262 [1932]). On the other hand, it has done away with federal guarantees of minimal
standards and funding levels, resulting in a fractured system where the responsiveness of safety net programs depends on state and local policy, fiscal capacity, and political culture (Currie 2006:7; Ingrid and Time 2001; Sheely 2012). For example, the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 gave states the option to expand Medicaid eligibility, but as of November 15, 2019, 14 states had chosen not to expand the program (Kaiser Family Foundation 2019).

Unlike the federal government, state governments typically cannot or will not respond to economic downturns by increasing funding through deficit spending; instead, when state budgets are tight, they cut services. As safety net functions are devolved to the states through block grants, the safety net loses deficit backing. When block grant funds are spent, programs have no more funding unless states choose to allocate more; when these programs face the highest demand--during economic downturns--states are unlikely to have the means to ramp up--or even maintain--spending. In this way, what appears to be a mere change in how funds are distributed has the de facto effect of reducing financial support for safety net programs (Currie 2006:6). Again, institutional arrangements have social and political consequences.

In addition to devolution and its funding consequences, another outcome of welfare reform has been increased reliance on networks of nonprofit organizations to deliver safety net services. In Arizona, for example, behavioral health services that had been provided by state units were contracted instead to private nonprofits (Milward and Provan 2000). In a sense, the safety net has been partially privatized, following a neoliberal logic. Grants and contracts for service delivery are justified as market-based
social welfare policies that emphasize choice and efficiency, a pattern that has been termed “new public management” (Anheier and Salamon 2006:92).

THE HOLLOW STATE

Block grants, devolution, and nonprofit partnerships do not only change funding and administration; they also have consequences for governance. Devolution reduces the federal government's command and control over safety net programs; in this less centralized system, the federal government must manage from a distance. The sum of administrative changes in the safety net is a decentralized system in which the federal government is replaced by networks of organizations. Now, public services are jointly produced, and no single organization can meet all needs. As discussed above, the safety net is a complex and interwoven system, and decentralization threatens the coordination of services. Therefore, the need for cooperation and coordination arises (Milward and Provan 2000:359). Milward and Provan (2000) sum up what they call the governance problem of the “hollow state”:

The governance problem is this: How can effective institutions be designed in a world of shared power where few organizations have the power to accomplish their missions alone? In health, mental health, children's services, drug and alcohol prevention, and welfare, responsibility for policy design has been devolved to state governments, and policy implementation has been decentralized to a network of local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private firms. (P. 360)
Traditionally, governance of state-run programs has been hierarchical, with top-down administration. But as administration is devolved through block grants and contracts to states and private entities, the work of government in a hollow state becomes managing networks rather than governing hierarchies (Milward and Provan 2000:362).

As institutions, networks have different characteristics than government bureaucracies, firms, or markets. Networks are not amorphous; they have a form constrained and shaped by “law, funding structures, and ideological presuppositions” (Milward and Provan 2000:362). Yet they are weaker than markets and bureaucracy because they are inherently unstable. In networks, “Managers are continually faced with problems that can lead to instability--negotiating, coordinating, monitoring, holding third-parties accountable, and writing and enforcing contracts--all for organizations that are relatively independent of the funder” (Milward and Provan 2000:363). Networks may also develop asymmetries of information or power, sometimes in the form of partisan/patronage politics, as members of the network compete for contracts. Networks can be challenging to govern, and they may also pose problems for the legitimacy of the services or programs they deliver. Government may fail to transfer legitimacy to network members despite transferring power--and government may still be blamed for inadequate service provision even as government loses power to enforce demands from contractors (Milward and Provan 2000:363-4).

Theorizing Safety Net Networks

If public/private networks of state actors and private entities, including nonprofits, are a distinct but increasingly prevalent form of organization and governance, how might
social scientists theorize their operation? Smith and Grondbjerg (2006) have proposed one way of thinking about the ties between government and nonprofits, how they emerge, and factors that affect their form. They describe three models of interaction between government and nonprofit sectors:

1. Demand/supply model: Government and nonprofit sectors complement or compensate for one another’s weaknesses. This model, based on rational choice theory and economic concepts of supply and demand, has also been referred to as a three-failures theory. Government, nonprofits, and the market each have unique failures, but compensate for one another’s shortcomings. According to this assumption, nonprofit networks arise to produce public goods in response to either market failure or government failure.

   a. Nonprofits can compensate for market failure. They meet the demand for goods that the market otherwise would fail to produce, help overcome contract failure (i.e., create trust), produce public goods, respond to minority demands that majoritarian governments do not meet, and innovate and experiment where government cannot or will not due to bureaucratic institutionalism. Nonprofits can also mobilize moral entrepreneurs who, because of religious or ideological conviction, are motivated to produce a good or service without profit (Smith and Grondbjerg 2006:225).

   b. Nonprofits can also compensate for government failure. Government delegates responsibilities to and funds nonprofits through transaction forms that may include contracting, grants, tax deductions, etc. For
nonprofits, the benefits from transacting with government include resources for mission, management experience and capacity, legitimacy, and entry into the political process and policymaking debate. Potential costs of taking on government contracts include threats to legitimacy and the burden of extra work, which may sometimes exceed an organization’s capacity. Contracting--especially bid-based or pay for service/performance contracting--can shift emphasis to controlling costs over maximizing quality of service; this may lead to for-profit entry into a field, though for-profit organizations often exit quickly because profit margins are too small. Taking on a government contract can cost managers their autonomy to innovate beyond the terms of the contract; contracted work may also trade off with other potential activities as organizations’ time and resources are stretched to fulfill the contract. For government, benefits include being able to outsource services, use competition to reduce costs, respond more flexibly to changing demands and exercise flexibility in hiring and HR, tap local knowledge, and reduce government's responsibility and accountability. Costs to government include the agency problem (i.e., oversight and quality/cost control), difficulty in taking credit for success, and threats to the legitimacy of taxes because citizens do not see government at work (Smith and Grøndbjerg 2006:227-8).

2. Civil society/social movements model: This model focuses on a theoretical tension between government (seen as coercive) and nonprofit networks (seen as sites of civil society, political advocacy, and citizen engagement). In this model,
nonprofit networks arise to confront the democratic failures of government. According to this perspective, the relationships between government and nonprofits are dynamic with social, economic, and political dimensions. The version of the model that focuses on civil society and social capital is concerned less with whether goods and services are delivered efficiently and more with whether the process meets social goals, including “responsiveness, freedom, cooperation, legitimacy, individual and community responsibility, citizen participation, obligation, and social capital” (Smith and Grøndbjerg 2006:229). This version of the model often sees government as coercive, undermining participation in voluntary associations, and points out that nonprofits can be sites of mobilization for protest or demands for policy change. A social capital perspective emphasizes collaborative social networks with government and nonprofits. The version of this model concerned with social movements is marked by three themes: nonprofit social movements deliberately conflict with government, which they generally aim to change; the nonprofit sector grows as it tries to change policy (e.g., civil rights); nonprofits politicize issues through advocacy, creating new public issues that can be addressed by nonprofits with public funds. When government funding or other constraints reduce advocacy efforts, nonprofits might join umbrella organizations that carry out advocacy for them--but umbrella advocacy organizations tend to have a narrow focus on funding and contract regulations rather than broad-based advocacy on behalf of clients or general public (Smith and Grøndbjerg 2006:227-33).
3. The regime or neoinstitutional model: This model adopts a comparative perspective, focusing on how and under what conditions social structures become institutionalized in particular forms. In the regime/social origin version of this model, the focus is on how economic and political structural developments influence state and social policies (e.g., Esping-Anderson's (1990) typology: where benefits are commodified rather than delivered as entitlements, nonprofits and for-profits have a bigger role). This model also interrogates the social origins of the nonprofit sector, asking which political groups are linked to power, giving them the ability to become agents of change. That is, “class power shapes the allocation of state resources, which in turn further reinforce class power” (Smith and Grøndbjerg 2006:234). The neoinstitutional version of this model maintains that nonprofits represent choices of individuals constrained or shaped by their institutional environment: it considers strength of government, available funding or tax incentives, public leadership, regulatory environment, etc. Rather than conflicting, nonprofits and government are interdependent--the institutional environment created by government plus government funding shapes nonprofit development: “In short, decisions about which sector to favor or use for what purpose reflect political choices” (Smith and Grøndbjerg 2006:236). The boundaries between nonprofit and government sectors are blurry, as individuals may cross over and as both are embedded in a set of institutional arrangements. This perspective predicts a high degree of local variation (Smith and Grøndbjerg 2006:234-7).
Working in a neoinstitutional vein, and building on the work of Barrington Moore’s (1966) social origin theory and Esping-Andersen’s (1990) typology of welfare states, Anheier and Salamon have proposed a four-part typology to characterize network assemblages of safety net providers.

In their typology, the network form (or “regime”) depends on the historical path of development the network has followed and the social and political context in which it operates. In turn, different regimes predict different levels of private (versus state) investment in safety net services. Anheier and Salamon (2006:106-8) outline four regimes:

1. *Liberal regimes* are characterized by low government spending and a large nonprofit sector. They are predicted to arise from heterogeneous society or a strong commercial middle class that neutralized landed elites and the working class, plus religious emphasis on individualism and institutionalization. Examples include the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. Liberal regimes predict more private philanthropic support for safety net services.

2. *Social democratic regimes* are characterized by high state spending and limited nonprofits. They are predicted to arise from conditions of cultural homogeneity or working-class mobilization with limited church influence and a weak landed elite, where the middle class was persuaded to back working class demands. Examples include Sweden, Norway, and Finland.

3. *Corporatist regimes* are characterized by large government spending and a large nonprofit sector. They are predicted to arise when the landed elites retain power and partner with the state and religion to contain working class demand. In
corporatist regimes, the state delivers service through pre-modern religious nonprofits, maintaining social control. Public funding is expected to be high. Examples include Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France.

4. **Statist regimes** are characterized by limited state and nonprofit social welfare. They are predicted to arise where landed elites retain power, industrialization is limited, there are weak urban middle and working classes, and there is a strong external colonial influence. Examples include Japan, Brazil, and developing countries. In statist regimes, programs are predicted to rely more on fees.

Compared to other regimes, liberal regimes generally, and the United States especially, rely more heavily on a large nonprofit sector to deliver services. Within the nonprofit sector, organizations are more prone to pressure to commercialize or to seek additional, alternative revenue in the private market (Anheier and Salamon 2006:108-9).

This typology challenges a simple demand/supply model of government/nonprofit relations. It calls into question a naive vision of the nonprofit sector as “the mute vehicle for meeting social demands left behind by the limitations of other societal institutions or as the expression of purely altruistic impulses” (Anheier and Salamon 2006:109). Instead, it theorizes the nonprofit sector as also “the reflection of broader power relationships among social classes and social institutions” (Anheier and Salamon 2006:109). The interplay of these power relationships makes government/nonprofit networks a promising site for sociological analysis. Indeed, Smith and Grondbjerg argue that “changes in government-nonprofit relations provide a strategic window through which to understand the nature of political regimes and vice versa” (2006:222). As such, it is important to
understand how welfare reform has played out across networks composed of both government and nonprofit networks.

**Patching the Hollow State: Governance in Collaborative Public/Private Networks**

In the wake of welfare reform and the devolution of funding, nonprofits and networked forms of governance have arisen. These network structures are not entirely new in the post-1996 welfare reform era. Since the 1950s, place-based programs (e.g., Community Action Program, Model Cities, empowerment zones) have tried to balance federal funding (to remedy concentrated poverty or lack of political power in poor and minority communities) with local control. What is new is the increased intermingling of public and private funding to provide what had, since the 1930s, been considered public responsibilities. In recent decades, reduced federal funding has increased the prominence of foundations in the safety net space (Henig, Riehl, Rebell, and Wolff 2015).

Networks of safety net providers increasingly rely not only on government funding, but also on private philanthropy, with implications for governance. Consequently, safety net providers now answer not only to government offices, but also to philanthropists and foundation boards. Philanthropists and board members with experience in the private sector have led to increased emphasis on data and measurement, tracking outcomes to determine whether investments are being managed for the largest return. Toward that end, funders have begun pushing for cross-sector collaboration, “a system-wide umbrella structure that incorporates multiple kinds of service deliverers” and “holds out the promise of increasing efficiency through coordination and the elimination of duplicative efforts” (Henig et al. 2015:50-1).
The rise of these new forms of governance brings forward two pressing questions:
First, what are the consequences of collaborative forms of governance? In particular, are networked forms of governance more or less democratic than direct public management? Second, if programs are to be governed collaboratively, what organizational structures and practices best facilitate successful collaboration? In short, what makes collaboration work?

THE HOLLOW STATE, COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE, AND HOMELESSNESS

For many people who experience homelessness, the situation is temporary and quickly resolved with short-term financial assistance. Other people experiencing homelessness have multi-dimensional needs that cannot be addressed by housing assistance alone. For these people, supportive services can help address underlying needs contributing to housing problems as well as build assets to move families toward self-sufficiency. Best practice research in affordable housing finds that secure housing coupled with supportive services improves outcomes for clients by providing “both roots and wings—roots that allow affordable housing residents to settle comfortably into a home and neighborhood and wings that enable these residents to achieve socioeconomic mobility” (Nguyen, Rohe, and Cowan 2012:16).

Matching people to the various supports they need requires a coordinated, collaborative community effort. Combined with the federal mandate that providers come together as Continuum of Care groups to manage grant awards, the complex nature of homelessness has led communities across the United States to consider ways to
collaborate. The hope is that collaboration and a commitment to an outcomes-based data initiative will help maximize the impact of housing and supportive services. Although expanding services will require increased investment, efficiencies can be realized through enhanced collaboration and coordination. For instance, streamlining the housing search process could reduce the time and effort that case managers devote to finding housing for families, allowing them to focus more attention on addressing families’ underlying problems. Further, research suggests that providing supportive services creates community cost trade-offs by reducing hospitalizations, substance abuse, and criminal activity (Stergiopoulos et al. 2015). Communities hope that collaborative governance guided by outcomes-based data will allow service providers to monitor efficacy, target efforts, and improve programs in order to move as many families as possible toward self-sufficiency, reducing overall demand for housing assistance.

In some communities, volunteers and community donors have come together to develop integrative supportive housing projects that offer a continuum of housing options in a single project. They might combine, for example, shelter, pay-to-stay, affordable rental units, and sometimes even market rate housing with medical services or employment counseling on site. Examples include Salt Lake City’s Grace Mary Manor and Sunrise Metro as well as Hennepin County’s (Minnesota) Dorothy Day Center and Higher Ground Housing. In Charlotte, North Carolina, a mixed-income housing development demonstrates the potential of bringing together diverse community partners: the development centers around a park and community center, which hosts local nonprofits that provide services such as day care and afterschool programming as well as mentoring. The project was funded with a mix of HOPE VI grant funds, tax-exempt
bonds, Section 202 for senior housing units, tax credits, funding from the city for infrastructure funding, and funding from the parks department for the park and community center. All told, the original $34.7 million HOPE VI grant leveraged over $95 million, over half of which was private-sector investment (Nguyen, Rohe, and Cowan 2012).

Federal incentives to pursue such collaborative projects are numerous. In the 1990s, following a recommendation from the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, communities across the country convened stakeholders to develop 10-year plans to end homelessness. In homeless services, the adoption of municipal 10-year plans to end homelessness have resulted in major, rapid changes in funding, opportunity, uncertainty, and advocacy in the field (Mosley 2012). In 2009, the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, known as the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009, consolidated HUD’s competitive grant programs and increased emphasis on outcomes measurement and performance. The HEARTH Act essentially requires homeless service providers to engage in collaborative governance in order to receive federal funds. As part of the consolidation of HUD’s competitive grant programs, the Continuum of Care Program consolidates a variety of Homeless Assistance programs, including the Shelter Plus Care Program, the Supporting Housing Program, and the Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Single Room Occupancy Program. Federal funds to address homelessness are now funneled through Continuums of Care, local collaborative governance bodies composed primarily of service providers.
The HEARTH Act also requires that Continuums of Care deploy Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), and that federal grant recipients enter data into the HMIS. HMIS data is used to measure and report federally mandated performance measures, such as the number of people who move from homelessness to permanent housing during a given time period. HMIS data are pooled across the providers in a Continuum of Care so that households can be tracked as they move from one service to the next. The implementation of HMIS data collection has required Continuums of Care to negotiate questions around data security, confidentiality, and reporting.
CHAPTER 3: THEORY

Collaborative governance structures composed of nonprofits differ from traditional, hierarchical governance structures led by government agencies. Theoretical explanations of that difference and its consequences vary. Principal-agent theory offers one way to think about strategies of governance with relation to network form, function, and effectiveness. In principal-agent theory, the principal is the initiating organization behind a network, the funder, or other authority; in the case of the social safety net and its devolution to local government and nonprofit organizations, the principal is the federal and state governments. Agents are those who carry out work on behalf of the principal.

According to this theoretical perspective, networks are more stable when principal-agent relationships are clear. This leads to the general conclusion that more direct, hierarchical forms could be more effective than horizontally organized collaborative networks. Milward and Provan (2000) hypothesize that effectiveness will be highest when “mechanisms of fiscal control by the state are direct and not fragmented or indirect” and “the network is integrated, but only when integration is centralized through a powerful core agency. This structure facilitates both integration and coordination and is relatively efficient” (Milward and Provan 2000:367). Following from this hypothesis, collaborative governance would be very difficult and potentially ineffective; networks would work better, it seems, when funding, authority, or other contracted agreements flow directly from the government (principal) to a large monopoly provider (agent).
Resource dependence theory similarly posits that the most important aspect of a collaborative governance structure is how resources flow (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Members will be willing to participate to the extent it helps them secure or maintain resources. They will engage in activities and advocacies primarily to protect their own resources or increase resources coming their way. As a consequence, collaborative governance structures should tend toward cartel politics and insider advocacy aimed at maintaining the status quo.

New institutionalism theorizes the way in which organizations are embedded in, constituted by, and contribute to norms and shared understandings (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Following this theory, it is crucial to understand the contexts in which collaborative governance structures are set up. Depending on that context, and depending on the norms established within a collaborative governance structure, it may be democratic and inclusive or insular.

This chapter explores different theoretical perspectives on the social origins and functions of nonprofit organizations and how they might contribute to democratic civil society or not. It also reviews theoretical perspectives on organizational characteristics that contribute to effective collaborative governance—that is, characteristics of membership, participation, governance, and local investment that may be associated with collaboration and the production of public goods via collaboration.
ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY PERSPECTIVES ON NONPROFITS AND THEIR ROLE IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Political sociologists and organizational theorists have raised concern about potential consequences of new collaborative forms of governance over the social safety net. Clemens, for example, asks, “what are the implications of such delegation for democratic governance and the legitimacy of public programs?” (Clemens 2006:215). Democratic governments, after all, are intended to represent the interests of the public and to provide for the public good. Private organizations, nonprofits among them, are not statutorily beholden to the will of the people. They might instead serve private interests or appease needs and thereby weaken support for state institutions with taxing and redistributive powers (Anheier and Salamon 2006:105). A key question is whether the proliferation of nonprofit organizations and collaborative governance signals—or could bring about—a healthy and robust democracy or a crisis of state legitimacy.

Competing interpretations explain the rise of collaborative nonprofit governance as a boon or a threat to democracy. On the one hand, nonprofit networks may lend themselves to more democratic governance. The proliferation of nonprofit organizations could indicate a Tocquevillean society, a robust democracy buoyed by a healthy civil society. In this line of thinking, nonprofit organizations may arise to meet minority demands that a majoritarian government fails to meet and create a new space for civic engagement and advocacy (Clemens 2006). On the other hand, nonprofit networks may be both a cause and consequence of a crisis of state legitimacy (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990:152). Nonprofit governance can be vulnerable to patronage politics or cooptation by
elected officials. As nonprofits compete for government contracts or grants, they may develop vested interests in securing and maintaining those contracts and grants (Clemens 2006).

Collaborative governance may also jeopardize the legitimacy and accountability of safety net programs. In welfare reform, the shift of program administration to nonprofits may have covered up downsized programs and shifted risk from public authorities. In regimes of shared governance, contracting with nonprofits may decrease accountability (or lead to the perception of decreased accountability) or lack of public control (Clemens 2006:215; Milward and Provan 2000). As Clemens puts it, “Insofar as nongovernmental entities are increasingly visible as the providers of social services, the legitimacy of public provision--increasingly restricted to funding rather than implementation--may be undermined” (2006:215). Citizens are less able to answer questions about what their taxes are doing. They may misrecognize public service as private benefit. They are likely to see nonprofits and private caregivers--not government bureaucrats--as the face of compassion and care. Collectively, these effects lead to “the possibility that as publicly funded services are increasingly mistaken for--or at least experienced as--private and charitable, this will undermine political support for continued public spending on these services” (Clemens 2006:215-6).

This section presents an overview of consequences of collaborative governance that have been identified in the literature: Nonprofit-led governance networks may be used as tools of the urban elite or be subject to patronage politics or cartel dynamics. Alternatively, nonprofits in collaborative governance structures could be a voice for minority demands and a third space for civil society. But as nonprofits collaborate, are
they able to maintain that advocacy role, or is voice stifled? One consequence may be a turn to insider advocacy instead of oppositional politics. And finally, as nonprofits engage in collaborative governance, they face increasing pressure to measure outcomes in ways that are legible to policymakers and market actors, but what consequences might those types of data and measurement have for mission-driven work?

Nonprofits as Tools of the Urban Elite

Those in the antidemocratic camp have pointed to the historical development of philanthropy to argue that nonprofits are tools of an urban elite. Historically, nonprofits were formed in the late 1800s to solidify social boundaries. Urban elites, fearing an unruly urban underclass, consolidated power and influence through new nonprofit organizations (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990:141). Nonprofits were “vehicles for social regulation” devised “by elites to craft a means to extend their wishes in time (beyond the limits of their own mortal existence) and in scale (beyond the capacities of single individuals)” (Clemens 2006:212-3).

To this day, nonprofit governance remains heavily under the sway of wealthy, urban members of the upper class. Board members and volunteer committees alike are populated not by those served by nonprofits but by members of the social elite. DiMaggio and Anheier hypothesize that nonprofits formed by non-elite classes (e.g., religious persons, workers, etc.) “are often less stable, less likely to incorporate, and less likely to claim community-wide missions than those created by the wealthy” (1990:142).

However, new forces in the nonprofit field could exert a democratizing influence on governance. In particular, elite influence may decline as nonprofits come to rely less
on donations and more on government funding. At the same time, nonprofits are becoming more professionalized, and, according to DiMaggio and Anheier (1990):

the central role in elite participation has moved from local upper classes to corporate managers, who are recruited on the basis not of kin but of company affiliation (Useem 1984). Although demographically similar to traditional trustees, many are 'corporate rationalizers' (Alford 1975), impatient with communal governance styles and supportive of managerial reform (DiMaggio 1991). (P. 141)

Patronage Politics and Nonprofit Cartels

Although nonprofits may not be directly governed by urban elites, they often still rely on funding from private philanthropists and foundations. Nonprofits pursuing funding may be vulnerable to patronage politics. Typically, private donations and foundation funding, in particular, are transitory; nonprofits may receive a grant to a new project, but ongoing foundation support for day-to-day operations is sparse. On the whole, foundation funding is not as stable and deep as government funding can be. As nonprofits compete for scarce and transitory funding, funders’ priorities could distort community-led missions; self-serving local nonprofits could chase foundation dollars by conforming to requirements and forming national foundation ties at the expense of locally significant and sensitive work (Henig et al. 2015:51). Alternatively, nonprofit organizations with shared interests could band together in cartel-like united fundraising bodies in an attempt to direct philanthropists (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990:148-9). The
question remains whether public/private partnerships backed by government funding might escape antidemocratic funding concerns.

*A Voice for Minority Demands and a Third Space for Civil Society*

On the pro-democracy side, nonprofits could be seen as sites where democracy and democratic citizens are forged. In the pluralistic, market-oriented version of this argument, government provides public services and public goods that have majority support, whereas nonprofits arise to meet demand for controversial or narrow causes. At the extreme, nonprofits and voluntary associations could further separatism and even intolerance or exclusion. For example, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* in 2016 identified more than 60 nonprofits granted tax-exempt status by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service but considered hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Among those nonprofits are white nationalist and anti-gay-rights organizations (Stiffman 2016). In any case, the traits and preferences of citizens drive nonprofit development and activities (Clemens 2006).

A stronger version of this argument holds that nonprofit organizations are places where people become citizens, learn preferences, and come together to make demands on government. That is, nonprofit organizations precede, rather than follow, citizens’ preferences (Clemens 2006). The question is open as to whether or when nonprofit organizations successfully generate democratic participation, political engagement, or innovative policy solutions.
A Stifled Voice

Nonprofit organizations may arise in response to demand (or perceived threat) from marginalized groups. But, arguably, the nature of nonprofit incorporation and nonprofit networks stifles nonprofits’ voice, hamstringing political advocacy. Under U.S. tax code, nonprofits incorporated as 501(c)(3) organizations are discouraged from political activity. This problematizes political action. Nonprofit organizations are, in effect, decoupled from their potential democratic function, a trend that could be especially problematic as 501(c)(3)s increasingly deliver publicly funded services (Clemens 2006). Nonprofit organizations that are enmeshed in collaborative networks may be especially impeded from political action, as navigating the network’s political boundaries and competing interests makes it difficult for organizations to take strong political positions (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990:152).

Changes in the administration of public safety net programs--particularly their devolution and privatization--has increased the intermingling of nonprofit organizations and government. One effect may be the cooptation by the state of nonprofits and their potential as advocates for marginalized groups. As human service nonprofits receive more government funds (due to devolution and privatization of service delivery), they may shift their advocacy goals to focus on securing government contracts rather than advocating on behalf of vulnerable populations--i.e., on “brokering resources and promoting the organization rather than substantive policy change or client representation” (Mosley 2012:841). Under this way of thinking, nonprofit organizations that rely on government funding come inside the establishment fold and lose the outsider voice they
might have had before. They thus abandon confrontational methods and try to position themselves as insiders in order to gain legitimacy. Now, “reliance on government funding has made advocacy participation and participation in collaborative governance virtually indistinguishable” (Mosley 2012:841).

In an in-depth case study of homeless services providers in New York, Mosley (2012) found that nonprofit advocacy has been fundamentally changed by the public/private collaborative governance structures that have emerged in the wake of welfare reform and devolution. The new type of advocacy incentivized by government funding and collaborative governance promotes the stability of the status quo rather than change. It may also privilege insiders and lock out newcomers to the field. As Mosley (2012) puts it:

[I]ncreased reliance on government funding among nonprofit human service organizations is providing incentives for organizations to engage in policy advocacy primarily to promote and extend the existing policy priorities that their funding is based on. Furthermore, this motivation--to ensure alignment between the policy/funding environment and organizational priorities--incentivizes advocacy that is highly strategic and based on insider knowledge and personal relationships. (P. 843).

In subsequence work, Mosley (2019) has found that network-led advocacy is more likely to occur in networks with greater capacity (i.e., larger budgets and more long-term strategic planning). However, whether or not providers in networks are engaged and able to influence that advocacy depends on the structure of the network. Networks that are led by independent organizations whose sole purpose is to govern the
network tend to have less engaged memberships, whereas networks led by member-providers have higher levels of engagement (although the causal direction is not clear).

To come full circle, Mosley finds that networks with more engaged members also tend to have stronger external relationships with policymakers. In sum, collaborative governance networks with abundant resources and highly engaged members are most likely to engage in advocacy and have strong relationships with policymakers.

*Two Theories of Insider Advocacy*

As a consequence of prevailing social and historical forces, nonprofits—especially those that are part of collaborative networks or receive foundation and government funding—may be less likely to engage in protest or outsider advocacy and more likely to try to position themselves to be seen as legitimate by powerful forces in order to engage in insider advocacy. Two alternative theories arrive at this conclusion by different routes. Neoinstitutionalism argues that nonprofits turn to insider advocacy because there is a shared understanding, or culture, among nonprofits and those who run them that insider advocacy is more effective. Resource dependence theory focuses not on culture but on material flows of funding. According to resource dependence theory, nonprofits build relationships and try to maintain close ties to those who control funding in order to help ensure resources continue to flow to the nonprofit. Both may miss the mark, however, in suggesting that insider advocacy forecloses opportunities for resistance or pushing for change (Mosley 2012).

Overall, neoinstitutionalists focus on the context in which nonprofits operate, the cultural assumptions that shape nonprofits, and the ways in which nonprofits and their
organization feeds back into the cultural framework. For neoinstitutionalists, analysis of nonprofits highlights how they operate as sites of shared meaning and symbolic action, rather than focusing on structures of authority or hierarchy within the organizations. That makes a neoinstitutional approach ideal for analyzing the types of horizontal relationships that arise in collaborative networks, for understanding how cultural and historical frameworks shape individual choices and preferences and actions. Coercive, normative, mimetic isomorphism all lead to similar choices by different organizations based on practices considered legitimate or effective. In other words, nonprofits and the actors within them may make similar choices across different communities if they perceive similar frameworks. In terms of advocacy, organizations may perceive that in order to be seen as legitimate by policymakers, they must comply--i.e., they need to become insiders (Mosley 2012:845-6).

Resource dependence theory looks instead at the flow of funding. In this line of thinking, organizations try to reduce uncertainty by influencing the funding environment in which they operate. The ecosystem of nonprofits has implications for strategies here. Where there are few nonprofits or a coalition of nonprofits, they may have increased power because they have a monopoly on provision of a needed service; monopoly or cartel structures (e.g., unified fundraising) are one way to secure a steady stream of funding. But where there are many nonprofits competing for government funding, the government holds more power. Organizations that rely on government funding therefore have an increased incentive toward advocacy--to increase funding stability and horizontal relationships with funders (public managers, policymakers) to help secure funding. In terms of tactics, organizations concerned with shaping the funding environment will
focus more on insider relationship building than on educating the general public, awareness, or confrontation (Mosley 2012:844-5).

Both theories seem to suggest that, as nonprofits are increasingly tied to government funding and service provision, they may abandon their social movement goals. Whether because of cultural norms or resource dependence, nonprofits may stifle the voices of outside protest and instead advocate for the stability of status quo systems and the funding attached to them. In the field of homelessness, this fear has been captured by the idea of a homeless industrial complex, an industry of nonprofits (e.g., shelter providers) who have a vested interest in seeing homelessness continue. After all, if no one experienced homelessness, shelters would not need to exist. However, such conclusions assume that insider advocacy is ineffective advocacy. Could it be, instead, that insider advocacy--at the same time it seeks to stabilize funding streams to a nonprofit--could offer a way for nonprofits to “resist, infiltrate, or negotiate current political and economic arrangements” (Mosley 2012:846)?

In a case study of New York-based nonprofit organizations, Mosley (2012) found that nonprofit organizations’ approaches toward advocacy depended on their characteristics and funding arrangements. In particular, she identified a small subgroup of struggling nonprofits--generally smaller, less professionalized--that were dependent on government funding. Nonprofits in this group felt a sense of powerlessness with regard to the system; they felt unable to influence the system from the inside, and instead they either engaged in confrontational advocacy or no advocacy. Another group of privately funded nonprofits were more likely to engage in advocacy aimed at increasing services that would benefit their clients, not on directly increasing funding streams. Instead, they
preferred to focus time and resources on mission-centric activities, such as providing services to clients or outreach to donors. Advocacy activities were also targeted to raise awareness among the general public and potential donors about issues facing their clients rather than to form relationships with public managers or policymakers. Despite differences between these two groups, she concludes that, under current cultural and funding arrangements, nonprofit advocacy tends to “amplify rather than challenge current political and institutional arrangements” because “their advocacy goals are very often squarely focused on maintaining the funding streams the organization has come to depend on and tactics are structured to maximize goodwill and minimize conflict” (Mosley 2012:861).

