Justifying Social Services:
Partnership and Risk in the Alberta Funding Regime

by

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Abstract

This research focuses on the funding relationships between the provincial government and the not-for-profit sector in Alberta. Since funding cuts and risk management accounting techniques were introduced in the 1990s, the funding environment has evolved in the direction of enhanced sophistication of risk management techniques. The current environment is a remnant of the changes in values that took place during this period. Current trends indicate a continuation of these values, repackaged under the guise of community and individual empowerment. Recent policy and legislation such as the Results Based Budgeting Act and the Social Policy Framework are reminiscent of past initiatives designed to enhance fiscal accountability, create efficiencies and generate expectations for the not-for-profit sector to deliver consistent services with fewer resources. Drawing on interview and observational data, this project examines the implications of key neoliberal assumptions and practices as they pertain to the not-for-profit sector in Alberta. In particular, I am interested in the devolution of what were previous state activities onto the not-for-profit sector alongside the notion of equitable partnerships, control at a distance through financial accounting measures, the role of evidence-based ideology and the embrace of risk management techniques. I argue that the actual implementation of these key neoliberal ideas often have detrimental consequences for not-for-profit agencies in terms of their ability to deliver focused programming and their need to dedicate a disproportionate amount of funds to accountability requirements and sustaining programs.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Caitlin Tighe. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1, "Justifying Social Services: Risk and Evidence in Funding Decisions", No. Pro00037306, May 2, 2013.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A group of individuals representing an array of interests are meeting over the span of eight hours to decide how government funds will be allocated to a select group of not-for-profit organizations. They are looking for organizations with established track records of accountability and community partnerships and project proposals that meet the strict scope and demonstrate evidence of effectiveness. Only one-third of the total amount requested is available and over half of the organizations who have applied depend 100% on government funding to run their programs. Each organization under consideration is anxiously waiting for the results, wondering if they will be able to continue operation. As articulated by a participant from a not-for-profit organization, "it depends what they look at. You know every year they're gunna have a different board sitting right, so the boards going to look at things differently, it's not always the same board... you know it can hurt you whoever's sitting on the board. No matter which program you have. So the unknown factor, of did you get the letter that says yes."

Funding arrangements between the not-for-profit sector and the Government of Alberta are a longstanding way to operate social service programming in communities throughout the province. The practice is continually evolving with changes in political priorities, emergent social issues and the development of burgeoning research and accountability techniques. What has remained consistent in recent years is the notion of risk and negotiations of power as the two sectors present both similar and competing priorities.

This research focuses on the funding relationships between the provincial government and the not-for-profit sector in Alberta. Since funding cuts and risk management accounting techniques were introduced in the 1990s, the funding environment has evolved in the direction of enhanced sophistication of risk management techniques. The current environment is a remnant of the changes in values that took place during this period. Current trends indicate a continuation of these values, repackaged under the guise of community and individual empowerment. Recent policy and legislation such as the Results Based Budgeting Act and the Social Policy Framework are reminiscent of past initiatives designed to enhance fiscal accountability, create efficiencies and generate expectations for the not-for-profit sector to deliver consistent services with fewer resources. Drawing on interview and observational data, this project examines the implications of key neoliberal assumptions and practices as they pertain to the not-for-profit sector in Alberta. In particular, I am interested in the devolution of what were previous state activities onto the not-for-profit sector alongside the notion of equitable partnerships, control at a distance through financial accounting measures, the role of evidence-based ideology and the embrace of risk management techniques. I argue that the actual implementation of these key neoliberal ideas often have detrimental consequences for not-for-profit agencies in terms of their ability to deliver focused programming and their need to dedicate a disproportionate amount of funds to accountability requirements and sustaining programs.

While substantial progress has been made in terms of improving funding structures, a gap remains between expectations and operational reality. Using the funding regime as a point of entry, evidence of disconnects are explored by interrogating the valued principles of neoliberalism in light of how they are experienced by service providers. In particular, while

certain neoliberal principles look good in theory, on the ground they are often problematic, creating contradictions and unintended consequences. The questions guiding this research are as follows:

1) How has the shift to evidence-based policy affected the attention, and consequently, funding given to organizations?

2) Has the shift to evidence-based policy affected how grants are managed and risks are mitigated?

3) How has the shift to evidence-based decision-making and risk management affected social service delivery capacity in the not-for-profit sector?

4) How are relationships between the provincial government and not-for-profit organizations negotiated within this context?

The funding relationships examined throughout this study are limited to the Alberta Government funding regime, using samples from selected ministries providing grants to social service programming. The primary focus of this research is to examine the processes that exist for both provincial government funders and their not-for-profit recipients. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals in management level roles. Five interviews were conducted with provincial government grant managers and eleven interviews were conducted with not-for-profit grant program managers. One full day of observation notes from a grant committee meeting have also been included as a supplementary source of data. Document and discourse analysis was on-going throughout the data collection process to complement interview and observational data. A detailed explanation of the research methods

and the specific data collection and analysis techniques used in this study are outlined in detail in Chapter Three: Data and Methods.

