ATTACHMENT A
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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND RESEARCH: WHAT WORKS AND WHY?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of this study is to improve our understanding of how some local and regional nonprofit, public interest organizations successfully use research to inform their rural development strategies. The end goal of the study is to find out how funders who work with rural development groups can encourage and support such research capacity.

Efforts to encourage development organizations to use and conduct research are based on the premise that they will be more credible than those whose strategies are based on emotion, hunch, and ideology. They can be more persuasive and ultimately more effective because what they say is based on thorough research and thoughtful analysis.

Encouraging development groups to conduct research is not simply a matter of making research money available. While development practitioners may be in an excellent position to identify key research questions, they often have little research experience themselves and lack a broad outlook on the critical needs and opportunities in their communities.

To learn more about how and why development groups conduct research, interviews were conducted with staff from local, regional, and national public interest development organizations representing a broad range of sophistication and experience.

The groups fall into three categories. First are those for whom research is not a priority, primarily because their advocacy focus precludes it. Since their skills and objectives lie elsewhere, these groups should not be the focus of an effort to strengthen research capacity.

Second are those that want to use research to inform their strategies, but whose scope and research experience tend to be limited. These groups could benefit from a targeted program to help them meet their specific research goals.

Third are groups whose objective is to affect policy at the highest level by having their platforms taken seriously and developing a position of trust and respect. These groups view research as a critical part of their work and devote substantial resources to maintaining the necessary capacity. They could benefit from broader contacts with professional researchers who could act as colleagues and peer reviewers, as well as with other development organizations.

Two common elements characterize organizations that have made research a specific, strategic goal. The first is a permanent, collaborative relationship between the development organization and people with research experience. Strong programs rely on consistent input from some person (or group of persons) who is drawn into the research project at its inception, and is involved through its execution until the review of its final product. The second is a willingness to draw in diverse interests who value and support the research process.

The study concludes that a carefully targeted, well coordinated program to strengthen research capacity is needed and feasible and would be well received by the groups themselves. It should be designed to meet the needs of both middle level and larger, intermediary development groups by combining peer level contacts and consulting services with tutorials and manuals.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND RESEARCH: WHAT WORKS AND WHY?

I. INTRODUCTION

Study Objective

The objective of this study is to improve our understanding of how some local and regional nonprofit, public interest organizations successfully use research to inform their rural development strategies. The end goal of the study is to find out how funders who work with rural development groups can encourage and strengthen such a research capacity.

The organizations discussed in this report are concerned with a broad array of rural development issues, including education, jobs, natural resources, and agriculture. Their geographic focus is the rural "community," whether it is local, state, or regional. They share an interest in understanding and managing the fundamental economic changes that rural areas face in the 1980's. Their major functions are advocacy, service delivery, economic development, research, and/or education. For brevity's sake, we refer to these organizations as rural development groups.

The rationale for encouraging community organizations to conduct research is based on the premise that they will be more credible than groups whose strategies are based on emotion, hunch, and ideology. They can be persuasive and ultimately more effective because what they say is based on sound research and thoughtful analysis. For example, many groups involved in rural development could benefit from better understanding the economic base and structure of their communities. Such an understanding would allow them to chart a pragmatic course for future program development based on thorough analysis and become advocates for policy changes rather than merely

reacting to current issues, randomly choosing strategies, or engaging in single issue confrontations with adversaries.

Rural development is a complex undertaking for community organizations. Their options are enormously diverse. Should they start a loan fund for new businesses? Attract a new hospital to their area? Start a day care center? Build an agricultural processing plant? Start a craft cooperative? Despite the wide range of options, strategies can be based on thoughtful planning and analysis if the organization appreciates research and has the tools to make its analysis.

What differentiates these groups from some local government, business, and civic organizations is their concern with equitable opportunity. They are advocates for changing the status quo; that is, they implicitly or explicitly define development as redistributing power (or income or wealth) for the benefit of a particular disadvantaged constituency. They have widely varying ideas about the specifics of development and how it should be achieved. They agree, however, that "business as usual" does not distribute resources equitably.

Background

The Rural Economic Policy Program (REPP) was established in 1985 as a collaborative program of the Ford Foundation, Aspen Institute, and Wye Institute in response to the economic crisis across the rural United States. Its purpose is to encourage policy research and focus public attention on the domestic rural economy. From the beginning, one of the program's primary objectives has been to encourage development and activist groups to bolster their work with more, high quality research. This goal is consistent with the Ford Foundation's historical commitment to wedding sound policy analysis with action at the community level.

REPP's first major project was a research competition designed to reach a broad spectrum of researchers. Working on the assumption that locally-based organizations were in a good position to identify key research needs in their communities, REPP staff and advisors hoped to attract proposals from development and activist groups who would combine field experience and understanding of local issues with policy research, thus strengthening their effectiveness and credibility.

Unfortunately, REPP's objective of supporting policy research by community-based groups was not fully realized through the competition strategy. Director Susan Sechler noted:

> [S]ome of the most important questions were posed by researchers who lacked the skills to answer them rigorously. Submissions from action-oriented groups tended to be programmatic rather than research-oriented. As a result, REPP was frustrated in its goal of using the competition to encourage the development of research results that would be of direct use to action-oriented groups.[1]

Clearly, the problem of how to encourage local groups to do research would not be solved by making funds available on a one-time basis. It seemed that a stronger base of research capacity had to be built within the leadership of activist organizations.

With REPP support, we conducted a study to explore these issues and better understand the potential for building research capacity. We had four main questions:

1. How important do groups regard research to their community development work?

2. What research questions are important to their development strategy?

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[1]Susan E. Sechler letter to REPP Advisory Committee members, Nov. 18, 1988.

3. What is the research experience and formal training of the staff and do they have links with professional researchers who might contribute to research capacity?

4. Do they want and need assistance in using or carrying out research, and if so, in what form?

We selected a sample of 15 rural development groups representing a range of sophistication and experience.[2] Our sample included both "grass-roots," community-based groups as well as larger, intermediary organizations.[3] The respondents varied widely in terms of the particular problems with which they were concerned, their strategic goals, staff size, geographic focus, and source and level of financial support. We used a questionnaire to personally interview staff members from each organization, usually at the group's home office. In addition to the original 15 organizations, we interviewed staff from 14 intermediary groups in a more informal manner to better understand how they value research and whether they see potential for building research capacity. Five of these groups participated in a roundtable discussion of research capacity in Raleigh, North Carolina on July 1, 1988.

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[2]This was a purposive sampling technique which Earl Babbie describes as yielding "a sample of observations that you believe will yield the most comprehensive understanding of your subject of study, based on the intuitive feel for the subject that comes from extended observation and reflection." The Practice of Social Science Research, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California, 1986, p. 247. A list of the people interviewed is included in Appendix B. The questionnaire is available from the author.

[3]Intermediaries provide technical and/or financial support to locally-based groups. They tend to have either a state-wide, regional, or national focus.

II. RESEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT WORK

Definitions and Concepts

In the abstract and general sense, research entails some systematic investigation designed to answer particular questions or establish certain facts and principles. Rural development organizations that have research capacity:

(1) understand the value of inquiry and investigation;

(2) ask strategic, relevant questions that inform effective development activities;

(3) find and analyze the information needed to answer questions that have been posed; and

(4) draw conclusions from the investigation, understand their implications, and translate them into action.

Thus, having research capacity means being curious, asking interesting, practical questions, knowing how to find answers, and using those answers in development work. Such a capacity is largely intuitive and very difficult to quantify, but we know it when we see it. The key is starting with questions rather than answers and being willing to accept results that do not necessarily confirm expectations. With this foundation, the activist or development practitioner can proceed to undertake research.

People often want to distinguish between "conducting" and "using" research, arguing that it is unrealistic to expect community groups with extremely limited resources to actually undertake research themselves. Rather, such organizations should be encouraged to use research conducted by intermediary groups and others. Building the capacity to use research means working from the demand side, encouraging groups' leadership to appreciate the value of research, helping them tap into sources of information and linking them with experts in their fields.

The distinction between "users" and "doers" is helpful insofar as it helps us target particular assistance or resources where they are most needed. However, more useful is a concept of capacity that depends simply on: (1) a basic curiosity about how a particular part of the the world functions, and (2) the recognition that finding out will take some work. It may mean "using" someone else's work to find answers (for example, reading a trade journal or census report), or "conducting" a study by collecting primary data. In this context, the distinction between "using" and "conducting" becomes blurred.

Why Research is Done

In order to answer the question of how to build research capacity, we need to understand why public interest groups collect information and how they use it. In the best of all possible worlds, research would both provide leaders with a perspective on how the local community fits into the broader regional, national, and international political economy and inform specific development strategies. In the more common (less than perfect) world, most community groups focus on more narrow, immediate research in order to chart a course for local development.