As nonprofits pivot from confrontational advocacy to insider tactics, they have an incentive to participate in collaborative networks. Nonprofits that do not participate in collaboration do so at their own peril. According to Mosley (2012):

> [D]irectors believed they must participate in insider tactics, and participate at the highest levels, in order to stay abreast of fast moving policy and funding developments. They believed that organizations not participating, or not participating in the correct ways, would be left behind or seen as less important than other agencies. Furthermore, data from the subgroup of organizations that were struggling, but reliant on government funding, suggest that they may be right. (P. 862)

The question remains, however, whether the shift to insider advocacy and fervent participation in collaboration actually leads to better outcomes for the public. This new orientation among nonprofits could lend itself to cartel-like entrenchment, where
nonprofit organizations become advocates for existing policies rather than for client needs. For funders and the public, cartelization of the safety net nonprofit sector raises questions about accountability: How are funders, including the government and the public it serves, to measure and evaluate change in client outcomes (production of public goods) and whether needs are met by current policies? And how can nonprofit service providers balance maintenance and self-interest with client representation?

Measurement and Accountability

Concerns about accountability among nonprofits have led to much discussion about the importance of data and measurement. Funders—both the government and foundations—impose on nonprofits the expectation that activities be tracked and that outcomes and impact be measured. In some cases, the outcomes produced and measured by nonprofit service providers are framed as a return on investment. The term philanthrocapitalism captures not only a perspective on philanthropy focused on return on investment, but also the movement of people from corporate environments onto nonprofit or foundation boards. They bring with them normative practices and expectations for data collection and measurement, a capitalist framework for measuring value.

For collaborative governance organizations, adopting the practice of collecting, combining, and reporting data can pose a nearly insurmountable challenge for new collaborative groups. Data collection efforts are rife with “the challenges of coordinating data systems, the costs of such systems, issues with sharing sensitive data that are subject to privacy protections, and the questions of how data are perceived, interpreted, and
utilized by different partners” (Henig et al. 2015:32). For complex social problems, it can be especially challenging to collect community-level data that would be essential to monitoring the success of a collaborative group; typically, data tend to reflect a single agency or program, the level at which the data are collected. Though it can be challenging to find suitable metrics that capture nonprofits’ value, the advantage of a move toward measurement is that it provides a tool for accountability, and it also allows funders to make decisions about how to allocate scarce philanthropic dollars (Edwards, Bishop, and Green 2014:555).

That said, the move toward measurement is not without its critics. Some critics argue that the value created by nonprofits cannot be measured in the same way as the value created by for-profit organizations, and to attempt to do so degrades the democratic, civil society function of nonprofit organizations (Jenkins 2011; Spar and Dail 2002). According to this critique, focusing on outcomes, measurement, impact, and the like imposes a market-based logic on civil society and philanthropy, changing nonprofits for the worse. This criticism is grounded in the three-failures theory of nonprofit organizations, which assumes nonprofit organizations arise to make up for services that market-logic and for-profit organizations will not support. If that is the case, then applying market logic to this sector is a bad idea--this sector exists precisely because it is not and should not be governed by the same incentives and constraints as the market (i.e., concern for efficiency and profit) (Edwards et al. 2014:542). What’s more, because nonprofit service providers must engage in the co-production of goods to meet deeply intertwined human needs, civil society is more ecosystem than market. Services produced by safety net nonprofits are usually not substitutable (domestic violence shelter vs.
immigrant job training), and even very similar or interrelated services are mutually supportive, not in market competition (e.g., job training and advocacy to raise wages). The value created by a nonprofit does not map directly to financial returns and may not even be evidence as a direct effect given this ecosystem arrangement. In a way, “the calculation of returns, including social returns, is a normative and political issue: resource allocation in philanthropy is an exercise in power and judgment, not a result of the market's ‘invisible hand’” (Edwards et al. 2014:541).

Since there is no obvious or direct way to measure the value created by nonprofit service providers (i.e., profit and loss), alternative measures of outcomes must be created. The danger in this is that a focus on setting measurable goals could lead to decision-making driven by what it is possible to measure, not what should be measured (Ordóñez, Schweitzer, Galinsky, and Bazerman 2009; Hollingworth 2009). To take homelessness as an example, measuring shelter nights is easier for most communities than measuring the number of people who transition from homelessness to housing and stay housed two years later. Yet most communities would agree that keeping people housed for two years would be more desirable than providing two years of emergency shelter. Generally, critics of the move toward measurement worry that it will benefit certain types of nonprofit service providers at the expense of others. Those likely to lose out may include nonprofit organizations that do good work but cannot generate direct financial return on investment or those that produce hard-to-measure social results. Instead, funders might focus on direct delivery of social and economic services, especially those focused on building individual economic assets (jobs, education, health, housing, microfinance, etc.). A focus on individual economic returns could divert effort from more fundamental
systems change. Internally, these market-based approaches could also cause mission drift: less time or resources spent on advocacy, for example, or a tendency to weed out difficult or higher cost clients to improve numbers. The result could be that nonprofit service providers produce services that mirror inequalities in society (e.g., underserving minorities) (Edwards et al. 2014; Ordóñez, Schweitzer, Galinsky, and Bazerman 2009).

As nonprofits get better at market logic, they may get worse at civil society functions. Insider strategies and professionalization could increase the distance between nonprofits and the people they serve (the grassroots), aligning them instead with funders to whom they answer. Nonprofits and civil society associations could become less effective at reform as they engage a smaller, more elite base. Also, nonprofit organizations may tend even more toward monopoly as larger organizations outcompete smaller ones. A push for efficiency, coordination, and streamlined services could become a push to reduce the number of nonprofits in the field: “There is already a belief among market-oriented philanthropists that there are ‘too many’ nonprofits and that mergers should be encouraged, which may be true in some areas of service delivery but is not true in terms of civil society's social and political role, where many more groups are needed” (Edwards et al. 2014:547).

ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY PERSPECTIVES ON MAKING COLLABORATION WORK

Whether or not collaborative governance of the social safety net benefits civil society, current federal policies mean this form of governance is the current reality. Therefore, the second motivating question for this dissertation asks how the sociology of
institutions and organizations can inform collaborative governance. Under what conditions does collaboration work? How can practitioners, policymakers, and others in the field shape networks to best promote the public good?

This section reviews current sociological thinking pertinent to these questions. First, it reviews whether evidence supports the idea that collaboration actually produces more public good than hierarchical organization. Assuming collaboration does create public benefit, what factors might lend themselves to more sustainable collaboration? This section asks whether existing evidence supports lean and efficient collaboration or more broad and inclusive membership. From there, this section moves into matters of transparency, trust, and legitimacy—both how these factors promote collaboration and how collaboration reciprocally builds them up. Finally, this section looks at the tradeoff of flexibility versus stability within collaboration and where governance power is vested within the collaboration (i.e., internal, external, or shared) as well as how communities invest in collaboration.

**Does Collaboration Produce Public Goods?**

To date, there is limited research into whether collaborative forms of governance are better than traditional, hierarchical structures when it comes to producing public goods. Part of the trouble in evaluating the efficacy of collaborative governance is that collaboration is often adopted as an approach for a specific set of social problems. That is, collaboration often comes about precisely because a difficult and complex problem exists, one which prevailing structures have failed to adequately address. In these cases, collaboration is a response to difficult circumstances where other forms of governance
have already tried and failed--this could mean, for instance, the failure of authoritative hierarchy (government) or competition (market) to meet a public need or solve a social problem. Such failure occurs, perhaps, in the face of complexity--social problems with multiple causes, intricate solutions, large scale or scope, enmeshed causes and consequences, and the like--so-called “wicked” problems (Henig et al. 2015:33-4). Collaborative governance, then, faces an uphill battle in demonstrating success. Milward and Provan (2000:361), in their seminal work on the hollow state and collaborative governance in the human services realm, found “very little empirical evidence that integrating human services, community policing, urban enterprise zones, public-private partnerships, or community coalitions to build social capital have a consistently positive effect on community level outcomes.”

Since then, quite a bit of scholarly attention has been paid to questions of collaborative network performance, but results are mixed. In a study of collaboration around water quality improvement, Scott (2016) found that government funding for collaborative watershed councils improved water quality through council activities that included education, outreach, and administrative support. Dopson, McGivern, Ferlie, and Fitzgerald (2012) find some evidence that organizational networks perform better than government hierarchies or markets, but conclude that comparing performance is complex and networks cannot be decisively declared better. From a national survey of urban sustainability efforts, Swann (2017) concludes that collaboration enhances policy implementation—in certain contexts: in particular, efficacy depends on the policy target and the administrative capacity and stakeholder support.
Lack of conclusive evidence could be due to the fact that complexity is hard to measure, making it unclear that cooperation itself is responsible for positive outcomes. Or, it may be the case that existing frameworks for measuring success are inadequate to capture the benefits produced through collaboration. For instance, Rogers and Weber (2010) study four cases of successful collaborative governance across four Western states. They find that collaborative governance enhances agency resources and the development and transfer of technology—that is, collaboration may spark innovation and lead to synergies that benefit participants.

Preliminarily, then, evidence suggests that collaboration produces public good. Yet what has become clear is that forming and maintaining collaborations—presumably the first step to achieving any success—is in itself a challenge. In particular, “cross-sector collaborations to improve urban communities and educational outcomes have historically been difficult to pull off and to sustain” (Henig et al. 2015:2). What are the factors that improve the prospects of success? In a meta-analysis of 137 cases of collaborative governance, spanning a range of different policy sectors, Ansell and Gash (2008) identified the following influential factors: a history of conflict or cooperation, incentives to participate, power or resource imbalance, leadership, and institutional design, plus face-to-face interaction, trust, commitment, and development of a shared understanding.

The remainder of this section consider how these factors that influence collaborative performance might intersect concerns outlined in the previous section with regard to the democratic and advocacy functions of nonprofits.
Membership: Lean and Efficient or Broad and Inclusive?

Perhaps the most fundamental question in forming a collaborative group is who to involve. On the one hand, large groups can become unwieldy; smaller groups may more quickly reach consensus on decisions and take action. On the other hand, larger groups better capture the benefits of collaboration. Broad, inclusive, cross-sector membership makes it possible to cross organizational boundaries and create links across segments of the community that may not always intersect or communicate. Broad and inclusive memberships convene “people who focus in multiple directions and translate interests, agendas, and operations from one unit to another” using diverse “materials and tools, routines, standard operating procedures, vocabularies,” and the like. For complex social problems, this type of work is essential. Broad-based groups can “help one unit make sense of what other unit does so they can work together well” (Henig et al. 2015:38).

Assembling broader membership can also encourage innovative problem solving as new ideas and approaches are brought together, and it can encourage group stability. Engaging diverse parties can lead to innovation, and combine resources in complementary ways. Participants in broad, inclusive collaborative groups are generally forced to engage in ongoing learning (which is good for problem solving) simply to keep the cooperation intact (Brown 1998). Further, the literature on civic capacity suggests broad, cross-sector coalitions help groups hold together even when member organizations have leadership turnover; in that way, inclusive collaboration increases stability (Henig et al. 2015:52).
Assembling a broad, inclusive, cross-sector membership can be challenging. Maintaining the group can be even more difficult. One challenge to assembling such a group is bringing together cross-sector organizations and bridging the power differences among them in order to achieve democratic participation. Low-power or marginalized groups may become apathetic if they feel they have little influence within the collaboration; high-power groups may be unaware of the power they wield to control the agenda (Brown 1998). But in collaborations where high-power groups drive the agenda and low-power groups check out, the benefits of collaboration are unlikely to be realized.

Thinking about democratic participation more broadly, collaborative governance of public safety net programs calls into question the extent to which the public maintains control over public policy. Collaborative governance that involves government, nonprofits, and others can blur the boundaries between policy-making and administration, or decision-making and implementation. Arguably, in collaborative governance, private agents with less direct accountability to the public are charged with making policy decisions formerly in the hands of the public via elected representatives. New collaborative forms of governance “link policy decision making and operational administration in new and consequential ways and raise questions about just how this works in the real world” (Henig et al. 2015:34).

Internal versus External Legitimacy

Collaborative governance organizations must establish both internal and external legitimacy. Internally, the collaborative, its agenda, and its function must be seen as
legitimate by members in order to sustain participation. Collaboration must come to be seen as the preferred way of doing business, preferred over independent action. This internal legitimacy must extend to all participating agencies, including those who might be perceived by some within the network as to blame for the failure that spawned the collaboration (Henig et al. 2015:43). Collaborations do not arise de novo. The success of cooperation depends in part on the position and characteristics of the initiating party, the history of relations among parties, the historical and institutional context of the parties, and similar factors. Establishing the internal legitimacy and credibility of the collaboration is crucial (Brown 1998:232).

Externally, the collaboration must be seen as legitimate by the public if it is to take ownership over a public problem. Additionally, each individual organization participating in the collaboration has its own concern for external legitimacy. When the collaboration itself is seen as legitimate by the public, it can encourage participation from member organizations whose own claims to legitimacy depend on being part of the collaborative group. Challengingly, though, participating organizations may attend meetings out of fear, not collaborative spirit, if they sense that participating is key to insider strategies to gain funding or public legitimacy. The flip side of this challenge is for participant organizations whose external legitimacy is threatened by participating in collaboration, e.g., organizations that might be charged with being co-opted the more they buy into collaboration (Henig et al. 2015:57-8).
Trust

Overcoming some of the legitimacy challenges to collaboration depends on building trust and social capital—that is, commitment to collaboration and shared understanding of mission. Many forms of network failure derive from a lack of trust: e.g., freeriders, bias, groupthink, exclusion. When it comes to collaboration, resource dependence, threats to external legitimacy, or (more positively) shared goals can all motivate collaboration. But collaboration is unlikely to succeed without trust.

Conflict, risk, and fluid membership all endanger trust. Trust can also be eroded by political motives or professional wariness across sectors or industries (Henig et al. 2015). Cooperation could be a consequence—or cause—of social capital. Projects that successfully create social capital tend to create new local organizations and increase the capacity of other participating organizations. Based on studies of development NGOs in Asia and Africa, Brown (1998:228-9) concludes that new, coordinating organizations “can play critical roles in fostering cooperation among unequally powerful parties when the aim is to solve social problems, and that such cooperative problem solving can in turn create social capital.” Mechanisms for building social capital and trust in collaborations could include, for instance, working individually with participant organizations to prepare them to engage the rest of the collaboration; using pilot projects to test and demonstrate the effectiveness of innovative approaches; establishing ground rules for cooperation; or identifying and creating plans that combine resources from multiple parties to achieve joint goals (Brown 1998).
When it comes to building trust and legitimacy, data and measurement can be a double-edged sword. Data could increase trust or diminish it, depending on whether it is seen as a tool of transparency and accountability or a means to exert control from a distance. Data can also become disconnected from institutional learning or rational and strategic improvement; measurement for the sake of measurement can distract from mission-critical activities. Optimistically, data-driven collaboration could be a democratic alternative to command-and-control accountability regimes (i.e., traditional hierarchical administration). Top-down policy reform is subject to distortion, which can be countered with stricter monitoring of data and outcomes and higher sanctions (e.g., No Child Left Behind); alternatively, collaborative data collection and outcome measurement could empower local stakeholders to hold policymakers accountable using democratic pressure.

In this version of democratic, collaborative governance, data and measurement empower civic brokers to wield a sort of soft power as an addition or alternative to the hard power of formal authority of government (Henig et al. 2015).

*Flexibility versus Stability*

Stable networks likely improve performance and outcomes, but excessive stability can be problematic. On the one hand, stability is important in order that providers and clients can learn to navigate the system, set up referral networks, and agree on division of labor (Milward and Provan 2000:370). On the other hand, stability bordering on rigidity may trade off with the ability of a network collaboration to learn, adapt, and innovate. Henig et al. (2015) surmise that bureaucratic rigidity may have doomed some collaborations in the 1990s, whereas looser associations are better for bringing together
potential competing organizations without too much defensiveness. They cite, as examples, school-based collaborations that fell apart because they failed to accommodate the hierarchy and bureaucracy of school administrations (school boards, principals, teachers), which struggled to find a way to integrate with separately funded private agencies or city departments, and neighborhood-based initiatives (e.g., Empowerment Zones) that failed because funding tied to specific projects was not flexible enough to allow long-term planning, systems change, or integrated services across providers. By contrast, they suggest, school-based collaborations based on looser, non-binding associations could better integrate organizations that might be critical of local schools but eager to support a collaborative program.

Although some theorists might argue that stability is detrimental to civil society, outsider advocacy, and democratic governance, Milward and Provan (2000) argue the stable systems--i.e., systems where funding and contracts are not frequently rebid--encourage collaboration. Granted, such systems disincentivize lobbying, which might be characterized as stifled voice; yet, with no expectation that lobbying would yield results, nonprofits instead have to work together to solve the social dilemma on their own. Stable funding arrangements also increase stability, which motivates nonprofits to invest in relationships that could benefit in the long run, instead of focusing on short-term, individualistic behavior. Repeated interaction among providers increases the strength of ties and acts like an iterated prisoner's dilemma, decreasing the risk of defection. In general, following this logic, more stable systems improve performance. Conversely, changes to systems can be disruptive and diminish performance if they reduce the
resources available to actors in the system, spur competition, or reduce long-term reciprocity.

*Governance: Internal or External, Shared or Brokered*

Given the factors outlined above, which might be the most effective actor to convene, broker, or maintain a collaborative network? Some research (e.g., Henig et al. 2015) suggests government tends to take the lead in organizing collaborative governance but does a bad job of it. When governments reach out to nonprofits or other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and ask them to serve as brokers with grassroots organizations, they signal the legitimacy of the NGO and “set the stage for mutual influence in social problem solving” (Brown 1998:232). In other cases, NGOs first work with grassroots organizations to innovate new types of solutions, then use the results of preliminary work to make the case for the solution's promise and legitimacy, only later approaching government. But this approach can be problematic if government sees the NGO as a threat to powerful groups accustomed to authoritarian decision-making (Brown 1998). Ultimately, governance fit and the answer to the question *Who leads?* might be contingent on circumstances, especially the size of the collaboration, the level of trust and consensus among participant organizations, and the need for network-level competencies (Henig et al. 2015).

*Investing in Collaboration*

Theories of collaboration and network effectiveness suggest that successful collaboration requires investment of resources. Investment of funding or staff time are
necessary to support the logistics of collaboration, including providing meeting space, scheduling meetings, following up with participants, collecting and housing data, and the like. Investment of resources may also spur collaboration if used to support incentives for collaboration. For participating organizations, collaboration can be costly, trading off with focus on mission, reputation for success, or even funding. Selective incentives to participation may offset those costs and encourage collaboration. Of course, beyond any funding or in-kind incentives, incentives could include access to information or reputation benefits; relationships of trust and reciprocity can also hold collaboration together by reducing friction and costs or redefining mission (Henig et al. 2015:56-7)

Beyond investment in support functions and incentives, resource-rich environments may be more likely to foster cooperation instead of competition. Collaboration pursued out of scarcity and a mandate for efficiency could give rise to competition (real or perceived) over scarce resources, which can erode trust and threaten collaboration. Even when parties want to collaborate, they may be competing for resources (e.g., limited government or community funding for human services); the politics of resource competition could get in the way of collaboration, and arguments that the benefits of collaborating will accrue to all participants in fact run counter to the efficiency justification for collaboration (Henig et al. 2015:57-8). Thus, Milward and Provan (2000 hypothesize:

Network effectiveness is most likely in a resource-rich environment and is least likely in a resource-scarce environment. However, resource munificence alone will not result in an effective network, and resource scarcity need not mean an ineffective network (i.e., other factors matter more). (P. 368)
Networks mediate the effects of funding. Just pouring more money into a system will not guarantee better results absent an effective network (Milward and Provan 2000). And also, when governments deputize nonprofits to carry out government functions (e.g., securing children’s rights through child welfare services), they may not provide sufficient resources for nonprofits to do that work (Marwell and Calabrese 2015).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Informed by these theoretical perspectives, this dissertation intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the consequences of collaborative governance for both providers and consumers of safety net services?
2. What makes collaboration work?
CHAPTER 4: METHODS

The history of safety net programs in the United States reveals that systems of public support were dismantled during the 1970s and 1980s. Government outsourced some functions to private providers; other functions were simply reduced or abandoned. What were the consequences for housing and homelessness? Homelessness services are an interesting case for understanding the hollow state and network governance because safety net programs, though still funded by the federal government through HUD, have been devolved to states and municipalities and are administered in large part by collaborative governance structures.

In particular, this dissertation asks, how is collaborative work around homelessness organized and managed? What are the “law, funding structures, and ideological presuppositions” that shape networks of homeless services providers (Milward and Provan 2000:360)? As Milward and Provan (2000:360) phrase it, “How can effective institutions be designed in a world of shared power where few organizations have the power to accomplish their missions alone?” In the case of homeless services provision, some—but certainly not all—providers have a contractual tie to the state (typically through receipt of federal grant awards rather than a direct contract for service). Given this even looser form of connection and control, is the state able to direct service provision, and how? And what implications does this new organizational form have for the legitimacy of the state and for democratic control over services and providers? Contracted agencies may form an interest group that bands together to pressure the elected representatives to act in their favor should disputes arise between providers and
the state (Milward and Provan 2000). Is there evidence of this tension in the homeless services sector? How is the tension mediated? How is accountability maintained? How do information flows and data collection figure into accountability schemes and state efforts to exert control? How does contracting out responsibilities affect the state’s perceived legitimacy or responsibility?

This dissertation also asks about the consequences of new governance structures for both the stakeholders involved (i.e., service providers) and for consumers of services (i.e., people experiencing homelessness). What are the consequences of this new organizational structure for the stakeholders involved? Does the nature of their work, their approach to advocacy, or their posture toward consumers or other constituents change by virtue of engaging in collaborative governance? What are the consequences for consumers? How do they navigate networks of service providers? Do they experience the network as disjointed or as advantageous (e.g., in connecting them to other organizations)?

STUDY DESIGN

To answer these questions, this dissertation adopts a three-pronged approach. The first presents a comparative case study of collaborative governance around addressing homelessness in six cities in the north central region of the United States. The comparative case study asks how the form and outcomes of collaborative governance vary based on local context, including the historical and present organization of work around homelessness (e.g., whether a city is part of a statewide Continuum of Care (CoC) or is itself a CoC).
Much of the research on nonprofit organizations and nonprofit advocacy in particular has been based on surveys rather than qualitative case studies. But qualitative methods are better suited for questions of how actors interpret the environment, how they process incentives and constraints, and what they perceive to be operating in terms of incentives or constraints (Mosley 2012). The comparative case study method can help better identify scope conditions, or the boundaries to where findings might by generalizable, as well as how variations in the community context affect the form and outcome of collaborative governance (Small 2009). As described in more detail below, the cases selected for comparison were not chosen because they have necessarily been successful sites of collaborative governance. It is important that they were not selected on the dependent variable. To understand the conditions under which collaborative governance succeeds--or fails--it is necessary to study a variety of stages of collaboration, including failed attempts at collaboration.

Second, this dissertation uses national data from nearly 400 collaborative governance bodies. Continuums of Care, or CoCs, are collaborative governance structures created by local or regional networks as mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. At a minimum, CoCs apply for federal grants for homeless services, distribute those grants locally, and collect data on local programs for people experiencing homelessness and the number of people locally who experience homelessness. Comparing CoC organizational structures, population characteristics, and performance outcomes allows for a more comprehensive extension of the more in-depth comparative case study method.
Third, this dissertation presents an in-depth case study looking at a single community and the organizational structure and consequences of collaborative governance there. Whereas the comparative case study and CoC comparison offer a snapshot, the in-depth case study examines the development of collaborative structures over time in a single community. It also focuses on the consequences of collaborative governance for stakeholders and consumers.

This project was approved by the SDSU Institutional Review Board, Approval No. IRB-1910001-EXM.

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

The primary research question behind the comparative case study presented in this research is this: How do different communities organize networks of homeless services providers and what makes collaboration work? The comparative case study method adopted here assumes, following neoinstitutional theory, that local context matters. The goal is not, as in quantitative research, to develop a generalizable description of organizational forms, but rather, to identify the types of variation that might exist among organizational forms, and to answer questions about how and why those variations develop, a strategy that follows a “case study logic” where cases are chosen by design, not in order to be statistically representative (Small 2009; Yin 2002). Given that all communities are subject to the same federal system but must negotiate different state and local conditions, what are the legal, funding structures, and ideological presuppositions that shape collaborative governance networks for homeless services, and how do they vary across communities? In particular, the comparative case study
presented here examines how funding flows from the federal government to service providers, how collaborative governance bodies attempt to marshal additional funding beyond federal allocations, how the federal government or other principals attempt to exercise control over the agents who receive funding and carry out service provision on their behalf, who in the community makes up the membership of the collaborative governance body, and who controls its direction.

A secondary research question for this section is this: What techniques does the federal government, state, local government or other principals use to make local needs and actions legible and attempt to control collaborative governance bodies? How do techniques vary across communities? In particular, I attempt to explore through this comparative case study how information is communicated from agencies to the principal and back, what asymmetries of information may arise, and what the implications of any disruptions in the flow of information may be. The case study method is well suited to these questions because it provides more in-depth, qualitative evidence than could be gleaned through a large-sample survey (Yin 2002). This section also asks how accountability is maintained and how well that serves both internal and external legitimacy. How do information flows and data collection figure into accountability schemes and state efforts to exert control? How does contracting out responsibilities affect the state’s perceived legitimacy or responsibility?

Third, this section delves into the consequences for civil society and advocacy of moving toward collaborative governance. It asks whether and how networks of homeless service providers have inculcated advocacy arms in different communities. Where advocacy efforts have developed, how did they emerge and what does that look like?
What is the relationship between advocacy and the network in each community and how does that vary? Are the members of collaborative governance structures positioned primarily as outside advocates giving voice to marginalized or minority demands, or are they engaged in insider politics consistent with resource dependence theory, trying to gain and maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the principal in order to secure (or keep) funding?

Finally, this section inquires into the characteristics of successful collaboration. Across the communities examined for this case study, what conditions lend themselves to successful collaborative governance? Where collaboration has been less successful, what have been the points of failure and what are the causes of those shortcomings?

The comparative case study presented here is based on research in six communities: Boise, Idaho; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Des Moines, Iowa; Fort Collins, Colorado; Omaha, Nebraska; and Madison, Wisconsin. Brief community profiles are provided below.

Community Profiles

*Boise, ID.* Boise/Ada County is a standalone CoC. The City of Boise is the lead agency and collaborative applicant for the CoC. CATCH, a nonprofit homeless service provider, is the lead agency for coordinated entry, which is branded as Our Path Home. The Iowa-based nonprofit ICA is the HMIS lead, charged with managing and reporting HMIS data. Over the last three to four years, Boise has made a significant investment in addressing homelessness with multiple community meetings and committee work to develop a strategic plan and coordination around homelessness. Although the community
previously had a group charged with coordinating homeless services, it was dissolved and reorganized because participants felt it was accomplishing little beyond holding meetings. The city was then and still is the lead agency for the CoC in Boise/Ada County, so they are obligated per HUD/HEARTH Act to do some of this coordinating work. But that obligation neither forced them nor, at first, led them to do it well. Leadership from the mayor’s office, local data reporting, and work on a new permanent supportive housing project brought the community together to reinvigorate efforts to address homelessness.

Fort Collins, CO. Fort Collins is part of the Colorado Balance of State CoC. With the other municipalities in Weld and Larimer Counties, Fort Collins has been experiencing rapid population growth. The more urban environment, population change, and different economic conditions compared to the rest of the state have led Fort Collins and the surrounding areas to sense a need for more concerted, local collaboration around homelessness. To date, efforts have been led by Homeward 2020, a 10-year organization incorporated as a 501c3 nonprofit to oversee initiatives and drive collaboration. United Way staff have also invested significant time in strategic planning and consultation with HUD and the Colorado Balance of State CoC to determine that forming a new Northern Colorado CoC would benefit the community. In collaboration with HUD, stakeholders in Fort Collins are in the process of forming a new CoC.

Madison, WI. The Madison/Dane County CoC is headed by a city employee but serves the entire county. The coordinator position at the city was created two years ago. The City of Madison is the collaborative applicant for the Dane County CoC.
Omaha, NE. Omaha, NE is part of a three-county CoC, led by a 501c3 nonprofit organization. That nonprofit has recently grown to nearly seven full-time staff, giving it critical mass to support its own operations and fundraising. Previously, it was housed within an incubator program at the University of Nebraska - Omaha. The Omaha CoC is unusual in that it includes counties in two different states: Nebraska and Iowa (Pottawatomie County).

Des Moines, IA. The Polk County CoC is a 501c3 nonprofit that was incorporated in 2013, while the City of Des Moines remains the collaborative applicant for CoC funding. The city also works with HUD and does oversight of CoC providers. The coordinator is the only CoC employee. Her office is with the Polk County Housing Trust Fund, which gives her connection with community partners to work with. The Trust Fund also serves as fiscal agent for the CoC.

Cedar Rapids, IA. The Linn County Continuum of Care is not--despite its name--a HUD CoC. The group calls itself a local CoC, though it is part of the Iowa Balance of State CoC. The group formed in 2000, and the current director, a Linn County employee, came on board in 2015 and has more recently assumed a leadership role. Linn County leads local collaboration efforts around homelessness, conducts a point-in-time count twice per year, and also conducts a more extensive survey of needs among people experiencing homelessness and low-income people in the community.

Demographic Description of Comparison Communities

Comparison communities were selected for their demographic and geographic similarity to Sioux Falls, SD, the community that is the subject of the in-depth case study
presented in the following section. They were also selected to represent a diverse set of organizational arrangements for collaboration around homelessness.

All of the communities selected for this case study are located in the north central region of the United States, in temperate climates where long-term unsheltered homelessness is generally untenable. Their climates are distinct from those in places like California or Texas, where the experience of homelessness may be quite different.

Although the comparison communities were chosen because they are midsize urban areas in the north central region, they do have some demographic and socioeconomic variation. In terms of total city population, Omaha is the largest community, and Cedar Rapids is the smallest. All of the communities have seen positive population growth in recent years. Growth has been especially rapid in Ft. Collins, CO, which saw the largest proportional increase in total population from domestic migration of any of the comparison communities. Boise, ID, also located in the amenity-rich Rocky Mountain region, likewise saw rapid growth due to domestic migration. This type of population growth can put pressure on housing stock, driving up housing costs.
Table 1. Total Population and % Population Change Among Comparison Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sioux Falls</th>
<th>Boise</th>
<th>Cedar Rapids</th>
<th>Des Moines</th>
<th>Ft. Collins</th>
<th>Madison</th>
<th>Omaha</th>
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<tr>
<td>City Population, 2015 Census Bureau Annual Estimate</td>
<td>171,544</td>
<td>218,281</td>
<td>130,405</td>
<td>210,330</td>
<td>161,175</td>
<td>248,951</td>
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<td>Percent Population Change, 2010-15</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA Population, 2015 Census Bureau Annual Estimate</td>
<td>251,854</td>
<td>676,909</td>
<td>266,040</td>
<td>622,899</td>
<td>333,577</td>
<td>641,385</td>
<td>915,312</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent Population Change, 2010-15</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 2010 to 2015 from domestic migration (MSA)</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparison communities also differ somewhat in family composition and age distribution. In particular, both Ft. Collins, CO and Madison, WI have younger populations and a smaller proportion of households with children. This reflects the presence of large universities in these cities: Colorado State University in Fort Collins and the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Those exceptions aside, the comparison communities are roughly similar in median age and the proportion of households with children.