This research was conducted within the context of neoliberalism and neoliberalist agendas of funding regimes. Neoliberalism involves the retraction or deregulation of state involvement in things like the economic market and welfare provisions. It is a form of governance that seeks to facilitate individualistic social responsibility. It fosters the conditions for citizens and institutions to become empowered to take on responsibilities previously within the state's domain. This is achieved by developing indirect techniques for maintaining authority while minimizing responsibility (Lemke, 2001, p. 201). Under neoliberalism, the not-for-profit sector has evolved and taken on a substantial responsibility for the delivery of social services. Governments rely on the work of the not-for-profit sector and have institutionalized a funding regime whereby they can retain power over the sector by limiting the availability of funding and requiring extensive evaluation data. This serves two key purposes. First, it minimizes expenditures while maximizing service delivery, as in order to obtain funding organizations must demonstrate that they can do 'more with less'. Second, it gives funders access to and power over the evaluation data typically required by funding agreements, enabling them to retain ultimate control and promote accountability and transparency. It is within this context that the institutions represented in this study work.

The questions guiding this research are influenced by a secondary desire to uncover how neoliberal political rationality reinforces power imbalances between the government and not-for-profit sector. This is done by comparing the celebrated positives of neoliberalism with some of

the on the ground realities, contradictions, problems and unintended consequences. Relationships between government and the not-for-profit sector are often characterized as a partnership. However, this characterization is questionable. Partnerships imply a mutual benefit to both parties and an even platform for negotiation. Power inequality challenges the autonomy of the not-for-profit sector to make decisions based on the needs of their community. Government operates as a formal institution with a well-established structure and representation whereas the not-for-profit sector is more informal. Organizations are often stretched to maximum capacity as they attempt to fulfill mandates in specialized areas of service. This reality coupled with the diversity and number of not-for-profit institutions makes it challenging to mobilize a unified voice and representation in policy debate (Elson, 2011a). Due to the informal structure of the not-for-profit sector, historically their capacity to influence or raise issues during policy negotiations is minimal. Paying close attention to the underlying principles of funding, this research explicates the simultaneous empowerment and subjugation of the not-for-profit sector, and how this serves to institutionalize the project of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism imposes an economic rationality onto the social domain, applying concepts of cost-benefit analysis and market criteria to social risks such as poverty or unemployment (Lemke, 2001, pp. 200-201). Evolving forms of accountability required as a component of funding not only demonstrate heightened mechanisms of control over projects, but also new forms of auditing practices. New auditing principles speak to the persistent desire for governance to render social action quantifiable. Neoliberalist ideals promote the rise of internal control, whereby responsibilization for such control is shifted onto not-for-profit organizations. This motivates them to produce evidence of credibility and regulation for reasons which ultimately

benefit the funder (Power, 2007). As Power (2007) notes, "new forms and intensities of auditing [have been] mobilized in the name of ideals of transparency, efficiency, and accountability, and the scope of auditing and inspection extended in many regulated sectors" (pp. 42-43). This trend is evident in recent Alberta policy, specifically the Results Based Budgeting Act (2012) and Social Policy Framework (discussed in sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 respectively) and has ramifications for how organizations operate, deliver services and report on those services.

Services devoted to human activities are constantly being shaped by internal and external social processes. Thus, the underlying theoretical commitment of this research is constructivist. The social construction of reality is a dynamic process that focuses on how our understandings of the world are constantly being reproduced. Therefore, the perspective taken throughout the presentation of this research is that the data has been jointly created and influenced by the myriad of actors involved. Understandings and the significance of funding relationships are a culmination of the cultural, political and societal forces and rationalizations of social actors. The purpose of this research is to critically analyze the practices and perspectives of individuals representing both government funding bodies and not-for-profit organizations. Throughout the research process, I aim to move beyond institutionalized language and discourse to uncover the current realities of government funded not-for-profit organizations. As the primary concern with social constructivism is raising consciousness to a particular issue, it is critical of the status quo, or the current reality of the phenomena being researched (Hacking, 1999, p. 6). Therefore, this research aims to raise awareness of the points of contention between the government and the not-for-profit sector, suggesting that these relationships are a product of historical events, social forces and ideology (Hacking, 1999, p. 2).