Some groups conduct research to document inequities and problems in order to mobilize and galvanize the community around a particular issue. They use information as an organizing tool to motivate their constituency and to give this constituency a reason to take some form of concerted action.

When used as a prelude to further analysis, this type of research can serve to mobilize and inform strategy. However, when information is gathered without asking questions--and used only to mobilize--it tends to be is used as ammunition, defining things in black and white, in an "us vs. them"

context. Public interest groups that use information exclusively in this manner are likely to be adversarial advocacy groups that have little credibility among people outside their own membership.

Groups also conduct research to "scope out the landscape" and better understand the world in which they operate. In discussing such research as it applies to understanding the local economic and political base, Duncan described the process as "peeling back the layers of an onion."[3] In some cases, this kind of research entails collecting basic economic and demographic information and identifying individuals and institutions with economic power. In others, it involves a detailed study of local resource ownership or of a particular segment of the population.

A third type of research that community groups undertake consists of specific evaluations, market studies, and feasibility analyses that help them plan their development strategy. Like any other research, the quality of the studies is critical to guiding the organization towards effective strategy.

Finally, some more sophisticated development groups conduct research to build a detailed, specialized understanding of a particular sector or industry that is critically important to development in their area. As used by the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) and others, the sectoral approach focuses on a single category of economic activity because of its magnitude, problems, growth potential, or generic

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[3]William A. Duncan. Understanding Your Local Economy: A Curriculum Outline, February, 1985, unpublished mimeo.

importance.[4] As used by the Northern Lights Research and Education Institute, sectoral research focuses on a particular natural resource whose management and allocation have major implications for economic activity and quality of life in the Northern Rockies. In both cases, these organizations identified particular sectors to research with the purpose of intervening in how they work. The strategy requires a wide ranging and comprehensive research project, and involves listening to and learning from diverse interest groups, academics, and policy makers. The organization must weigh and analyze current public and private policies, and look for an angle for intervention that is both pragmatic and bold.

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[4]William A. Duncan. "An Economic Development Strategy," Social Policy, Spring 1986.

III. RESEARCH ACTIVITIES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT GROUPS

Whether local and regional development organizations value and conduct research is closely related to how they perceive their strategic goals and role in community development.[5] At one end of the spectrum, we find advocacy groups whose goal is to empower a particular constituency and whose strategy is to confront those who appear to have power. In doing so, these groups tend to polarize issues. They have little motivation to objectively analyze issues and do not see the value of spending scarce resources on research. In the words of one former director:

> Our analysis says that the best data, the most rational analysis does not prevail. It is ultimately a question of power...One person can go in and have the best thought-out proposal, but if they don't have the power, it doesn't matter...Frequently, we train our leadership in confrontational situations where people say "What do you propose?" to say, "We don't have a proposal, that's up to you guys to figure out"...We tend to almost bend over backwards to say, "We don't need research." Our experience is that it's at the expense of organizing.[6]

Also at this end of the spectrum are groups whose primary function is social service delivery. Although they would likely benefit from better use of information, their leadership is often so immersed in making ends meet and getting their clients through the next week that research does not enter their thoughts.[7]

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[5]In the interviews, research was specifically defined as "systematically collecting and analyzing information (either primary or secondary data) in order to answer questions that concern your organization and the people you represent." This somewhat roomy definition was used in order to accommodate the broadest spectrum of capacity.

[6]Personal interview, May 16, 1988.

[7]Clearly some social service agencies use research to make their delivery programs more effective. An example is the Northwest Iowa Mental

(Footnote Continued)

At the opposite end of the spectrum are larger, intermediary organizations whose goal may be empowerment, but whose political strategy is to work from within, side-by-side with decision makers in both the public and private sector, pushing the mainstream to take account of their disadvantaged constituency. Their objective is to affect policy at the highest level, and they work to earn trust and respect so their platforms will be taken seriously. Their policy positions are grounded in the experience they gain from working on practical problems and providing technical and financial assistance to community-based organizations.

Their development strategy depends on a clear-sighted analysis of how the system works (whether it is a particular industry, institution, or critical resource). Research is the linchpin and the staff devotes substantial resources to maintaining research capacity. Without it, they lack basic credibility with both their constituents and the larger public whose policies they seek to change. Being knowledgeable is a prerequisite to being effective.

In between these two extremes are smaller organizations who neither have the capacity nor the desire to effect major, structural changes in how entire industries or sectors work, but who nonetheless respect the value of information to inform their work. They pose good, researchable questions that emerge in the course of developing their strategies.

(Footnote Continued)
Health Center. Faced with severe emotional problems among rural families during the recent farm crisis, staff members sought out resources, information, and analysis from a variety of agencies and organizations. In general, however, research does not play a crucial strategic role among social service groups.

The director of one such middle range organization noted that the need to conduct research is dictated by the community itself, not by the desire to build new data bases. She added, "Influencing policy is a matter of survival for the development organization and research is one means of entering the policy debate."[8]

Others also see research as a means of impacting policy and of challenging the assumptions around which policy debates revolve:

> Our job is to elevate the debate. If you have a debate in which all the information generated is one-sided, there is no debate. People don't even have the option to say, "What if your assumptions are wrong?" The public policy arena is, after all, a place where you balance the assumptions you make about what is going to happen. Our job is to provide the balance which says that some assumptions should be made about values which are different than strictly making a dollar...If we don't provide that balance, there is no debate.[9]

Despite their appreciation of the value and power of research, these groups are sometimes hard pressed to put it at the top of their agendas. Analysis is in constant competition with other more pressing activities. In the words of one director:

> Our general operating mode is that we work cheap and run fast and low to the ground. Often it's hard to say, "We could use $10,000 just to do research for the long term so that three years from now we'll be much better prepared." Alternatively, we could just go out and fight a campaign right now.[10]

Brushfires and crises often compete for precious time and money. But in many cases a particularly insistent staff person, board member, or

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[8]Phone interview, July 20, 1988.

[9]Personal interview, May 17, 1988.

[10]Personal interview, May 19, 1988.

funder successfully sounds the reminder that it is worthwhile to step back, think things through, and use analysis in planning action.

How various groups in this broad spectrum carry out their research is discussed below.

Identifying Research Questions

The fifteen organizations reviewed in this study each identified a recent research project that they believed was important to their development strategy (Table 1). Although these projects varied in terms of their breadth (from single issues like "Women's Nontraditional Employment" to broader sectoral analyses such as "Coal and Economic Development"), all reflected the organizations' strategic goals. Each was designed to inform the organization's strategy or position on a particular policy issue. Several examples illustrate this point:

* In their work with communities trying to set up recycling centers, staff from the Minnesota Project sought to develop more effective strategies for collecting and processing refuse, marketing recycled material, and transporting it to market. The organization initiated research that would help the staff understand the problems communities face in establishing recycling centers and serve as background for developing more widely used cost-effective systems.

* The Idaho Conservation League (ICL) wanted to better understand and document below-cost timber sales in Idaho's National Forest Management areas. As one of the major actors in the policy debate surrounding resource management in Idaho, ICL had an obvious need to develop an informed and credible position on this controversial practice.

* Member organizations and constituencies of the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) were concerned over what they perceived to be increased corporate control of land resources. To determine the extent of such control, WORC conducted an extensive land ownership study in four counties in each of four western states. A subsequent report outlined the study's policy implications.

Table 1. Research projects, staff education level, and types of collaboration, fifteen organizations

Organization	Research Project	Education Level[a]	Research Collaboration with		
			Other CBO's[b]	Private Consultants	Univ. Researchers
1. Alternative Energy Resource Organization	Sustainable Agriculture Project: Networking and On-farm Research	BS/BA	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Arkansas Women's Project	Women's Nontraditional Employment: A Planning Project	MS	No	No	No
3. Appalachian Communities for Children	(Does not conduct research)	BA	--	--	--
4. Center for Women's Economic Alternatives	(Does not conduct research)	High School	--	--	--
5. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon	(Does not conduct research)	Some College	--	--	--
6. Forest Trust	Deforestation Practices in Six National Forests	MS	No	No	Yes
7. Ganados Del Valle	Distribution of Economic Growth Attributable to Tourism	MS	No	Yes	Yes
8. Idaho Conservation League	Public Cost of Idaho Timber Sales	BA	No	Yes	No
9. Institute for Community Education and Training	Women's Economic Development and Research Project	MS	Yes	Yes	Yes
10. Mountain Association for Community Economic Development	Coal and Economic Development	Ph.D.	No	Yes	Yes
11. Minnesota Project	Rural Strategies for Community-based Recycling: 7 Case Studies	ABD	Yes	No	No
12. Montana Alliance for Progressive Policy	Montana Tax Structure: Lost Revenue and Inequity	ABD	No	No	No
13. Montana People's Action	Bank Reinvestment Practices in Montana	BS/BA	Yes	No	No
14. Northern Lights Research and Education Institute	State of the Clark Fork River	LLB	Yes	Yes	Yes
15. Western Organization of Resource Councils	Who Owns the West	BS/BA	Yes	No	No

[a] Highest level of education among staff members during the period that research was conducted.