Table 2. Selected Demographic Comparisons (Core Cities Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sioux Falls</th>
<th>Boise</th>
<th>Cedar Rapids</th>
<th>Des Moines</th>
<th>Ft. Collins</th>
<th>Madison</th>
<th>Omaha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons per household</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of households with children</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 ACS 1-year estimates

All of the comparison communities rank near the top nationally for low annual average unemployment, but they vary in terms of average wages and cost of living and housing affordability. The highest average wage was paid in the Des Moines MSA. The Boise MSA had the lowest average wage. In 2015, the annual unemployment rate for each of the comparison communities was low, at 4.0% or less. The Omaha MSA was tied at 13th nationally for lowest unemployment rate, the Ft. Collins MSA ranked 18th, and the Madison MSA ranked 23rd nationally. The Boise MSA, which had the highest
unemployment rate of all of the comparison communities, ranked 60th among the 387 metropolitan areas nationwide.

Table 3. Wages and Unemployment in Comparison Communities (MSAs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sioux Falls</th>
<th>Boise</th>
<th>Cedar Rapids</th>
<th>Des Moines</th>
<th>Ft. Collins</th>
<th>Madison</th>
<th>Omaha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Weekly Wage 2015 annual average</td>
<td>$863</td>
<td>$817</td>
<td>$955</td>
<td>$1,003</td>
<td>$908</td>
<td>$965</td>
<td>$899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate 2015 annual average</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics LAUS and QCEW 2015 annual averages

In 2015, the estimated median household income in the comparison communities varied from $49,072 in Des Moines to $61,514 in Ft. Collins. The estimated median value of owner-occupied homes varied from $119,500 in Des Moines to $302,500 in Ft. Collins. Although a lower median value can make home ownership more achievable, a lower value can also indicate that the condition or quality of the houses is lower, or that less demand exists from potential home buyers. Considered as a percentage of income, median owner housing costs varied from a low of 16.9% in Boise to a high of 19.7% in Madison. The percentage of income that is applied to home ownership costs depends on both the income levels of homeowners and the value of the housing.

Costs for renters also vary somewhat across comparison communities. Median rent was lowest in Cedar Rapids, at just under $700, and highest in Ft. Collins at more than $1,100. Considered as a percentage of income, the median gross rent in most of the
comparison cities was low enough to prevent households from incurring a cost burden—that is, paying more than 30% of income for housing. The exception is Ft. Collins, where the median renter household paid more than 35% of income for rent.

Table 4. Median Income and Housing Cost Data (Core Cities Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sioux Falls</th>
<th>Boise</th>
<th>Cedar Rapids</th>
<th>Des Moines</th>
<th>Ft. Collins</th>
<th>Madison</th>
<th>Omaha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>$53,802</td>
<td>$55,309</td>
<td>$51,011</td>
<td>$49,072</td>
<td>$61,514</td>
<td>$57,690</td>
<td>$51,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median owner housing value</td>
<td>$166,100</td>
<td>$209,900</td>
<td>$135,100</td>
<td>$119,500</td>
<td>$302,500</td>
<td>$222,800</td>
<td>$143,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median owner housing costs as % of income</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median gross rent</td>
<td>$745</td>
<td>$864</td>
<td>$697</td>
<td>$781</td>
<td>$1,171</td>
<td>$981</td>
<td>$813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median gross rent as % of income</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 ACS 1-year estimates

Households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing are considered cost-burdened and are at increased risk of homelessness. The highest proportions of cost-burdened households were found in Madison and Ft. Collins, the cities with the highest median home value and gross rent. Certain subpopulations are more likely to experience a cost burden. In all 6 comparison cities, renters and lower income households are more
likely to be cost-burdened. Ft. Collins and Madison stand out as the least affordable cities among the comparison communities: they have the highest rates of cost-burdened households across nearly all subpopulations. However, all of the communities fall into a narrow range of variation, with cost burdens affecting around 40 to 50% of renters overall and about 90% of renters with incomes under $20,000.

Table 5. Housing and Cost Burden (Core Cities Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sioux Falls</th>
<th>Boise</th>
<th>Cedar Rapids</th>
<th>Des Moines</th>
<th>Ft. Collins</th>
<th>Madison</th>
<th>Omaha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of all households</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a cost burden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% owner households</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a cost burden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% renter households</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>61.2%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a cost burden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% renter households</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with income &lt; $20,000</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a cost burden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% renter households</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with income $20,000 - $35,000 with a cost burden</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2011-15 ACS 5-year estimates, Table B25106
Paycheck to Paycheck, an annual report from the Center for Housing Policy at the National Housing Conference, ranks more than 200 metropolitan areas for affordable ownership and rental housing. Its rankings reveal that, compared to the other comparison cities, Boise, Ft. Collins, and Madison rank among less affordable cities (though Boise remains affordable for renters).

Table 6. Paycheck to Paycheck National Rankings, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sioux Falls</th>
<th>Boise</th>
<th>Cedar Rapids</th>
<th>Des Moines</th>
<th>Ft. Collins</th>
<th>Madison</th>
<th>Omaha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Rental Ranking</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Ownership Ranking</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Housing Policy

For its rental affordability rankings, the Paycheck to Paycheck report uses the HUD Fair Market Rent (FMR) calculations from 2015 for a two-bedroom rental unit to compare rent levels between communities. The most expensive rental market among the comparison communities was the Madison MSA, ranking 79th nationally. For ranking home ownership, the Paycheck to Paycheck report used home value estimates from the first quarter of 2015, as supplied by the National Home Builder’s Association or the National Board of Realtors. Among the comparison communities, the most affordable, the Omaha MSA, had a median home value of $148,100 and ranked 125th nationally.
Among the comparison communities, the highest home values were in the Fort Collins MSA and the Boise MSA, at $285,000 and $219,000, respectively. Fort Collins ranked as the 30th most expensive market nationally, while Boise ranked 54th.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is the primary funding source for rental assistance programs in larger cities, which can be compared based on the number of units available through Housing Choice Vouchers, Public Housing, Project-Based Section 8, and other HUD programs. To allow for direct comparison between communities, the total number of units assisted by HUD subsidies are given as a percentage of all renter-occupied units counted by the 2010 Census, the last highly reliable estimate of the number of renters in each city.
## Table 7. HUD-Subsidized Rental Units in Comparison Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Housing Vouchers</th>
<th>Public Housing</th>
<th>Project Section 8</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent of Renters 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sioux Falls</td>
<td>1,811</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>3,019</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>1,960</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1,011</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>3,332</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boise</td>
<td>1,638</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>2,598</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>2,832</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>1,119</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>4,466</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Rapids</td>
<td>1,073</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2,042</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>1,396</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,063</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>2,660</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des Moines</td>
<td>2,732</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>1,478</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>4,727</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>4,074</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>1,861</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>6,691</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft. Collins</td>
<td>1,188</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1,722</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>2,070</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>3,035</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>1,874</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>1,672</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4,381</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>3,238</td>
<td>1,012</td>
<td>2,772</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>7,236</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omaha</td>
<td>5,123</td>
<td>2,773</td>
<td>1,061</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>9,342</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>7,284</td>
<td>3,380</td>
<td>2,343</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>13,684</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development
In Des Moines, more than 15% of renter households would have had access to a subsidized unit, the highest percent for the cities. Omaha also had a large relative supply of HUD-assisted units. The individual cities with the smallest supply of subsidized options, when compared to renter-occupancy households, were Ft. Collins and Boise, both below 8% for subsidized housing. Public housing refers to housing units operated by a public housing authority. Cedar Rapids had no public housing; by contrast, Omaha had more than 2,700 public housing units. Increasingly across the United States, communities provide housing assistance not by building public housing but by offering vouchers that renters can use to subsidize their rent in any privately-owned apartment. Among the comparison communities, only Madison had less than 50% of their subsidized units offered in vouchers.

Demographic and socioeconomic variations among the comparison communities inform the context in which homelessness arises and in which service providers and collaborative governance bodies act. Another key component of that local context is the way in which collaborative governance structures have come to be organized vis-a-vis HUD’s requirement that competitive grant recipients participate in a Continuum of Care. The table below shows the type of Continuum of Care (CoC) to which each community belongs and whether the community’s collaborative governance coordinator is housed with a government agency or a nonprofit organization.
Table 8. *Comparison Communities by Collaborative Organizational Structure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuum of Care membership type</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Nonprofit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local CoC</td>
<td>Boise/Ada County, ID</td>
<td>Omaha, NE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Madison/Dane County, WI</td>
<td>Des Moines/Polk County, IA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance of State CoC</td>
<td>Cedar Rapids/Linn County, IA</td>
<td>Fort Collins, CO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The communities in this comparative case study represent the full set of possible combinations in this table. In Boise and Madison, the CoC is organized at the local level, made up of service providers and other organizations based in the community and with jurisdiction of geography that roughly aligns with the city (in both cases, the CoC is actually coterminous with the county in which the city is located). Boise and Madison also both have a government employee who has taken on the work of supporting the collaborative body. Likewise, in Cedar Rapids, a government employee does the work of coordinating the collaborative body. But Cedar Rapids, unlike Boise and Madison, does not have a local CoC; instead, Cedar Rapids is part of a so-called “Balance of State” CoC that encompasses the state of Iowa (other than Des Moines and a few counties near the western border). Cedar Rapids and Linn County have organized an alternative, local collaborative body apart from the HUD CoC that is composed of local organizations.

Fort Collins, like Cedar Rapids, is part of a Balance of State CoC. Unlike Cedar Rapids, Fort Collins does not have a government employee who works to coordinate local collaboration. Instead, in Fort Collins, a nonprofit organization has been
spearheading that work. Similarly, in Omaha and Des Moines, nonprofit organizations have taken the lead in coordinating collaborative governance groups. But in Omaha and Des Moines, collaborative governance happens within a CoC organized at the local scale.

Comparative Case Study Data Collection

The comparative case study is based on a review of public information, organizing documents, reports, and conversations with leaders from the comparison communities. The types of documents reviewed include organizing documents such as Continuum of Care board charters, 10-year plans to end homelessness, updated strategic plans to end homelessness, cities’ consolidated plans and CDBG application materials, CoC grant applications, and websites and media coverage. Between May and June 2019, I also spoke with leaders from each of the comparison communities and from two organizations: the Institute for Community Alliances and the Rapid Results Institute. The Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) is a Des Moines-based nonprofit organization that provides HMIS training and support in 13 states, including all of the comparison communities except for Ft. Collins, CO. The Rapid Results Institute is a Connecticut-based nonprofit consulting group that specializes in community development and systems change.

CONTINUUM OF CARE NATIONAL COMPARISONS

I augmented the data collected through in-depth, comparative case study methods with data collected for each of 397 CoCs currently in operation across the United States. Data, as described in detail below, include the number of people experiencing
homelessness, the types of programs available and number of beds, funding allocation by program type, the type of organizations serving as collaborative applicant and HMIS lead (i.e., nonprofit or government agency), and system performance outcomes. This dataset makes it possible to contextualize the cases explored in depth through the case study method, comparing characteristics of case study communities to patterns observed across the country. This dataset can also be used to test hypotheses about which types of organizations come to lead collaborative governance networks as well as relationships between network characteristics and community context and network performance.

CoC Data Collection and Analysis

In most communities in the United States, data collection around homelessness is driven by HUD requirements. As a consequence, most data pertaining to homelessness are collected at the level of a Continuum of Care (CoC), which may be as small as a single city or county or as large as a state. The map below shows CoC boundaries across the United States. A high-resolution, updated version of the map can be found online at https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/gis-tools/.
Figure 1. Continuum of Care National Boundary Map, FY 2018
HUD, through HUD Exchange, makes much of the data collected by CoCs publicly available. The following reports were downloaded from HUD Exchange for use in this analysis.

First, the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) for 2018 provides estimates of the number of people experiencing homelessness and the number of beds in programs that serve people experiencing homelessness. Each year, HUD prepares and submits to Congress its Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). The AHAR summarizes data reported from each CoC, particularly the results of the Point-in-Time (PIT) count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) conducted in January (see below for further description of PIT and HIC data). The PIT count data provide a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a given night, while the HIC data show community capacity to address homelessness through shelters, temporary housing, permanent supportive housing, and other housing programs. The AHAR is available online at https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/ahar/#2018-reports (accessed 9/26/2019).

Second, I use Point-in-Time (PIT) and Housing Inventory Counts (HIC) from 2018. CoCs are required to report PIT and HIC data annually. PIT count methodology can vary across CoCs because HUD accepts a variety of different methods, but every method attempts to count every person experiencing homelessness on a given night in January. PIT counts include information about certain characteristics of people experiencing homelessness, such as whether they are in individual or family households, whether they are veterans, whether they are chronically homeless, and whether they are sheltered or unsheltered. HIC data accompany PIT counts and reflect the number of beds
available in a community to shelter people experiencing homelessness. The HIC data include emergency shelter beds as well as transitional housing and permanent housing designated for people experiencing homelessness. PIT and HIC data are available online at https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/ (accessed 9/26/2019).

I use the System Performance Measures from 2017, the most recent available at the time of writing. Since 2015, HUD has required that CoCs report system performance measures based on data collected in their HMIS. These measures are intended to reflect community or system-wide outcomes, not the performance of specific providers. Measures include the number of people who successfully exited homelessness to permanent housing, changes in income for people who exited homelessness, and the number of people who return to homelessness at 6 months or 24 months after exiting. System performance measures are available online at https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/system-performance-measures/#data (accessed 9/26/2019).

To determine the organizational form of CoC lead agencies, I used CoC Grantee Contact Information. HUD makes available contact information for grantees across all of its grant programs, including the CoC grant program. For CoCs, contact information is provided for the CoC’s collaborative applicant, HMIS lead, and point-of-contact for homeless persons. Using this contact information combined with publicly available information gleaned from internet searches, I was able to determine whether the organizations serving in these roles were nonprofits or government agencies. Organization type and year of incorporation were taken directly from organizations’
public websites. The Guidestar nonprofit database was consulted to confirm nonprofit status or year of incorporation as needed. Examination of organizations’ websites and provided histories suggest that mergers and reorganizations are common. In some cases, this may mean an organization traces its history to the founding of the oldest organization involved in these mergers; in other cases, an organization may consider its founding as the date at which the merger resulted in the present organization. Where organizations gave a date on their website, I adopted that date as their date of incorporation; if I could not identify a date from their website, I used information from Guidestar. For organization type, I considered an organization a “nonprofit” if their primary mission was to network service providers but they did not provide direct services to people experiencing homelessness. I considered organizations “nonprofit providers” if they provide direct services. Other categories I used include city, county, state, or regional government, Community Action Agencies (which, when noted, may also be included with nonprofit providers), United Way agencies and foundations, and housing authorities. When an organization could not be found through an internet search or in the Guidestar database, or where organizational status was unclear, I used the email address and organizational affiliation of the individual listed as point of contact. Grantee contact information is available online at https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/contacts (accessed 9/26/2019).

Population Experiencing Homelessness

Per the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, HUD requires that each CoC conduct a regular point-in-time (PIT) count of people experiencing homelessness.
Statutorily, the PIT count is defined as a “count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons carried out on one night in the last 10 calendar days of January or at such other time as required by HUD” (24 CFR 578.3) and is to be carried out “at least biennially” (24 CFR 578.7(c)(2)). The actual manner in which each CoC carries out the PIT count is left to local discretion, provided the method meets minimum legal requirements. Some CoCs attempt a full census, while others use sampling methods to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness; some CoCs rely on HMIS records of people staying in emergency shelters on the night of the PIT count, while others collect PIT-specific records (for further details on allowable methodologies, see Dunton, Albanese, and D’Alanno 2014). Because of differences in local methodology, PIT counts might not be entirely comparable across jurisdictions. Nonetheless, the HUD-mandated count provides the most consistent available data on the number of people experiencing homelessness in communities across the United States.

PIT counts are done by CoCs, whose geographies vary, encompassing a single city, a few counties, or an entire state. In order to compare the number of people experiencing homelessness across CoCs, I used American Community Survey data along with PIT count data to calculate per capita rates. These rates take into account the vastly different sizes of communities, from sparsely populated rural areas to large, densely populated cities. To find the total population living in each CoC, I used the total population estimates from the American Community Survey 2017 5-year file (Table B01003). American Community Survey data are not tabulated by CoC geography, so I used R, a free software environment for statistical computing, to map the data, overlaying American Community Survey boundaries with CoC boundaries. For American
Community Survey data, I used county boundaries from the Census Bureau’s 2018 U.S. County Tiger Line Files. CoC boundaries came from HUD’s CoC GIS National Boundary file for FY2018.

In most cases, CoCs fully contain one or more counties, and the CoC boundaries align with the county boundaries. Where this was the case, county population characteristics were summed and assigned to the CoC so that the total population of the CoC was equal to the total population of the counties contained within that CoC. In some cases, a CoC only contains part of a county that it intersects. Typically, this happens when a CoC’s boundaries align with a city (e.g., Chicago) instead of a county (e.g., Cook County). Where county and CoC geography did not align, population characteristics were manually retrieved from the American Community Survey for the appropriate geography. Once CoC total population had been calculated, I merged PIT count data for each CoC from HUD’s report of 2018 PIT counts. Using PIT counts and CoC total population, I calculated the number of people (and people per PIT category) experiencing homelessness per 100,000 people in the CoC’s total population.

IN-DEPTH CASE STUDY

The comparative case study and analysis of national Continuum of Care data provide insight into how different organizational forms are related to patterns of collaborative governance. The third and final prong of this dissertation turns from that comparative perspective to an in-depth study of a single case. This focused, in-depth approach makes it possible to delve deeper into the intricate interconnections among stakeholders within the system, to understand the historical development of the current
organization, and to investigate how consumers of services experience networked organizations and collaborative governance. This end-user perspective is crucial for answering questions about the effects of collaborative governance on the ground. It builds on the provider-focused analysis of organizational forms done by Mosley (2012; 2019).

The research question motivating the in-depth case study is an applied question: What are the consequences of collaborative governance and networked service delivery for (a) the stakeholders and providers in the system and (b) the people who seek or receive services within the system? For stakeholders, how does participating in a collaborative network shape advocacy activity? How do stakeholders in the system reflect on the efficacy, advantages, and challenges of working in collaborative governance environment instead of one with a centralized controlling organization? For people seeking services, how do they navigate the network of providers? What are advantages or disadvantages of seeking services from a network of collaborating providers as compared to a single center? And finally, this component of the dissertation asks what lessons can be learned about how to design systems to make the best use of a network structure of collaborative governance, both for stakeholders and people seeking services.

Community Description

This case study delves deep into the history and experience of people in the homeless services sector in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, a midwestern city with a 2018
population of just under 200,000. Sioux Falls is an interesting case study because of its location, demographics, and relationship to the Continuum of Care governance structure.

The city is the urban core of a four-county metropolitan area. Sioux Falls is by far the largest city in the state, and it is located roughly 350 miles from the second largest city, Rapid City, whose population in 2018 totaled less than 80,000. Sioux Falls is an employment center for the state, home to thriving banking and healthcare industries as well as a pork processing plant.

When it comes to homeless services, Sioux Falls has a range of programs and providers, including three shelters (one of which is a domestic violence shelter), transitional housing programs, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and ancillary services such as soup kitchens, case management, and mentoring. Sioux Falls is part of the South Dakota Statewide Continuum of Care. However, the city differs significantly from the largely rural population in the rest of the state, and relatively more service providers are concentrated in Sioux Falls. Further, few of the service providers in the city receive Continuum of Care grant funding. Those who do not receive Continuum of Care funding have no obligation to participate in statewide collaborative governance or contribute data to the state HMIS. Sioux Falls, then, offers an interesting case study for how collaborative networks develop outside or alongside the obligations of federal grant programs.

The figure below shows the total Point-in-Time (PIT) count for Sioux Falls / Minnehaha County from 2005 to 2019. PIT counts are aggregated at the CoC level, which in South Dakota is statewide. However, historically, local count coordinators have recorded local numbers before passing them on to the state, and since 2012, the South
Dakota Housing for the Homeless Consortium has made available local data for Minnehaha County, where Sioux Falls is the county seat. More detailed count data are available online at [http://www.housingforthehomeless.org/homeless-counts.html](http://www.housingforthehomeless.org/homeless-counts.html).

It should be noted that the way in which the PIT count is conducted and the definition of homelessness used for the count have changed over time. Before 2014, the count was conducted in September and January, and summer (September) numbers were reported. Beginning in January 2014, it became a winter count conducted only once per year. The definition of homelessness has also been clarified to exclude people who are doubled up (i.e., temporarily sharing a home with another household) or staying in an institution such as detox, jail, or a hospital. Consequently, apparent trends should be interpreted with caution. The evident decline in the number of people experiencing homelessness is likely due in part to changes in methodology and the adoption of a narrower definition of homelessness.
Figure 2. Total PIT Count for Minnehaha County, 2006 - 2019

Source: South Dakota Housing for the Homeless Consortium

(http://www.housingforthehomeless.org/homeless-counts.html)
The figure below shows trends in the number of people experiencing homelessness identified during the annual PIT count who were sheltered versus unsheltered.

Figure 3. Sheltered PIT Count for Minnehaha County, 2016 - 2019

Source: South Dakota Housing for the Homeless Consortium

(http://www.housingforthehomeless.org/homeless-counts.html)
The figure below shows change over time in the number of people experiencing homelessness who belonged to different subpopulations: youth (under age 24), veterans, and chronically homeless.

![Minnehaha County: PIT Count Subpopulations](http://www.housingforthehomeless.org/homeless-counts.html)

*Figure 4. Youth, veterans, and chronic PIT count for Minnehaha County, 2016 - 2019*

Source: South Dakota Housing for the Homeless Consortium

The declining PIT count numbers could indicate a decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness or could be due to changes in methodology. One indication that the decrease has more to do with methodology than a decrease in homelessness is the countervailing trend seen in McKinney-Vento data collected by the Sioux Falls School District.
The figure below shows the number of Sioux Falls School District students identified each year as experiencing homelessness for at least part of the year. Unlike the PIT count, which is a snapshot for a single night in January, the McKinney-Vento count is cumulative: the number for a given year reflects the total number of students who were known to have been homeless at any point during the year. The McKinney-Vento count rose rapidly between 2004 and 2008, leveled off until 2016, then increased sharply from 2016 to 2017.

Figure 5. Homeless students identified by the Sioux Falls School District, 2004/05 - 2017/18

Source: Homeless Advisory Board 2017 Annual Report

(https://www.minnehahacounty.org/hab/2017AnnualHAB_Report.pdf) and Sioux Falls School District
The numbers in the figure above differ somewhat from the McKinney-Vento numbers reported by the U.S. Department of Education. For local trend analysis, numbers are based on direct report from the Sioux Falls School District using a more inclusive count than is recorded by the U.S. Department of Education: The district counts all youth experiencing homelessness from birth to age 18 (and to 21 if they are enrolled in school). They also count those youth experiencing homelessness who leave town before enrolling, and they count youth who attend school in surrounding communities but reside in Sioux Falls.

Data Collection and Method

Results presented below draw on three major sources of data, collected over a four-year period from 2016 through 2019: focus groups conducted with people trying to find affordable housing or who were at risk of homelessness, interviews conducted with participants in a supportive housing program for homeless families, and focus groups and interviews conducted with community stakeholders, including policymakers, service providers, landlords, developers, real estate agents, and community advocates active in the affordable housing and homeless services fields. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, then thematically coded for qualitative analysis.

Each data source is described in detail below.

People Seeking Housing Services

From April through October 2016, I conducted a series of focus groups with people who self-identified as seeking or living in affordable housing. The focus groups
were intended to better understand consumers’ perspectives on finding, obtaining, and maintaining housing. In total, I held eight focus groups: five at the downtown public library, two in a shelter for people experiencing homelessness, and one in the offices of a faith-based nonprofit service provider. The focus groups were held at various times of day and on both weekdays and weekends. Participants were referred to the focus groups by service providers. Flyers advertising the focus groups were also distributed to shelters and posted on community bulletin boards at the public library and downtown stores. Participants in the consumer focus groups received a $20 gift card to Payless Shoes as an incentive. Focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The table below summarizes characteristics of consumer focus group participants.
Table 9. Consumer Focus Group Participants

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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<table>
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<th>Annual household income</th>
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Housing Program Participants

From December 2017 through March 2018, I conducted 25 interviews with current and former participants in a transitional housing program for homeless families with children. The program is a joint effort of a Community Action Agency, public housing authority, and city department. The city funds the program with federal block grants; the Community Action Agency provides programming and case management; and the public housing authority administers rental assistance. Participants included 8
graduates and 17 current program participants. On average, graduate participants had left
the program 1.5 years before the interview. Time since graduation ranged from 6 months
to over 6 years.

Interviews were conducted in person or by phone. Participants were asked about
their experiences during and (for past participants) after leaving the program, including
experiences with housing, homelessness, and eviction; financial situation, including
employment, income, assistance, and transportation; and child care arrangements or
child’s or children’s school attendance, achievement, and behavior. On average,
interviews lasted 30 minutes.

Community Stakeholders and Service Providers

Interviews and focus groups with stakeholders and service providers were
carried out in three waves, from April 2016 through May 2019. The first wave was
carried out in April through July 2016. During that time, I conducted three focus groups
with stakeholders from the development, social services, government, and nonprofit
sectors. In total, I conducted interviews and focus groups with representatives from 25
stakeholder organizations, including developers, property managers, local city and county
government, federal government, non-profit organizations, businesses, and faith-based
groups. Stakeholder participants were recruited based on community directories of
organizations involved in affordable housing or supportive services and referrals from
preliminary stakeholder interviews. Additional interviews were conducted with
stakeholders who were not able to participate in focus groups. These groups were
intended to be as inclusive as possible; no interested participants were turned away.

Interviews and focus groups lasted from 45 to 90 minutes.

During the second wave, between December 2017 and March 2018 I interviewed the director and the two case managers of the transitional housing program described above. All three were employees of the Community Action Agency. On average, interviews lasted about 30 minutes.

In the third wave, during April and May 2019, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 community stakeholders, primarily current and former members of a city-county homeless advisory board developed in 2005 to oversee the community’s 10-year plan to end homelessness. Participants also included representatives from homeless service provider organizations, community advocates, and local government. Interviews lasted from 30 to 90 minutes.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY RESULTS

This section contains detailed descriptions of the organizational structure and current efforts toward collaboration to address homelessness in the six communities studied for the comparative case study.

Boise, ID

Boise/Ada County is a HUD CoC. The City of Boise is the lead agency and collaborative applicant for the CoC. CATCH, a nonprofit, is the lead agency for coordinated entry, which is branded as Our Path Home. The nonprofit Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) is the HMIS lead. Unlike the City of Boise and CATCH, which are locally based in the city of Boise, ICA is based in Des Moines, IA. In addition to contracting with the Boise/Ada County CoC, they serve as the HMIS manager for around 30 CoCs in 12 states.

Data Collection and Performance Tracking

The Boise/Ada County CoC is not unique in working with an outside organization (and ICA specifically) for HMIS management. In fact, all six of the case study communities studied for this dissertation contracted with ICA as their HMIS lead, with the exception of Fort Collins, CO. The prevalence of outside contracting for HMIS management reveals something significant about how collaborative networks work. In collaborative networks, governance is often conducted by nonprofit organizations that are
also service providers, where organizational expertise lies in addressing homelessness, not information technology or data management. However, in the face of federal requirements and a general movement toward systematized data collection and outcomes measurement, these networks must find a way to marshal data expertise. Frequently, they solve that problem by expanding the network, contracting with an outside organization.

This context has given rise to specialized organizations, such as ICA, a nonprofit that has grown very rapidly to fill a niche created by the structure of the federal government’s attempt to measure, track, and award performance among numerous locally organized CoCs. In a way, ICA mediates the relationship between the federal government and localities by collecting and reporting data—and, increasingly, by providing counsel and guidance to local CoCs in complying with federal regulations and putting together more competitive grant applications for the CoC grant program.

At the same time, ICA’s organizational expertise in HMIS management and reporting allows them to be responsive to local reporting needs, whether municipalities are standalone CoCs or part of statewide CoCs. Though HMIS data are collected per federal mandate, these local data can also be useful for local service providers and collaborative governance networks to understand and effectively address homelessness, but statewide HMIS managers do not always have the capacity to manage local data requests or reporting. In Alaska, for example, ICA found the CoCs needed codified strategic plans and a way to prioritize report requests for localities and providers. The statewide HMIS was not able to manage reporting needs. Now, with ICA running the HMIS, they are able to provide local reporting for municipalities that are part of the Balance of State CoC.
ICA’s contracts with CoCs typically encompass fulfilling federal data collection and reporting requirements as well as collaborating with CoCs to monitor and benchmark data quality, to improve data, and to translate their data into action. To improve data quality, ICA helps CoCs monitor data collection. One of the products ICA provides is a data completeness scorecard. It helps CoCs benchmark where they are in terms of getting data into the HMIS, and it can be used to gently prod or shame providers into providing better, more complete data. ICA brings to CoCs the philosophy that data can inform and motivate action, and quality reporting motivates data collection. For communities that work with ICA, dashboarding and data visualization motivated many to get on the HMIS. ICA staff report that they have heard from providers who feel they are able to show the impact they are having.

**Composing Collaborative Networks**

Though Boise stands out among comparison cities for their energy around collaboration, stakeholders there reported Boise has been on a journey over the last three to four years. They started with no strategic plan or coordination around homelessness. Although they had a group charged with coordinating homeless services, according to community leaders, it felt like they were just having meetings in order to have meetings, like they were wasting time. The city was then and still is the lead agency for the CoC in Boise/Ada County, so they are obligated per HUD/HEARTH Act to do some collaboration work (i.e., putting together a required CoC executive committee). But that obligation neither forced them nor, at first, led them to do it well.
Leadership from the mayor’s office kickstarted current collaboration efforts. The mayor’s office remains highly involved, and the city funds 1 FTE within city government for a CoC Director to lead coordination. In the past, the CoC contracted with an external consultant to pull together its executive committee and working groups, but it was not working well. There was little interest, commitment, or leadership. The city decided to commit general funds for a full-time position within the city government. The hope was that the community would come together and this person would serve as a leader.

This experience suggests that, whereas contracting out for technical expertise such as managing an HMIS appears to improve network performance, contracting out for coordination and leadership may not work as well. This suggests that leadership and building collaboration are not simply technical skills, but socially embedded practices that require something beyond technical knowledge or administrative organization. In the case of Boise/Ada County, trust and relationship-building proved crucial to success in convening a more engaged collaborative network.

The work around identifying a viable coordinator for collaboration in Boise/Ada County further reveals the importance of trust and relationships. Before the CoC Director position was created, leaders had considered deputizing a nonprofit, but they ultimately decided government was the right home for homelessness coordination, in part to avoid any perceived conflict of interest. Housing the coordinator within city government also brought the advantage of access to other resources--finance, backend support, etc. Under the current organizational structure, the city provides a backbone for the CoC enterprise--but this arrangement has hinged on the mayor’s support. Evidently, locating a coordinator
position within a well-resourced organization does not guarantee support without backing from a local champion.

In addition to the mayor’s role as champion, Boise has benefited from the work of the mayor’s Director of Partnerships, a relationship builder with a background in fundraising. The Director of Partnerships has worked to bring together partners and funders for new projects (e.g., a permanent supportive housing project). These efforts have the mayor’s backing, and the mayor’s office continues to dedicate staff time to addressing homelessness and proposing new interventions. Having these strong advocates has not only brought the city along, but helped recruit and build up collaborators.