1.1 Defining the Not-For-Profit Sector

Reaching an inclusive definition of not-for-profit organizations presents a challenge as the diversity of such institutions includes universities, hospitals, religious groups and community-based organizations. The not-for-profit sector can be more easily defined by what it is not, specifically it is not supposed to pursue or distribute profit. The not-for-profit sector holds a position in-between the market and the state (Scott, 2003, p. 4). Other commonly used terms to describe the not-for-profit sector are the Third Sector, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and non-profit and/or voluntary organizations. These terms can be used somewhat interchangeably, however in order to maintain consistency in terminology, I have used the term not-for-profit throughout when referring to this sector or individual organizations.

In the interest of keeping a focused scope for this research, quasi-governmental institutions like universities and hospitals have been excluded, as well as religious groups and larger not-for-profits that function more as a funder than as a service provider, such as the United Way. For the purposes of this research, the term not-for-profit refers to community-based organizations existing primarily to serve the public and contribute to social welfare. Such organizations can be further characterized by their reliance on government grants, volunteer contributions, and private donations. Services offered by these organizations are often aligned with the government's mandate and priorities, justifying the allocation of grant funding for related programs. The not-for-profit organizations represented in this study are a mix of small, community grassroots groups as well as larger, more formally established organizations. The charitable status of the organization was not part of the inclusion criteria, and therefore those represented may or may not hold charitable status, though the majority do.

The not-for-profit sector is understood to be unique in its ability to respond to social ills within a community. This sector includes largely independent organizations with a higher level of flexibility than possible for government run services. Often situated within the communities they serve, these organizations can offer tailored solutions to community problems. In tackling complex social problems, there is no guarantee of the outcome or an easy way to determine long-term impact making investing in social programs a risky endeavour. Since the 1990s, institutions in all sectors have been challenged with the notion of managing uncertainty, or mitigating risk. Standards of practice, guidelines and accountability tools have all evolved in a concerted effort to create and maintain the perception that risks can be controlled and managed (Power, 2007). These changes have been especially noticeable within the not-for-profit sector.

As noted, the not-for-profit sector relies on the government for financial support. Government decisions regarding social service program funding are under constant public scrutiny, as it is the general public who both pays for and is affected by these decisions. While trying to maintain public support, government officials must also consider the program evaluation research and make decisions that are framed in terms taxpayers will accept. Within a system of competing political agendas and the need for accountability to the taxpayer, we are increasingly seeing the growth of managerialism and the political shift to "evidence-based" decision-making (Haggerty, 2009). Evidence-based initiatives are particularly notable for how they seek to eliminate political obstacles in the interest of supporting only those proposals based in evidence of effectiveness (Townley, Cooper & Oakes, 2003; Welsh & Farrington, 2005). Service delivery proposals are expected to demonstrate that they will produce concrete

outcomes, impacts, and results (Sparrow, 2008). Such rhetoric helps to justify expenditures in particular areas and not in others.

The following chapter provides an overview of key neoliberal assumptions within the funding contexts and the politics of funding both generally and specific to Alberta. Chapter 3 will then discuss the methodology used to conduct this study. It includes a more in-depth discussion of the research process as well as the criteria for participants in this study. Chapter 4 includes the results and analysis of findings, discussing in detail the key concerns with the neoliberal assumptions presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the central findings, the limitations inherent in this study and considerations for future research.

Chapter 2

Funding Contexts and the Politics of Funding

2.1 Not-For-Profit Service Delivery in Canada

In the current economic and political climate, the not-for-profit sector is seen as important from a government perspective because it inexpensively fills a gap in service delivery. Not-for-profits have a long history of community involvement in Canadian society. Since the 1960s, 'the community' was identified as the suitable means for responding to social problems. It was at this historical juncture that the community became entwined with politics and complex bureaucracy (Ilcan & Basok, 2004, p. 132).

The retrenchment of the Canadian welfare state during the 1990s has had significant implications on the not-for-profit sector. Funding allocated to the sector dramatically decreased,

while the demand for social services began to increase (Hall, Barr, Easwaramoorthy, Sokolowski, & Salamon, 2005, p. 23). These changes are explored in depth in the following section on neoliberalism. The move from core funding supporting the full range of organizational activities and expenses towards project-based funding was another key shift in funding policy changing the way not-for-profit organizations operate (Miller, 1998, pp. 409-410). Project-based funding was problematic for agencies that relied heavily on government support for their entire operation, as the strict funding limitations set on project-based funds would typically exclude or only minimally include overhead costs to support infrastructure or general administrative costs of providing services (Hall et al., 2005, pp. 25-26).