[b] Including public interest and intermediary organizations.

* In South Carolina, the Institute for Community Education and Training (ICET) is interested in developing a statewide organization to improve the economic status of women. Motivated by their involvement in a participatory research project sponsored by the Southeast Women's Employment Coalition (SWEC), ICET has undertaken an analysis of women's economic status and barriers to employment in the state. The objectives are to inform women about their economic circumstances, promote community-based leadership, build a network of local activists, and influence state policy as it affects South Carolina women.

Groups identified particular research needs according to their staff's organizing, development, or research experience. For example, Montana Alliance for Progressive Policy (MAPP) conducted an extensive series of systematic, personal interviews to find out what research questions members of its constituent organizations thought were important. The Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO), based in Montana, decided to concentrate their efforts on a sustainable agriculture project when member farmers expressed interest in more information on low-input farming practices. MACED initiated its timber, coal, water, and education projects in response to opportunities that emerged in their region when local community, business, or state leaders were ready to address the particular issue.

Putting the Research Projects Together

All but one of the groups that conducted research funded their projects with grants. Principal granting institutions included the Arca, Ford, Jesse Smith Noyes, Levi Strauss, Northwest Area, and OCRI Foundations. Montana People's Action covered the costs of their research out of general operating funds.

To conduct their research, the groups combined expertise from their own staffs, other public interest and intermediary organizations, outside consultants, and university researchers. Although formal research training on staff was not a prerequisite to conducting research, groups whose staff

members or advisory boards: (1) had M.S. or Ph.D. degrees in the social or physical sciences and/or (2) collaborated with university or private researchers consistently had stronger projects. Several examples illustrate the need for internal or external research experience. Among the groups who utilized outside researchers are the following:

* AERO surveyed several hundred farmers about low-input agricultural practices and will soon begin directing extensive on-farm research trials. Although none of AERO's three staff members has an advanced degree, they have collaborated extensively with university administrators, researchers, and extension staff (as well as with private consultants and other public interest groups) in every phase of the research project. AERO also assembled a knowledgeable advisory committee to monitor the project. The outcome of such cooperation is a well-designed, objective project that will yield useful results.

* MAPP completed a study of Montana's tax structure in 1987. The study focuses on an issue of major concern to MAPP's member organizations (representing conservationists, low-income people, senior citizens, women, workers, and teachers). It was directed and authored by a staff member who is a doctoral candidate in economics from the New School for Social Research. While the study would likely have benefitted from more input from outside researchers, it remains a good example of how a citizens' organization can tackle complex policy issues if they can attract staff with research experience.

* Ganados del Valle is conducting a relatively complex study of the distributional impacts of tourism development in New Mexico. The project director has an advanced degree in rural planning. Her community field work and formal education give her an exceptional appreciation of research. The project has benefitted from assistance from a REPP advisor who is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Kentucky and ongoing assistance from a private consultant who has a Ph.D. Although the analysis phase of the project is not complete, it promises to provide very useful information for the community's future development strategy.

* The Minnesota Project has a staff with research experience as well as strong ties with outside researchers. In their recycling study, they collaborated with national and regional recycling organizations. On other projects, they have developed strong

working relationships with the Hubert Humphrey Institute and Center for Regional and Urban Affairs.[11]

* The Land Stewardship Project, based in Minnesota, is a non-profit education program set up to promote ethics and policies that support land stewardship and conservation practices. As the number of farm foreclosures in the early and mid-1980's mounted, anecdotal evidence caused LSP staff to become concerned about increasing land ownership by insurance companies and the consequences for soil management. They collaborated with researchers at the Center for Regional and Urban Affairs to investigate how much acreage insurance companies were acquiring. They were able to document the extent of insurance company farmland ownership and also to identify gaps in the data that prevented them from learning about the implications of such ownership for soil conservation practices.[12]

In contrast, groups that neither had experienced researchers on staff nor worked with outside researchers had weaker projects:

* WORC conducted its land ownership study without experienced or trained researchers on staff and did not use outside researchers to help design the project. The result, in WORC's own estimation, was a methodology that led to a significant amount of information that was collected but could not be analyzed. The project also suffered because WORC's working definitions of two key variables were ambiguous, making the study hard to replicate and the data base difficult to compare with others.[13]

* ICET also does not have trained researchers on staff, and although they have had occasional help from researchers at SWEC, they

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[11]According to the director, Minnesota Project organization works more closely with researchers associated with policy institutes than with those directly affiliated with universities. She suggests that the institutes are more likely to identify research needs by looking outward to government and community groups than are universities.

[12]The Land Stewardship Project was not included in the sample of groups interviewed for this study.

[13]These two variables were: (1) nature of owner, including individual, partnership/association, family farm corporate, corporate, public, private non-profit, and unknown, and (2) owner residence, including in county, out of county/adjacent, out of county, in state, out of state, out of state/adjacent, foreign, and unknown. Classifying parcels of land by nature of owner and owner residency is a task made difficult by lack of data and often requires judgement calls on the part of the enumerator.

needed more consistent help in research methodology, including sample design, questionnaire development, data collection, and analysis. Data collection was completed in 1986 but lack of experience with data coding and entry have prevented staff from beginning the analysis. ICET staff posed good questions but they lack research experience and do not have researchers to advise them.

* The Arkansas Women's Project, another group with no research experience or assistance, surveyed Arkansas organizations by mail to learn about programs and services available to women. The response rate was so low that staff decided abandon the survey and start the project all over again.

* Montana People's Action (MPA) conducted a study to determine whether state banks were in compliance with federal legislation that mandates certain local reinvestment practices.[14] MPA has no staff trained as researchers and no occasional contact or working relationship with outside researchers. Their reinvestment study did not have the intended result of changing local banking practices, in part because it had no input from people who could lend credibility to the study.

Most groups see the need for continual input into the research project from staff or advisors who have research experience. Two of the groups interviewed for this report -- Ganados del Valle and the Institute for Community Education and Training -- have reached the analysis phase of their projects. Staff from both organizations are seeking research assistance from people familiar with particular methodologies that will help them use their data most effectively. Both groups have formulated good questions and conducted careful surveys, yet neither has adequate analytical capacity within their own staff or among their advisors to use that information without outside consultants.

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[14]The Community Reinvestment Act, itself the result of sound research about the banking industry, is used by many development organizations to monitor local banking practices.

The Role of Reviewers

Another factor strongly associated with the strength and credibility of the research projects is whether the final reports are reviewed by people outside the organization. The purpose of such a review is to gain an objective evaluation of the studies by researchers who do not have a vested interest in the results. When these outside reviewers are satisfied that the methodology is sound (whether or not they agree with the policy implications), their satisfaction lends more credibility to the report. For example, the Forest Trust in New Mexico conducted a study on deforestation practices in national forests. The study was commissioned by the Wilderness Society, which established a panel of scientists to review not only the final report, but the design and execution of the project. Another example is MACED. In all their major projects, they relied extensively on sociologists, political scientists, economists, and industry or government leaders for technical and policy reviews. MACED asked these reviewers to be available for contacts from journalists who were covering the reports.

Relationship with Extension Service

One possible way for development organizations to make contact with researchers in land grant universities is through Cooperative Extension Service (CES) programs. For example, the CES Community and Rural Development Program (CRD) was set up to provide information and educational assistance to local governments, community groups, and others interested in local development. The program's objective is to strengthen the ability of citizens and community leaders to identify and resolve local problems, using the research and education resources of land grant universities. Four regional rural development centers have been in existence since the 1970's for the express purpose of supporting the interface between CRD research and extension activities.

It seems logical, then, that the development organizations we studied might use CES as a conduit or bridge to university researchers. However, only half of the respondents had worked with CES in any capacity at all. Their relationship was generally with county agents and most often for the purpose of holding training sessions and workshops rather than making research contacts.

The groups with farm constituencies (AERO and WORC) seemed to have the strongest working relationship with CES. AERO has CES staff on its sustainable agriculture steering committee. Two of WORC's member organizations are working at the state level to influence administrative policy and program content.

In the community resource area, the Minnesota Project is attempting to engage county agents in water policy discussions. The organization also has a CES representative on one of its community development project steering committees.

Perceived Need for Assistance

Respondents were asked a series of questions about whether their organization would benefit from research-related technical assistance, and if so, in what particular areas and in what form.

Twelve of the fifteen groups indicated that assistance in one form or another would be helpful. The areas in which assistance was most often requested were: (1) designing a research project; (2) finding out what is already known about a subject; and (3) analyzing information. Locating appropriate secondary data and collecting primary data were also cited by a number of respondents.