Notably, there is a legacy of animosity between Boise’s city government and its providers. That tension came to a head in a lawsuit years ago over alleged city mismanagement of a shelter. The CoC Director immediately prior to the current one had worked for nearly a decade as a service provider and had preexisting relationships with providers, which helped secure trust and buy-in for renewed city efforts. A commitment to increased transparency has helped, too: posting minutes, sharing data dashboards, etc.

In these ways, the Boise/Ada County CoC has set up a principal in the mayor’s office, a leader for the CoC’s collaborative network who has worked to establish trust between principal and agents. At the same time, the members of the collaborative network have built up and reinforced horizontal connections and trust among service providers. In Boise, providers and people in the homelessness services space are geographically near one another and know each other or have been able to get to know one another. Face-to-face meetings of local providers help reinforce relationships in a way that conference calls, annual meetings, or representatives and delegates may fail to
do for statewide groups. The ability for all involved to be physically present is an important advantage of local collaborative work.

About five years ago, when Boise began what stakeholders call its journey toward reinvigorated collaboration, leaders in the mayor’s office and CoC members were simultaneously working on setting up coordinated entry, taking control of their HMIS data, and taking ownership of the CoC lead position. The city hired a CoC Director who led outreach to a variety of institutions that intersect homelessness, including criminal justice, jails, hospitals, etc. The intent (and outcome) was to build ground-level investment in confronting homelessness. This work pulled together diverse stakeholders to agree on a shared vision and think at a systems level. It also brought providers together in a more focused way to solve some of their own systems problems. To start, they held brainstorming and visioning sessions with flipcharts and sticky notes. They were a broad-based group to ensure providers and others felt they had input into the system that was set up. The key was to help providers see themselves as part of a larger system and to raise awareness. Boise/Ada County’s focus on building a broad-based membership shows the extent to which it has become necessary for communities to build collaborative networks to support work such as addressing homelessness. In part, this is because homelessness is a complex social problem whose solutions require coordination and co-production of public goods, across community sectors.

Now, a sense of shared mission and priorities keep the network focused and members engaged. The Boise/Ada County CoC has made a concerted effort to simplify its strategic plans. When the city created the CoC Director position, Boise had, on paper, a 10-year plan. However, committee members found that it was not a living document:
few people had read it, referred to it, or used it to guide intentional work. During the governance overhaul, the mayor’s office and CoC committee led a new strategic planning process that was more inclusive and resulted in a three-page plan with four initiatives—a short, simple, accessible plan with broad buy-in and energy behind it.

Around that time, the Boise/Ada County CoC overhauled its governance. It refreshed the membership of the executive committee, which had been composed of the same people for a long time and had become non-functional. New members, stakeholders reported, reinvigorated the work with fresh energy and new perspectives. At the same time, the CoC reorganized its structure and reworked its policies and procedures. Before this overhaul, the CoC had many working groups with loose charters and voluntary membership. They tended to be unproductive. The CoC revamped the governance structure with tighter bounds on executive membership. They retired all working groups and formed four standing subcommittees to replace them. Following the reorganization, all members are appointed, and all subcommittees are staffed and have a designated chair. Subcommittees include (a) planning and development, (b) score and rank for federal Notices of Funding Availability (NOFAs), (c) data and performance for HMIS, and (d) coordinated entry. The group has the flexibility to form advisory work groups as needed. For example, they formed a New Path advisory committee to oversee the development of a new permanent supportive house (PSH) project and a Valor Point advisory committee for a veterans project.

Boise demonstrates how not only trust but perceived value are important to putting together collaborative governance structures. To encourage participation in collaboration, Boise leaders have structured meetings to share information, give time for
networking and training, and generally to make participation valuable. Now, instead of being perceived as a waste of time, meetings are set up as provider forums that offer a learning opportunity and collaborative time plus a training opportunity quarterly.

Networking Governance

As a case study, Boise reveals how the organization of federal assistance programs into separate block grants requires communities to come together to create a cohesive network and plan that ties together disparate funding streams and programs. In Boise, as for many communities across the United States, this means finding a way to weave together CoC grants with Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and HOME funds that may be allocated to different governing bodies (e.g., city or state government rather than a CoC) but that support the same community mission (housing and community development).

Tying HUD-backed work together across housing and homelessness makes sense from a city administration and reporting perspective since the city has to provide feedback to HUD in multiple areas. In Boise, homelessness is connected to mainstream housing and community development activities by staff co-located in city government. That physical proximity and shared space makes it easier to share information and coordinate work. Both the CoC and CDBG are run through the city’s Housing Department, though by different people. The CoC Director has been invited to join the Housing Department’s scoring and ranking committee and to sit in on the scoring and review of CDBG applications, where she was able to answer questions from citizen reviewers about programs and clarify elements in applications that might have otherwise
led them to discount an applicant. As the Boise CoC has improved its HMIS and data collection, having a strong and well-coordinated CoC with excellent data is beneficial to city-wide HUD reporting efforts, augmenting applications and reporting for other federal grants.

Beyond the government-level networking, the Boise CoC and City of Boise have also used funding structures to encourage collaboration in a variety of ways. Although federal funds augment what the city provides, the City of Boise itself invests general funds for programs. The City of Boise funds the CoC Director position. Once the city stepped up to take the lead with its pocket book, others were more willing to come along. In addition to supporting 1 FTE for the CoC Director, the city has a federal HMIS grant that makes it possible for the city to cover fees for the HMIS contract now so that providers do not have to pay. The city also uses CDBG and general funds to incentivize collaboration. They give providers the message that if they want access to grant dollars, they must use the HMIS and performance metrics. The Rescue Mission shelters, which do not receive CoC funds, were most reluctant to join the effort, but eventually even they joined in collaboration meetings and are now talking about using the HMIS. Boise leaders used the carrot of HMIS funding and stick of convincing funders such as the United Way and hospital systems to threaten to pull funding from providers that did not participate with the CoC and HMIS. Faced by the prospect of losing funding, reluctant providers are coming around. Those funders in question included the United Way and the hospital systems.

In this effort, Boise looked to Houston as a model because their funding community has become very strategic around homelessness and because Houston as a
city has done an exemplary job in addressing homelessness. The funders there essentially pool their money in a pot and let the CoC decide how to spend it, following the Funders Together to End Homelessness model. Along this model, Boise had tried to launch a funders forum with private funders who have been frustrated with the many piecemeal grant applications all chipping away at pieces of homelessness or poverty. The funders wanted a more coordinated community approach. Some of them have been toying with the idea of a consolidated grant application to the funders forum, but they still have to figure out the grant structure, not wanting to replace existing grants, but perhaps offering a new funding source to incentivize change.

In the meantime, discrete projects have been more successful in attracting investment and have also brought together broad networks. Boise’s new permanent supportive housing (PSH) project, for instance, has been successful in attracting outside investment. The hospitals expect to realize cost savings by having high utilizers housed, so they are paying for supportive services in the PSH project. The city made the same appeal to the county jail. There will be an outcome evaluation of the project to see whether it has successfully reduced the high utilizer use of services. Banks and large corporations—plus the real estate market—are as-yet-untapped community resources that the CoC plans to pursue as potential funders. The mayor’s Director of Community Partnerships will likely play a key role in approaching them.

Boise leaders have found that projects can focus attention and bring people together initially, though collaborative infrastructure is necessary for ongoing work. For introducing change, a concrete project is good for bringing people together. For example, Boise has been working on a PSH project that will combine LIHTC funds, hospital funds
for supportive services, and funding from the city and county. Focusing on the project has helped generate excitement and bring in new partners. Ada County--like the rest of Idaho--is politically conservative and, historically, has not been very active on addressing homelessness, even though the CoC extends to include all of Ada County. However, things began to change last year when Ada County agreed to collaborate on the new Housing First PSH program. One of the main motivations was reducing the cost of serving super utilizers. With Boise State University, the CoC conducted a study to look at top super utilizer costs. After seeing that data, the county came on board because of the promise to reduce jail stays and indigent costs. County commitment may increase further with Commissioner Lachiondo’s election to the Ada County Commission: she had previously driven the Housing First PSH project as a member of the Boise mayor’s staff. Hospitals came on board as funding partners, too, because of the promise to reduce use of emergency medical services. Now the hospitals are helping to fund supportive services for the housing program.

Boise leaders also use local data reporting to gain buy-in from providers and funders. Years ago, Idaho had a statewide HMIS, housed with the Idaho Housing and Finance Association. But that state agency had little capacity for reporting, and it was terribly difficult for Boise providers to get their own HMIS data extracted from the state system. Eventually, Boise leaders pushed to break up the statewide implementation in order to get access to their local, historical data. The Boise CoC issued an RFP for HMIS lead and ended up contracting with ICA out of Iowa. Since then, there has been increased buy-in to the HMIS and much more interest among providers--both CoC-funded providers and others--in participating in the HMIS. The CoC has even seen more interest
from funders now that there is data to back applications. The Boise CoC now has near-
100% HMIS participation (and anticipates reaching 100% bed coverage once the Rescue
Mission joins). Especially for providers who do not receive federal funds--and who
therefore have no obligation to participate in the HMIS--ICA’s data dashboards were a
powerful incentive to contribute data.

Funding and data are also key components of maintaining accountability toward
the community’s strategic goals and initiatives. HMIS reports on data quality and
performance outcomes have also been critical in keeping people accountable.
Additionally, the CoC Director emphasizes following through on assignments from
meeting to meeting, helping to ensure the group maintains forward momentum.

In terms of network formation and collaborative governance, funding and data
have become ties that bind agent and principal. The Boise/Ada County CoC has been
able not only to assemble but to hold together and even expand a collaborative network--
even beyond the federal requirements for a CoC--to pull in nearly all homeless service
providers in the community. They have done so in a way that appears inclusive and
democratic, but at the same time, this collaborative network has aligned policymakers,
funders, and service providers. Could it crowd out innovation or outsider advocacy?

Advocacy

In the Boise/Ada County CoC, efforts to control messaging around homelessness
are clear. Collectively, these efforts are intended to head off outsider advocacy, protest,
or contention generally around homelessness. The city has attempted to brand efforts
around homelessness in an inclusive way to appeal to a wide segment of the community.
The city initiative around homelessness is called *Grow Our Housing*—they intentionally broadened the focus to housing, not just homelessness, in order to appeal to funders who are turned off by the idea of affordable housing or homelessness. After getting this broader initiative off the ground, they are now adding homelessness back in. At the same time, the CoC itself has developed branding to increase its visibility. At first, there was little to no community awareness of the CoC executive committee or its work, but that is increasing now: Boise has branded their CoC and coordinated entry as Our Path Home and developed a unified message and image, so all points of entry point to the same place.

Communications are intended to inspire community buy-in. Leaders try to avoid fear-based messaging and instead keep messaging positive, focusing on hope and the achievability of ending homelessness in Boise given current numbers. This is perceived as important to Boise because they are experiencing rapid population growth and want to keep things positive. As they grow, they are also cognizant of the need to avoid the paths of Seattle, San Francisco, and others when it comes to homelessness and housing.

Boise leaders have worked to build public engagement through communication, inclusive but unified messaging, and transparency. Three or four years ago, the mayor began hosting housing and homelessness roundtables. Those ran their course and are now morphing into an annual summit, which is intended to build engagement. The summit will also be used to meet federal requirements for annual meetings of the CoC. It will be led by a professional facilitator, include roundtables, and solicit feedback from the community. Gathering community feedback is intended to help build buy-in for the PSH project.
Fort Collins, CO

Fort Collins is part of the Colorado Balance of State CoC, which is composed primarily of rural areas and small municipalities. Colorado also has two urban CoCs: metropolitan Denver and the Colorado Springs area. Faced with a rapidly growing metropolitan population, Weld and Larimer Counties--home to Fort Collins and Greeley--are in the process of forming a third metropolitan CoC. Although HUD is focused on encouraging CoC mergers, not splits, stakeholders in Northern Colorado have argued that large, rural states in the middle of the country are facing different circumstances than those on the coasts. At this point, however, they remain part of the Balance of State CoC.

Localizing Governance

In their efforts to form a new Northern Colorado (NoCo) CoC, Weld and Larimer Counties have received significant support from HUD’s Communities of Practice Technical Assistance (TA) program. Leaders credit this program with increasing local engagement as people have learned more about HUD’s CoC structure and its potential. Through this process, providers and other stakeholders have come to understand CoCs not as hoops to jump through for federal funding, but as an organizational mechanism to solve problems, encourage and enable collaboration, and successfully end homelessness. HUD TA has also assisted the community in determining the impact on funding of forming a new CoC by determining what the new federally determined funding need and allocation would be and whether current funding is proportional to that need. Although the potential funding impact varies from community to community, leaders were advised that a CoC might expect to lose 5% or 10% of current funding when it first breaks away
from a larger CoC. The move to form a new CoC is not, therefore, primarily about increasing federal funding availability, but instead about increasing local control over that funding.

For a new NoCo CoC, more localized action could improve local fundraising efforts as leaders build networks and control messaging and advocacy. The new, more local CoC, leaders hope, will be able to make a clearer pitch to potential funders. As part of a Balance of State CoC, local service providers had difficulty convincing funders that money given to the CoC would stay local and not be used in some of the 50 other counties that were part of the CoC. A new local CoC could clarify the structure and organizational boundaries and make it clearer to funders that CoC work happens locally, and that the CoC will be able to layer federal funds with other types of funding. Like funders, leaders hope, providers may feel more engaged with a local CoC. A more local CoC could foster a stronger community contract, where participants feel like they have to accomplish work and play by the rules so they can put in a strong application to HUD and bring more funding back directly to their community and to the funded agencies in the community that they care about.

Unlike Boise, where the city—with strong support from the mayor—plays a lead role in collaborative governance, the City of Fort Collins has only a limited role. Although the city’s strategic plan states the goal of making homelessness brief and rare, its actual involvement in coordination around homelessness is minimal. The City of Fort Collins has partnered to host a community conversation on available services and gaps. The summit was intended to present a unified message to the general public and make them more aware of existing programs so rogue citizens do not start up duplicative
services. But aside from the summit and landlord mitigation fund (discussed below), the city has not taken the lead when it comes to addressing homelessness. As a result, efforts are being led by nonprofit organizations and the United Way—a case, it appears, of a nonprofit organization stepping up to address a governance void.

**Governance Structure**

In Fort Collins, local collaboration around homelessness is led by Homeward 2020, a 10-year organization incorporated as a 501c3 to oversee initiatives related to homelessness and to drive collaboration. Homeward 2020 has a two-board organizational structure: it has an executive board and a collaborative board. On the executive board sits the executive director of the United Way, members of the city government and city council, service providers, landlords, and the like. The collaborative board comprises more providers.

Homeward 2020’s purpose is to be a strategic think tank charged with developing innovative and collaborative approaches to addressing homelessness. But unlike more permanent institutions in other communities, Homeward 2020 is intended to be a temporary, 10-year entity that will sunset in 2020. At that point, collaboration work may be turned over to a newly formed NoCo CoC encompassing Weld and Larimer Counties. Homeward 2020 is, in essence, a temporary organization that is spearheading initial coordinating and assembling pieces to put new projects in place, begin more concerted data collection, and then turn over the work to more institutionalized providers or collaborative organizations.
In the broader Weld and Larimer Counties area, collaboration is led by the United Way, which has dedicated staff and funding for capacity building around homelessness coordination and coordinated assessment and housing placement. The executive director of the Larimer County United Way sits on the Homeward 2020 executive board, and the Weld County United Way has coordinated efforts to form a new CoC. The United Way also houses and pays for a full-time staff position to lead coordination efforts and for a full-time staff person for the area’s Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement Specialist.

Collaboration in Fort Collins has been very project-oriented and has not yet become institutionalized as a system. Homeward 2020 was founded in 2010 with significant financial support from individual philanthropists who wanted to end homelessness. However, the organization remained rather uninfluential until around 2017 when they began to gain traction by focusing on a specific project, the Housing First Initiative, which is housed under a provider organization: Homeward Alliance. Homeward Alliance has an organizational advantage in leading the coordination necessary to launch the Housing First Initiative: they are the lead agency among four nonprofits collocated in the Murphy Center, a one-stop-shop that is home to nearly two dozen service providers.

Though systemic, institutionalized collaboration is nascent, the Housing First Initiative has effectively sparked cross-sector collaboration around this particular project. The project is supported by five newly created project-based vouchers administered through Housing Catalyst, the local Public Housing Authority (PHA), and funded by marijuana tax dollars. Landlords have partnered in a variety of ways, including by
offering short-term leases for people escaping domestic violence, giving 24 hours advance notice for new project clients before posting units publicly, negotiating agreements to house sex offenders, voluntarily offering units at discounted tiered rent (e.g., 30% of income the first month with gradual steps up) outside of a formal subsidy program, and more. Project leaders have worked hard to diversify available paths into housing by developing creative, custom landlord partnerships. To facilitate outreach to landlords, Homeward Alliance has a landlord engagement committee, which works on shared messaging and communication with landlords--not only convincing landlords to participate in the program but also making sure that only one service provider calls one landlord on behalf of one client so landlords are not inundated with calls and do not get an artificially inflated sense of market demand for units.

The Housing First Initiative demonstrates how focusing on a target population--e.g., super utilizers--can help marshal community resources. Like other comparison communities, Fort Collins is working with the Frequent Utilizer System Engagement (FUSE) program though the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH). Through FUSE, they have received technical assistance and are planning to set up a social impact bond. Players at the table include UC Health, the jail, city police, primary care physicians who accept Medicaid, and 911 dispatch. Through FUSE, they have also received guidance in establishing business associate agreements and data use agreements for data sharing across systems.
Funding and Influence

Fort Collins provides a case of networked governance operating in a resource-rich environment. Although a NoCo CoC might lose out on some federal funding, it benefits from unique funding sources available to Colorado organizations, particularly funding allocated by the state out of marijuana tax revenue. Some of this revenue has been earmarked by the state for homeless solutions and is awarded through an open funding process. Additionally, Fort Collins benefits from a relatively wealthy population base, having both the highest median income and home value of the communities studied.

It appears that wealth translates into philanthropy. In fact, Homeward 2020 as an initiative was launched because of interest and philanthropic backing provided by a wealthy individual. Whereas collaboration in Boise is being pushed forward by the political heft of the mayor’s office, in Fort Collins it is buoyed by available funding. Homeward 2020 maintains its leadership role in part by helping to raise and direct funds. The organization sometimes has its own funding available to distribute to providers, usually through private donations from the wealthy founders, as well as through a contract with the City of Fort Collins to provide actionable data about the Housing First Initiative. The Homeward 2020 director also seeks out additional funding opportunities--grants, social impact bonds, etc.--and either applies directly or, if eligibility requires an entity that provides direct services, refers funding opportunities to service providers who are eligible. With this funding, Homeward 2020 can partner with nonprofits and direct funding toward them to help accomplish its goals.
This influence over funding in turn gives Homeward 2020 some influence over providers. The organization can attach strings to funding in order to incentivize desired actions. For example, the City of Fort Collins funds a mitigation fund for landlords, but limits participation to landlords who are part of the coordinated assessment and housing placement program. The fund is managed by Neighbor to Neighbor, a nonprofit, which also provides first month’s rent up to $500 for people exiting homelessness, and has materials available about tenant education, braiding together multiple programs to increase impact.

Data Collection

Colorado has a statewide HMIS implementation using Bitfocus. Locally, data collection has focused on the Housing First Initiative and is largely managed by the provider organization Homeward Alliance, which could become the HMIS lead for the newly formed CoC. The new CoC would continue to be part of the statewide HMIS, from which it would extract its own local data. Since everything in the statewide HMIS is coded by CoC number, software developers have said it will be easy to pull local data. On the back end, developers will change a setting so all the data will be restricted to the new CoC.

With regard to local data, Homeward Alliance is in a unique position: they are the lead agency among four nonprofits who cohabitate in the Murphy Center, a one-stop shop with 20 service providers. Because Homeward Alliance staffs intake and the front desk, they are able to collect data across providers. They also try to attend case consultation and partner meetings whenever possible in order to keep data updated. Homeward
Alliance is already setting up data dashboards, working with contracted web developers so staff will simply have to upload a quarterly spreadsheet to update the dashboard. It appears that Homeward Alliance’s location in the network of providers positions it to become a lead in the governance structure.

**Madison, WI**

Madison is part of the Dane County CoC, which is headed by a CoC Coordinator who is a City of Madison employee. The CoC Coordinator position is funded by a CoC Planning Grant. Though the CoC serves the entire county, being located primarily in Madison works for the CoC because most services are also located in the city. The CoC has toyed with other ways of organizing the lead agency, including designating a single agency that receives CoC funds—but that was considered a conflict of interest. They also considered creating a new nonprofit to lead the CoC, but that idea was rejected because the CoC would have lost so many shared resources from the city that help support the CoC (e.g., space, infrastructure, office support). The City of Madison has always been the CoC collaborative applicant for Dane County, but they only created the coordinator position two years ago. Previously, the CoC coordination work was done by city staff in between their other responsibilities. Having a full-time dedicated coordinator has allowed more effective collaboration work. As for data, Madison and Dane County are part of a statewide HMIS system. The state of Wisconsin contracts with the Institute for Community Alliances (ICA).

Because the CoC Coordinator is located within the City of Madison’s Community Development department, she is able to consult on city funds that are directed toward
people experiencing homelessness in order to braid together multiple funding streams to support strategic efforts to address homelessness. For example, the coordinator consults on the city’s Consolidated Plan and CDBG activities. In fact, part of the coordinator’s job description requires work on the Consolidated Plan and helps to justify the position within the city. The coordinator’s influence on CDBG activities is less formal: Madison uses CDBG to offer incentives to affordable housing developers who plan to serve people experiencing homelessness, and developers sometimes come to the CoC Coordinator for advice about how to do that. The CoC Coordinator and city government are able to manage any potential tension between CoC objectives and city objectives. Occasionally the city and CoC might have diverging visions, but in that case, the coordinator’s city supervisor understands that CoC preferences trump the city’s vision.

Governance Structure and Network Membership

The Dane County CoC has an executive board as well as around eight committees. Members are mostly CoC agencies, but sometimes community members or people with lived experience attend. CoC agencies tend to be the most consistent participants because they feel obligated to be there, and the CoC Coordinator has struggled to get others to participate. In an effort to broaden participation, the CoC membership meeting is an open meeting, and the CoC Coordinator has pitched committee participation as a leadership opportunity: In the service industry, there is not much room for upward growth. Agencies tend to have frontline case workers and an executive director. For frontline case workers, serving on committees can be an opportunity for professional development and building personal leadership skills. The
CoC Coordinator has also asked provider agencies to put in job descriptions that part of
service providers’ roles is to sit on committees and work on collaborations. The aim is for
employers to recognize the value of that work, to be sure employees who participate are
being compensated for their time, and for supervisors to recognize the importance and
value of taking that time to do collaborative work.

With a new full-time coordinator, the Dane County CoC is pursuing more
partnerships, but still lacks formal partnerships with strong segments of the community
that could be crucial to further collaboration. Although Madison and Dane County have
not worked closely or in creative ways with their local PHA, leaders suggested looking at
the Milwaukee CoC as an example of PHA partnership. In Milwaukee, the CoC worked
with the local PHA to prioritize Section 8 for chronically homeless and, along with that,
the county is funding supportive services for those households. Likewise, the Dane
County CoC also has not yet developed a strong relationship with the university.

Funding and Business Involvement

In addition to CoC funds from HUD and some city general funds, other major
funding sources for addressing homelessness in Madison are Dane County and the United
Way. County funding mostly goes toward shelters, and the United Way especially
focuses on programs for households with children. The Dane County CoC is working on
outreach to healthcare and business, including large corporations with a major presence
in the area and downtown business owners. These efforts remain a work in progress. For
the past several years, the CoC has been talking about an H2 initiative (housing +
healthcare). They have brought together providers from both sectors, and now more
recently they have brought people with decision-making ability to the table. One hospital has hired a street outreach worker who is active on CoC committees. And, as Madison is thinking about the need for a new shelter in town, they are hoping the hospital will help fund it—perhaps by funding a few medical beds.

As for major corporations, the CoC is working on getting the EMR provider Epic to help fund homelessness initiatives, recognizing that the Madison-based business has brought many new people to the community, leading to the development of new, less affordable housing. The CoC also works with Downtown Madison Inc., to reach out to business owners who do not want people sleeping outside their storefronts, trying to get them to help fund homeless services.

Madison demonstrates how the devolution of federal safety net programs has required communities to build more inclusive networks, in part in an effort to find funding to provide public goods such as homeless services. In Madison, the CoC leadership has framed an appeal to private businesses in terms of providing public goods—a case where not only nonprofits but private businesses, too, may network together to patch the hollow state.

**Advocacy**

In Madison as in Boise, CoC leaders see advocacy as messaging and education, focusing on an optimistic message of progress and solutions. Consistently across these cases, collaborative networks shy away from outsider advocacy or critical messaging. Madison has used strategic planning and education to improve approaches to addressing homelessness. According to leaders, Madison had just been maintaining the status quo
with homelessness, not working to end it, until they started changing the conversation around their work. Part of that was convincing providers of the importance of low barrier housing first approaches that do not make services mandatory.

Omaha, NE

Omaha, NE is part of a three-county CoC that leads collaboration around homelessness for the Omaha and Council Bluffs area. The CoC comprises Douglas and Sarpy Counties in Nebraska and Pottawattamie County in Iowa. It is led by a 501c3 nonprofit organization called the Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless (MACCH). Outside of the Omaha area, Nebraska has another metro CoC in the Lincoln area and a Balance of State CoC that encompasses the remaining counties in Nebraska. As for data collection, the state of Nebraska has a statewide HMIS with four organizations involved: the state’s three CoCs plus Community Action Nebraska (CAN). Each of those four organizations has a certain number of seats on the HMIS board, which is a statewide board to set policies and procedures for HMIS. Reporting is done by CoC (i.e., MACCH for Omaha) or, for individual program reporting, by agencies that run those programs.

Institutionalizing Governance

Until about one year ago, MACCH was connected to the University of Nebraska, Omaha (UNO). UNO has a nonprofit incubator, where MACCH got its start. MACCH gradually separated from the incubator program but relied on UNO for office support, including payroll and HR. About one year ago, they separated operations completely,
although MACCH is still located in space on the UNO campus. For MACCH, starting in the UNO incubator was helpful during their early years when the organization was small. Now that they have grown, they are better able to take on the responsibilities of a standalone organization, including writing their own policies and procedures and accounting. For MACCH, the advantage of becoming independent has been the flexibility in adding staff, designing positions, looking for more suitable office space, setting insurance and vacation policies, and the like. MACCH’s experience suggests these benefits might not be as relevant for a smaller organization of only one or two full-time staff; for such an organization, it would likely make more sense to stay under the umbrella of another organization to benefit from shared resources. A disadvantage of becoming more independent is the increased need to fundraise for staff and other needs.

The question of how to right size an organization is an interesting one when thinking about collaborative governance structures. The case of Omaha suggests that, over time, networks may develop organizations that institutionalize themselves, gaining critical mass to become self-sustaining. In Omaha, initial investment in building MACCH as an organization came from the network of service providers who were interested in strengthening CoC governance and also from community support, including the UNO incubator program. In a sense, the size and heft of a governing organization may reflect community interest and investment and network strength or the existence of resources--outside of the network (e.g., UNO)--to support the growth of new institutions. Likely, insufficient staffing hampers capacity, whereas a more robust organization can begin to be self-supporting through grant writing and fundraising. But growing an organization takes work. In its early years, MACCH had been just two people who were stretched thin
writing grants and policies, hosting meetings, and carrying on day-to-day operations. Now they have hired a new coordinated entry manager and posted for an administrative position; when new grants are awarded, they plan to hire three more staff for a total staff of seven.

The MACCH director compared this organization to the Springfield, Missouri CoC with which he had worked as a provider. In Springfield, the city contracted with two individuals to do the day-to-day work. But both of those people worked with provider agencies, so their time was divided between collaboration and agency. No one was fully dedicated to overseeing and thinking about the collaboration organization. And because the positions were contracted out, there was no dedicated person thinking about it all the time.

Community-level Advocacy

As MACCH has grown, they have experienced some growing pains. Having a nonprofit as lead entity for collaboration can be complicated. The board, for instance, must fulfill a dual purpose: it is charged with being the governing board for the nonprofit and with doing the coordination work around homelessness in the community. Unlike a traditional nonprofit board, the MACCH board advocates not for a specific point of view but on behalf of community-wide interests. For some board members who are familiar with serving on nonprofit boards but unfamiliar with homelessness coordinating, that dual responsibility is a struggle. The diversity of board members and their affiliations also means that advocacy and fundraising can be tricky: members come from organizations with divergent interests. To address these challenges, MACCH is working
on developing a unified message around their core values and priorities in the community.

This experience highlights the way in which collaborative governance may attempt--for better or worse--to co-opt advocacy efforts in a community. Vocal outside advocacy, criticism, or opposition would signal dissension from the network’s unified message. To establish and hold together a network, it appears, it may be necessary to silence or at least separate from outside, oppositional advocacy.

Unifying Funders

MACCH is currently working on bringing together different funding organizations to streamline their applications and evaluations by asking the same questions and requiring the same performance measures. The goal is to see commonly used metrics adopted across the community, which would simplify HMIS data collection and reporting.

At the same time as MACCH has been working with funders to get them on the same page, a local foundation in Omaha recently pulled together nearly all of the local foundations to talk about homelessness. Though initially a one-time event, there is discussion about trying to institutionalize a regular funders forum, perhaps as a quarterly or biannual meeting. The goal is not to tell foundations where to spend money, but to inform them about needs and efforts underway in the community. For example, the forum could offer a means to tell funders about the fact that coordinated entry exists and how it works so that funders could choose to encourage participation by asking applicants whether they are participating in coordinated entry.
Such efforts to align funding are only in the early stages in Omaha, as are efforts to connect homelessness coordination with mainstream housing resources, the city’s Consolidated Plan, and the CDBG process. Going forward, leaders hope, aligning funding with strategic priorities would make it easier to braid together multiple funding sources to support new initiatives around homelessness (e.g., combining Nebraska Housing Trust Fund dollars with ESG and CoC grants plus foundation support). For now, MACCH works with the City of Omaha, which is the ESG recipient, and also assists with the CAPER and provides HMIS data as relevant to City grant applications. MACCH has worked closely with the City on the ESG RFP and score card, and beginning with the 2019 cycle will split the ESG administrative allocation with the City for that work. Beyond the City, MACCH also provides reports to the state finance authority, which manages the state’s housing trust fund, and to the United Way.

Policy Influence

Further integrating homelessness coordination with mainstream housing and city programs might someday extend to MACCH’s advising on local ordinances and policies, though Omaha is not there yet. MACCH’s influence on local policy is mostly informal. A county commissioner sits on the MACCH board, offering one way of relaying information. The director of MACCH also has a standing meeting every other month with the city planning department to discuss homelessness and housing. MACCH sees a need to develop clearer mechanisms to communicate information to local leaders when they consider new ordinances, new housing developments, or other changes likely to affect people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
MACCH faces the challenge of maximizing engagement from a broad-based board by avoiding meetings focused on detailed policies and procedures, instead using board time for higher level strategic planning. The MACCH board is composed of about 17 members, including service providers, local government, local foundations, mental health providers, healthcare providers, developers of affordable housing, and other human service or supportive service providers. Because MACCH is the lead agency for the CoC, board meetings sometimes become narrowly focused on HUD policies. The board must carry out quite a bit of mandatory policy review and change and discussion of HUD rules and guidance. But non-HUD providers and board members from other sectors have little interest in those meetings. To prevent board meetings from being bogged down in HUD details, MACCH is setting up a HUD-specific work group to free board meeting time to talk about more widely relevant topics like affordable childcare access, transportation, and other strategic priorities.