The changing funding regime is creating a situation where service delivery organizations are becoming disconnected from the needs of their community. By weakening the not-for-profit sector, opportunities for social participation, democratic involvement and active citizenship are eroded (Scott, 2003). New methods of funding, in the form of shorter term, project-based funding with increased requirements is creating a bifurcation of not-for-profit organizations (Elson, 2011a). Larger, historically established organizations are more likely to have the capacity to mobilize in response to increased demands and leverage funding from other sources (i.e., private donations or fundraising). Those organizations whose mandate involves morally appealing or politically salient causes are also more likely to sustain their activities. Small, rural or newer organizations with less established reputations will likely have a more difficult time adapting to or sustaining themselves within this new environment. Those whose mandates involve less appealing or salient causes are also likely to face challenges in obtaining additional funds to offset administrative and evaluation costs not covered by project grants. This dynamic

creates a feast or famine situation where some organizations survive, if not flourish while others will struggle or potentially fail (Scott, 2003).

2.2 Neoliberalism

To understand the relationship between government and the not-for-profit sector, the context this relationship has arisen in requires a thorough examination. The process of neoliberal state restructuring, also referred to as the "rise of the shadow state", involves reducing maintenance of the welfare state while subsequently fostering conditions that enable the not-for-profit sector to take on more social service responsibility (Mitchell, 2001, pp. 172-173). The steady decline of federal and provincial safety nets promoted the development of the broader political agenda of neoliberalism (Mitchell, 2001).

In Canada, neoliberalism is evident in a number of areas at both the provincial and federal levels of government. Key aspects of neoliberalism include the "decentralization and attrition of federal governance"; increased power given to provincial governing bodies; and the deregulation and privatization of various institutions (Mitchell, 2001, p. 174). Most pertinent to the welfare state are the severe cutbacks to many social service programs as justified through rhetoric of deficit and the unnecessary excess of welfare provisions (Mitchell, 2001, pp. 174-175). In this climate, we see the not-for-profit and voluntary sector taking on the role of providing welfare services in local communities as a way to compensate for such reductions.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as community-based organizations came to take on more responsibility for delivering public services, their capacity for maximizing efficiency while reducing expenditures became more formally recognized (Mitchell, 2001, p. 176). A new form

of governance, where the government subcontracts with not-for-profit agencies to administer services, represents a restructuring of the state apparatus to align with the broader agenda of neoliberalism. As previously autonomous organizations unconstrained by the bureaucratic nature of governments, not-for-profits increasingly came under the control and regulation of the state. In this way, not-for-profit organizations have become a de facto extension or arm of the state (Trudeau, 2008). While not concerning itself directly with administering services, the state is still able to exercise power and control by fostering and developing community partnerships with less financial commitment.

Strategies of neoliberal state governance through the rise of partnerships with not-for-profit community-based organizations have found justification and support in the argument that this method is better suited to the needs of communities. "The vision of non-profits as builders of community and enhancers of citizen participation in the governance of public affairs" (Rathgeb Smith, 2000, p. 9) sets up the notion that communities are empowered to customize services to local circumstances. What follows is a brief overview of some of the key neoliberal assumptions regarding funding relationships between the provincial government and not-for-profit sector in Alberta. I will then turn to a discussion of the relevance of two recent Alberta Government policies influencing these funding relationships.

2.2.1 Power and Partnerships

The primary characteristics of neoliberalism in a society are: "economic deregulation; welfare state devolution, retraction, and recomposition; an expansive, intrusive, and proactive penal apparatus; and the cultural trope of individual responsibility" (Woolford & Nelund, 2013,

p. 293). Post-welfarist, neo-liberal agendas influence how community-based organizations work. This influence is explicit and implicit: it is felt through funding agreements requiring social service agencies to produce quantifiable outcomes and through the push towards community and individual responsibilization (Rose, 2000, p. 327; Woolford & Nelund, 2013, pp. 292-293). Shifts towards risk management, community and individual responsibilization have allowed government funding bodies to cede responsibility for social service provisions and maintain control over how they are delivered.

Leveraging assets within communities to respond to social problems is thought to be an effective and cost-efficient method to respond to social issues. By promoting community strengths, existing knowledge and resources can be used to engage local community institutions. This grassroots approach promotes diversity, pluralism, and individual freedom and contributes to the accumulation of social capital (Rathgeb Smith, 2000, pp. 10-13). 'Social capital' refers to the networks of cooperation within communities generated through citizen involvement within the voluntary sector (Rathgeb Smith, 2000, pp. 12-13). The social capital that community-based organizations can accumulate promotes effective public services by assisting the government in smoother program delivery (Swanstrom & Koschinsky, 2000, p. 67) while minimizing bureaucratic red tape to allow for "responsive and innovative solutions to pervasive policy problems" (Trudeau, 2006, p. 2808). This is evident in the neoliberalist metaphor for the "government to steer rather than row" (Milward & Provan, 2003, p. 6). It could be argued that the task of government has become to enable, inspire and assist citizens in taking responsibility for the social problems within their communities and develop individualized solutions rather than to take action on social problems itself (Ilcan & Basok, 2004, p. 132).