As might be expected, the groups whose staff felt that research was a priority but who had little access to research experience (either on staff

or outside the organization) perceived the greatest need for technical assistance. These included the Idaho Conservation League, Western Organization of Resource Councils, Center for Women's Economic Alternatives, and Institute for Community Education and Training. Even organizations whose staff members have research experience said that assistance would be helpful in particular areas such as learning how to use computerized data bases (Minnesota Project); finding out what is already known about a subject (Montana Alliance for Progressive Policy); and working effectively with consultants (Ganados del Valle).

Respondents who said they would benefit from technical assistance on specific research projects overwhelmingly preferred to receive it in the form of one-on-one help from an experienced researcher or in training seminars. They were less enthusiastic about "how-to" manuals, although roughly half said manuals would be at least "somewhat helpful." Montana People's Action said they would use whatever they could get their hands on, including manuals.

Staff from AERO, MACED, Northern Lights, Minnesota Project, and Forest Trust said that they were basically self-sufficient in terms of research skills. AERO relies heavily on its advisory board and membership for research capacity; MACED and the Minnesota Project both have a strong core of staff members with research experience; Northern Lights utilizes a collaborative model that engages a variety of people who know how to find and use information; and the Forest Trust has a solid track record in both designing and executing research projects as well as contracting out as necessary.

Although these groups do not need help in improving their research skills, they did indicate that inadequate funding and staff time constrain

their ability to conduct research, and that they could benefit from more contacts with researchers as colleagues and peer reviewers. They often cited the need to know more about what research is currently being done in their particular fields, and to have stronger links with and support from various research institutions.

Summary

The groups that conducted research fall into three categories. First are those for whom research is not a priority. Their tendency is to adopt a confrontational approach that keeps them on the fringes of policy debates. Because their skills and objectives lie elsewhere, these groups should not be the focus of assistance in using and carrying out research.

Second are the groups that use research to inform their strategies, but whose scope tends to be limited. Some are charting the territory in which they want to operate and get a clearer grasp of the problems their constituents face. Others focus specifically on one policy issue rather than a broader industry or sector. Still others use research to inform individual business development strategies. These groups could clearly benefit from a targeted program to help them meet their specific research goals.

The third group consists of organizations with a broader mandate. Their research efforts are designed to inform larger scale and longer term community development. Their strategy is to win broad public support for their disadvantaged constituencies by being informed on issues and developing a position of respect. These groups could benefit from stronger working relationships with researchers in universities, government, policy institutes, and other development organizations.

We explore successful research models used by the second and third types of organizations in the following chapter.

IV. SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH MODELS

The Sectoral Approach

Mountain Association for Community Economic Development

MACED is a nonprofit economic development organization in Berea, Kentucky. MACED defines development as the redistribution of economic opportunity and benefits to benefit those left out by the status quo.

Bill Duncan, President of MACED from 1976-87, originally developed a "sectoral intervention" strategy in an effort to broaden and magnify the scale of MACED's development activities. The strategy uses research at every stage. It involves: (1) identifying critical local industries that have a major impact on the source, level, and distribution of income within the community; (2) determining whether there are opportunities and resources to change how the industries conduct their business in ways that would provide more benefits to poor communities; and if so, (3) focusing on policy changes that affect how the industries distribute costs and benefits.[15]

MACED has used the intervention strategy with varying levels of success in the lumber, coal, banking, and education sectors. MACED's staff carefully researched each sector and used their analysis to convince key leaders at the local and/or state level (both elected and informal) to take action. In the case of coal, Research Director Dr. Cynthia Duncan coordinated a seven-part series of reports on coal and economic development.[16] This

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[15]William Duncan and Cynthia Duncan, "Rechannel the Mainstream," Southern Exposure, pp. 71-75, Volume XIV, Numbers 5-6, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986.

[16]The seven reports in the coal series are: Coal and Economic Development in Central Appalachia: A New Framework for Policy, Coal

(Footnote Continued)

series is an invaluable record of the broad view approach to research. Over a period of years, MACED staff were immersed in the coal industry. They interviewed industry leaders, workers, and policy makers. They carefully studied employment, income, productivity, revenue, and expenditure data, always with the objective of finding a way to translate coal industry growth into local improvements through public and private reinvestment. Their reports received wide press coverage and stimulated public debate about the industry's contribution to Kentucky's future. As evidence of MACED's position of respect within the state, they were awarded a contract by the Kentucky Department of Employment Services to develop a comprehensive dislocated workers' program for coal miners. MACED continues to seek an appropriate means of intervening in the coal industry to promote large scale change.

Research also played a crucial role in MACED's education work. In the mid-1980's, Kentucky's Fifth Congressional District had the lowest percentage of high school graduates in the nation and the lowest standardized test scores in the state. In an effort to identify practical opportunities to improve education, MACED interviewed over 150 people in the Fifth District, including school superintendents, principals and other administrators, teachers, business and professional people, students, parents, and college administrators. Their conclusion was that people in the district were ready to act and work for improvements in local education. Community leaders and

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(Footnote Continued)
Employment: Trends and Forecasts, 1975-1995, Labor Productivity Changes in Appalachian Coal Mining, Industry Perspective on Development: Transcripts of Interviews with Coal Industry Leaders, The Coal Industry After 1970: Cost Internalization, Good Works, and Public Planning for Development, A Public Sector Income Statement for the Coal Industry in Kentucky, 1985-2000, and Making the Best of It: Kentucky's Dislocated Coal Miners Face the Future.

the general public were dissatisfied with existing conditions and there was clearly an opportunity to make the educational system better. As a result, MACED formed an independent organization called Forward in the Fifth devoted to improving education and economic development in the district.[17] Forward in the Fifth has effectively changed public expectations about what schools can be in this rural area.

MACED staff also used research to inform its work in the banking industry. They identified particular mortgage financing practices as a significant obstacle to affordable housing in Kentucky. In an effort to make mortgages more accessible and available to low income people, MACED organized a consortium of bankers that negotiated with private mortgage insurers and secondary market agencies to loosen standard mortgage terms. MACED also organized two revenue bond programs to bring more affordable mortgage money into rural areas in Kentucky.[18]

In each of these projects, MACED's effectiveness resulted from the staff's thorough understanding of the particular issue. Their community work, which gave them a sense of local problems and opportunities, grounded their political and economic analysis of the various industries which they identified as crucial. They have gained respect among policy makers in the state, have a public voice that represents the interests of poor rural people, and thus are able to work effectively to promote economic development.

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[17] Would You Like to Swing on a Star, a report to the Shakertown Roundtable Conference on Economic Development and Education in Kentucky's Fifth Congressional District, 1986.

[18] William A. Duncan. "An Economic Development Strategy," op. cit.

Forest Trust

The Forest Trust is a nonprofit organization based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Its mission is best described in its 1986 Annual Report:

> The purpose of the Forest Trust is to build value in the nation's forest resources through practical, conservation-minded resource management...By "building value" in natural resources, we mean amplifying the integrity, resilience, and productivity of forest and rangelands. This task requires that we restore native ecosystems, develop new management approaches while capitalizing upon existing knowledge, and explore the role of rural communities and traditional cultures in natural resource management.

One of the organization's program areas is forestry development for rural communities. Because Northern New Mexico communities depend heavily on timber income, Forest Trust staff members have identified forestry as an industry that is critical to the quality of life and economic well-being of local residents. If forests are managed in such a way that timber stocks are replenished and enhanced, then local residents will retain a major source of income over the long term.

Several factors combine to suggest that intervention in the forest industry may be an effective development strategy. First, forestry is a major employer in the area. Second, it could potentially provide significant income to many small landholders and producers. Third, forestry has traditionally played an important role in the region's economy and is a culturally acceptable form of development.

As part of its economic development work, the Forest Trust operates a training and forest products marketing center in the small community of Mora. The center trains local workers in forestry skills, contracts with landowners to provide the labor they need to manage their timber stands, and works to improve markets for local wood products.

The goal of the Forest Trust's development-related research efforts is to build a sustainable economic base in the small forest products industry

while enhancing the value of the region's forests. According to the director:

> As we approach new projects, our information needs are voracious. I think of it as the Weyerhauser dictum: If you want to control the market, the first thing you need to do is know everything about it.

The research addresses equity and distributional issues by examining who benefits from the forestry development strategy. It is also market oriented. The Forest Trust recently mailed a questionnaire to 1,500 builders in several western states to better understand the small forest products market. Specifically, the survey is an attempt to assess whether the demand for small forest products is growing, who major suppliers are, and how satisfied builders are with the quality of what they buy. This market study will help Forest Trust identify ways to expand northern New Mexico's small forest products industry.

The Forest Trust takes a very different approach to preserving and sustaining natural resources than do more traditional environmental organizations. They attempt to "engage the mainstream" rather than confronting it. The director noted in his 1986 Annual Report:

> The key to quality forestry management lies with people and with the evolving political process that will determine the future of the forests...I use the word "political"...to describe a dialogue between divergent viewpoints...In the case of forest management, all participants have something to offer, something to teach.