**Trust and Relationship-Building**

MACCH has also struggled to build trust and relationships among stakeholders. Several years ago, sensing that the provider community was fractured and siloed, a local foundation hired a consultant to begin the work of setting up a community of practice. The community is now on their second year of the process. They hold monthly meetings where participants engage in visioning and trust building to find common goals and work together. The work focuses on overcoming the “midwest nice” tendency for people to bite their tongues when they disagree and instead wait for the meeting after the meeting, which ultimately leads to dissension and dysfunction at subsequent meetings. The group
has been working on the need to feel comfortable disagreeing openly and still knowing that they are all ok with each other. During the beginning stages of building this trust, meetings benefit from skilled facilitation to increase participation and engagement and reflection and even disagreement--asking participants how they feel about proposed steps, how they think it might impact their agency, any concerns they have for their agency. To build successful collaboration, the group cannot just assume silence means people are willing to come along.

Des Moines, IA

In Des Moines, coordination around homelessness is led by the Polk County CoC, a 501c3 nonprofit that was incorporated in 2013 (however, the City of Des Moines remains the collaborative applicant for CoC funding). The CoC nonprofit has one full-time employee whose office is located with the Polk County Housing Trust Fund, which facilitates connection with community partners. The Trust Fund also serves as fiscal agent for the CoC nonprofit.

Before the CoC nonprofit was incorporated in 2013, Polk County had long had a coordinating council for around 25 years. The council had taken a variety of forms and was mostly provider-led. With changes in HUD requirements and CoC structure, the group knew they had to change. So they created the current board, which has 25 members, most of whom are not service providers (though some are). The board includes faith community leaders, members of the legal field, education providers (i.e., Des Moines Public Schools), substance abuse providers, and similar stakeholders.
Problems with Agents as Principals

Des Moines, as a case, provides an example of a system in which agents (i.e., service providers) served as principals (i.e., the governing body or coordinating council). Before 2013, though the City of Des Moines nominally led governance as the CoC collaborative applicant, in actuality, collaborative governance occurred at the level of the provider-led coordinating council. Des Moines’s experience is illustrative of some of the tensions that arise as governance power is devolved or dissolved among service providers.

The transition from a provider-led system to the current board was rocky at first, but providers now support the new board. The organization of the nonprofit was perceived by some as a loss of control. Its broader, not-entirely-provider-based membership challenged the dominance of providers in setting the agenda. Currently, some providers serve on the CoC board itself, and others serve on committees or workgroups. The board previously had a directors council made up of directors from different agencies, but that group is currently on hiatus because its goals were unclear. The board does maintain a service council, which is made up mostly of frontline staff. The service council is training oriented, bringing in speakers and training on topics such as serving LGBT populations, domestic violence, and equal access. Providers also serve on a service coordination group that is working to coordinate services.

The decision to incorporate as an independent 501c3 was not based on a strong preference for that structure but more on political expediency. The structure allowed the CoC to be perceived as independent. Given the politics of the community, the CoC
needed a board that was independent of city and county government. The independent board also made sense because the CoC wanted to be free to innovate above and beyond the restrictions of what HUD would fund. Though the CoC is a one-employee small nonprofit, it benefits from being housed within a larger organization: the director can draw on the Trust Fund’s six staff members for administrative support, graphic design, and other specialized skills. The CoC contracts as needed for other services, such as consultation on HUD regulations.

*Designing a Coordinator Role*

Des Moines’s experience suggests that, in determining appropriate staff size, communities should consider the purpose of staffing a collaborative organization. Is the purpose to minimally keep the board and workgroups running and type minutes, or to fundraise, or to lead community planning? Those are political decisions about goals that need to be made before choosing a board and staffing structure.

The Polk County CoC has only had a full-time director for about three years. When the CoC decided to hire an executive director, they asked whether they only wanted to play for HUD CoC money, or whether they wanted to expand the vision and purpose of the board to further community collaboration. The board affirmed the decision to play a broader role in the community, and so they hired an executive director and, recently, have been engaged in developing a community plan around homelessness. Without a full-time staff person, it would be difficult for a volunteer board to take on the additional work of community planning. The staff provides necessary support as board members undertake strategic planning.
Job responsibilities of the CoC director go beyond compliance with HUD CoC requirements. The responsibilities also include the following:

- Facilitate the group’s committees and aid collaboration. In addition to the typical committees required of a CoC, the board has workgroups on racial equity, extreme weather, discharge planning (which may be expanded to include corrections and mental health), and diversion/rapid resolution.
- Manage the board. Keep board members informed and engaged. Develop a new board packet and orientation materials that communicate expectations for board members.
- Oversee HUD programming.
- Grant writing.
- Oversee the community vision and plan. This work is for the community as a whole, not specific to CoC responsibilities. The community plan will have four areas of focus with associated action items, and it will also outline core beliefs (e.g., Housing First, racial equity). As part of the planning process, board members have been going on site visits, holding community meetings, and doing strategic planning. They have engaged consultants for this work.
- Navigating local politics. The Polk County CoC encompasses the county, the City of Des Moines, and other nearby municipalities, plus must grapple with state politics by virtue of being located in the state capital.
**Duplication and Efficiency**

As the Polk County CoC has expanded its reach into community collaboration, they have had to find ways to work with other organizations in the community and to avoid duplicating what already exists. One way in which they have done so is by sharing workgroups with other organizations. One of the CoC’s standing committees is the Housing Committee, which is both a CoC committee and a United Way committee. It developed that way because the United Way had launched a collective impact initiative called OpportUnity, and one of their workgroups focused on housing. That group already had many of the same members as would be on the CoC’s Housing Committee. Rather than duplicate and create extra work for overlapping members, they combined, pooling resources as one meeting. The workgroup deals with landlord issues, affordable housing, the LIHTC process, ways for people to move on from PSH, accessing National Housing Trust Fund dollars, and coordinating efforts.

**Networking Nonprofits and Government**

The CoC board also has representatives from county and city government, though the board’s relationships with local government are complicated by the existence of the vestigial Homeless Coordinating Council. The city’s Community Development director sits on the CoC board and grant committee, and that person is also the head of the local PHA. Those connections have enabled the CoC to connect with the PHA over how to use mainstream vouchers to coordinate with homeless providers. Representatives from the county also sit on the board and facilitate coordination and communication between county and CoC.
However, coordination with local government is complicated by the continued operation of the local Homeless Coordinating Council (HCC), which used to make funding decisions before the CoC was strong and active. The HCC includes the mayor, councilors, county supervisors, community foundation, United Way, food pantry, and other major community players. Though its function has largely been duplicated by the CoC, the HCC persists because members feel it connects them to the community. Integrating the CoC and HCC has proved challenging.

Influencing Funders

Despite the legacy of the HCC, the CoC was able to gain legitimacy and influence in the community because it gained buy-in from funders. The Housing Trust Fund and other local funders began telling applicants that participating in centralized intake and committing to Housing First were necessary to receive funding. The also communicated (less explicitly) that the CoC was driving community conversations around homelessness and providers should participate if they wanted to be competitive in their funding applications.

The CoC plans to create a development plan for fundraising that focuses on systems-level activities (so that the board is not competing for funding with providers). Historically, funding for the board has come from Polk County for CoC board operations, the City of Des Moines, and a HUD planning grant. More recently, the board has received money from local foundations for operations and centralized intake, and the director is actively submitting LOIs and applications for other grant opportunities from local business foundations and others. The community plan is expected to facilitate
development by showing potential funders concrete goals and accountability and a sense that their investment will be well placed.

In an interesting way, then, the structure and membership of a network can lend the network legitimacy. In other cases, networks were able to recruit and influence funders because the network was already seen as influential in the community. In Des Moines the reverse is evident: because the nonprofit-led collaborative was able to capture attention and interest from the funding community (in part due to its close ties to the Housing Trust Fund), it was able to gain legitimacy.

*Buy-in for Data Collection*

Those challenges aside, Des Moines benefits from being part of a one-county CoC that is able to focus on local data, coordination, and planning. The community has more flexibility than if they were working with a larger CoC, especially given that they are more urban/suburban than the rest of Iowa. The board’s ability to look at local community needs is key—the needs in Des Moines may not align with state needs. Helpfully, the CoC has 100% HMIS participation and centralized intake (different than coordinated entry), which are both working well. Setting up centralized intake helped increase collaboration and launch conversations. The system was resisted at first, but has gained buy-in as results show its efficacy in prioritizing placement and getting chronically homeless people into PSH now that placement depends less on advocacy and more on demonstrated need.
Communication and Advocacy

Future plans for the CoC are to finish developing a community plan then work on a development plan and a communication plan. The community plan will be a three- or four-year plan with four pillars and associated action steps. Once the community plan is finished and priorities have been distilled, it will be used as the basis for making appeals to businesses and other sectors to support community priorities. The plan will allow more cohesive conversations to occur.

Once the community plan is finalized, part of the board’s purpose will be to communicate the priorities it has set and develop a unified voice for the community. Structurally, having a full-time director for the CoC has provided a single point of contact in the community to have conversations around homelessness and community needs. For example, when a community provider heard about a proposed river redevelopment project, the provider directed the developer to the CoC director, who was able to meet with the developers and communicate the fact that people camp along the river and redevelopment would pose a problem.

For now, the board and director do minimal advocacy work around policy because they do not have the structure or capacity for it. However, the director is working with the United Way on their advocacy plan to support their day on the hill. In the future, they might work with the Balance of State CoC to lobby the state legislature and develop asks around increased state funding.
Unlike the other comparison communities, Cedar Rapids is not a HUD-designated Continuum of Care. Although the community refers to itself as the Linn County Continuum of Care, this is an unofficial designation. The City of Cedar Rapids and Linn County are formally part of the Iowa Balance of State CoC. (To avoid confusion, this report refers to the Linn County Continuum of Care as the Linn County Continuum rather than CoC.) The fact that Cedar Rapids has developed a collaborative governance network outside of any federal requirement makes this case an interesting point of comparison to the other cases considered here.

Membership and Organization

The Linn County Continuum, which leads collaboration around homelessness in the Cedar Rapids area, formed in 2000. It is staffed by a Linn County employee who serves as director. The director provides a single person and point of contact in charge of moving continuum work forward by supporting the board and workgroup subcommittees. The director takes attendance at meetings, records and sends out minutes and agendas, maintains contact lists, and directs data monitoring.

The continuum convenes a large, inclusive, cross-sector collaborative board. Its diverse membership includes criminal justice, food pantries, property managers, shelters, and other service providers. It also includes representatives from different county departments, and city participation has increased over the last three to four years, especially with a focus on different initiatives such as tiny homes, which face zoning restrictions now. The continuum has seen especially involved participation from the...
city’s housing services director, who is active on the continuum board and subcommittees.

The large, inclusive board--which has around 60-member organizations represented at monthly meetings--focuses on networking and information sharing, including receiving reports from subcommittees, which do more detailed work. These meetings are an opportunity for education and awareness about available resources, updates on data, and coordination for a unified voice when needed. The large group is not used for detailed work; when it considers proposals, those come up from subcommittees nearly complete. Standing subcommittees including the following:

- Planning group for a new seasonal overflow shelter
- Public awareness subcommittee, which has recently been working on a cost of homelessness report. This group also regularly sends editorials to the local newspaper and holds events to raise awareness around homelessness.
- Healthcare for the homeless subcommittee, which consists of healthcare providers, behavioral health, substance abuse, and mental healthcare providers plus housing services providers who come together to talk through barriers and issues they are seeing among those they serve. Recently, this committee helped prepare documents along with the Public Health Department about shelter health protocols and disaster protocols for working with people experiencing homelessness.
- Data subcommittee, led by the continuum’s director, and which reports on local data collection
Building Relationships

In line with the philosophy that networking fosters collaboration, the continuum has built opportunities for social interaction outside of meetings. The continuum’s happy hour group is an informal opportunity for providers to collaborate, socialize, and get to know one another.

Data Collection

In addition to convening the board, the Linn County Continuum engages in local data initiatives. These efforts are one of the major functions of the group; in fact, in internal surveys, Linn County Continuum participants name data collection as one of the things the group is doing best. Since 1998, the continuum has conducted a twice-yearly point-in-time count (every January and July). Recently, there has been discussion of increasing the frequency to conduct the count quarterly. The count requires a significant volunteer effort, which is a challenge, but which also keeps people involved and engaged.

Annually during the July point-in-time count, the continuum conducts an Individual and Family Needs Survey, which is a 25-30 question survey fielded at meal sites, shelters, transitional housing projects, county assistance offices, public transportation, and similar community locations. The continuum usually receives around 250 to 300 responses, not just from people experiencing homelessness but also from people categorized as “at risk,” a term the continuum defines broadly based on the fact that people were contacted at a meal site or other place that suggests they are struggling. The Individual and Family Needs survey asks about housing status, eviction history, and other needs, including financial problems, health status, and the like. The survey is used
as a general needs scan. It is not strictly limited to homelessness or housing needs. In the past, for example, the survey identified the need for dental health, which led to the development of a dental health center at Linn County’s federally qualified health center.

In spite of these local data collection activities, like other comparison communities, when it comes to extracting their HMIS data from the state system, this community struggles, too. Since Linn County is part of the Balance of State CoC, much of the data providers enter into the HMIS and coordinated entry system is reported directly to the state. Since Linn County is not itself a CoC, the data cannot be easily extracted at the local level. For example, the Linn County Continuum would like to see local VI-SPDAT numbers (a client intake needs assessment) and to see the number of people recommended for different placements through coordinated entry, but unless agencies individually capture and save that data before sending it on to the state, it is very difficult for the continuum to get it back.

Finding Authority without a Federal Principal

Because the Linn County Continuum is not a HUD designated CoC, it lacks some of the formal authority of other comparison community CoCs. Unlike CoCs, which collaboratively apply for grant funds from HUD, the Linn County Continuum does not have any funding opportunities to offer. In the past, the continuum hosted a fundraising event and redistributed the proceeds to providers, but it has discontinued the event. The continuum has not worked closely with other funders in the community to align community funding priorities with the continuum’s strategic priorities: although two representatives from the local community foundation sit on the continuum board, the
foundation has not built continuum participation into grant criteria or anything along those lines.

County supervisors are appointed to serve on the continuum’s board, but there are no elected city officials among its members. At this point, the continuum’s connection to city policymakers is through board membership overlaps. The city’s housing services director participates in the continuum, and the City of Cedar Rapids designates a spot for a continuum representative on all city boards related to housing. The city recently set up an affordable housing commission, and half of its 25 members must be providers; since most providers are also continuum members, there will be significant overlap in membership. In the future, the continuum hopes to consult more on the city’s Consolidated Planning process.

Overall, the continuum’s primary influence comes from networking and information sharing. The continuum has established itself as the local authority on matters related to homelessness and what they call “at-risk” populations. Although the continuum does not appear to have much formal or institutionalized influence on local government policy, both the city and county seek out input and information from the continuum. For example, the continuum provides training to the Linn County Sheriff’s Department on working with people experiencing homelessness or behavioral health crises. The city has also voluntarily consulted the continuum on proposed ordinances. Around 2015, when the city was considering a panhandling ordinance, they sought input from the continuum, and made changes to the ordinance based on the feedback they received. Currently, the city is considering a SafeCR nuisance abatement measure that would penalize property owners for repeated service calls to an address. The city has
again proactively sought out input from the continuum on this ordinance, and the continuum counseled that the measure could lead to landlords’ being less willing to rent to “problem” tenants, and it could be especially dangerous for people experiencing domestic violence.

Recognizing that information is a commodity, the continuum focuses its meetings around sharing information and networking. Although this strategy has proven effective at getting members to attend and participate in meetings, it has been less effective in generating community action or change. The continuum is in the process of strategic planning, trying to streamline work and translate information and collaboration into action.

One purpose of the continuum’s strategic planning is to identify goals and objectives that are accessible, understandable, agreed upon, and that will drive meetings and action. In the past, the continuum had developed goals, but they were not used to drive meeting agendas, they were not referred back to, and ultimately they were not realized. The group’s strategic planning is beginning with national level goals (e.g., the USICH Open Doors federal strategic plan), which will be adopted and tweaked to fit local needs.

CONTINUUM OF CARE NATIONAL COMPARISON RESULTS

This section presents the results of analysis of data from Continuum of Care organizations across the United States. The CoC dataset contains data on the 397 CoCs organized across the United States. The table below summarizes the organization type for
the lead agency/collaborative applicant for each CoC. For nonprofit, provider, funder, and CAA organizations, a summary of year of incorporation is also given.

Table 10. Number of CoCs and Median Year of Incorporation by Lead Agency Organizational Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead Agency Organizational Type</th>
<th>Number of CoCs</th>
<th>Median Year of Incorporation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>170</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing authority</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Action Agency</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funder</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organizations included in the government category include 94 county governments, 54 municipal governments, 14 state governments, and 8 regional governments or intergovernmental bodies. In some cases, CoCs designate a specific office within the government as lead agency (e.g., Department of Community Development); in other cases, the office is not specified.

The housing authority category consists of public housing authorities, which generally operate at the local or, less frequently, state level. Typically, housing authorities are created by an act of government but operate as independent agencies. Housing agencies often administer major federal housing programs, such as the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program, so that much of their funding comes from the federal government. In that sense, they can be seen as hybrid or quasi-governmental organizations.
The *nonprofit* category refers to nonprofit organizations whose primary mission is to coordinate and support other organizations that provide direct services. As best could be determined, the organizations in this category do not provide direct services. The median year in which these organizations were incorporated is 2002, ranging from 1946 to 2018. For the most part, these organizations have been founded more recently that any of the other categories of lead agencies. Many appear to have been set up in response to the HUD Continuum of Care grant program requirements, filling the need for a collaborative governance organization. The few nonprofits in this category that incorporated before the 1990s appear to provide technical assistance and supportive research and planning services to a range of social service sectors, not homelessness services exclusively.

The *provider* category consists of nonprofit organizations that act as CoC lead agencies but that *also* provide direct services. Most (45) of these provider organizations are homeless services providers. Others are hospitals, behavioral health providers, a university, and a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO), a type of nonprofit affordable housing developer.

*Community Action Agencies* are a special category of nonprofit provider singled out in this analysis because of their organizational distinction. Community Action Agencies were established in 1964 as part of the War on Poverty, so not surprisingly, most trace their founding to the 1960s. They administer the Community Services Block Grant, a federal grant. Community Action Agencies were created through official designation by local or state government and incorporated as public or private nonprofit organizations. They have a tripartite board structure that includes representatives from
local government (elected public officials), representatives from the private sector and business community, and low-income residents. Community Action Agencies provide direct services and also exist to build community collaboration and public/private partnerships around addressing poverty.

Finally, the funder category includes 16 United Way agencies that serve as the lead agencies for their CoCs as well as 2 community foundations. The median year of incorporation for the funders in this dataset is 1964 and ranges from 1926 to 2000.

Organizational Type and Community Size

The geographical and population density context in which a CoC operates could make different organizational forms more advantageous for collaborative governance. Larger, more rural CoCs face the challenge of coordinating across large distances where providers may rarely see each other face-to-face, whereas CoCs in major cities face the challenge of larger, denser populations and, potentially, a greater number of providers and community sectors to coordinate. HUD categorizes CoCs into three groups based on geographical extent: Major Cities CoCs encompass large, dense, urban areas (e.g., Chicago). Smaller Cities, Counties, and Regional CoCs include smaller urban areas (e.g., Omaha) and are often geographically coterminous with one or a few counties (Omaha, for example, is part of a CoC composed of three contiguous counties). Balance of State and Statewide CoCs are generally geographically expansive with low population density, though they may include several smaller cities within their boundaries. The State of South Dakota, for example, is a Statewide CoC, and Cedar Rapids, IA and Fort Collins, CO are both part of Balance of State CoCs that encompass all of the rural counties in
The organizational type of a CoC’s lead agency is associated with the geographical type of the CoC. A chi-square test for independence shows a significant association between CoC geographical type (i.e., whether a CoC is a major city, smaller city, or state) and the lead agency organizational type (chi-squared = 86.508, df = 10, p = 2.63e-14). The table below presents the cross-tabulation of CoCs by lead agency organizational type and geographical type.

**Table 11. CoC Lead Agency Organizational Type by Geographical Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Balance of State and Statewide CoCs N (proportion)</th>
<th>Major Cities N (proportion)</th>
<th>Smaller Cities, Counties, and Regional CoCs N (proportion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAA</td>
<td>1 (.023)</td>
<td>0 (.000)</td>
<td>23 (.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funder</td>
<td>0 (.000)</td>
<td>1 (.021)</td>
<td>17 (.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>12 (.273)</td>
<td>22 (.458)</td>
<td>135 (.449)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing authority</td>
<td>14 (.318)</td>
<td>2 (.042)</td>
<td>6 (.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>12 (.273)</td>
<td>22 (.458)</td>
<td>71 (.236)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>5 (.114)</td>
<td>1 (.021)</td>
<td>49 (.163)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, major cities and smaller cities/counties/regional CoCs tend to have either government or nonprofit lead agencies. By contrast, balance of state/statewide CoCs often have housing authority lead agencies but are also quite likely to have government or nonprofit lead agencies. That is, whereas other CoCs have gravitated their states that are not part of Major Cities or Smaller Cities, Counties, and Regional CoCs.
toward either government or nonprofit (i.e., fairly independent) lead agencies, balance of state/statewide CoCs have not.

**Organizational Type and Permanent Housing Programs**

CoCs annually report to HUD their housing inventory, a count of the number of beds available in the CoC area, broken down by bed type. This section looks at whether and how the distribution of bed types might be related to the organizational type of the lead agency. In particular, this section asks whether organizational type is associated with the percentage of a CoC’s housing inventory that is composed of permanent housing beds. Permanent housing—a category that includes rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and other permanent housing beds—are housing programs that focus on deep, permanent subsidies or other measures to house people experiencing homelessness quickly and long-term. They are contrasted with temporary housing programs, which include emergency shelter, transitional housing, and safe haven beds. Temporary housing programs are time-limited and may also impose strict rules (e.g., sobriety) as a condition of providing housing.

The proportion of permanent housing in a CoC’s housing inventory is used here as a rough proxy measure for the effectiveness of collaborative governance. In large, national experimental studies, permanent housing programs have proven to be the most successful at preventing return to homelessness. Emergency shelters and transitional housing, by contrast, provide temporary shelter but have proven less successful in moving people out of homelessness over the long term (Gubits et al. 2016). Theoretically,
communities with effective collaborative governance structures around homelessness will be both willing and able to establish permanent housing programs.

The boxplots below show the percentage of beds reported in CoCs’ housing inventory counts (HICs) that fall into permanent housing categories (rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and other permanent housing).

![Boxplots showing permanent housing beds as % of total housing inventory by CoC organizational type](image)

*Figure 6. Permanent Housing Beds as % of Total Housing Inventory by CoC Organizational Type*

The results of a one-way ANOVA test show a significant difference in the percent of permanent housing beds across organizational types ($F(5, 390) = 6.692, p = 0.00000536$). I conducted a Tukey test of multiple pairwise comparisons to identify the specific pairwise differences. The table below presents the results of the Tukey test (only pairwise comparisons whose difference was significant at $p < 0.05$ are shown).
Table 12. Results of Tukey Test of Pairwise Comparisons for % of Permanent Housing Beds by Organizational Type of CoC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Lower 95% CI</th>
<th>Upper 95% CI</th>
<th>Adjusted p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funder - CAA</td>
<td>15.71</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>30.39</td>
<td>0.0281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government - CAA</td>
<td>13.98</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>24.16</td>
<td>0.0014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit - CAA</td>
<td>10.93</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>21.49</td>
<td>0.0378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing authority - Funder</td>
<td>-16.00</td>
<td>-31.10</td>
<td>-0.90</td>
<td>0.0306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing authority - Government</td>
<td>-14.27</td>
<td>-25.04</td>
<td>-3.51</td>
<td>0.0023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider - Government</td>
<td>-8.39</td>
<td>-15.76</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
<td>0.0153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit - Housing authority</td>
<td>11.22</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>22.35</td>
<td>0.0470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, CoCs where the lead agency is a nonprofit tend to have more permanent housing than those led by Community Action Agencies (CAAs) or housing authorities. CoCs led by governments likewise tend to have proportionally more permanent housing than those led by CAAs, housing authorities, or providers. On the flip side, CoCs led by CAAs have proportionally less permanent housing than those led by funders, governments, or nonprofits, and those led by housing authorities tend to have less permanent housing than those led by funders, governments, or nonprofits.

Preliminarily, it appears that CoCs led by nonprofits, governments, or funders have higher proportions of permanent housing in their housing inventories when compared to CoCs led by CAAs, housing authorities, or providers. Notably, CAAs and housing authorities are also providers--that is, they provide direct services and housing to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.
If the proportion of permanent housing in a CoC’s housing inventory is understood as a proxy measure for effective governance, these findings are consistent with findings from the comparative case study that communities seeking more effective collaborative governance around confronting homelessness are moving away from provider-led networks toward networks led by local government or nonprofits whose focus is on building collaboration.

In terms of theories of collaborative governance, provider-led networks could be less effective because of the so-called homeless industrial complex, or cooptation by an organization with a vested interest in maintaining its suite of services (historically, temporary shelter).

Organizational Type and People Experiencing Homelessness

After calculating the total population within the geographic boundary of each CoC, I calculated the number of people experiencing homelessness per 100,000 people in the general population using PIT count estimates of the number of people experiencing homelessness. I used per capita rates to account for the vastly different geographical and population sizes of different CoCs. However, even with this adjustment, PIT counts may not be directly comparable because CoCs are allowed to adopt different methodologies for conducting the counts. Nevertheless, PIT count data remains the only somewhat comparable means for comparing the number of people experiencing homelessness across communities nationally.

Using an ANOVA test for difference among CoCs by lead agency organizational type, I found no significant differences in the total number of people experiencing
homlessness, the number of sheltered or unsheltered homeless, or the number of homeless veterans or youth per 100,000. However, there is a significant difference in the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness per 100,000 by organizational type (F(5, 379) = 2.776, p = 0.0177). A Tukey test of pairwise comparisons shows government-led CoCs have significantly more people experiencing chronic homelessness per 100,000 than provider-led CoCs (difference = 21.95, CI 3.18 to 40.73, adjusted p = 0.0114)

Organizational Type and Performance Measures

The HEARTH Act established a common set of System Performance Measures that all CoCs report. The measures are derived from HMIS data, and in reporting them, HUD includes a disclaimer that data may suffer from quality issues derived from software vendor changes. HMIS coverage also varies widely among CoCs. Ideally, all of the beds available to people experiencing homelessness would be tracked in a CoC’s HMIS. In reality, however, only providers who receive CoC grant funding are required to enter data into an HMIS. Other providers may choose to do so, but they are not obligated. This creates a missing data problem that makes it challenging to compare performance measures across CoCs.

Differences in HMIS coverage could themselves be thought of as a measure of the effectiveness of collaborative governance. The comparative case study presented earlier revealed that shared data systems are central tools and outcomes of collaborative governance. They allow collaborative bodies and participants to think about and measure change at a community level rather than on an individual, provider-by-provider basis.
Indeed, an ANOVA test for the difference in percent of beds covered by HMIS shows the proportion varies significantly by organizational type of a CoC’s lead agency (F(5, 384) = 2.569, p = 0.0265). However, a Tukey test of pairwise comparisons shows no significant pairwise differences. Instead, HMIS coverage appears more closely related to CoC type—that is, whether a CoC encompasses a major city, a smaller city or county or region area, or is a balance of state or statewide CoC (typically rural). An ANOVA test for difference in HMIS coverage by CoC type is significant (F(2, 390) = 6.857, p = 0.00118), and a Tukey test for pairwise comparisons shows that CoCs in major cities and CoCs in smaller cities, counties, or regions both have higher rates of HMIS bed coverage than balance of state or statewide CoCs (see table below). These results suggest that the geographical size and political and population milieu in which a CoC operates matters for its effectiveness of governance.

Table 13. Results of a Tukey Test of Pairwise Comparisons for HMIS Bed Coverage by CoC Geographical Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Lower 95% CI</th>
<th>Upper 95% CI</th>
<th>Adjusted p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Cities - Balance of State and Statewide CoCs</td>
<td>14.55</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>25.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller Cities, Counties, and Regional CoCs - Balance of State and Statewide CoCs</td>
<td>13.22</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>21.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the caveat in mind that HMIS coverage varies across CoCs, I tested whether HEARTH Act System Performance Measure outcomes varied across CoCs depending on the organizational type of the lead agency. An ANOVA test found no significant
difference in the percentage of people returning to homelessness after 6 months, 12 months, or 24 months by organizational type. Likewise, an ANOVA test found no significant difference in the percentage change in total income or earned wages among leavers or stayers by organizational type. And an ANOVA found no significant difference in the percentage of people experiencing homelessness who exit to or retain permanent housing.

However, there is a significant difference in the median number of days spent in emergency shelter, safe haven, and transitional housing beds by organizational type (F(5, 386) = 2.861, p = 0.015). A Tukey test showed a significant pairwise comparison between CoCs led by a nonprofit compared to those led by a government agency, with a median length of stay 30 days shorter in nonprofit-led CoCs than government-led CoCs (95% CI -57.32 to -3.44, p = 0.017).

What Predicts Success for Collaborative Governance?

The preliminary analysis presented above suggests that the organizational type of a CoC’s lead agency is associated with three potential measures of organizational effectiveness: the percentage of housing inventory made up of permanent housing beds, the median number of days people spend in temporary housing (emergency shelter, safe havens, or transitional housing), and the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness per capita. However, the analysis also revealed associations among organizational type of the lead agency, geographical type of a CoC, and HMIS bed coverage.
Here, I use multiple linear regression to test whether the association between organizational type and effectiveness persists after accounting for geographical type and HMIS bed coverage. I performed three regressions for the three outcome variables of interest. The table below presents descriptive statistics for additional variables included in the regression analysis.

*Table 14. Descriptive Statistics for CoC Regression Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HMIS Bed Coverage (%)</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Days in Temporary Housing</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>899.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Homeless per 100,000</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>267.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Housing as % of HIC Beds</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regression results are presented in the following table.
### Table 15. Regression of CoC Organizational Characteristics on Performance Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th>Permanent Housing as % of HIC Beds</th>
<th>Median Days in Temporary Housing</th>
<th>Chronic Homeless per 100,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Org Type: Provider</strong></td>
<td>-6.702*** (2.410)</td>
<td>-31.959*** (11.672)</td>
<td>-19.072*** (6.257)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Org Type: Funder</strong></td>
<td>1.202 (3.829)</td>
<td>-26.818 (18.416)</td>
<td>-16.057 (9.913)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Org Type: Housing authority</strong></td>
<td>-8.357** (3.870)</td>
<td>-16.060 (18.614)</td>
<td>-7.165 (10.235)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Org Type: Nonprofit</strong></td>
<td>-3.282* (1.923)</td>
<td>-35.194*** (9.252)</td>
<td>-13.948*** (5.079)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geographic Type: Balance of State and Statewide CoCs</strong></td>
<td>-12.641*** (3.402)</td>
<td>-23.394 (16.365)</td>
<td>-40.867*** (8.999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geographic Type: Smaller Cities, Counties, and Regional CoCs</strong></td>
<td>-8.920*** (2.417)</td>
<td>-15.043 (11.627)</td>
<td>-30.864*** (6.276)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HMIS Bed Coverage (%)</strong></td>
<td>17.746*** (3.549)</td>
<td>-70.124*** (17.075)</td>
<td>-18.789** (9.451)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>37.070*** (3.922)</td>
<td>145.152*** (18.866)</td>
<td>81.649*** (10.376)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
<td>394</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>0.169</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusted R²</strong></td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residual Std. Error</strong></td>
<td>15.393 (df = 385)</td>
<td>74.040 (df = 384)</td>
<td>39.820 (df = 376)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F Statistic</strong></td>
<td>9.810*** (df = 8; 385)</td>
<td>4.150*** (df = 8; 384)</td>
<td>5.747*** (df = 8; 376)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Net of the effects of geographic type and HMIS bed coverage, compared to CoCs led by government agencies, those led by providers or nonprofit have significantly less permanent housing, shorter stays in temporary housing, and fewer people experiencing chronic homelessness per 100,000. CoCs led by Community Action Agencies have less permanent housing and shorter stays in temporary housing but do not differ significantly in the per capita rate of people experiencing chronic homelessness. CoCs led by housing authorities have less permanent housing but do not differ significantly in terms of days in temporary housing or chronic homelessness. Funder-led CoCs do not differ significantly on any of the outcomes compared to government-led CoCs.¹

In one respect, these results are surprising: government-led CoCs appear more successful at devoting a larger proportion of their housing inventories to permanent housing, which large-scale experimental evidence suggests is the most effective intervention for housing people experiencing homelessness. At the same time, government-led CoCs appear less successful at shortening the length of time people spend in temporary housing and in ending chronic homelessness. That is, government-led CoCs appear to be putting the right structure in place but not having the intended effects on the ground.