As the formalized relationships between government and not-for-profit organizations become further entrenched, certain mechanisms and practices evolve. Increasingly, funders are requiring more rigorous applications, reporting, financial accounting and evaluations. Taken together, these processes force "not-for-profits to dedicate valuable staff time to documenting and reporting outcome of service" (Trudeau, 2008, p. 2808). Consequently, time and attention are taken away from the core service delivery mission of the organization. The structure of not-for-profits becomes eroded by bureaucratization, rendering them into a semi-autonomous position whereby they must maintain a balance between both meeting the needs of their community and their funder(s). These practices have become common throughout North America, specifically in Canada where, "by the end of the 1990s, this public-private relationship was formally institutionalized and solidified following the release of the Working Together: [A Government of Canada/Voluntary Sector Joint Initiative] report (Mitchell, 2001, p. 177). This report was an effort to explicitly lay out the strategic relationship between the sectors, making the not-for-profit sector more overtly a direct arm of the state apparatus (Mitchell, 2001, p. 177; Trudeau, 2008, p. 2806).

2.2.2 Managing Risk and Enhancing Accountability through Evidence-Based Policy

Michael Power (1997) describes the demand for improved accountability and efficiency of the public sector as one of the prominent reasons for the rise and success of managerial practices in political discourses (p. 44). Citizens and stakeholders are believed to have the right to hold organizations accountable for how their money is being used, specifically that it will be used "economically, efficiently, and effectively", giving added credence to "value for money"

ideals (Power, 1997, p. 44). However, managerialist rhetoric has created contradictions, shifting policies towards internal organization, efficiency and measurable outcomes (Brownlee, 1998, pp. 313 & 325). Pressure to develop outcomes-based reports align with the philosophy of New Public Management (Sparrow, 2008, p. 124) and reinforce the language of efficiency as an unassailable global phenomenon in post-industrial societies (Brownlee, 1998; Gross-Stein, 2001). The move to enhanced accountability is inherently tied to the risk management that has become entrenched in organizational practice. Risk assessment is no longer only a component of accountability; it has become central to the governance structure of organizations (Power, 2007, p. 156). Within the context of the not-for-profit sector, the onus is on individual organizations to demonstrate risk-averse management practices through third party financial audits and rigorous evaluations with demonstrable outcomes.

The recent move by the Canadian government to evidence-based policy-making is a further indication of the broader neoliberal shift in the partnering relationship with the not-for-profit sector. It also places additional requirements on funding provisions. Evidence-based policymaking represents recent efforts to re-structure policy processes through the prioritization of evidence in decision-making criteria (Howlett, 2009, p. 154). The rationale behind this direction is that by relying on evidence, policy failure is minimized while efficiency and effectiveness are maximized (Howlett, 2009). Promoting the use of evidence as a 'best practice' is meant to ensure organizations are incorporating knowledge from their own and from other's evaluations and not repeating mistakes (Laforest & Orsini, 2005, p. 482). Funders expect their recipients to demonstrate concretely what their program has accomplished and the risks or harms prevented (Sparrow, 2008, p. 127).

Past organizational studies have demonstrated that not-for-profits have a tendency to monitor those things which are easily measured, such as number of clients served or activities provided (LeRoux & Wright, 2010, p. 574). Moving beyond basic output data to measuring outcomes and impact requires a more fulsome evaluative approach. The use of evidence and performance measures has been demonstrated to promote the use of strategic decision-making while enhancing the effectiveness of these decisions within not-for-profit organizations (LeRoux & Wright, 2010, p. 583). Decisions informed by evidence ostensibly allow funders to funnel finite resources into proven practices. Evidence-based funding can reduce financial losses, eliminate redundancies and/or ineffective practices as well as promote on-going program evaluation. Promoting evidence-based practices in the not-for-profit sector is a mechanism through which government can ensure accountability and transparency in its decisions, thereby cultivating public trust (Laforest & Orsini, 2005, p. 485).

2.3 Neoliberalism as Policy: Alberta Context

In recent years, the Government of Alberta has introduced new initiatives, policy directions and legislation that impact its funding relationships with the not-for-profit sector. Most pertinent to this research are the Results Based Budgeting Act released in 2012 and Alberta's Social Policy Framework released in February 2013. This kind of legislation and policy is in accordance with dominant principles of neoliberalism and exemplify how these ideals are becoming mandated and institutionalized throughout the province. The perspectives of both government and not-for-profit leaders interviewed for this research exist within the current reality of these initiatives.

2.3.1 Looking Back, Looking Ahead

New policies allude to a willingness to do things differently and better the lives of Albertans. It is important to first consider previous attempts at achieving such ideals and take into consideration the impact, or lack thereof, on the outcomes. Incorporating a historical perspective in conjunction with current trends allows for a broader analysis of the interaction between institutions, shifts to risk management approaches and evidence-based policy as well as the dynamics of power.