Ganados del Valle

Founded in 1981, Ganados del Valle is a community-based rural development corporation in the upper Rio Chama Valley of northern New Mexico. The organization's purpose is to improve the well-being of community residents while preserving traditional cultural values and maintaining local ownership of natural resources. Tierra Wools, the corporation's largest program, is a

cooperatively-run spinning and weaving enterprise that combines job training with an extremely successful retail sales outlet.

Ganados was born out of local concern that agricultural enterprises, traditional mainstays of the community, were no longer viewed as viable economic enterprises. Sheep production was becoming less profitable and traditional weaving skills that had been passed on through generations were disappearing. At the same time, state level policy makers and outside developers proposed building a destination ski resort in the valley as a means of increasing local employment.

Thus, in the early 1980's, local residents found themselves faced with what seemed to be a tradeoff between maintaining traditions and improving their economic opportunities. While tourism might bring jobs to local residents, it could also dilute and destroy local culture and community patterns.

Consequently, community support for destination tourism development was not universal. However, no one really understood what changes such development would bring, either in terms of resource ownership, traditional culture, or employment and income levels. Successfully arguing the pros and cons of development or negotiating different terms of development required a thorough understanding of its social, economic, and cultural impacts. Leaders within Ganados del Valle proposed that the Rural Economic Policy Program support research to examine these questions.

The research project compares socioeconomic conditions in the Upper Rio Chama Valley with those in the adjacent Taos Valley. Prior to the construction of a major ski resort in the Taos Valley in 1962, the two valleys were similar in terms of economic base and cultural traditions. Thus the two

valleys offer a unique opportunity to examine the effects of capital intensive tourism development on host communities.

Ganados researchers are focusing on equity and distribution questions, asking who benefits from development: Who gets the new service sector and construction jobs when a ski resort is built? Who owns the land on which condominiums are built? What happens to indigenous economic enterprises (such as agriculture) when water rights are transferred from local to outside ownership?

The Ganados project is an example of why support for community-based research activities is important. It is possible that university researchers would not have posed questions about the distributional impacts of a tourism development strategy because conventional wisdom assures us that tourism brings jobs and must therefore alleviate poverty. And yet, intuition on the part of local residents suggested otherwise. Without the kind of analysis that Ganados is doing, we have little evidence one way or another.

Ganados also illustrates two important problems that small community groups face in conducting research. First, although staff members have an indispensable intuitive understanding of local problems and opportunities, they do not have all the necessary research skills to undertake a complex or sensitive study such as this tourism evaluation. Specifically, they have neither collected nor analyzed primary data and have few contacts that can provide them with assistance. Second, the addition of a major research project on top of day-to-day administration means that their staff resources are spread almost fatally thin. The two senior staff members (only one of whom is full-time) are responsible for running Tierra Wools, as well as a sheep breeding program, revolving loan fund, and livestock marketing effort.

They will need to hire more help if they are to meet their research and economic development goals.

The Cooperative Model

Northern Lights Research and Education Institute is a nonprofit organization set up to inform and engage the public in policy discussions about community development and natural and cultural resources in the northern Rockies. Its three principal activities are research, education, and leadership development. Common to all Northern Lights projects is the goal of resolving problems with open communication and cooperation rather than adversarial confrontation. According to former Acting Director Maeta Kaplan:

> [D]ecisionmakers and citizens of all ideologies and political persuasions are weary of the divisive bickering that accompanies contemporary politics...there is a longing to find new ground for independent thought, cooperation, and concerted action on behalf of a common good that transcends special interest.[19]

The Northern Lights commitment to cooperation translates into a unique collaborative research methodology in which the process of researching an issue is at least as important as the end product. This methodology (which is not the only one used by Northern Lights in its research) is best understood by examining the Missouri Headwaters Project.

In the early 1980's, Northern Lights identified water as a critical issue in the West. Water resources dominate the economy, define the geography, and shape the culture of the region. Like MACED, Northern Lights sees the policy guiding water resources as critical to future development and the

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[19]"Update," Northern Lights, Vol. IV, No. 2, April 1988.

distribution of benefits. Their goal is to engage the public in formulating the direction of future water policy for the greater common good. Towards this end, Northern Lights initiated the Missouri Headwaters Project in 1984.

The Missouri River basin is one of the few in the West whose flow is not fully apportioned or legally spoken for. Policy regarding its future allocation will have significant (and distributional) implications for the region's economy and quality of life. Northern Lights concluded that the Missouri represented an opportunity to intervene in and reorient the traditional, "business as usual" method of determining who would benefit from future allocation policy. Collaborative research was to play an important role in such a strategy.

The first step of the project was to form a steering committee representing a variety of constituencies who had a political or economic stake in the Missouri's future. The committee commenced a thorough analysis of the river's geological, cultural, and legal history.[20] The study involved not only sifting through endless legal and administrative documents, but also many interviews with people knowledgeable about the Missouri.

Northern Lights then convened two public symposia to discuss past and future policies regarding the management and allocation of the Missouri. The symposia were unique in that they brought together a wide circle of citizens and decision-makers from states, Indian tribes (many of whom have legal but unrecognized rights to the Missouri's water), and federal agencies. Northern Lights "brought to the same table new actors representing

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[20]"Boundaries Carved in Water," by Mark D. O'Keefe, Nancy E. Slocum, Donald R. Snow, John E. Thorson, and Paul Vandenberg, Northern Lights Research and Education Institute, Inc., 1986.

old agencies and interests, and taught them to teach themselves."[21] People listened to and learned from each other, recognizing that collaboratively exploring the issues held greater promise for change than pursuing individual gain. Diverse interests agreed on the questions that needed to be answered, the methodologies for answering them, and a means of presenting to the public their agreements and disagreements.

The public gained from the Missouri Headwaters Project because a much broader spectrum of constituencies is now represented and active in the policy arena. Northern Lights gained because it established itself as a credible, trustworthy actor in the process of resolving conflicts over resource allocation.

Engaging the Land Grant Universities

AERO is a nonprofit educational group serving the northern Rockies and Plains states. Since its inception in the 1970's, AERO's major focus has shifted from energy issues to sustainable agriculture. AERO is currently conducting a 3-year networking and on-farm research project designed to increase understanding of and promote sustainable, low-input agricultural practices.

AERO's sectoral approach involves reorienting U.S. agriculture from a high input, relatively unstable industry towards one which is more environmentally sound and "sustainable" in the long run. Implicit in the organization's philosophy is the belief that a more diverse agriculture made up of smaller family farms will help revitalize rural America. What makes AERO

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[21] "Missouri River Management Project," Northern Lights, Vol. IV, No. 2, April 1988.

particularly credible and effective is their commitment to involving research and extension institutions in this alternative vision for agriculture and their interest in changing research priorities. AERO has had a significant effect on persuading land grant universities in the region to devote more resources to sustainable agriculture research. By conducting their own well-designed, credible research project designed to document current low-input farming practices, AERO has positioned itself to be a respected actor in the dialogue about research priorities.

V. GROUPS THAT DO NOT CONDUCT RESEARCH

Three of the fifteen groups that we interviewed do not conduct research. Two groups, the Center for Women's Economic Alternatives (CWEA) and the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (specifically, EMO's Common Ground project), have identified questions they want answered but, for various reasons, have not undertaken the necessary research. The third group, Appalachian Communities for Children (ACC), is primarily a service delivery organization. Although the staff has not articulated any research needs, they were included in the study so that we could better understand why some groups do not use research.

Center for Women's Economic Alternatives

The Center for Women's Economic Alternatives (CWEA) is located in northeastern North Carolina, a poor part of the state with a high percentage of black population. The organization's main activity is educating and organizing women around workplace issues, primarily in the poultry industry. Three of the seven CWEA staff members are organizers whose job is to provide: (1) information to women workers about their rights and benefits and (2) referrals to lawyers, health professionals, and social service providers. CWEA also does economic development work in the form of technical assistance to local women interested in starting new businesses.

CWEA systematically collects information on women poultry workers. Organizers contact women who have particular problems with or concerns about workplace conditions. For example, an organizer may contact a worker who has developed job-related injuries or has experienced sexual harassment on the job. Basic information about each woman interviewed is recorded on an "intake" form. However, this information is not actually analyzed or tabulated on a regular basis.

CWEA staff members are interested in learning more about the poultry industry itself and realize that research could strengthen their work. They cited several issues they would like to study, including the long term health effects of working in hatchery and poultry processing occupations. They did not raise fundamental questions that would lead them towards an analysis of how the industry works but were, instead, concerned about being able to document the magnitude of the problems they wanted to solve.