¹ It should be noted that the R² values for all three models are less than 0.2 with adjusted R² of less than 0.1 for all but the first model. Additional variables that were not available for this analysis could be informative. For example, region, weather, and local economic conditions may be important factors in predicting the relative number of people experiencing homelessness across communities.
Among organizational types, providers are associated most strongly with shorter length of stay in temporary housing and lower per capita rates of people experiencing chronic homelessness. Although provider-led CoCs have relatively less of their housing inventory invested in permanent housing, they appear more successful at actually realizing desired outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

Finally, the HMIS coverage coefficients are revealing. CoC’s with higher HMIS coverage (that is, where more providers participate in a shared data system) have more permanent housing, shorter lengths of stay in temporary housing, and fewer people experiencing chronic homelessness per capita. This analysis cannot determine whether this association is causal. Theoretically, and based on the findings in the comparative case study presented earlier, this finding makes sense: CoCs with effective collaborative governance successfully persuade providers--even providers who do not receive CoC grant funds--to participate in the HMIS. Shared data makes it possible to better understand homelessness in the community and design interventions, and the practice of coming together to share data reinforces the collaboration that presages that data sharing.

IN-DEPTH CASE STUDY RESULTS

*Collaborative Governance and Networked Service Provision*

Sioux Falls stakeholders have been working inside at least two collaborative structures: the statewide Continuum of Care and the local Homeless Advisory Board. In Sioux Falls, like in other communities across the United States, these collaborative
structures were created after a wave of reforms in the 1980s and 1990s that dismantled or devolved many of the safety net functions of federal and state government.

One stakeholder, a retired program administrator with decades of experience in the field, described how that transition played out locally. Since the 1880s, the Sioux Falls area had a county poor farm located north of the city on about 40 acres of land. New federal safety net programs such as SSI led local leaders to judge the poor farm obsolete, and in the 1970s it fell into disuse. The land was auctioned off in the 1980s. However, this move coincided with cuts to federal welfare programs, and Sioux Falls began to see a shift in the composition of the demographics of people experiencing homelessness: young, more families, and facing more economic hurdles. In the mid-to-late 1980s, faith-based groups opened a soup kitchen, then a homeless shelter. The county human services department, which had previously been a rather small and insignificant provider, grew to serve people in financial crisis. The newly deinstitutionalized model of service provision relied on many service providers to co-produce the assemblage of supports that could help people experiencing homelessness find stability.

In March 2004, Sioux Falls Mayor Dave Munson appointed a Blue-Ribbon Task Force to develop a plan to end homelessness in the Sioux Falls area. The task force outlined a 10-year plan to end homelessness. Among the task force’s recommendations was a proposal to create a homeless advisory board, which would be charged with carrying out the 10-year plan to end homelessness (Blue Ribbon Task Force 2005:6). From that recommendation, a Homeless Advisory Board (HAB) was established on August 15, 2005, by city ordinance #86-05. On March 21, 2006, the City of Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County committed to a joint cooperative agreement to be involved with
the HAB. In 2007, a full-time coordinator position was created and jointly funded by the City of Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County.

These local efforts were part of a national trend. In 2001, under President George W. Bush, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had launched an initiative to end chronic homelessness. In 2003, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) challenged cities to embark on 10-year plans to end homelessness.

Sioux Falls was one of hundreds of communities that answered the call. Local conversations began in early 2003. Four community-wide meetings were held between February 27 and June 26, 2003, to discuss ending homelessness. Presentations were made by more than 24 service providers. Out of these presentations and subcommittee work emerged a focus on “chronically addicted homeless.”

In November 2003, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) gave a presentation at a Supportive Housing Conference in Sioux Falls. In that presentation, which was called “Blueprint Planning to End Homelessness Changing Systems,” CSH recommended aspiring towards systems change by ensuring the following factors were in place:

- power (people with formal authority and responsibility for activities) and funding are available,
- collaboration is a habit,
- data and communication are available and used effectively,
- champions and leaders exist,
- there is collaborative planning, integration, coordination, and streamlined funding,
• there is quality assurance and monitoring following industry standards, and

• an intermediary is designated to act as a neutral catalyst.

In that presentation, CSH also suggested that, in order to be effective, the neutral catalyst (i.e., what would become the HAB) should

• be independent of old systems (new or outside forces with no long-standing alliances to existing factions),

• have a clear point of view and a map forward,

• and be able to draw from experience.

The HAB’s initial charter was shaped by USICH’s call for 10-year plans, CSH’s recommendations for fostering community collaboration, and the local Blue-Ribbon Task Force report on local conditions around homelessness. The HAB’s charges were myriad. According to the Blue-Ribbon Task Force’s 2005 10-year plan, the HAB was intended to do the following:

• Carry out the 10-year plan to end homelessness.

• Assist governments and service providers in addressing (a) housing and (b) services.

• Hold open meetings that include participation by people experiencing homelessness, governments, churches, service providers, and interested citizens.

• Facilitate and encourage common protocols and procedures among service providers (e.g., common intake, shared reporting).

• Recommend programmatic and operational changes to maximize efficiency among service providers.

• Lead immediate and long-term planning regarding homelessness.
- Compile an annual list of community-level goals and objectives.
- Measure and monitor data on outcomes of service providers.
- Issue an annual report to inventory available resources, document progress toward goals, and include (at least) the following data elements:
  - Change in number of unsheltered homeless;
  - Number of chronically homeless moved to permanent housing;
  - Change in costs to provide emergency health, mental health, and shelter services;
  - Change in length of time homeless, hospitalized, or incarcerated; and
  - Rates of recidivism in homeless assistance system.
- Establish annual priorities for city, county, state, federal, and private funding; recommend and guide funding; and have such influence that funders solicit the consensus, endorsement, and approval of the HAB. The 10-year plan envisioned HAB’s influence extending to a range of public funding sources, including
  - City public health funds and additional discretionary funds;
  - Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME) funds;
  - HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) grants;
  - County poor relief;
  - State first time home buyers and mortgage assistance programs; and
  - Federal housing vouchers and Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) credits.
Despite this hefty load of responsibilities, the HAB—as originally envisioned by the Blue-Ribbon Task Force—was not to have its own funds or direct oversight or regulatory control. Instead, it was to operate in an advisory capacity and make recommendations. The task force also suggested that the HAB would require only very light administrative duties to be covered by existing staff at the City of Sioux Falls. It would not, the proposal claimed, require a new hire (Blue Ribbon Task Force 2005, p. 8).

HAB members remember the HAB as first focused especially on super utilizers with a high risk for recidivism into the system of homeless services, jail, and detox. With that focus, HAB helped pull together collaborators for Safe Home, a housing first initiative designed for that target population. Board members judged Safe Home a success, both in terms of its intended purpose and as a focus for collaboration.

HAB’s Challenges: Why 10-Year Plans Failed

But in the following years, board members reflected, little additional progress was made. In interviews, current and former HAB members described structural programs that eventually stalled the momentum that had launched the HAB. As they saw it, the HAB lost focus. Members had no agreed upon role and no shared vision, and a leadership vacuum emerged. The board became a passive recipient of information rather than an active leader in setting strategic priorities around homelessness.

Board members described the HAB as directionless, lacking clearly defined and accessible priorities, goals, or objectives. Meetings came to consist primarily of reports from the coordinator to board members, and members took on a passive listening role. The combination of receiving an overwhelming amount of information with the lack of
clear priorities for action or a well-defined way for board members to push projects forward left many feeling like the HAB lacked a purpose. As one board member put it:

I’m not really sure what that mission or vision looks like. I think years ago when the 10-year plan was created there was more of a direction and there was a mission, there was a vision, and there were different things that were happening that the board was either involved in or else they were encouraging or that they were seeking out. Over the last maybe four years I think it’s become a little more stagnant. I think the board members themselves, including myself, are a little confused about what is our actual mission, what are our goals, what is our role within the community, and trying to better define that and also questioning do we have a role in the community or are we duplicating some other services? Because that’s not necessary either.

Several board members corroborated the timeframe, saying this state developed over the last four or five years, after the first 10-year plan had expired. Under the first 10-year plan, they reported, the HAB had a few major wins, including work on Safe Home (a housing first initiative) and Bishop Dudley Hospitality House (a shelter for individuals and families). Even without any formal legal authority or funding, the board was able to broker partnerships to accomplish goals laid out in the first 10-year plan.

But problems became apparent as the HAB tried to pivot beyond the first 10-year plan—which, though it led to certain accomplishments, had not ended homelessness. The board lacked leadership capacity to move forward. The HAB coordinator position itself was not vested with decision-making power, and leadership did not emerge among members or outside community leaders to prioritize the HAB’s work.
Further, the new 10-year plan was adopted without first establishing community buy-in. Board members reported that the first 10-year plan (the Blueprint) was put together by “a lot of very key lead people, powerful people,” so it had a lot of buy-in—both in process and in the people who were involved. The second 10-year plan lacked that buy-in. According to board members, the board came together for a brainstorming session, but the strategic plan was largely put together by the HAB coordinator. That may have contributed to a lack of investment in the plan.

Additionally, the new 10-year plan set goals that seemed beyond the scope of what the HAB could accomplish. The first 10-year plan had a clear focus and goal: house super utilizers of homeless and emergency services (which led to Safe Home). The next 10-year plan was broader; goals seemed unachievable and the purpose of the HAB—as compared to other organizations—seemed undefined. Without that focus, confusion arose among board members over what niche the HAB should serve as opposed to the Homeless Coalition, Thrive, or other collaborative organizations in the community. One board member summed it up:

It [the new plan] was way too broad an approach. If you target one or two things like, well, Safe Home, like they did [in the first 10-year plan], that’s something people can get behind.

Some board members were discouraged by the loftiness of the new 10-year plan’s goals. The ultimate goal—“ending homelessness”—seemed unrealistic, and even intermediary goals seemed beyond what HAB could hope to achieve. The new plan lacked tangible, short-term goals that could inspire action. As one board member put it:
I don't know that we're going to end homelessness to be real truthful. I think we can have a significant impact on homelessness, and I would hope that [the] time [that] families or individuals...spend homeless, we could have significant impact on that.

Some of the goals in the new plan were things that the HAB and its members had no power over. Some were ostensibly outsourced to other organizations in the community (e.g., the Thrive Housing Action Team), but without setting up organizational infrastructure to tie those to the HAB’s 10-year plan (e.g., MOUs, regular reports from organizations, or shared board membership). Other goals, board members reported, were simply unrealistic--as, for example, a goal to build 1,600 housing units. One board member reflected:

[The goals] weren’t reachable. The organization didn’t have the horsepower to do it. It had to be done by local real estate and developers, nonprofit and for-profit real estate developers, and funded by the state housing authority, and it took expertise that the Homeless Advisory Board didn’t have.

Ultimately, board members agreed, the HAB’s primary purpose over the past few years had become compiling data about homelessness. But data was not collected or reported in a strategic way. Board members described “drinking from a firehose” and being overwhelmed by the quantity of data. Without a strategic vision and tangible goals driving data collection, HAB members were unable to sift through all of the information they received. One board member, recalling the copious amounts of data presented, recalled:
How many beds were available at all the different shelters, what the occupancy percentages was, how many beds were open—all of those things. But there never seemed to be that, what are you going to do with it? Like, what do we need to do with those numbers? How do we make this number less, how do we make this number bigger? There was never a plan, or a strategy.

Board members generally agreed that collecting data is important, and that with the HAB on hiatus pending this report, the one thing they had missed was having that data available. However, they also agreed that if the only real purpose of the HAB was to collect and distribute information, it need not be a board. It could as easily be an email list, website, or other mechanism for posting and sharing information without the time commitment of a monthly meeting. As one board member put it:

You can give me information, but what do I do with that information? There really wasn't any leadership about what to do with that information. It was all about gathering information, but then nothing about what to do with that information…. I can just read this, you could just send me an email, and I don't need to go to a meeting.

Board members believed the HAB had become directionless, but they also recognized its unrealized potential to direct action to address homelessness. Board members generally agreed that addressing homelessness is important for the community and that collaboration for maximizing the impact of available resources is important, but they questioned whether the HAB in its current manifestation could accomplish those objectives. Several board members suggested a better use of the HAB would be reviewing information in order to offer strategic feedback about new programs or
initiatives, new objectives. That is, the HAB had unrealized potential in pulling people

together to identify a shared vision, set goals and objectives, and then work to achieve

them. As one board member envisioned it:

If there was going to be a continuation of the board, I would see that there would

be, maybe, an advisory board that could dissect information and look at the

community stats and be able to offer directives or feedback--Gosh, have we tried…?

Have we looked at what we considered…? Here may be options.--and do

doa collective approach such as that.

**Leadership Vacuum.** Not only did the HAB lack a strategic plan; it also lacked the

leadership to have carried it out. HAB members painted a picture of a rudderless ship

without a captain: the HAB lacked a strategic plan with meaningful objectives, and it

lacked the leadership capacity to carry out such a plan. Rather than seeing themselves as

advocates or leaders, HAB members saw their role as receptive listeners. Meetings were

frequent, but board members were unsure of their roles or responsibilities, beyond

listening to presentations. They did not know what action to take based on the reports

eyearted. Some said they felt more like a sounding board than a decision-making board.

One member explained, “At the end of the day I just thought we were there as a sounding

board and to share information. We didn't really do anything.”

Asking about the future of the HAB and what would be lost if the HAB folded,

most board members said the biggest loss would be collection and distribution of

information about community needs. They thought other organizations could probably

fill the gap of collecting that information, agreeing it was a critical activity to continue.
But the gap of *acting* on that information would remain whether the HAB folded or continued down its current path. As one board member put it:

I could never figure out what we were doing. I mean, information came in, which was helpful, but now that I'm not getting that information, I can see that was a bit of a void…. But there was no idea what you're supposed to do with that information and no discussion of how to move the needle on the problem.

Some board members perceived lack of leadership within the HAB itself. One board member reflected that, in the past, the HAB had a very passionate board chair who took on the role of local champion, but when that person left, no new champion emerged. Another board member acknowledged that the HAB’s influence waxed and waned depending on whether sitting members saw it as their responsibility to take messages from the HAB and be an advocate back to their home institutions. In recent years, that was not the way board members understood their roles.

Others said that the leadership vacuum was external. City boosters, they explained, preferred to downplay homelessness and instead focus on the city’s virtues, so they paid little attention to the HAB.

Lacking any other strong champion in the community, the HAB coordinator emerged as an advocate for people experiencing homelessness. That advocacy role is important for the community in general, members averred. But the HAB was intended to be a neutral catalyst to collaboration, and members perceived tension between advocacy and advisory roles. Growing advocacy efforts, they suspected, eroded trust in the coordinator’s role as an impartial advisor to city and county government. One board member summed it up:
everything dies without nurturing, and so I think there was some lack of leadership, lack of investment, lack of direction and I think in all of that [the coordinator] just felt so tied…. I think there got to the point where it was just coast and try to be under the radar to not upset people.

A few interviewees attributed this tension to having a board that primarily consists of government employees and wanting that board to take on an advocacy role. One suggested looking to the Sioux Empire Homeless Coalition, a 501c3, for the advocacy piece since it could be more of a provider and citizen forum. But at this point in time, the Coalition’s board is likewise made up mostly of government employees, who feel tension between their official capacity and advocacy.

Structurally, some board members believed, the fact that the HAB coordinator’s position was housed within Minnehaha County offices led to the perception that the county was more invested in the HAB than the city. Over time, the city appointed different liaisons to the HAB, changing from the mayor’s direct involvement to the Director of Community Development, then to the Housing Director. According to several HAB members, that change reinforced the perception of the city’s disinvestment. A few board members suggested that new leadership in the mayor’s office might be an opportunity to restructure the board for greater impact. One board member recalled:

We were all concerned about it [ending homelessness] and how to do it, but there was just no push from the people needed to make the push. And I’ll lay a lot of fault on that to the city. Not the people that were working on it from a city standpoint--I think they all were committed and they knew and understood what
was going on, and maybe even had an idea of how we could fix it. But at the mayor’s level, it was let’s just not talk about it because we’re such a great city.

*Power and Authority.* Problematically, without strong support from a champion in a position of power, the HAB was hamstrung. The board itself, as currently structured, has no formal power or authority. It does not directly control any funding or policy. As one board member put it, the HAB “has no authority, it has no budget, it has nothing but good intentions.” One board member reflected that the HAB’s lack of formal power actually contributed to its lack of influence on policy makers and the city’s decreased involvement: “the thing was viewed as a toothless tiger and not a meaningful role.” Yet the problem of leadership and authority was more fundamental than a lack of influence: the HAB had no strategic agenda for a leader to push. One board member returned to the problem of lacking a strategic plan:

It's very difficult to accomplish something anyway, and if you don't have--the only authority they had was the ability to influence decision makers…. That was an issue for HAB, and I recognize that. The roadblocks came earlier in my mind, so that never really became the roadblock because we never really had something we were trying to get done and couldn't get done because we didn't have the authority or the power or the money to do it.

*Collaboration and Public Awareness.* Board members evinced some disagreement over the HAB’s intended audience. Who was the HAB meant to speak to, influence, or advise? And how was that advising to take place? Was advising to be the role of the coordinator or of board members? Was the HAB meant to serve an advocacy
role? Was part of HAB’s mission to raise public awareness and educate the community about homelessness? Opinion varied.

Some board members saw the HAB as an advocacy organization. They thought the HAB needed to do more or “be more forceful” about communicating information to the public and holding leaders accountable for making progress toward ending homelessness. They wanted to see more public awareness around homelessness. Board members pointed to hunger and homelessness awareness month activities and the HAB’s annual “pie party” as examples of public awareness activities, but said such activities were limited. They believed there was little public awareness of the HAB or its work--in part because that work settled into routine reporting of data rather than action. As one board member put it:

[The coordinator] was incredibly involved in the community, yet the community didn’t know about it. That sounds so odd, but she was intimately involved with knowing the programs and problem solving and trying to be connected and understanding where some of the gaps were, yet the community at large really didn’t know what she did…. Most often if things are kind of successful, you’re doing different things, it’s in the news and you hear about even periodically.

When did you hear about HAB? You know, you really didn’t…. [The HAB] was never really embarking on anything. There was no significant finding, there was no change.

However, for those who attended HAB meetings, they saw value in the awareness and education board members gained by bringing people together who might not normally sit at a table together (e.g., people knowledgeable about homelessness with city
planners). They wanted to see more leadership and involvement outside of appointed HAB members—that is, have the business and nonprofit sectors as well as the public step up. Board members believed that would require more public education, awareness, and accountability. As one board member put it, “We have to have a stronger commitment. Now of course that takes money, but it also takes just an awareness for people to step up. You’re never going to get the money unless people are aware.”

Board members agreed that having city and county representatives to the board is important, but several suggested that the HAB should not be primarily composed of government representatives. Instead, they suggested, it should be made up of citizens and those knowledgeable about homelessness who can make informed recommendations about actions to take. Government representatives could then weigh in from the public sector perspective, and all could work together on a solution. The HAB, they worried, may have been too heavily composed of government actors with only the coordinator to relay input from providers’ perspectives, resulting in meetings that felt less like coming together to problem solve and more like being fed information.

Outside investment, board members believed, would build support and influence for the HAB; collaboration would also help refine goals and actions or innovate new solutions. One board member reflected on the value of broader collaboration:

I think we do need more from the outside sector. When I say outside, outside of the world of homelessness I think would be beneficial. Because I think sometimes when you’re in that world, you tend to get so focused on that and you’re kind of in the trenches, so to look beyond that, you kind of get tunnel vision. And so bringing in other people that all of a sudden start asking questions, you know that
are, oh I haven’t thought about that in years because that’s just something that I work on a daily basis.

If the HAB were to continue and work to set and achieve strategic goals, board members believed, a broader, more inclusive coalition would be necessary. The HAB, they thought, could serve as the mechanism to foster collaboration around shared goals and objectives.

Several board members thought part of building that broader coalition might be coordinating available funding in the community by setting strategic priorities for funders, too, and communicating them to the public and individual philanthropists to get everyone on the same page. One board member drew a parallel to the way the Chamber of Commerce coordinates community appeals. Several saw an unrealized opportunity for the HAB to use funding as a carrot to advance strategic goals.

Similarly, board members identified a need for the HAB to better collaborate with other collaborative organizations, to build on collective impact initiatives rather than fight for turf. For example, when a local collective impact initiative pulled together a volunteer group focused on affordable housing, the HAB tied sections of the strategic plan to the HAT. But rather than building on that synergy, allowing HAT to lead on those objectives and redirecting limited HAB resources elsewhere, some board members sensed, tension and competition arose between the HAB and the new housing group. One board member put it this way: “We can’t let everybody stand in the way of each other. We’ve got to find one consortium that can make it happen.”

*Board Management.* Overall, the challenges the HAB faced were structural. However, board members also pointed out some procedural concerns that exacerbated the
HAB’s lack of strategic focus. As several board members described it, the HAB would have benefited from more structured board management. They reported that, over the past few years, meeting attendance dropped off, some members stayed on the board without attention to terms or required board composition, and there was a lack of understanding even among some board members of who was a board member and who was just a member of the public who frequently attended meetings.

Several board members said they wished they had been through an orientation when they joined the board. They also suggested strict meeting agendas be sent in advance, supplemental materials be provided at least two or three days in advance, and meeting times and days be set well in advance. Most fundamentally, board members said, meetings and agendas need to focus on a strategic plan and driving forward specific projects or objectives. One explained:

We just couldn't get the momentum of the project management, if you will, to get those things moving forward and even keeping them on the forefront and top of mind with the board. We ended up talking so much about other things and kind of whatever's the bright shiny object to talk about…but not staying focused on the strategic plan.

Conclusion. Local creation of the HAB in Sioux Falls was part of a national trend launched under the Bush Administration. Sioux Falls, like communities across the country, developed a 10-year plan to end homelessness; the HAB was intended to oversee implementation of that plan. However, after 10 years, the HAB (like other similar organizations nationwide) had not ended homelessness. As the HAB attempted to pivot beyond its initial charter, it lost momentum.
HAB members attribute the board’s stall to the lack of a shared vision and actionable strategic plan, meetings that had settled into a routine of overwhelming data presentation without strategic sifting or leadership to act based on data, lack of leadership from within the HAB, and lack of support from powerful champions in the community. The HAB’s influence and public visibility declined. For better or worse, the problems the HAB confronted were not unique to Sioux Falls. Stalled implementation was common across communities that developed ten-year plans. Most plans lacked clear goals, did not identify funding sources, did not include timelines for implementation, and did not identify entities responsible for implementation (Batko 2016: 254).

How Stakeholders Experience Collaboration

Stakeholders See a Need for Collaboration. Homeless service providers in Sioux Falls operate within a statewide Continuum of Care and a local Homeless Advisory Board, two organizations intended to spearhead collaboration. Nevertheless, there was widespread agreement among stakeholders that addressing housing and homelessness require better collaboration and coordination of effort. In the current system, the lack of shared knowledge impedes effective planning. Stakeholders feel as though they are operating in the dark, without a sense of what others are doing. One participant put it this way:

We're wanting to get involved in a range of housing with a lot of different partners, but we don't really know what's going on out there. I recently drove into a new housing development up in the northeast. It's huge! But we have no idea
what's going on up there and whether that's going to be a subsidized setting, mixed, or whatever. I don't think anybody really sees the whole picture.

According to stakeholders, lack of coordination gives rise to inefficiencies and duplication of effort. Service providers, for example, spend inordinate amounts of time trying to connect families to housing using a system that is opaque to consumers and providers alike. Stakeholders who work directly with consumers lamented the fact that they spend so much time trying to secure housing for consumers that they have little time left over to address other needs.

Stakeholders agreed that lack of collaboration and coordination threatens the quality of services. As one explained, “With that number of agencies, all well intended, you can't help but have something falling through the cracks. The coordination of pulling it together is going to be a big part of what's needed here.” As another stakeholder reflected, better coordination or dedicated housing specialists could free up service providers’ time to focus on other needs:

We spend all this time in this community with all these different agencies--every social worker everywhere is trying to look for housing. Why not have 6 people or however many that do that full-time, professionally, under this umbrella and nobody else instead of you spending all your time not getting the direct services to the children and the families.

Stakeholders expressed support for community-wide collaboration on housing and homelessness. One participant likened such an effort to the economic development campaign led by Forward Sioux Falls, a joint venture economic development partnership of the Sioux Falls Development Foundation and the Sioux Falls Area Chamber of
Commerce. They imagined the impact that could come for focusing community effort around addressing homelessness. As one put it, “What we need is a broad-based community effort, like [the effort] to bring 15,000 new jobs. I'd like to see us take and eradicate kids having to live in a car and go to school because I can't imagine anybody having to do that in our community.”

Stakeholders voiced a need for an umbrella organization to facilitate collaboration. That is, they saw a need for some sort of organization to coordinate the network of collaborators. By increasing collaboration and coordination, stakeholders believed, an umbrella organization could encourage specialization and reduce duplication of effort:

There may be too many people who want to be everything to everyone. Maybe there is a better way for us to coordinate those efforts. There's a lot of redundancy and overhead that exists because they try to be everything to everybody. We could standardize some of those things and get people focused, [then] hand the baton off to somebody else. We can't continue forward at this pace and think that we're going to get to any different solution unless we change the actual structure of affordable housing in the community.

Stakeholders pointed to several current initiatives focused on community collaboration and networking, but said none quite fit the bill. The 211 referral agency, for example, is coordinating a data sharing initiative for service providers in the community to track or refer consumers of services across agencies. However, stakeholders pointed out that any collaboration will require additional leadership and coordination, effectively restructuring the affordable housing sector:
Everyone needs to talk to each other, everyone needs to step back a second and stop saying, my agency already does that. Your agency does that, but could it do this, or could you work closer with another agency that already does that? How do we coordinate the services better then? It is more than just the 211, it's more than the Network [of Care]. There has to be an overall umbrella: from a community-wide standpoint, everyone needs to know what everyone else is doing.

Stakeholders agreed that collaboration should be data-driven, but they said that in order for that to happen, the community will need to develop better data resources. An overwhelming majority of stakeholders called for more comprehensive data that would give an overview of the housing and homelessness situation in Sioux Falls. Stakeholders pointed out that data could reduce duplication of effort and unnecessary competition over limited money available for housing programs, helping to ensure that new efforts are driven by empirical knowledge of community needs.

In interviews, housing program case managers reported that the success of their program participants depends on collaboration and co-production of outcomes through referral to other agencies. They explained that partnerships are central to the program’s success—not only the funding and administrative partnerships with the city and public housing authority, but also relationships with other agencies that allow Bright Futures to refer families for a range of services that the program could not provide on its own. Case managers also said that good working relationships with landlords facilitate finding housing for participants entering the program.

Collaboration to Improve Consumer Access. Stakeholders suggested that it would be beneficial for Sioux Falls, as a community, to provide more resources to support
people experiencing homelessness, but also to make it easier for people to find and connect with the resources that already exist. They agreed on the need for an information clearinghouse or housing database. One stakeholder described his vision for a central housing clearinghouse: a web-based database for housing seekers that could match searchers with available affordable housing from private landlords, project-based housing, tax credit properties, and more based on the searcher’s income or other qualifying conditions. It would present other options for rental assistance or to help searchers move toward self-sufficiency (e.g., education and employment options). Other stakeholders echoed the need to provide families on the Section 8 voucher waiting list with alternative options while they wait.

Importantly, though, some stakeholders acknowledged that compiling a directory of programs is not the same as building a network to facilitate consumer access to information and programs. In fact, community directories of housing programs already exist; what a few stakeholders suggested is missing is not information but guidance for consumers trying to navigate the many providers, programs, and housing options who make up the homeless services safety net in Sioux Falls. In general, stakeholders and consumers agreed on the need for navigators or housing specialists to ensure consumers could successfully navigate the system and use the information they found. One stakeholder gave the example of Hennepin County housing specialists as a model to emulate—individuals dedicated to helping consumers and case managers locate suitable housing. Stakeholders pointed out key points at which it would be important to provide individuals and families with information and guidance, such as after families sign up for the Section 8 voucher waiting list but before they receive a voucher. They suggested
additional outreach to those on the waiting list to match them with services or housing that is currently available. Stakeholders also suggested creating a better-defined pathway to facilitate the transition from homelessness to transitional housing to income-based housing to market-rate housing, or to help connect those facing eviction with services that could help keep them housed. They said that doing so would require better collaboration among both housing and service providers, beyond simply making referrals.

For example, some stakeholders suggested that efforts to improve the housing search process could be augmented by creating a common application for subsidized or affordable housing to streamline the process of applying to housing programs. A common application could save prospective tenants—many of whom are currently homeless—from having to call or visit apartment after apartment in search of housing. Instead, they could submit one application and be put on all the waiting lists for project-based housing, then admitted to whichever came open first, or they could apply to all landlords willing to accept a renter with their profile and ability to pay.

Reducing the length of applications and number of application fees would also help. Stakeholders reported that, currently, the application for income-qualified tax credit properties is over 50 pages long and includes a $50 application fee. Although case managers said they try to save consumers time by steering them toward properties where they are likely to meet the qualifications, they said it would be useful to publish different properties’ criteria for crime-free, credit score cut-offs, and the like so prospective tenants would only need to apply where they actually have a good chance of being accepted.

*Collaborate for Efficiency and Funding to Provide More Services.* Stakeholders insisted residents need more case management in order to move toward self-sufficiency.
But, they lamented, the community currently lacks adequate case management capacity to serve all of the potential consumers. One participant put it this way:

There doesn't seem to be a process where people can actually move up and get out of this condition. We seem to still be stuck in just meeting day-to-day basic living conditions. But how do we transition them so that a working mother or a working family can somehow bootstrap themselves into self-sufficiency? I think counseling and case management is a big factor that is missing.