Current policies have been shaped and reinforced by the events, decisions and structures in place now and historically. In 1993-94, the Alberta Government undertook substantial changes in response to a perceived crisis in the legitimacy of government (Townley et al., 2003, p. 1051). Performance measures were established across government. All departments were required to produce three-year business plans accompanied by performance indicators to evaluate the success of their initiatives (Townley et al., 2003, p. 1051). The key question driving this process was "did the programmes and services and dollars we spent achieve the results we wanted and make a positive difference to Albertans" (Townley et al., 2003, p. 1051). The development of performance measures/indicators is the mechanism used to hone in on the desired results of government programs. Performance measures are touted as a powerful tool for communicating and comparing activities. They can be used to clarify purpose and provide guidance for making future decisions. However, in order to be useful in informing business decisions, performance measures must be based on meaningful and reliable data. Certain lines of business lend

themselves better to translating value into performance indicators whereas for others it is far more challenging.

Central to performance measurement is quantitative representation, or the production of numbers and statistics to demonstrate value. Numbers have come to take on a superior level of importance in evaluation. Their impartial status is exploited and is thought to remove the use of discretion or bias when making difficult political decisions or allocating scarce resources (Townley et al., 2003). These are the "political technologies that render a realm governable" inculcating the belief that social process can not only be measured, but can also be accurately compared across disciplines and programs (Townley et al., 2003, p. 1059). As demonstrated by Townley et al. (2003), techniques of calculation and measurement can suppress socially justified or moral actions by government. When social service related programming is subjected to this limited form of evaluation, organizations have been known to abandon innovation in favour of standardization. This fundamentally impacts the types of services available to individuals, a shift that has been well documented in the literature (Burd, 2009; Elson, 2011a; Hwang & Powell, 2009).

Peter Elson (2011a) describes institutions as "building-blocks of social order" representing the structure that social reality and the expectations for performance of social actors is shaped around (p.7). In order to understand social reality, one must take into consideration the institutional processes and histories that are in place and have evolved over time. The natural history model provides a mechanism for empirical research of the construction of social phenomena. The natural history of social phenomena is a compilation of social activities and

institutional structures that is used to inform or explain current social reality (Spector & Kitsuse, 2001). In terms of government funding structures, Elson (2011a and 2011b) demonstrates the importance of taking into consideration the natural history of institutions using path dependency and analysis of what he terms "critical junctures". His analysis demonstrates how certain institutional structures came to be, how they have changed and how key events or critical junctures can alter the path trajectory of social processes.

Elson (2011a) describes three characteristics of the importance of path dependency analysis. First, because early stages of policy development can have a significant impact on later outcomes, a historical perspective allows for an examination of these early processes. Second, as the timing of policy developments is crucial, once institutional norms have been established, even large developments may not have a substantial impact on outcomes. Small developments prior to the established norms may have a much greater influence. Lastly, early stages of policy development are more open to a variety of potential outcomes, whereas once a path has been developed and reinforcement of processes occurs, practices and behaviours become institutionalized (Elson, 2011a, p. 11).

Critical junctures are the events triggering the development of a new path. Critical junctures are characterized by political uncertainty and the willingness to explore other viable policy options. Considering the concept of path dependency, the time during and immediately after these critical junctures occurs is key to enacting sustained institutional change (Elson, 2011a, p. 11). Looking at the historical institutional relationship between the Alberta government and the not-for-profit sector taken together with the perspectives of leaders in both

sectors, there is potential to create a new path and explore new ways of doing business that will

be mutually beneficial to both sectors.

2.3.2 Results Based Budgeting (RBB) Act

In 2012, the Alberta government released the "Results Based Budgeting Act" (Results

Based Budgeting Act, 2012, Chapter R-17.5), legislating that all provincial ministries will adhere

to decision making practices informed by evidence to curtail frivolous spending, particularly

within the current climate of fiscal restraint. Results Based Budgeting (RBB) is the provincial

government's commitment to demonstrating transparency and accountability for the way Alberta

tax dollars are spent. The three-year process, currently underway, is a comprehensive review of

all government programs and services designed to ensure that the outcomes of each are aligned

with Alberta priorities (Alberta Treasury Board and Finance, 2012, p. 2). Though the primary

goal is not to reduce budgets or eliminate certain programs or services, it is acknowledged that

savings will likely occur as a result of the review process and the implementation of more

efficient and effective ways of doing business (Alberta Treasury Board and Finance, 2012, p. 2).