CWEA is an example of an organization that has articulated research questions but currently has very limited research capacity. None of the staff members has experience that would give them the skills necessary to conduct research on their own. They could, however, become better "users" of information and could benefit from stronger, working relationships with intermediary organizations that conduct research. CWEA staff members are in contact with Bob Hall (Institute for Southern Studies) who may, as an intermediary, be in a position to address some of their research needs.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

The Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO), an organization of 16 denominations representing about 2,000 congregations, provides social services, education, and job development assistance. EMO is an interesting example of an organization that has tried unsuccessfully to use researchers at a land grant university rather than conducting its own research. EMO sponsored a project called Common Ground to address farm and rural issues in Oregon. EMO's community work suggested that official statistics underestimated the severity of farm financial problems and did not adequately address the question of which farmers were most stressed. Over a period of several months, project staff worked with an agricultural economist at Oregon State University (OSU) to better document farm financial stress in the state.

EMO and OSU failed to establish a working relationship on this issue. EMO staff were frustrated because they believed the university researchers were asking the "wrong questions," that they didn't listen to people in the community when they designed their research projects, and that they ignored anecdotal evidence of severe farm financial stress. EMO staff cited American Bankers' Association (ABA) data that they believed supported their contentions about an Oregon farm crisis, and thought that perhaps the university had a predisposition to minimize the severity of the crisis.

The agricultural economist, on the other hand, felt that he was being asked to produce evidence of a crisis that the data did not support. He argued that he could not find the ABA data that Common Ground staff used. And he, too, felt that the "wrong questions" were being asked, that together they should be addressing other rural issues such as health services and the aging of the population.

The two were unable to reconcile their views of the key issues facing rural communities, although they both hoped to try again in the future and parted amiably. In retrospect, it seems that EMO was unwilling to view its anecdotal evidence in the context of the larger picture painted by university researchers. EMO's interest in advocating for distressed farmers seems to have prevented them from accepting the finding that fewer farmers were in financial trouble than their experience suggested.

The lesson is that not all collaboration is fruitful. Only a mutually acceptable set of questions, assumptions and methodology will yield results that are credible to both parties.

Appalachian Communities for Children

Appalachian Communities for Children (ACC) is a grassroots citizens' organization in eastern Kentucky. Its three community centers are located

in rural Jackson County, where "rural" means 15 miles from the county seat (population 500) on a rutted dirt road. ACC's current programs are designed to: (1) increase adult literacy and education levels; (2) tutor children with learning disabilities; (3) tutor and counsel court-referred juveniles; and (4) provide health education for pregnant teenagers.

One of ACC's goals is to increase parent involvement in the education process. Towards this end, ACC programs are staffed not by professional teachers and counselors but rather by parents and paraprofessionals. As a contractor for the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) Title II program, ACC graduated 120 adults with graduate equivalent degrees in 1988. Five of the current tutors are graduates of the program. Of all the JTPA Title II contractors in Kentucky, ACC has the lowest cost per student.

ACC's funding is hand-to-mouth and derives primarily from JTPA, church contributions, and Save the Children Fund. The full-time director earns $10,000/year and receives no fringe benefits. On the day I visited one of the community centers, there was no running water because the well was dry. The director hopes to install a cistern soon.

Research is not a priority for ACC. The organization's programs (as well as its funding) could benefit from a systematic research effort directed, for example, towards better understanding the causes and implications of local high school dropout and teen pregnancy problems. And certainly ACC staff are in a position to identify questions of paramount importance to the development of the community. However, at least two immediate factors conspire against operating in any but a program-by-program framework. First, low and insecure funding means that ACC has little opportunity to do the kind of long-term planning necessary to undertake research. The organization's resources are spread too thin to allow the luxury of research.

Instead, the staff's attention is turned towards securing one-year JTPA contracts and maintaining operating facilities. Second, staff members have no research background and do not see themselves as having a research mission. ACC's work with MACED over the years has not resulted in increased interest in research.

VI. OTHER EFFORTS TO BUILD RESEARCH CAPACITY

Other intermediary organizations have addressed the question of how to build research capacity among local public interest groups. One is the Youth Project, a national organization set up to provide seed money and technical assistance to smaller local groups. The Youth Project received a planning grant from the Ford Foundation to assess the feasibility of providing research training and assistance to low income, Hispanic groups in the Southwest. Although the project was not approved, the study funded by the planning grant merits consideration. It is discussed in Appendix A.

Another capacity building project was undertaken by the Center for Community Change (CCC) in Washington D.C., an intermediary organization that has worked with low income and minority community groups across the country since the mid-1960's. CCC provides leadership training, teaches groups how to raise money, and gives advice on specific development projects. Its technical assistance work with local groups forms the basis of CCC's involvement in state and national policy issues affecting poor and minority people.

In 1979, CCC received funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Research Assist Project (RAP). The purpose of RAP was to "build or improve the capacity of community-based organizations to conduct research on topics of importance to the everyday life of the community's residents."

CCC Project Overview

CCC set up the Neighborhood Revitalization Project (NRP) to conduct the RAP. Among the project's objectives were:

> To demonstrate a process for selecting organizations that would benefit from technical assistance in the area of research and that have the capacity to conduct research;

To identify methods that successfully build the research capacity of community groups; and

To demonstrate how research can help groups achieve their objectives.

These objectives suggest that NRP staff hoped a permanent technical assistance program would be set up in the future, although according to the NRP Director, CCC was not interested in being its sponsor.

Participating Groups

NRP staff used a networking approach to identify potential participants. They developed a list of 150 groups, most of which had some previous contact with CCC. Final selection was based on a lengthy series of telephone calls and site visits.[22] Nine participants (all urban) were selected on the basis of their: (1) accountability to a grassroots constituency; (2) interest from the leadership in the research project; (3) potential capability of either staff or leadership in research and utilization of the research project; and (4) potential for involvement with local academic institutions.

One of the main criteria on which groups were selected was their interest in undertaking research on the benefits that accrue to local communities from publicly subsidized economic development projects. The outcome of this selection process was that all the participants were concerned about the relationship between large scale, subsidized economic development in downtown areas and the improvement of employment, housing,

[22] An earlier, pilot project involved competitive solicitation of proposals. CCC staff abandoned the competition strategy, in part because they wanted to learn what topics were of concern to groups before suggesting that financial and technical assistance were available.

and neighborhood conditions for low-income people. Thus they shared an interest in learning "how the system works." They asked, for example, what are the obligations for companies that receive public subsidies to provide jobs for low-income people? Who has applied for or received subsidies? What are the local zoning laws? Do these laws permit commercial development in residential neighborhoods?

Assistance from the NRP

The NRP provided participant groups with technical assistance throughout the project. Staff located around the country had frequent telephone and face-to-face contact with the participants. The NRP's function was to:

> Help design a research plan and assist organization staff in both adhering to and modifying the plan as the project progressed;
>
> Perform a networking function between participant groups interested in similar issues and in need of similar background information;
>
> Provide back-up research on, for example, Industrial Revenue Bonds and Urban Development Action Grants; and
>
> Respond to specific requests for information on technical questions.

In addition to technical assistance, participants received $5-10,000 to conduct their research.

Did The Project Work?

Like the Rural Economic Policy Program, CCC's goal was to build the research capacity of community-based organizations, and ultimately, to make research an integral part of their programs. Their experience bears directly on this study, and the lessons from the NRP can inform future efforts to build research capacity. Did CCC's intensive technical assistance program succeed?

According to the report submitted to HUD at the end of the two-year project, NRP staff were satisfied that the research undertaken by participants had tangible, positive effects. Although the RAP participants were not tracked after the project, conversations with Ed Gramlich, NRP Director, suggested several factors that may have limited its long-term success.

First was the perspective or horizon of the participant groups. Most were unable to change their short-term, organizing and advocacy-oriented perspective, and thus they were impatient with research. Gramlich attributed their perspective, in part, to the nature of those who work with community organizations -- they are troubled by an urgent, grating problem or injustice and want to see immediate results from their work. Consequently, their approach to research is often quick and dirty information gathering rather than careful and patient analysis designed to find answers.

Second was the type of problem that the participants addressed. They could not see immediate results from the research because they were wrestling with complex distributional questions which often required political solutions. In one organization,

> [S]taff members became frustrated with rigorous research when fairly timely payoff in the form of policy changes or rapid progress toward potential jobs did not materialize.[23]

Even after they completed their analyses, the groups faced the time consuming task of using the results to build political support for improving conditions in their communities.

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[23]Project report submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Third, given that the groups did not start out with a long range perspective and that their financial situation was often insecure, one year of funding to do a small piece of research was not adequate to convince them to make research an integral part of their agendas. According to Gramlich, if groups are to be nudged towards strategic thinking, they need the security of several years of research money. Alternatively, they might benefit from more general support money that would relieve the constant pressure to raise funds and allow them to concentrate on long term planning and research. Even if the group's leaders are committed to building research into the organization's mission they cannot do so without greater funding support.