In general, among stakeholders, there was overwhelming support for additional case management, though stakeholders acknowledged the difficulty of funding additional case managers. Some suggested that, by designating a few housing specialists to focus on matching consumers to housing, they community might save case managers across agencies time and increase efficiency to better serve more consumers. Many echoed the sentiment that collaboration and coordination would be critical to providing additional case management. Several pointed to integrated supportive housing programs in other communities, such as the Dorothy Day Center in Hennepin County and Salt Lake City’s Grace Mary Manor and Sunrise Metro. These facilities bring together shelters, pay-to-stay, and affordable housing along with case management and medical services on site. According to stakeholders, these projects were made possible by volunteers, donations, and board-based community support and collaboration. To these stakeholders, then, collaboration is seen as another tool to better meet community needs through efficiency, a tool that has become necessary in the face of increasing need and fewer guaranteed safety net resources.
Another way to expand services, aside from increasing efficiency, would be to secure more funding for the homeless services sector. Stakeholders explained that the need for funding is an ongoing, structural problem. Because federal funding is set and, for all intents and purposes, unalterable—and because foundations prefer to fund one-time projects, not ongoing programs—local funding streams are critical. Several stakeholders spoke of affordable housing as a public good, explaining that it benefits both employers and the community as a whole; therefore, they argued, it should be publicly funded. Others urged more support from businesses, especially major employers who rely on affordable housing to retain their workforce, and from the faith-based community, which might pursue affordable housing as a mission or ministry. On the whole, stakeholders saw collaboration as a means to secure funding for new, alternative sources that have not traditionally funded safety net programs.

Stakeholders imagined several ways in which collaboration and advocacy could be used to generate more funding for homeless services and affordable housing. Several suggested that tax or regulatory reform could cut the cost of construction and make it feasible to build more affordable units. They emphasized the importance of setting up taxes that incentivize investing in property, not letting property deteriorate. One stakeholder cited the example of Fargo’s Remodeling Property Tax Exemption, which exempts value added by remodeling for five years on buildings that are at least 25 years old. Others pointed out that the state currently taxes multi-family housing as commercial property. They suggested creating a third category to bring the multi-family housing tax rate down closer to the owner-occupied rate—though, as they acknowledged, this would require a state-level policy change.
In general, stakeholders saw local government funding or tax incentives as a crucial source of funding, aside from the foundation or philanthropic funding typically available to nonprofit providers. One stakeholder pointed out that government’s taxing and bond-issuing authority could be a key funding mechanism going forward. She cautioned that the community cannot rely on nonprofits to fund comprehensive affordable housing solutions, saying, “There just is not enough money, and nonprofits are different than the government. That’s why we need to get the government there. Nonprofits, they raise their money five dollars and ten dollars at a time, and it’s hard, and the money is drying up.” Some stakeholders gave the example of a local developer which had recently used a state bond issue to help finance a new affordable housing development downtown. A few stakeholders suggested using a municipal bond to set up a housing trust fund, as described below.

Stakeholders also suggested using market-based incentives to encourage the production of more affordable housing. Some suggested creating incentives for developers and property managers to set aside low-rent apartments—not subsidized apartments, not rental assistance, just apartments priced at a lower level. Such a policy, they maintained, would pull in private market and existing apartments rather than building additional units. They suggested, for example, offering exceptions to certain building codes in exchange for more affordable units, implementing property tax relief, or waiving certain fees.

Revolving funds and trust funds are one way to help finance additional affordable housing efforts. As one stakeholder pointed out, a trust fund could facilitate one-time investments in equity to lower rent, which would likely be less expensive than providing
ongoing subsidies to tenants who cannot afford available units. For example, a local trust fund could be used as gap financing to help cash flow affordable units for extremely low-income families (e.g., families at less than 30% of area median family income). A stakeholder and local developer explained:

Thirty percent AMI is as low as we go for anything with tax credits, and that’s usually 2 to 5 units per complex. Can we go lower? Because we have so many people out there who can maybe pay $200 a month in rent. We don’t build those units. Developers aren’t going to build those units. Without some way of funding that, those are some big gaps.

A newly approved federal housing trust fund began paying out in 2016, the year these focus groups and interviews were conducted, but its funds are limited and competitive. Further, stakeholders hoped, a local trust fund would help alleviate uncertainty about state or federal appropriations. One stakeholder, for example, noted that although the South Dakota Housing Opportunity Fund exists, funding is always in question, so it is not a reliable source. Stakeholders spoke of a city trust fund as a dedicated revenue source that would always be there, not subject to appropriations or politics. They reported that trust funds have been set up in many other communities and have a track record of success.

To fund a local trust, several stakeholders recommended a municipal housing bond issue, pointing to the example of Minnesota’s housing finance agency, which has successfully issued bonds for affordable housing. Public funding, they hoped, would also help drive additional private investment. One stakeholder said, “Public dollars have to be the catalyst to drive the private dollars to make it work.” Others hoped private
philanthropy would step up. For example, several stakeholders suggested organizing the community to donate initial funds, whether through a Chamber of Commerce capital campaign or a city-wide faith-based affordable housing initiative.

Stakeholders widely maintained that, in any collaborative effort around housing and homelessness, it would be crucial to engage business leaders and employers. They argued affordable housing is, in essence, a workforce development problem, and that therefore employers should take an interest in ensuring sufficient affordable housing is available for employees. Many stakeholders commented on housing that has been lost as various local businesses and hospitals have expanded. They suggested that these organizations should invest in housing in the city or in some way make an effort to replace the housing they have removed. For example, one stakeholder suggested employers contribute to a local affordable housing trust fund, as described above.

Stakeholders also suggested recruiting employers to participate in savings incentive programs for their employees. They proposed asking banks or employers to match residents’ savings. Match amounts, they thought, could be capped at a certain annual amount, and they could also be earmarked for designated purposes, such as a down payment to encourage homeownership.

Many of these suggestions would have redirected public funds from tax revenue or public spending toward private developers. That pattern suggests that, in new collaborative governance structures and networked service provision, a Matthew Effect is in operation (i.e., rewards accrue to those who already have more). The private developers and city boosters who Logan and Molotch (1987) refer to as the urban “growth machine” approach homelessness and affordable housing as an opportunity to
direct funding toward urban growth and development (i.e., construction of new housing by private developers).

In fact, stakeholders explicitly addressed the perception that for-profit developers dominate the market for constructing affordable housing. For example, several stakeholders explained, the burdensome process of applying for tax credits means that only a few developers who specialize in affordable housing have the capability to complete the application process. They are able to train apartment managers to qualify families under highly technical programs, even for properties with layered funding from various sources, each with their own reporting requirements. According to stakeholders, although some smaller companies may contract with larger affordable housing specialists, hiring out property management for affordable housing properties, for most small companies, start-ups, and nonprofits, the application and reporting process is unrealistic. One stakeholder explained how specialized affordable housing development companies operate: “They have these people, and all they do is number crunch. A nonprofit doesn't have the ability to run a low-income housing kind of a thing and do that kind of number crunching. It takes the tax credit people who know stuff days and days and days to fill out all the different forms.”

Stakeholders also argued that the faith-based community could be a significant force in bringing about more affordable housing and better access to homeless services. One stakeholder pointed out that volunteers and community donors have played a central role in other communities, such as Hennepin County where the Dorothy Day Center was built by donors, or Salt Lake City, where Grace Mary Manor and Sunrise Metro were made possible by volunteers who helped assemble furniture, donors, and community
support. In Sioux Falls, stakeholders said, the faith-based community has done some work in housing, but has not been effectively organized for impact. For example, stakeholders said, the Catholic church has been a major contributor to constructing and developing affordable apartments, especially for seniors. One stakeholder also cited the example of a faith-based group that has set up a services “mall,” a building in which service providers can rent space and where, the owners hope, consumers can come and efficiently visit multiple providers. The group has also worked with a local developer on a tax credit property to create a new housing program. According to stakeholders, both the Catholic church and this faith-based group view affordable housing as ministry. The faith-based community has helped improve shelter availability and transitional housing through a new shelter that opened recently and a transitional housing program entirely funded by private philanthropy. However, stakeholders agreed that current initiatives do not represent the full extent of the faith-based community’s potential impact. Broader outreach to churches and other faith-based organizations could bring in more resources for ensuring those in need have affordable housing, they hoped.

_Data and Accountability._ Stakeholders noted the need for accountability data in order to assess the effectiveness of current and future efforts. One participant suggested, “Agencies can show you outputs. They can show you how many people they served. Very few of them can show you the total impact or the lifelong impact that that program’s had, and that is the problem.” Some stakeholders also suggested that accountability data could be used to identify high-performing agencies or programs in order to model them, or to make the most of comparative advantages among agencies in order to increase efficiency and reduce redundancy.
In general, stakeholders emphasized the need to identify and track program outcomes in order to measure effectiveness. Stakeholders were most interested in seeing long-term outcomes for those who successfully complete programs as well as for those who fail out, plus data on the length of time people spend on vouchers or other programs. This data, they insisted, is a necessary corollary to any effort to focus on self-sufficiency or moving people off of vouchers. “The piece that's missing,” according to one participant, “is—are those people able to transition into a better condition of life? Are you serving the same family this year that you're serving 5 years later?” Stakeholders expressed hope that data gathered as part of the 211 referral agency’s new data sharing initiative could be used to begin tracking outcomes both at the program level and system-wide.

**Network Challenge: Maintaining Focus on Homelessness.** Focus groups revealed one of the challenges in assembling broad-based, inclusive community collaborations. In focus groups, stakeholders from local government and business saw mainstream housing policy in terms of workforce development. Compared to consumers and homeless service providers, they tended to focus less on meeting the needs of extremely low income or homeless households and instead on building affordable single-family homes and increasing homeownership. This shows how collaboration can be difficult when stakeholders are coming from different perspectives—even on a shared topic—and have different priorities. Homeless service providers might focus on supportive programs and subsidized rental housing, but as they seek to network and collaborate with the mainstream housing services sector, they will be talking to developers and policymakers
whose minds are on building single family homes for workforce. With limited time, energy, and resources, how do collaboratives manage competing priorities?

Stakeholders explained that housing initiatives target households whose income is at or below 80% of median family income (MFI). In general, they acknowledged that existing housing initiatives tend to target the upper part of that income range, neglecting the lowest income households. Some stakeholders reported that properties developed through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program have trouble filling units at the 60% MFI range (i.e., the upper part of the eligible income range), whereas the waiting list for Section 8 vouchers, which serves households at the lower end of the income range (less than 50% MFI) has a nearly 4-year waiting list. In essence, stakeholders explained, tax credit properties and the voucher waiting list serve different populations; while there are signs of an oversupply of affordable housing for households above 50% MFI, there are signs of an undersupply for households below 50% MFI.

Although stakeholders saw affordable housing as a social safety net, they also advocated a move away from thinking and talking about affordable housing as welfare. Instead, several stakeholders suggested reframing affordable housing as workforce housing and an investment in the local economy: not only does it provide housing for employees; subsidies and tax credit also provide an infusion of capital for local developers and construction companies. In their view, framing housing as workforce or economic development would more successfully win over allies than framing it as welfare or a social safety net. One participant put it this way:

Look at just from the federal side of things, just through housing subsidies between the housing authority and the others, that’s probably $20 million coming
to Sioux Falls. People can argue and fuss about government. Ok, how do you make your money? I’m a contractor. Well, do you do work for Sioux Falls Housing? You’re getting federal dollars. So how we frame that—as soon as you say ‘affordable housing,’ there’s a faction of people that go ‘ah.’

Many stakeholders spoke of affordable housing as workforce housing, which appeared to have at least two meanings. To some, workforce housing means market housing without income guidelines or regulations, but priced to be affordable to lower wage earners. They pointed to a need for what they called affordable market workforce housing, or housing for those who earn too much to qualify for subsidized housing but not enough to afford the market rents available.

To others, workforce housing refers to the idea that affordable housing—including subsidized, income-based housing—meets a key workforce need, ensuring that employees can find a place to live. Several stakeholders praised the community’s economic development, but cautioned that creating new jobs requires new housing. One worried, “We’re going to bring in 15,000 new jobs over a period. Where the heck are they going to live? I’ve asked that question a hundred times: where are they going to live? But we don’t want to talk about it.”

Stakeholders shared a common concern that lack of housing for employees could begin to hurt businesses that can no longer fill jobs. One stakeholder provided an illustrative anecdote: “Unemployment’s 2.7%. Full! Everybody’s looking for workers. You can’t go anywhere without a help wanted sign. I talked to [a local fast-food franchise owner] yesterday. He has to pay $11 [to new employees], and then he hopes they stay.”
Low unemployment and high demand for labor are boosting wages for the moment, but stakeholders predicted wages would eventually fall. In the meantime, they acknowledged, even $11/hour is not enough to afford market-rate rent. Further, stakeholders pointed out the connection between economic development initiatives that create high-paying jobs and the continued expansion of the low-paying service sector. According to one stakeholder, “We’ve worked hard getting a level of work that pays maybe $20, $25/hour, $30/hour, because we pride ourselves on good-paying jobs. Well when you get those, you also create a whole bunch of other jobs that are at $8, $9, $10, or $12/hour.”

If mainstream housing services are to be included in a broad-based community collaborative convened to support the development of housing for people experiencing homelessness, the group would need to accommodate these perspectives. But a focus on developing affordable workforce housing may not be consistent with developing housing or services for people experiencing homelessness. Further, this perspective seems to embody the perception that housing programs are a business investment with an expected return (i.e., a stable pool of employees and low wages). That philosophy may also undermine a social welfare philosophy that sees housing as part of the social safety net, provided even to those who cannot or do not work.

How Consumers Experience Networked Service Provision

Navigating Networks. During focus groups, consumers spent much of the time discussing the difficulty of finding housing. Consumers said that finding housing is difficult because most people have no idea where to start. One explained that her problem
was “Just to find out what I can and can’t do or how the system works—I have no idea and I never had to go through this before.” Many consumers said they had little experience searching for housing or negotiating leases. Often, lack of experience with finding housing was coupled with a non-existent rental history, which presented additional problems for housing seekers. Stakeholders agreed the system is opaque and confusing. As one put it, “That’s one of the huge issues, even for people already here. They don’t know how to navigate the system. Even for us, navigating the system is—we just send it back and forth between [agencies], half the time. Oh, you’ve already talked to them? Oh, sorry!”

Consumers reported using a variety of strategies to search for housing. Several consumers said they went to Craigslist or local printed classifieds to look for apartment listings. Others reported using Google to try to find housing, though without much success, especially in finding housing for felons. Most consumers were familiar with 211 and the 211 agency’s printed resource guide, which they found at the public housing authority, the state social services offices, and in shelters. Although consumers said they sometimes used resource guides or lists of landlords provided by agencies, they found that internet research, word of mouth through social networks, and looking for yard signs were the most effective ways to find apartments. One consumer echoed others when she explained, “A lot of times, I take the bus and just ride around and look because I look through the paper, I look through the Shopping News, I don’t see a whole lot. So my sister drives me around and we see more on the lawn signs than you do in the paper and all that.”
Ultimately, consumers said, lists of resources were available but not helpful in navigating the networks of providers. They said what was missing is guidance and help in finding housing that is a good match and help in filling out applications. They agreed that the real barrier to finding housing came not in finding information, but in taking that information and acting on it or following it up.

Among those who found housing or programs that seemed viable, the application process was one of the most frequently cited barriers to actually obtaining a place to live. Consumers said the application process for income-qualified housing and programs is difficult to navigate: applications are long and require extensive documentation for every member of the household, a requirement consumers found difficult to navigate. One consumer explained, “Not a lot of people know the process and what they have to do and the forms that they have to have, and not just for themselves, but for everyone in the household.” On top of that, application fees add up quickly as families apply for apartment after apartment. Some consumers reported applying for as many as 30 apartments before finding a place to live. A few consumers said they had tried to avoid filling out unnecessary applications by telling landlords about felony convictions or unemployment even before applying. But, they reported, landlords still encouraged them to fill out applications and pay the application fee, only to turn around and reject them because of a criminal background or lack of employment.

Both consumers and stakeholders said that credit checks and employment history often pose problems when searching for affordable housing. Consumers reported being denied apartments or having to pay down debts they did not know about in order to sign a lease. Several consumers said that simply coming up with the three to six months of bank
records that applications required was difficult, especially for those who do not have a bank account. Consumers reported that they were also frequently asked to pay for background checks with each application, which made searching for housing expensive.

Consumers saw lack of rental history or a history of eviction as a significant barrier to finding housing. Several consumers said they had no rental history because they had never had leases in their own names, and now that they were out on their own looking for an apartment, that had become a problem. One consumer explained, “My family always lived together. Everything was always in grandma's name. But after grandma died, we were all left to fend for ourselves. And they told me having no rental history is just as bad as having bad credit.”

Consumers explained how the search process became even more difficult for those with a criminal background. One consumer explained her situation this way: That [criminal background] kind of dwindles down your choice for any assistance, too. I'm interested in the income-based housing, and I don't have too much information about it. I don't know where to get it besides Google it, Google the information about if they help felons. I have a felony on my background, and I don't even know if I still apply for the housing waiting list, or if the income-based will help me.

Consumers reported that, as they navigated housing programs and applied for apartments, mixed messages and confusion reigned. Strict background check requirements generally kept anyone with a felony on their record out of subsidized housing or larger properties managed by companies. Several consumers said they had been assured by landlords that they could move in despite having a felony conviction,
only to be rejected after filling out an application and paying an application fee. Instead, most people with a felony record resorted to the felon-friendly housing list, which they obtained at shelters or various service agencies. However, consumers explained, felon-friendly housing was generally lower quality or in less desirable neighborhoods than subsidized housing. One consumer gave this example:

It's hard because I’m a felon, so I have to stay in the felony friendly. I found one just earlier today for $575 for a 2-bedroom [west of downtown], but the area has kind of got me worried, you know? But right now I'm just trying to get my foot in the door. I went through probably about 30 landlords and I got a lot of Nos, we don't have no vacancy, stuff like that, and it really got to me. I didn't want to go out and look again. My mother was a felon, and she had a hard time with places, too. She just got whatever she could find, whoever accepted her.

Consumers found themselves in the position of running around town among service providers trying to put together the documentation and money they would need to apply for and move into an apartment. Beyond application fees, security deposits also were a barrier for many families. Not all consumers were sure of how to make that happen, though several consumers reported they were aware of services available to help pay security deposits. One rattled off a list:

There's County, there's [the Community Action Agency], and Salvation Army. Those three are helping me right now. They said just find a place and one company--Salvation Army will help with my rent or my deposit and the other will take up the other bill. That way I can save up a month's worth of income so I never fall behind.
Stakeholders confirmed that these application problems are widespread among the consumers they see. Some stakeholders who work directly with consumers said they try to steer families toward properties where they are likely to meet qualifications so that families waste less time and money on applications. However, they explained, that process would be much easier if properties published their criteria for crime-free, credit score cut-offs, income thresholds, and the like so prospective tenants could better target their applications. Stakeholders also mentioned project-based housing waiting lists, each of which is kept separately by the project-based housing development. Tenants must apply separately to each one.

Several consumers found that their housing searches were made more difficult by inconsistent availability of programs and services offered by nonprofit organizations. One consumer, exasperated, put it this way:

What happens to the money that the people get for the programs and the office is only open for, like, one or two months and they have a big old flyer—you know, GED, rental assistance, and all of this other stuff—make the flyer look good, but they’re only open for two or three months, and then you go up there, and they’re not there?

Stakeholders who work in case management noted the same problem:

The directors have to make hard cuts when the program loses funding or doesn’t need the numbers. But I also think sometimes we see issues where people are saying they’re doing something, or have grant funding for that, so when you call and you say I thought you did this, they say we do, but we don’t have anything available right now. Well, then you’re not providing that service!
These statements make clear one of the consequences of relying on a patchwork of funding and network of providers. Not only are consumers unsure of where to go or how to navigate a network of providers, but they do not trust that services will continue to operate from day to day. Ephemeral grant funding begets ephemeral programs and exacerbates consumers’ difficulties finding and receiving safety net services.

*The Voucher Lottery.* One of the seemingly most straightforward approaches to securing housing was to get a Section 8 voucher. To consumers, getting a voucher felt something like winning the lottery: so long as tenants remain eligible, vouchers provide a deep, permanent housing subsidy. Yet most consumers said they had given up on the possibility of getting a Section 8 voucher any time soon; they were familiar with the long waiting list. In fact, not only did participants report a long waiting list for vouchers, but also for project-based subsidized housing and for affordable tax credit properties. Some consumers said they had considered applying for vouchers in other communities where waiting lists are shorter, but without reliable transportation, they could not commute back to Sioux Falls for work.

Even those who had made it to the top of the list explained that finding an apartment where they could use the voucher was difficult. Vouchers have rent caps, so recipients must find an apartment that is available at or below about 110% of the fair market rent level set by HUD. Otherwise, the difference falls on the tenant, and failure to pay means losing housing and the voucher. Stakeholders had explained that some landlords may be reluctant to accept vouchers, especially those who have had or heard about negative experiences in the past. Families may also have trouble finding an apartment with enough bedrooms, or finding a landlord willing to accept them.
Stakeholders and consumers alike reported that the strict credit and criminal background checks for HUD-subsidized housing also kept many consumers out.

_The Pitfalls of Private Housing Markets._ Consumers overwhelmingly agreed that finding affordable housing in Sioux Falls requires sacrificing housing or neighborhood quality. Many consumers complained about slumlords with poorly maintained properties. One answered a question about where to find affordable housing with a single word: “Slumlords. If you’re looking for a place that is anywhere under $700/month, you’re going to end up with a landlord who’s not responsible, for the most part.”

Without consumer advocates or government oversight, consumers felt resigned to accept a variety of housing quality problems, from cockroaches and bedbugs to mold, holes in walls or stairs, dysfunctional appliances, and plumbing problems. Generally, consumers regarded subsidized housing as being of higher quality than the market housing they could afford, in part due to the required inspections. “We moved into a house,” one consumer recalled, “and we were so happy to move in! But once we moved into it, it was so bad that I was like, oh my gosh, if I were on housing, they wouldn’t allow that!” Other consumers, however, reported that, even in subsidized housing, there was little follow-up or enforcement when inspections turned up problems.

Stakeholders acknowledged that slumlords and poor-quality housing were often the only available option for those waiting for housing vouchers or for people with a criminal background, poor credit, or other factors that make it difficult to secure a lease. Low-income renters are an especially vulnerable tenant population, as both consumers and stakeholders observed:
In that situation, there’s no real way—because it’s [subsidized] housing—that the tenant can withhold [rent], find out how much it takes to replace whatever is broken, or how much it takes to get rid of the mold. The tenant can’t go and withhold that rent, put it in escrow, and have that repair done. There’s no way.

Certain groups, such as people recently released from prison, are even more vulnerable. Unable to secure decent affordable housing, they may end up without a lease in a slumlord property with no recourse if something goes wrong. Consumers generally were unsure of their rights or protections available to tenants. Even then, with so few housing options available, particularly vulnerable tenants may be unlikely to exercise their rights. One stakeholder explained, “[In slumlord situations,] the tenants have some sense of their rights, but are too afraid to go to their landlord because they may owe rent or whatever, and so they don’t think that their landlord’s going to do anything about any issues.” Consumers confirmed that fear, explaining that tenants are often blamed for property damage or wear and tear that should be the landlord’s responsibility (e.g., peeling paint, plumbing and electrical problems, mold).

**Complex Problems Require Multifaceted Solutions.** Consumers’ explanations of barriers to finding housing highlight the complexity of homelessness as a social problem. Although providing housing is, of course, the simplest way to house someone who is homeless, equipping a household for self-sufficiency requires addressing a range of issues beyond housing, from income to transportation to child care. Therefore, safety net programs that intend to address homelessness and housing must internally develop a wide range of services or--more common in practice--network with a range of providers who can offer those services and supports.
Both consumers and stakeholders identified income as perhaps the most significant barrier to securing and maintaining housing. Both identified special needs among groups on limited incomes, such as those who depend on disability benefits as their main source of income. But they also said that, for many working people, wages simply are not high enough to afford market-rate housing. Consumers reported that it is especially hard for parents—and particularly single parents—to earn enough to afford housing and childcare. Often, consumers said, they were faced with a trade-off between working enough hours to afford expenses and being available for their children. One stakeholder, a single mother, explained:

At my last job, I was making $13. But I've moved over to a new job because my hours were 12 hours, 5 days a week. It was just too much. I was losing control of where my kids were, everything, so I changed my job so I could be around my kids more. And I'm making $10 there. And as long as it's $10 on up, I'm fine. Anything under $10, you're struggling.

Consumers also identified transportation as a significant barrier to finding and securing housing. Many consumers said they use the local bus system, and infrequent bus service and difficult transfers made it difficult for them to juggle their schedules. As one consumer explained, “I just wish they had more [bus service]! Because some of those routes just go once every hour, and once you miss it, there goes 2 hours of your time just waiting on buses. And then I wish some of them would cross paths. That way you could jump off one and get onto another one.” Consumers reported that, because buses run infrequently and transfers are inconvenient and expensive, bus trips take an inordinate
amount of time. Several consumers said that, because they spent hours on a single trip, they ended up missing appointments. One gave this example:

   Just to go out and get my son’s Social Security card took me 2 and a half hours, and I ended up missing another appointment just because I couldn’t get back downtown in time. Then when you go and say well I’m sorry, they’re like [scoffs] how could you go wrong? And I’m like well you try and go get a Social Security card way the heck out there on [the south side of the city] and try to get back downtown within an hour to two hours!

   Without reliable transportation, even accessing services or the documentation that is a prerequisite to applying for housing or services becomes a barrier. Consequently, consumers said they try to look for housing near the center of the city so they have easy access to most services. “Where would you find it [housing]?” One consumer reflected. “I'm hoping close to downtown in walking distance, close to grocery stores, that way it cuts back on gas and stuff like that. I know a lot of people tell me there's housing on the outskirts of town, but in my mind, I think, well am I going to be able to walk to a store? That's why I don't even bother looking at those.”

   For consumers, having a reliable car significantly opened up the options for housing, because it allowed them to search on the outskirts of town and in surrounding communities. Stakeholders agreed that transportation is a significant barrier. Several mentioned the difficulty consumers face in finding reliable transportation from home to all of the services available to support them on the path to self-sufficiency. One stakeholder gave this example:
We work on budgeting and how to be self-sufficient. The other day this mom was saying—she’s out in Tea. She got a really nice apartment. It's a beautiful apartment and [she was] so grateful, [but] she has to get into Sioux Falls without transportation to see her probation officer, her therapist, counselors, the social worker, you know, everyone like that.

Stakeholders also pointed out that transportation is a key piece in connecting people with jobs. One noted, “You work out there at the convention center, and the bus doesn’t run [to your apartment], so you hire a taxi. And by the time you get a taxi out there and a taxi back, you could just as well have stayed home because you’ve got pocket change.” For some consumers, accessing jobs meant finding transportation from housing on the outskirts of the city back into Sioux Falls for work. For others, that meant finding transportation from housing in the city to distant jobs—for example, in processing plants in Minnesota. In any case, stakeholders reported, when consumers find housing without transportation to work and services, the path to self-sufficiency is blocked. According to one stakeholder, “If they can’t get a job, they’ll never grow out of affordable housing subsidy to be able to build assets. If they can’t get to basic services—health, county, whatever—it’s just impossible for them to ever get ahead.”

For households with children, child care and other child-related concerns were intricately interwoven with the experience of homelessness and finding housing. Several consumers elaborated on the unique set of barriers to housing faced by families with children. In particular, many consumers reported struggling to balance the costs of housing and childcare and having trouble finding affordable apartments with enough
bedrooms. One consumer described how she tries to juggle housing with other basic needs:

I have a little boy and a little girl, seven and nine, and right now they share a room, but they're going to be at that point where they're going to need to get their own. But I'm barely paying the $530 a month for myself and utilities with my kids. That's not going to happen. I'm not going to find a three-bedroom. I'm like oh my lord, where's that going to come from? Any kind of assistance I get from my son's dad goes on the daycare expenses. With my income we don't even qualify for food stamps. I have to pay health insurance where I work. We don't get anything else. It's just like, oh my gosh, one of these days I'm going to have to move into a different apartment, and right now I'm just not making it.

Many consumers reported that they struggled to balance employment and parenting. Few could afford childcare, so they found themselves choosing between going to work or supervising their children. In many cases, the costs of childcare made it infeasible for consumers to work; they could not afford it. For many consumers, this made working infeasible. One consumer explained:

I've worked at McDonald's for a while and they pay $10 an hour. I thought it was good money just for working at McDonald's. But the hours were long because they didn't have enough workers, and they always called me in for work, and I felt like I was living at work more than I was living at home. I couldn't keep up with my little brothers and my son.

When consumers reflected on housing and children, they said one of their primary concerns was with neighborhood quality and its effects on children. They worried
especially about neighborhoods with concentrated poverty—the same neighborhoods where they said affordable housing or housing programs were mostly likely to be found. For these consumers, it seemed that accepting help from housing programs or supportive services meant compromising on their other needs and desires. One consumer described her situation:

We lived in a poor neighborhood. And my children, their behavior has already improved since we've moved out, just because the neighborhood. They don't have those influences that they had over there. I really feel like you get help and you accept it and you take it, and then the children suffer because of the neighborhood and different kids running around and things they do.

For several consumers, the search for affordable housing was entwined with custody of children. For some, lack of affordable housing was one barrier in gaining custody. One consumer described her situation:

I'm battling a custody battle for my daughter with her dad. It's kind of not really a battle. I mean, he's very well-established. His family owns property and they rent property to their family members. So he has his house and he rents it from his aunt and she takes care of him. But going through court and then telling them that I'm still struggling trying to find housing makes it a big deal because then the courts think that you're not adequate enough to take care of your child just because you don't have housing. It kind of hurts and breaks my heart, but I've gone through this like twice now. And it's all about having the affordable housing, or if you have housing in certain neighborhoods.
Other consumers said that, because they did not legally have custody of children or grandchildren living with them, they could not find childcare or receive assistance based on family size, so they struggled even more to work and afford housing.

*Discouraged and Worn Out by Rejection.* In a system where consumers are often on their own to navigate a network of providers, where people experiencing homelessness ride the bus for hours to collect documentation and funds just to apply for housing and programs, many consumers spoke about the difficulty of overcoming repeated rejections in their search for housing. Many said they became discouraged and felt like giving up. One consumer described the discouragement that comes from not being able to locate available resources or navigate the system.

How do they figure it out? It's sad. Some of them don't. That's why you see the shelters overflowing, because they don't know who to ask. You have pamphlets and brochures and stuff about places where you can go, but some of them are too scared. They don't want to, you know. And then to actually go into somewhere where they help, and then to get denied and say well you're going to be on the waiting list, that just breaks their spirit even more. There's just people that are out there that don't know where to go, don't know where to turn to, and don't know who to ask because they're tired of being told no.

*The Promise of Well-Networked Providers*

Consumers in the community--people experiencing homelessness or precariously housed--were worn out trying to navigate provider networks, applying for scores of apartments only to be rejected, running around trying to patch together the resources they
needed to apply for housing, and navigating ephemeral programs short on funding. But for consumers who had successfully found their way into a transitional housing program for homeless families, the benefits of being part of a well-networked program seemed clear.

In interviews, participants in a transitional housing program said one of the major advantages of being part of the program was being able to tap into referral networks that case managers made possible. Past participants who had graduated from the program praised case managers for their sincerity, personal connection, ability to relate, and swiftness and resourcefulness in making referrals. When asked to describe core components of the housing program, graduates highlighted referrals to resources as a key component of the program, including referrals for furniture, holiday food baskets and gifts, counseling, and employment.