Though the actual RBB process is finite, due to be completed within three years of

implementation, impacts of the process in the form of recommendations garnered from the in-

depth reviews are likely to be on-going. Assessing the intended outcomes of funding programs

will largely rely on the reports from the funded agencies. Therefore, should it be deemed that

funding programs could do a better job of targeting funding based on evidence or demonstrating

performance measures, the end result will mean further strain on the not-for-profit sector as they

will have to shift to meet enhanced demands within status quo or decreasing operating budgets.

2.3.3 Social Policy Framework

Alberta's Social Policy Framework resonates with the aforementioned neoliberalist ideologies of government retraction and the facilitation of individualistic social responsibility. Underlying concepts for the framework are not new and can be viewed as a reiteration of ideas of increased accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness, repackaged in a way that government can promote the perception of engaging in an equitable partnership with all Albertans. Alberta's Social Policy Framework has strong outcomes and measurable results focus with the intention of influencing social policy directions for the next 10-15 years. It takes the stance of government in the backseat with regards to social development, allowing communities and citizens to step up and take more active roles in their communities. It emphasizes collaboration, engagement and equality between the government and all others. This approach is reminiscent of the classic neoliberal idea of fostering and leveraging community capacity.

The need for a new approach to social policy development is justified on the basis of emergent pressures identified within the province. The growing complexity in the needs of individuals is cited as one of these pressures, highlighting that there are currently 4000 contracted agencies delivering social services on behalf of the Alberta Government. Sustainability challenges as a result of changing demographics have also placed pressures on the range and costs of services required by citizens (Alberta Human Services, 2013, pp. 6-7).

Goals of the social policy framework are oriented around fostering equality and accessibility for all Albertans, with a recognition of the considerations required for vulnerable populations. It is also clear that individual and community success must be based on mutual

responsibility and individual accountability. The not-for-profit sector is expected to act as a delivery agent for social services, responding to the specific needs of local communities in addition to acting as a bridge between the government and the public (Alberta Human Services, 2013, p. 16). In this way, the Alberta government makes it clear that its role is not in directly providing for the needs of citizens, but rather to create an environment where it can dictate desired outcomes and facilitate action from an arm's length. In fact, an expected shift in social policy in the future is the transition from government as a service provider, funder and legislator to government as an influencer, convenor and partner (Alberta Human Services, 2013, p. 17).

Fostering an environment where communities can deliver services implies the dedication of resources and support to communities and local not-for-profits to achieve the desired results. This is outlined as part of the provincial government's roles and responsibilities (Alberta Human Services, 2013, p. 16) and in the shift of social policy purpose, stating "policy supports citizens by providing the resources and competencies for success" (Alberta Human Services, 2013, p. 17). The juxtaposition of wanting to retract its role as a funder while committing to supporting communities with 'resources' to promote success does not provide a cohesive picture of how not-for-profit service delivery will look going forward. The not-for-profit sector relies on government funders for the majority of their operating budget (Scott, 2003). Interpreting the stated upcoming social policy shifts, the not-for-profit sector can expect government to be providing less financial resources for social service delivery than in the past. As the Alberta government is looking to further reduce its direct involvement with community social service delivery, the onus will be shifted onto community organizations and citizens to find other ways to support their programming with diminished financial capacity.

Chapter 3

Data and Methods

3.1 Research Methods

In conducting this research, I sought to learn what the implications of neoliberal policies were on funding decisions and service delivery. Specifically, how the focus on evidence-based programs affects decision making and how financial and reputational risks are mitigated under this structure. As a sub-focus, I also wanted to explore how these institutions understand 'evidence' as a mechanism for promoting programs and the cost and responsibility of collecting such evidence. I will explicate the implications neoliberalism has on not-for-profit service delivery by examining partnerships in terms of power imbalances and risk management. Lastly, I explored how relationships between the provincial government and not-for-profit organizations are negotiated within the contexts of neoliberal assumptions and implications.

The first step in the research process was to identify a number of relevant grant programs and agencies. Eligible grant programs are provincial government programs for social service delivery and/or benefit of public good. Eligible agencies are registered not-for-profit, community-based organizations receiving provincial-level funding for their contribution to public good. Not-for-profit organizations included were of varying sizes and capacity level located throughout the province of Alberta. Once the list of agencies and relevant grant programs had been compiled, the next step involved identifying the individual(s) who could speak on behalf of each organization and/or program (i.e., in a management level role). This information was obtained from publically available sources, such as the organization or funder's websites, or

through snowball contacts. These potential, qualified participants were then e-mailed a University of Alberta REB approved introductory e-mail and invitation to participate in the study.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection involved 16 semi-structured interviews with both key stakeholders involved in provincial-level program funding decisions in Alberta and not-for-profit organizations who receive provincial grant funding. Given that there are proportionally more not-for-profit agencies compared to funding bodies, a greater number of interviews were dedicated to interviewing funding recipients, with eleven interviews in total. Five interviews were conducted with provincial government funding managers, spanning four funding programs.