In sum, CCC's experience tells us that groups with narrow advocacy objectives are not the best candidates for research assistance, and further, that training alone cannot instill an appreciation for research. Leadership must have a broader vision that allows them to step back from day-to-day power struggles to carefully study their problems. In addition, although we have no evidence that the RAP participants forgot about research after the project ended, we could surmise that longer term support would have resulted in a better chance of making careful analysis an integral part of their programs.

VII. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The interviews reflect a broad array of attitudes towards research. Some groups conduct little or no research at all, either because they do not view research as part of their mission or because they cannot garner the resources to do so. Others have insatiable appetites for knowledge and make research a basic component of their program. In between are the majority, who appreciate research but generally need a push to do more and do it better.

Two common elements characterize strong research programs. The first is a permanent, collaborative relationship between the development organization and people with research experience. Strong programs rely on consistent input from some person (or group of persons) who have a background in research, most often an M.S. or Ph.D. in the physical or social sciences. These people may be either staff members, advisory committee members, cooperating researchers from universities or policy institutes, or paid consultants. They are drawn into the research project at its inception, and are involved through its execution until the review of its final product.

Groups that do not have trained researchers on staff and that choose to collaborate with outside researchers face special problems. Such collaboration can result in good research that serves the organization's goals, as it did in the case of the Land Stewardship Project, but it requires openness and respect from both parties. As the brief encounter between the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and Oregon State University points out, such a relationship cannot be taken for granted.

The second common element is a willingness to draw in diverse interests who value and support the research process. MACED, Northern Lights, AERO,

and the Forest Trust all engage the people that advocates might consider to be the "other side." MACED interviews coal executives; Northern Lights brings utility representatives to the table; AERO pushes the land grants to participate; and the Forest Trust involves the federal government and landowners in finding a solution to rural underemployment.

These two elements are common to organizations that have made research a specific, strategic goal. They hire researchers on staff, budget scarce resources to pay for research, and need the funders' support to maintain their work. They also engage outside researchers to help as colleagues and peer reviewers.

Not all groups have made such a commitment. Many respect research, but are hard pressed to make it a priority, in part because they lack several basic research skills. In the interviews, they indicated that technical assistance in one form or another would help them do better research.

The areas in which assistance was most often requested were: (1) designing a research project; (2) finding out what is already known about a subject; and (3) analyzing information. Locating appropriate secondary data and collecting primary data were also cited by a number of respondents. Several also requested training in how to use computerized data bases, how to work effectively with consultants, and how to collaboratively research an issue with participation from widely disparate interests. Respondents preferred to receive such training in the form of one-on-one assistance, although half said how-to manuals would be at least "somewhat helpful."

Implications for Strengthening Research Capacity

The study provides convincing evidence that a coordinated program to strengthen research capacity is needed, feasible, and would be well received by the development organizations themselves. Those who are most likely to benefit from such a program are the middle range groups that want to use research to inform their strategies and strengthen their programs but who do not have researchers on staff. Many are currently being supported by foundations to do research but they feel a little over their heads and unprepared to do it well. We believe they could have much stronger projects with the right assistance.

Although staff members of these organizations have an indispensable intuitive understanding of local problems and opportunities, many do not have experience either in research design or execution. Specifically, they have trouble formulating clear research questions; they do not know how to locate secondary data necessary for understanding their local economies or how to analyze the data when someone gives it to them; and they have not had experience collecting or analyzing primary data. The result is that they lack the fundamental understanding of their local economy and constituency that could lead them to identify opportunities for development. These groups could clearly benefit from a targeted program to help them meet their research goals.

While larger, intermediary groups generally have adequate research skills on their staff, they too could benefit from a program designed to build stronger working relationships with researchers in universities, government, policy institutes, and other development groups. Such peer-level contacts will bring increased credibility and support to these organizations.

For example, AERO needs to increase its contacts with university researchers who are studying sustainable agriculture in different parts of the country. Such contacts would provide a much-needed boost to AERO's hard fought standing among land grant university administrators. The Forest Trust could also benefit from building relationships with other organizations and researchers, particularly those who see forestry as a potential rural development strategy. Like scholars in universities, these development organizations can avoid becoming insular and parochial by hooking into the larger research community.

In contrast, advocacy groups are not likely to benefit from a program that provides research assistance or broader research contacts. Their skills and objectives lie in political organizing rather than in research. Although some may decide in the future that careful, objective analysis can inform their work, most are not now seriously interested in devoting the necessary resources.

Hence, we propose an experimental project to build and support research capacity in development organizations. If the pilot project succeeds and is cost-effective, it can be replicated and expanded.

The program is designed to meet the needs of both middle level and larger, intermediary development groups in a systematic, coordinated manner. It has two components, first a research consortium that will provide groups with peer level contacts and consulting services, and second, a set of carefully targeted tutorials and manuals.

The Consortium

One of the most significant findings of our exploratory study was that collaboration between trained researchers and development organizations consistently resulted in stronger projects. Involving university researchers in project design and analysis was an effective approach for the smaller, more focused groups, while peer-level contacts with outside researchers brought increased credibility and support to the larger groups. All those interviewed for the study said they were willing to collaborate in the future. Most named people with whom they would like to work but need help in coordinating the collaboration.

There is currently no systematic way to broker contacts between researchers and development groups. Now collaboration is most often random and chance. Sometimes it occurs at the funder's suggestion; other times because a particular staff member happens to know of a researcher who might help. We need to build on and make more systematic the relationships that already exist.

We propose forming a consortium of 8-10 researchers from various research institutions who are qualified and willing to consult with development organizations from project design through the completion of their research. These researchers will consult individually with development groups according to their particular area of expertise and will be reimbursed for time and expenses out of a project fund earmarked for that particular purpose.

The consortium will provide assistance to mid-level development groups who need very focused, technical assistance and to larger intermediary groups who need to expand their peer level contacts. To understand how the consortium will assist mid-level groups, consider the example of ICET in

South Carolina. Suppose ICET decides they need to better understand the current availability and quality of job training programs in their state. They apply to the Ford Foundation for research money and Ford approves their proposal contingent on their collaborating with a consortium researcher. Ford notifies the director of the consortium who, in turn, makes the contact between ICET staff and a consortium researcher who has experience evaluating employment programs.

The researcher reviews ICET's proposal and makes an initial visit to help the organization design their research project. Together they discuss ICET's objectives and methods, that is, what in particular they want to know about South Carolina's job training programs, why they think these questions are important, how they might proceed with the research, and how they plan to use the results.

The researcher makes two subsequent visits to meet with ICET staff, probably after their data have been collected and again during the analysis phase of their project. He or she serves as an advisor, providing a consistent, reliable source of expertise and enabling ICET to meet its research objectives far more efficiently than they otherwise would have.

The consortium will serve a different function for larger intermediary groups who have experienced researchers on staff. Consider the example of the Minnesota Project, a public policy and community assistance center established in 1979. Suppose the Minnesota Project is funded by the Northwest Area Foundation to objectively analyze the seriousness of groundwater contamination by studying the origin and toxicity of pesticide and nitrate pollutants. Minnesota Project has already completed a study of how five nonprofit organizations are confronting farm chemical groundwater contamination, so they know the general subject area. What they lack are

contacts, working relationships, and to some extent, credibility with university researchers.

The Northwest Area Foundation proposes that Minnesota Project collaborates with a consortium researcher on their new groundwater study. The project director works with Minnesota Project to select a researcher who will make on-site visits much the same as in the case of ICET. In this example, however, the researcher's goals are to provide specialized, tehcnical expertise and to build links between the Minnesota Project and other institutions, helping staff members find the top experts in the field and bringing the organization into circles where groundwater issues are being discussed. The consortium researcher serves both as an expert research consultant and as a bridge to the larger research community.

Funders, development groups, and researchers will all benefit from the kind of collaboration illustrated by these two examples. Funders will have ready access to professional researchers who can help grantees strengthen their projects. Development groups will meet their research goals more efficiently and effectively. And finally, researchers will gain from their exposure to practitioners whose field work provides valuable insights into rural policy questions.

Manuals and Tutorials

We recognize that the consortium will assist only a small number of development organizations during the course of the 18-month pilot project, and furthermore, that the consortium strategy is designed to provide assistance on specific research projects rather than to build general research skills. Thus, we propose a complementary effort in the form of manuals and

tutorials to reach more groups and build stronger overall capacity. Again, we need to think about the two different parts of our audience.

Our interviews with staff from mid-level development groups convinced us that "how-to" manuals are not a complete answer to building research capacity, particularly among those who have no research experience. Staff members from groups like ICET need skills that are too complex to be mastered by reading a manual on their own and they would benefit more from personal instruction that is supplemented by workbooks or manuals. Hence, we propose combining written materials with tutorials as strategy to build the research skills of staff from these particular organizations.