Conclusion

In the eyes of stakeholders and consumers alike, the homeless services system is program rich but systems poor: It is a complex system with many influential stakeholders but no coordinating authority. Although programs exist to address a variety of needs, a lack of coordination among programs leaves consumers and providers alike without a clear idea of how to access the programs and resources that are available. Families in need of assistance may turn to a small number of housing search and information services, but they have no clearly defined, single point of entry to begin accessing the resources that currently exist. Stakeholders generally agreed that better coordination and collaboration among stakeholders in Sioux Falls could help ensure that existing programs
and resources reach people who need them. Because the homeless services system is complex, successful coordination will require broad-based collaboration by many of the actors in the network.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings presented above demonstrate how the devolution of federal safety net programs has required communities to ramp up collaboration and build networks to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. These collaborative governance structures are used to set priorities, establish shared goals, collect and distribute data, and disburse funding. In addition to managing and disbursing federal funds, these collaborative governance structures are being used to seek out private funding in order to augment federal and local government funding. These new bodies vary widely in their structures, being led by local government offices, nonprofits, or service providers, and service geographical regions that vary from a single city to an entire state. This dissertation finds that the context in which these collaboratives operate not only shapes the structure that develops but also its effects, both for providers and consumers in the system. This section revisits the research questions driving this dissertation in light of the findings, first elaborating the consequences of collaborative governance for providers and consumers, then outlining factors that make collaboration work.

CONSEQUENCES OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Consequences for Consumers

An important contribution of this dissertation is to better understand the consequences for consumers of the devolution of the federal safety net in general and the use of collaborative governance among homeless service providers in particular. The findings presented above suggest that consumers may suffer from a poorly coordinated
network of providers. Consumer struggle to identify a front door to the system, a place to get started. Further, given the ephemeral nature of patchwork funding, consumers may not trust that services will continue to operate from day to day. Lack of stability in networked systems can undermine both the ability of consumers to navigate and make use of the system and their trust in the system.

However, for consumers who do manage to navigate the system and find a point of entry, collaboration among providers can be advantageous in confronting complex problems, such as homelessness. Findings from interviews with participants in a transitional housing program reveal the significance of referrals among providers. For complex problems, no single provider will likely meet all of a consumer’s needs, which may range from healthcare to employment to transportation and housing or more. But in a well-coordinated network, providers can work together to collectively meet the needs of consumers.

*Preconditions for Collaborative Governance*

Where and when does collaborative governance arise, and what predicts the organizational form it might take? Resource dependence theory argues that collaborative governance arises in order to secure and maintain resource flows, such as government contracts, and tends to reinforce the status quo. Neoinstitutional theory argues that collaborative governance and its form depends on local context and political culture, and that local norms of collaboration may develop outside of resource-seeking behavior. The findings presented in this dissertation support a neoinstitutional perspective, demonstrating how local context and political considerations shape the organizational
structure of collaboration. However, the findings also suggest that accessing resources is an important—though not the only—factor in shaping collaboration. Further, findings presented here suggest that resources driving collaboration are not only funding or contracts, but also information, training, data sharing, and networking.

In the field of homeless service provision, the rise of collaborative governance came about in part due to a federal mandate. Communities organized CoCs in order to apply for and receive federal funding through the CoC grant program. Yet federal guidelines give a fair amount of latitude in how CoCs organize their collaborative governance structure and activities. Further, the requirements of the CoC grant program are not sufficient to explain why providers—and even entire communities—that do not directly apply for or receive CoC grant funds still participate in—or organize—collaborative governance structures.

Neoinstitutionalist perspectives are most useful in explaining the rise of collaborative governance in the homeless services space. The current arrangement of collaboration, with all of its local variations, is the result of political decisions and interdependence among nonprofits and government and the establishment of new norms of networked service delivery. The force behind these arrangements cannot be reduced to resource dependence or self-serving seeking of funds or contracts, and collaborative governance in and of itself does not necessarily have a preordained outcome. Both the precursors and consequences of collaboration depend on political context, local history, and local players. In Des Moines, for example, a provider-led coordinating council was replaced by a nonprofit lead organization that was perceived as more neutral. The transition from a provider-led system to the current board was rocky at first, but providers
now support the new board. The organization of the nonprofit was perceived by some as a loss of control. The decision to incorporate the lead organization as an independent 501c3 was not based on a strong preference for that structure but more on political expediency: it allowed the CoC to be perceived as independent. Given the politics of the community, the CoC needed a board that was independent of city and county government. In Madison, similar political concerns resulted in a different outcome: there, the lead organization is city government. Like in Des Moines, however, a provider-leader was seen as potentially entangling conflicts of interest or bias. But unlike Des Moines, Madison leaders rejected the idea of an independent nonprofit lead because the CoC would have lost so many shared resources from the city that help support the CoC (e.g., space, infrastructure, office support).

It appears that communities make a good faith effort to organize collaborative governance in an effective way. However, the form of governance that will be most effective may depend more on local context than any overarching association between form and function. The analysis of CoC data from across the United States supports this point: for the most part, organizational form of CoC lead agencies is not consistently associated with performance. What appears more important is how the collaboration functions, and based on case study findings, that appears to depend on managing local context.

Two additional patterns in the findings lend themselves to a neoinstitutionalist interpretation: First, participation in collaborative governance does not seem to be primarily driven by seeking funding or contracts, as resource dependence theory would predict. Providers participate in collaboration when they see value in it, but value does
not always come in the form of funding. It could also be training, information sharing, or networking. Consistent with a new institutionalist perspective, norms of collaboration and participation also seem to be a strong incentive to participation, although it is possible the influence of norms is conflated with pressure to participate in strategic planning discussions that could shape the direction of future policy and funding. Second, local communities such as Cedar Rapids and Sioux Falls are organizing collaborative governance structures at the local level even though they are not required to do so by HUD or the CoC grant program. Instead, collaboration in these communities appears driven by a norm toward collaboration, perpetuated in part by the prevalence of CoC collaborative structures in other communities—the type of structural isomorphism neoinstitutionalism expects to arise as an organizational culture develops.

Civil Society and Advocacy

What are the consequences of collaborative governance for civil society and for advocacy in the homeless services space? The findings presented above suggest that, indeed, collaborative governance structures may tend toward antidemocratic insider politics at the expense of outsider advocacy and minority voices. Optimistically, though, antidemocratic tendencies may be attenuated by an increased focus on measurement and transparency.

Consistent across collaborative groups is a marked effort to get everyone on the same page with a shared vision and working toward the same ends. Contrary to pluralist theories that see nonprofits as a way to give voice to minority concerns, new collaborative networks of nonprofits focus on creating strategic agreement, and
dissention may be seen as undermining legitimacy and threatening the network. Consistently across communities in this study, leaders frame one aspect of collaborative work as trying to avoid dissension and to co-opt advocacy by becoming the voice and authority on homelessness.

Although resource dependence theory is not adequate to explain the rise and organizational form of collaborative governance, it does offer a compelling explanation for differences in bed type availability across CoCs with different types of organizations at the helm and differences in the shape of advocacy efforts in collaborative systems. Resource dependence theory predicts that collaborative networks would tend toward cartel politics and insider advocacy. Consistent with this theory, CoCs led by provider organizations appear to have stayed more entrenched in the traditional, emergency shelter-based approach to addressing homelessness, whereas other CoCs have moved toward higher proportions of permanent housing. This association between organization type and approach to services may reflect the cartel-like operation of a so-called homeless industrial complex, or cooptation by an organization with a vested interest in maintaining its suite of services (historically, temporary shelter).

Efforts within collaborative governance organizations to create a shared vision and common goals may be further evidence of a tendency toward cartel politics and insider advocacy. Even further, collaborative governance could offer a model by which networks of nonprofits gain influence over funders and policymakers—for example, through Funders Together or by including funders on boards and informing them about the needs as perceived by providers. By uniting under a shared vision and list of strategic priorities, providers might crowd out minority voices while gaining influence over
funding and policy; that influence, in turn, allows the collaborative group to put further pressure on outsiders. Boise offers a case in point: there, collaborative leaders used the carrot of HMIS funding and stick of convincing funders such as the United Way and hospital systems to threaten to pull funding from providers that did not participate with the CoC and HMIS. Faced by the prospect of losing funding, reluctant providers came to participate. At the same time, the Boise/Ada County CoC engaged in efforts to control messaging around homelessness, intended to head off outsider advocacy, protest, or contention generally around homelessness. As a result of their efforts, the Boise/Ada County CoC has been able not only to assemble but to hold together and even expand a collaborative network—even beyond the federal requirements for a CoC—to pull in nearly all homeless service providers in the community, even those who do not receive CoC grant funds. They have done so in a way that appears inclusive and democratic, but at the same time, this collaborative network has aligned policymakers, funders, and service providers. Could it crowd out innovation or outsider advocacy?

The implications of these effects on advocacy may be attenuated by a simultaneous move toward increased measurement, transparency, and accountability. Minority voices and outsider advocates may indeed by quieted as providers jump on board and see collaboration as the new norm and the way to tap into resources. Yet the consequences for communities—and particularly for people experiencing homelessness—may still be positive if collaboratives can effectively marshal data and transparency for accountability and performance improvement. Contrary to hypotheses that contracting with nonprofits could decrease accountability or public control, some local collaboratives are proactively trying to become more transparent (e.g., by hosting
data dashboards). Revealingly, in the analysis of CoC data, HMIS coverage (i.e., a comprehensive data tracking system) seems to be one of the best predictors of effective CoC collaborative action in reducing homelessness. CoC’s with higher HMIS coverage (that is, where more providers participate in a shared data system) have more permanent housing, shorter lengths of stay in temporary housing, and fewer people experiencing chronic homelessness per capita. Measurement and accountability appear to go together with good governance and effective intervention.

Further, analysis of performance measures across CoCs suggests that provider-led CoCs—despite maintaining a higher proportion of temporary shelter instead of permanent housing—perform better than CoCs led by other organizational types when it comes to reducing chronic homelessness and the length of time people spend in temporary housing. Although provider-led CoCs have relatively less of their housing inventory invested in permanent housing, they appear more successful at actually realizing desired outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. Thus, although provider-led networks may tend toward cartel-like politics or an entrenched status quo approach to service type, there is not clear evidence that these tendencies hurt consumers.

The concept map in the figure below summarizes the relationships uncovered in this dissertation. Key concepts and relationships are labeled.
Figure 7. Concept Map
MAKING COLLABORATION WORK

Ultimately, it appears that the ways in which communities organize networks of homeless services providers depend on local context. Across different contexts, organizational forms may vary widely. Nevertheless, general principles can be distilled to guide effective collaboration. This section summarizes findings that help reveal the conditions under which collaboration works best and how practitioners, policymakers, and others in the field can shape networks to best promote the public good. In brief, effective collaboration is organized around a unified vision and voice, led by a local champion, and backed by sufficient resources; it engages a broad and diverse membership organized into task-oriented groups and uses strategic plans, data and information, and funding to incentivize participation and collaboration. Effective collaboration uses advocacy as a tool to promote a shared agenda and focuses on building horizontal relationships and trust among members.

Unified Vision and Voice

Collaboratives aim to foster systems thinking, identify a shared vision, and communicate with a unified voice. As discussed above, focus on a shared vision could crowd out innovation or outsider advocacy; nevertheless, it is central to effectively coordinating collaborative work. Across the cases examined here, community-level strategic planning is a top priority for collaborative networks. Governance committees seek to add value to the community by bringing together stakeholders from across systems to talk about homelessness and set priorities for reducing it. But because network members come from diverse professional backgrounds, they come to this work with
different priorities. Across cases, collaborative groups described the early years of collaboration as a process of identifying, clarifying, and working toward a shared goal and a shared vision. Commonly, stakeholders were convened in order to agree on a shared vision, begin to think at a systems level, and set priorities. By establishing that basic agreement, members of the system hoped to communicate to external parties clearly and with a unified voice.

Homelessness intersects a wide range of institutions. To generate systems-level change, a broad cross-section of those institutions need to work together to co-produce solutions. In most case study communities, a similar list of institutions to invite emerged, including both housing and homeless service providers as well as representatives from the courts and criminal justice system, county jails, hospitals and healthcare providers, and others who serve people experiencing homelessness. When building this coalition, most communities focused initial meetings on establishing a shared vision and priorities. In some cases, this process was spurred by a staff coordinator or small team assembling relevant data and information about the community (e.g., in Boise where staff partnered with the university for a study demonstrating the potential financial impact of providing more permanent supportive housing). But across cases, collaboratives aim to create inclusive processes (e.g., community summits) for strategic planning and developing a vision and priorities. The common philosophy is that collaboratives should work to build consensus so that all members of the coalition feel bought in to the priorities that are set. In cases where the process is regarded as successful, strategic plans are thought of not as a list of priorities on paper, but an opportunity for participants to network and begin thinking of themselves as part of a larger system. That is, strategic planning is not about
the plan that is produced so much as it is about building the social infrastructure for collaborative governance.

In addition to setting priorities, collaborative groups commonly work on finding a way to communicate clearly with external groups and develop a unified voice around homelessness. Communities report that establishing credibility, expertise, and a unified message are essential to gaining influence in the community; the group must be seen as the authority when it comes to homelessness. An indicator that the group is gaining influence is that external entities consult the group before implementing policies or pursuing initiatives that may affect people experiencing homelessness. Some communities have gone so far as to designate a staff coordinator or board chair creates a single point of contact that external groups can easily find. That person facilitates communication in three major ways:

- Coordinating internal communication to keep stakeholders working together toward shared goals,
- Serving as a single point of contact to communicate points of consensus with external groups, and
- Serving as a broker to check in with stakeholders as new issues arise.

In terms of democratic function, however, this consensus-based approach to developing a unified vision and communicating a unified message could stifle opposition. As networks grow, excluded groups that attempt to advocate or criticize from the outside may lose access to funding, policymakers, press, and overall legitimacy. The communities studied for this project are fairly new to their efforts, so it will remain to be seen over coming years how this tension plays out.
Local Champions and Sufficient Resources

Across case study communities, successful collaborative efforts to address homelessness were led by local champions. In Boise, that was the mayor and his staff; in Fort Collins, a real estate attorney and United Way employee. The identity and specific position of the local champion appears less important than the fact of having an individual or small core team pushing for collaborative work to happen. Local champions who are in positions of power and influence have a unique opportunity to pull together the community.

Focal projects were another common way in which collaborative groups first stitched together a network. In several communities, work on a new housing project helped focus attention and launch collaboration around homelessness. A concrete project brings people together around clear goals and objectives. However, project-based collaboration is typically short-lived. For long-term sustainability, organizational infrastructure needs to be put in place.

Commonly, projects focused on a small defined population such as veterans, youth, or chronic homeless. In several of the communities studied here, that population is a small group of super utilizers--people who are frequent, well known users of emergency medical services, law enforcement, emergency shelters, or other community services. For example, in Boise, work on a permanent supportive housing (PSH) project for super utilizers of community services brought together city leaders with county and hospital leaders, all with a shared interest in reducing the cost of serving super utilizers. In Fort Collins, work on a housing first initiative reinvigorated collaboration. Although projects
were the most commonly cited spur to action, other things could also kickstart collaboration. Additional spurs to action include new group membership, new or renewed commitment from local government, new funding source, new champion in a position of power and visibility, or a new branding and messaging campaign.

In order to make the charismatic appeal of a local champion or the energy behind a focal project more sustainable, communities face the challenge of institutionalizing collaborative work. For sustainability and efficacy, communities sought to invest in capacity building--someone whose job description (or part of it) is building systems, finding solutions, and weaving together data, funding, and stakeholders. In the communities studied here, it was typical to house a coordinator within city government or with a nonprofit organization.

These communities reveal how collaboration requires resources and dedicated staff time. The consensus across communities was that the coordinator should be located within an organization that has the economy of scale necessary to provide administrative and back office support--larger, better resourced organizations will be better able to support the group’s work. An advantage of locating a coordinator position within city government is that government has access to other resources--finance, backend support, and the like. In essence, the city provides a backbone for the enterprise. Several communities, including Boise and Madison, transitioned from a part-time or external coordinator to a full-time, internal city employee. They funded the positions with general funds and CoC grants. That city investment signaled interest and leadership around homelessness and helped bring other stakeholders to the table.
An alternative to housing a coordinator within local government was to establish a nonprofit organization to lead the collaborative (as, for example, in Des Moines and Omaha). However, there appear to be distinct challenges to this approach. First and foremost, smaller nonprofit organizations lack the resource support provided by being housed within a larger organization (e.g., space, infrastructure, administrative office support). A new nonprofit also must take on the work of governing the nonprofit itself, which can lead to confusion for board members who are asked to do the work of a typical governing board and the coordination work for which the organization was set up. Another option is to designate an existing nonprofit (e.g., a service provider) as the lead, but that may generate perceived conflicts of interest.

Those communities that housed coordinator positions in separate nonprofits typically did so for political reasons (i.e., the nonprofit was perceived as more independent and neutral), and they recognized the challenges and limitations incurred as a result. They also recognized that they were able to use a nonprofit structure only because they could realize economies of scale--in one case, because the nonprofit employed around seven people full-time to do administrative work and fundraising, and in another because the nonprofit was nested within a larger organization that served as fiscal agent and provided space and office support.

*Broad, Diverse Membership*

Because homelessness and its effects cut across sectors of a community, the communities studied here attempted to assemble collaborative groups whose members represented a broad, diverse cross-section of the community. Collaborative groups in all
of the case study communities had, or were attempting to create, memberships that were broad, diverse, and cross-sector. Collaborative governance appeared to benefit from recruiting strong systems in the community that shared a mutual interest in addressing homelessness (e.g., healthcare). This makes sense since systems that are strong have the ability to bring resources to the table; systems with a mutual interest in addressing homelessness have the motivation to bring resources to the table.

In case study communities, systems represented in collaborative groups included public housing authorities, city planners, healthcare providers, behavioral health providers, law enforcement, emergency services, property managers, housing developers, foundations and other funders, human services providers, K-12 and higher education, faith community leaders, and people with recent lived experience of homelessness. Consistently, communities were moving away from governance by homeless service providers; instead, most were seeking to carve out a more limited role (or proportion of membership on executive bodies) for homeless service providers. In terms of the individuals seated on collaborative governance boards, there was some variation across communities, but a general consensus that front-line staff are not in an ideal position to network for governance. Instead, frontline staff should be involved to the extent they can benefit from training or information sharing, but they were not recruited for leadership or decision-making positions. Instead, communities seem to prefer people at the leadership level in their home institutions (e.g., associate directors). In most case study communities, collaborative work was seen as higher-level planning work, setting specific short-term goals, then delegating to workgroups for more targeted work. Collaboration, in other words, was indeed about governance, not sharing day-to-day work.
In several cases, efforts to address homelessness were coordinated with other community plans and collaborative groups and tied to mainstream housing and community development activities. Commonly, the collaborative group working on homelessness was consulted on the local municipal Consolidated Plan for CDBG and HOME funds. In some cases, where local government allocates general funds toward homelessness, the group was also be consulted on how those funds can be woven together with other available funding streams to support shared priorities around homelessness.

Mechanisms to formalize these connections varied. Communities used shared board membership, reserved seats, and formal consultation, or periodic summits to connect diverse efforts. For example, in Madison, the coordinator’s job description includes work on the Consolidated Plan; in Omaha, the collaboration group splits ESG administration costs with the city and helps evaluate recipients but consults on the Consolidated Plan pro bono out of shared interest in grant allocations. In Omaha, the collaborative group also has a standing bi-monthly meeting with the city planning department to discuss homelessness and housing. In Cedar Rapids, the city designates a spot for a member of the collaboration group on all city boards related to housing. Annual summits also bring together stakeholders and policymakers to keep all informed about existing initiatives. These linkages help ensure that the collaboration group’s strategic plans align with other community plans related to housing and homelessness.

In no case did that advisory capacity extend to actual policymaking, but in some cases, the collaborative group did have the ear of policymakers and their consultation was sought on changes to local ordinances or policies where they could affect people
experiencing homelessness. Close ties—sometimes interlocking board membership—between collaborative groups and local government made it easy for policymakers to consult with that group as the point of contact for community opinion around homelessness. That might bolster the legitimacy of the collaborative group, but could also jeopardize democratic decision-making if it means other groups with outsider agendas had more limited access to policymakers.

Strategic Plans as Governance Tools

Common across comparison communities, collaborative groups led strategic planning to address homelessness. Typically, they oversee a needs assessment and gaps analysis to identify community needs, bring stakeholders together to set priorities, then collect data and report on progress toward goals. In the last few years, it appears, there has been a shift toward short, simple, and accessible strategic plans. In the communities studied here, collaborative groups have aimed to create inspirational, not overwhelming or pessimistic plans. This makes sense in light of evidence that, nationwide, 10-year plans went unfulfilled because the goals seemed unachievable and distant or because the plans themselves were never read. This turn toward shorter, simpler plans appears to be a tactical governance move intended to facilitate collaboration—keeping people and institutions aligned toward a limited set of short-term objectives that can be achieved in a timeframe shorter than leadership turnover within member organizations (i.e., one- to three-year goals).

Comparison communities also reveal how strategic plans have become communication tools. Though often grounded in data, evidence, and months or years of
debate and discussion, strategic plans in several communities were presented simply, even as a single page or website. Boise, for example, uses a three-page plan to present four initiatives and communicate strategic priorities in a concise and inspirational way. The language used to communicate goals is inspirational, not doom-and-gloom. Collaborative groups try to create plans that will attract community support and investment because they seem achievable and the problems identified do not seem intractable. These documents not only commit the collaboration to a shared vision; they are also used to communicate that vision to the community and to attract additional investment. Yet at the same time, these short, simple strategic plans paper over possible dissension or alternative paths and competing goals that might have emerged during the planning process.

Organizing the Work of Collaborative Governance

Several comparison communities had suffered disengaged boards with loose charters and voluntary membership. By revamping governance structure with more clearly defined expectations, communities like Boise were able to increase engagement and efficacy. Several communities had recently completed or were currently working on revising organizing documents to more clearly outline roles and responsibilities for participating organizations, group members, and staff.

Typically, comparison communities structured their collaboration groups as a single executive committee with several standing subcommittees or ad hoc work groups. The executive committee might be given flexibility to form additional advisory work groups as needed, for example, to oversee development of a new housing project.
Staffing levels varied. Investing more in dedicated staff will enable the group to accomplish more, provided expectations and objectives are clearly defined. A staff coordinator’s job description could be limited to minimally keep the board running and typing minutes or could include a range of responsibilities such as fundraising, leading strategic and community planning (though planning itself should be collaborative and inclusive), monitoring and reporting on progress toward strategic goals, researching and designing interventions, and external communications.

A well-designed subcommittee and workgroup structure allow the executive committee to focus on high level, strategic priorities and delegate more detailed work. The number and type of workgroups varied by community, but common examples include workgroups for data and HMIS, coordinated entry, a providers forum, public awareness and advocacy, healthcare, youth or other target population, or a funders forum. Typically, across communities, providers came together in a providers workgroup focused on networking and training rather than governance. Information is a commodity, and meetings focused around sharing information make participation valuable and engagement more likely. Communities where providers actively participate tend to structure meetings around learning opportunities, collaborative time, and training.

Although collaborative groups aim to be broad and inclusive, the communities studied here brought the full memberships together only occasionally for periodic meetings. These large meetings are useful for workgroups to give updates, for sharing education and awareness about available resources and data, and to renew commitment to areas of consensus and shared vision. However, such large meetings make detailed work
difficult; agendas instead focused on information sharing, approving proposals from committees, or strategic planning.

Data as a Governance Tool

Across communities, conversations about data were absolutely central to collaborative governance. The collaborative groups clearly prioritize local data access and reporting as a way to incentivize and measure the outcome of collaboration. Arguably, local data are necessary to tailor interventions and track performance on a local scale. Most homeless management information systems (HMIS) run at a state or Continuum of Care (CoC) level. For localities that do not have their own local HMIS, obtaining local data can be difficult. Localities may choose to break up a statewide data system or develop a parallel local system. For example, Idaho had a statewide HMIS implementation, but when the HMIS lead failed to accommodate local reporting requests, the statewide system was broken up. In Fort Collins, which is part of Colorado’s statewide HMIS, additional local data are being collected to augment what they are able to receive from the state. Alternatively, a locality could work with the state to build capacity within a statewide system for local reporting. In Alaska, for instance, the Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) manages the statewide HMIS and provides local reporting for municipalities that are part of the Balance of State CoC.

Useful data reported seems to motivate action and investment in collaborative groups. Both bed use HMIS data and coordinated entry data provide real-time information about community needs and capacity. But in order for that data to be useful, it must be of high quality and communicated clearly. Data dashboarding and visualization
are tools that these comparison communities are increasingly using to help communicate data clearly. One strategy they have adopted is to choose a few high impact metrics to keep reports focused.

Providers who receive federal funds are obligated to participate in an HMIS; for those who do not, collaboration groups need to create an alternative incentive to report data. In several of the communities studied here, data reporting was being used to provide that incentive. Again, information functions as a valuable commodity. ICA uses data quality reports to give feedback on which providers are submitting complete and accurate data and which need to make improvements. In comparison communities that work with ICA, data dashboards and visualizations have proven to be a powerful incentive to get providers on the HMIS and to improve data entry among those who are already on the system.

Money Talks

Much of the literature on government and nonprofit collaborative governance has focused on funding arrangements. In these communities, too, finances were important--though they were clearly not the only factor at play in collaborative governance. Still, across comparison communities, there was a general consensus that when it comes to securing commitment to collaboration, money talks. Funds can be used either as a carrot or a stick to incentivize collaboration, data sharing, HMIS participation, or other desired outcomes. In some cases, collaboration groups have funds of their own that they can direct. More commonly, groups work with funders in the community to ensure funding priorities are in line with the group’s strategic priorities.
Collaboration groups that exercise more-or-less direct control over funding typically tap CoC planning grants, city general funds, or federal grants--that is, they act as intermediaries between the principal (government funder) and the agents (service providers). They may use these funding streams to help pay for operations and the data collection necessary to support collaboration, diverting some funding from service provision to support collaborative infrastructure. For example, in Boise, the city not only uses CDBG and general funds to incentivize collaboration; they have also allocated general funds to pay for HMIS startup costs and ongoing fees to get more providers on the system. This financial support makes it possible for providers to join and broadcasts the message that collaboration and data tracking are priorities.

Some collaboration groups engage in fundraising. To augment the capacity of local or federal government funds, they seek out grants, contributions, or corporate gifts in cash or in kind. Often, contributions are tied to specific projects. For example, groups in Boise and Fort Collins have worked to secure funding from hospital systems for permanent supportive housing projects. The hospitals have committed funds to these projects in the hope that housing super utilizers will decrease unnecessary emergency department use and reduce costs to the hospitals. In Fort Collins, setting up a local collaborative and developing a branded identity for it has also helped appeal to donors, who like to know their dollars will stay local. In Des Moines, developing a strategic plan and means for data collection have helped the collaboration coordinator communicate funding priorities and plans for evaluation and accountability to major foundations in order to secure grant funding.
Another strategy adopted in several communities was for collaborations to leverage available community funding by advising funders on strategic priorities, without the collaboration group itself soliciting any funds. As a mechanism for doing so, some collaborations find success in involving funders on the collaboration’s executive board or in a funders forum subcommittee. By bringing funders together, they keep them informed of community needs and gaps. Collaborations hope these efforts will unify strategic priorities and funding priorities community-wide. Funders may see coming together a more effective and streamlined way to achieve community impact than a piecemeal approach to grantmaking. In Boise, for example, funders are toying with the idea of creating a consolidated application to the funders forum for grant-funded work around homelessness. In Omaha, the collaboration group is in talks with funders not to create a single application but at least to agree on some standardized priorities, questions, outcomes, or formats for grant applications. In several large cities, such as Houston and Los Angeles, the funders forum idea has been implemented to wide acclaim under the Funders Together to End Homelessness model.

A collaboration group is uniquely positioned to braid together multiple funding sources. Collaboration groups have a more holistic view of needs and gaps across the community, and they can help providers and funders braid together federal, state, local, and private funding for maximum impact. Across comparison communities, community efforts around homelessness are typically funded by the city, county, United Way, and federal grants (including Continuum of Care, ESG, and CDBG). In some communities, housing trust funds, special state funds (e.g., marijuana tax dollars in Colorado), or local foundations play a significant role. In several communities, the healthcare sector is
increasing its investment in addressing homelessness, typically by contributing to permanent supportive housing projects by funding or providing in-kind services.

In funding and governance, there appears to be a Matthew Effect or self-fulfilling prophecy effect. In a way, government funds appear to function as seed money to establish a collaborative governance body, which in turn creates a shared vision, unified voice, and set of strategic goals. As the plan laid out by the collaborative group gains momentum, other funders may align their funding with that group. To the extent that these efforts are successful, a participate-or-perish dynamic may arise in communities: providers or advocates who disagree with the priorities of the collaborative governance body will be iced out, with little influence over policymaking and limited access to funding.

*Advocacy Effects*

In these communities, collaborative groups have moved to build public engagement through communication in a proactive, not reactive, way. Some communities face a vocal and oppositional advocacy community, whereas others have little advocacy around homelessness happening in the community. In both cases, the collaboration group has tried to drive the conversation around homelessness by taking on education and community engagement. Typically, communication plans center around points of consensus and a positive shared vision. In some communities, such as Boise, they have branded the Continuum of Care and coordinated entry (e.g., Our Path Home) and developed a unified message so that efforts are visible and recognizable in the
community. Several communities incorporate annual community summits into their communication and education plan, and all report data (most through a dashboard).

*Relationships and Trust*

Collaborative work requires relationships and trust. Across comparison communities, interviewees stressed the importance of investing in relationships. Preexisting relationships can help foster trust—for example, when a provider moves into a coordinator role and is able to effectively engage providers because of a longstanding relationship. Relationships can also be built deliberately through one-on-one coffees or happy hours, facilitated communication and trust building workshops, and frequent face-to-face meetings. Several communities said happy hours and coffees were major investments that led to identifying champions and knitting together a group of committed leaders around addressing homelessness.

Geographical nearness and preexisting relationships can bring social capital to a group, and some collaborations have also worked intentionally to overcome group members’ tendencies to bite their tongues during a meeting and wait for the meeting after the meeting to sow dissent. In Omaha, for instance, the group is in its second year of facilitated sessions to increase participation, reflection, and open disagreement to build trust and encourage communication. In Boise, transparency—posting minutes, sharing data dashboards—has been crucial to building trust.
CONCLUSION

Consistent with new institutionalism, whether and how collaboration emerges depends deeply on local context and local political culture. Further collaboration and its success depend on establishing local norms that collaboration is the way business will be done. But consistent with resource dependence theory, collaboration also tends to turn inward, even when its intent is to be broad and inclusive: parties focus on building trust and relationships and also on increasing funding flows to participants in the collaborative by wielding influence over foundations, even to the point of cutting off resources to parties who refuse to go along with the shared vision. When the collaboration itself is seen as legitimate by the public, it can encourage participation from member organizations whose own claims to legitimacy depend on being part of the collaborative group. Challengingly, though, participating organizations may attend meetings out of fear, not collaborative spirit, if they sense that participating is key to insider strategies to gain funding or public legitimacy.

Often, it appears as though factors that make collaboration work are also the things that tend to make it less democratic. That is, collaboration appears to work best when the group embraces a shared vision and goals—but that unity in purpose might come at the expense of minority voices. Also, collaboration appears to work best when horizontal relationships among members are strong, but strong inward bonds could favor insider relationships that trade off with outsider engagement and discourage innovation in ideas. Collaborative structures appear to embody a tension: fostering strong internal bonds may (a) narrow focus and diversity of activity and (b) reduce investment in
outward facing activities, including oppositional advocacy. Collaboration turns action inward but undermines the theoretical pluralistic check on cartel politics. Paradoxically, it appears, collaboration that is intended to be inclusive and participatory tends toward anti-democratic forms.

Importantly, collaboratives appear to have at least a partial corrective: measurement, accountability, and transparency. At their best, collaboratives combine a professional focus on measurement, performance tracking, and quality improvement with a public commitment to openness and transparency. That public/private partnership is critical to effective, democratic collaboration that serves the public interest.
REFERENCES