Staff from groups that have had research experience, on the other hand, can improve their skills by reading manuals on their own and do not need personal instruction. They know what the pitfalls of conducting a survey are, for example, and would benefit from a publication that taught them how to avoid these pitfalls.

Our approach, then, relies on combining manuals and tutorials for mid-level groups and manuals alone for more experienced groups. The manuals and tutorials will be designed to bolster research skills that were identified in the exploratory study as being particularly weak, first the ability to investigate and understand the local economy and second, the ability to collect primary data. (A third topic, finding secondary data pertinent to rural policy research, is covered in a manual being prepared under an earlier Ford Foundation grant to Washington State University.)

Again, we use an example to illustrate how we plan to meet our goal of improving research skills. Suppose the Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) receives funding to study alternative economic development strategies for Montana communities. Despite their research experience and

familiarity with secondary data sources, AERO staff have no training in economics, and they do not feel confident about approaching the subject on their own. The project director visits the organization and spends a day and a half presenting a tutorial designed to give them basic background in the principles of community economics to get them started on their research. AERO staff members use the manual for reference as they get further into their project.

Final Report

Because this is a pilot project designed to test two particular capacity building strategies, it is important that the project be carefully and honestly evaluated. Therefore, we suggest that the project director write a final report addressing the following questions:

(1) In the opinion of the staff, participants, and granting institutions, did the program result in greater objectivity and/or more useful research projects?

(2) Assuming there were some tangible benefits from the program (in terms of objectivity and usefulness), how do these benefits compare with the costs of operating the program? Could the same benefits have been achieved through other means?

(3) What did we learn about providing consulting services and personal instruction to development organizations? Were they receptive? Did they learn anything? What went wrong?

(4) Have we built stronger links between development groups and research institutions?

The final report should serve as a basis for deciding whether the capacity building project should be continued, and if so, how it might be improved.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: The Youth Project Research Assistance Proposal

Appendix B: Community Organization and Intermediary Interviews

APPENDIX A
The Youth Project Research Assistance Proposal[24]

In 1987, the Youth Project received a planning grant from the Ford Foundation to determine the feasibility of developing a research-related training and technical assistance program for grassroots organizations in the Southwest. Although the project was not approved, the study funded by the planning grant merits consideration.

According to Youth Project Field Representative Frank Sanchez, the project goal was to build the capacity to conduct "action" or "power" research that would allow groups to:

> ...understand what strategies they needed to take on a particular issue; to understand the playing field,...what it was going to cost to work on this particular issue; and if they have the organizational resources to take on the issue. So it's something to help them improve their tactics as well as develop their strategy on a particular issue.

According to the project report submitted to Ford, the specific method of research addressed by the study is "strategic research... the collection, analysis and dissemination of information designed to shape and address key policy issues and alternatives." The Youth Project was especially concerned that such research should inform, but not substitute for, action.

The feasibility study was designed to determine: how enhancing research skills might improve the effectiveness of grassroots groups; which groups might benefit from receiving research skill training; how such training should be organized; and how much it would cost. Research skills, in this case, meant the ability to: identify questions; locate and acquire

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[24]Based on a personal interview with Youth Project Field Representative Frank Sanchez and on "The Youth Project, Summary of Findings, Southwest Office Research Technical Assistance Project," a report submitted to the Ford Foundation in March 1988.

information necessary to answer these questions; and interpret, utilize, and disseminate findings.

Sanchez initially identified eight strong organizations, all with established working relationships with the Youth Project, as potential participants in a research skills training program. Project leaders expected that training in strategic research would strengthen each group's effectiveness by improving their understanding of key institutions, sectors, and industries.

The Youth Project proposed a two track program that would provide training, technical assistance, and small research grants. Track 1 would involve 5-8 groups in a 3-5 day intensive training workshop followed by on-site visits and phone consultation. The proposed training would extend beyond research methods to address:

> How citizen groups can play a role in public policy formation and what skills they need to develop and incorporate into their work; how information that does not appear to be available can be acquired by citizen groups; and how citizen groups can analyze information and communicate findings to their constituencies and the general public so as to have the maximum public education and policy impact.[25]

The study noted that substantial resources would need to be devoted to developing a curriculum for the training sessions and that people who had research skills would need help in becoming effective trainers.

Track 2 of the project would involve research grants of approximately $5,000 to a few of the participants. These groups would be selected based on their track record, the breadth of their constituency, their proven capacity to conduct research, and the strength of their research plans.

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[25]"Youth Project, Summary of Findings," op. cit.

The Youth Project estimated costs of Tracks 1 and 2 over a two year period of between $115,000 and $160,000.

Comments

The Youth Project study suffers from three shortcomings. First, it does not address the factors associated with research capacity. A good training or technical assistance project needs to build on an understanding of what makes research happen. Yet no effort seems to have been made to figure out why some community groups have developed strong research components and others have not.

Second, the research grant component of the proposal is too small to be effective. The study proposes that only a select few of the groups involved in training would receive research money and does not indicate how the other groups would fund their analyses. Interviews conducted for the current study indicate that very little (if any) effective research is funded out of general operating capital. As the CCC study suggests, even the groups that receive the research grants would likely find the sum too small and short-term to make a substantial commitment to conducting research.

Third, the study makes no reference to building working relationships between research institutions and the community groups. Even if the project were to succeed in teaching research skills and following up with technical assistance over the life of the grant, it seems that relatively permanent links with researchers need to be forged.

The proposal has several important strengths as well. First and most basic, it recognizes the importance of building research capacity as a means of improving the effectiveness and credibility of community-based organizations. Second, it reflects an appreciation for both basic "scoping out the landscape" and broad view research. All of the example research projects

cited in the report are potentially strong. And finally, the proposal acknowledges the labor intensive nature of building research capacity. There are no short-cuts -- the process is likely to require substantial time and money.

APPENDIX B

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND INTERMEDIARY INTERVIEWS [26]

Alternative Energy Resource Organization in Helena, Montana (Al Kurki, Director, and Nancy Matheson, Research Director)

Arkansas Women's Project in Little Rock, Arkansas (Suzanne Phar, Director)

Appalachian Communities for Children in McKee, Kentucky (Judy Martin, Director)

Center for Community Change in Washington D.C. (Norm DeWeaver, Economic and Rural Development Specialist, and Ed Gramlich, Research and Community Development Specialist)

* Center for Community Self Help in Durham, North Carolina (Kate McKee, Director)

Center for Women's Economic Alternatives in Ahoskie, North Carolina (Sarah Davis, Director)

Community Information Exchange in Washington D.C. (Alice Shabecoff, Director)

Economic Research and Development Center, University of Arkansas in Pine Bluff (John Fluker, Director)

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon in Portland, Oregon (Barbara George, Deputy Director)

Forest Trust in Santa Fe, New Mexico (Henry Carey, Director)

Ford Foundation in New York, New York (Mildred Warner, former Program Officer, and Ellen Arrick: telephone interviews)

Ganados del Valle in Los Ojos, New Mexico (Maria Varela, Director)

Idaho Conservation League in Boise, Idaho (Mary Kelly, Director)

Institute for Community Education and Training (Laura Bush, Research Director)

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[26] All contacts were by personal interview unless noted otherwise. Participants at the roundtable discussion ("Community Based Organizations and Research Capacity") are marked with an asterisk.

* Institute for Southern Studies in Durham, North Carolina (Bob Hall, Director)

Local Initiative Support Corporation field office in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (George Esser, Field Representative: telephone interview)

* MDC, Inc. in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (Leslie Takahashi)

Mountain Association for Community Economic Development in Berea, Kentucky (Ron Wilson, President, Cynthia Duncan, former Research Director, and Carol Lamm)

Minnesota Project in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Marcia Keller, Executive Director)

Montana Alliance for Progressive Policy in Missoula, Montana (Don Reed, Director, and Ken Peres, Research Director)

Montana People's Action in Missoula, Montana (Jim Fleischman, Director, and Secky Fascionne, former Director)

* North Carolina Legal Services Resource Center in Raleigh, North Carolina (Deborah Warren and Abdul Rasheed, Community Development Specialists)

Northern Lights Research and Education Institute in Missoula, Montana (Don Snow, former Executive Director, and Dan Kemmis, consultant)

Rocky Mountain Institute, Economic Renewal Project in Snowmass, Colorado (Micheal Kinsley, Director: telephone interview)

* Rural Economic Development Center in Raleigh, North Carolina (Rick Carlisle)

Southern Development Bancorporation in Arkadelphia, Arkansas (Jeff Doose, Director of Southern Ventures, Inc. and Julia Vindasius, Director of Good Faith Fund in Pine Bluff)

Washington Association of Community Economic Development in Seattle, Washington (Don Comstock, Director: telephone interview)

Western Organization of Resource Councils in Billings, Montana (Pat Sweeney, Director, and John Smillie, Research Director)

Youth Project field office in Roswell, New Mexico (Frank Sanchez, Field Representative)