Supplementing this interview data, publically available government documents including the "Results Based Budgeting Act" (2012), Alberta's Social Policy Framework (2013), grant criteria and application forms/instructions were analyzed. In addition, observations of themes and general perspectives were documented during a one day grant committee meeting. This observation allowed for insights into the perspectives of the individuals representing the interests of the funding body as to which proposals ought to receive funding and why. Observation and analysis of this process supplemented interview data and shed light on how funding decisions are made. The focus of this observation was not on individual statements or program details, but rather a broader analysis of the themes/trends within the group decision-making process to determine what factors play a role in the distribution of funds.

All 16 interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Interview transcripts and observation notes were then analyzed using NVIVO software. Emergent themes in the data were coded allowing for comparison across interviews and an assessment of similarities and/or differences between government and not-for-profit perspectives. Audio files and transcripts were kept on a password protected personal computer accessible only to the researcher. Once interviews had been transcribed and verified for accuracy, audio files were deleted and participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

3.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

For the participants involved in distributing and managing grants, inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Must play a role in the development of the grant program and/or in determining eligibility for funding.

- Must be able to speak to the mandate, vision and goals of the grant program model.

- Must have relationship with the recipients of the grants.

For the participants in the not-for-profit sector, receiving grants and delivering social services, inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Must play a role in the grant application and procurement process.

- Must be able to speak to the mandate, vision and goals of the organization/program.

- Must have some type of relationship with the granting organization.

Since the unit of analysis for this research is the organization or institution, it was imperative that the individuals selected for interviews were in a position to speak on behalf of their organization.

This means that in determining and recruiting participants, inclusion was largely based on whether the individual held a management level role or was the primary individual involved in overseeing the application and reporting for grant funds.

Chapter 4

What was Heard: Funder and Not-for-Profit Perspectives in a Neoliberal Funding Environment

4.1 Summary of Findings

This study brought to light key findings that can be summarized into two broad themes with respect to the funding environment in Alberta. The first theme is the concept of equitable partnerships and negotiations of power between the funding entities and the not-for-profit sector. Both groups have their own priorities and have differential power. In Alberta these themes are predicated by the trends of neoliberalism, and policies influencing the outcomes of funding decisions. The second theme is the notion of risk management and evidence-based funding decisions, more specifically the tendency for both funders and not-for-profit groups alike to take a risk-averse approach to both funding and service delivery. Risk aversion is prevalent and comes with challenges to effective service delivery.

I found a disconnect between the two institutional spheres and frustrations with the funding process were expressed by both not-for-profit groups and funders. The expectation to do more with diminishing or stagnant resources, specifically with regards to accountability and reporting requirements was among the strongest concerns. In addition, there was a perception from the not-for-profit sector that government is unconcerned about their objectives. The frustrations and challenges faced by the funding environment are not the result of any single

person, organization or program. Rather, the current funding structure is a result of the political and social history of funding arrangements between institutions.

This chapter unpacks the findings from this research project organized by the two key neoliberal themes identified: Partnerships and risk management and evidence. Sub-themes relevant to each key subject area are explored and detailed in each section. As neoliberalism is the primary assumption underlying the themes identified within this study, I begin first with a section on the broad subject of neoliberalism as it pertains to these findings before delving into the main themes. A conclusion chapter, reviewing the central findings and contributions of this research, limitations of the study and directions for future research, will then follow.

4.2 Neoliberalism

Comments regarding how the funding regime operates or is intended to operate were aligned within the socio-political context of neoliberalist philosophies. The current system of funding places an unequal level of risk onto the not-for-profit sector, thereby benefitting those who distribute funding. Funders interviewed for this study were optimistic about the current structure, highlighting how it allowed them to leverage the existing community capacity and maximize the outcomes of funded programs. Not-for-profit organizations recognize their enhanced capacity, in comparison with government agencies, to deliver meaningful community services, though with much lower compensation and security.

By shifting both risk and accountability for social services onto the not-for-profit sector, community-based organizations act as a buffer against public criticisms, while still allowing the state control and credit for successes (Goddard, 2012). As evidenced in Alberta's Social Policy

Framework, the position of individual and community responsibilization is clear. Funders see their role as facilitator, rather than as a leader in the involvement of social issues. As described by a funder, "with this particular program the intent was also establishing some local accountability, so getting communities involved in addressing their own social issues and … growing from that and being able to become more independent and help their neighbours then as well … that was the whole basis for the program and that's certainly where we're seeing this go, government can't be all things to all people." While recognizing their strengths in communities, not-for-profit participants questioned whether the responsibility for social services should be at the community and individual level. Some were of the opinion that not-for-profits are doing the government's work better and cheaper than government could do. Essentially, communities recognize that the increasing push to individual responsibilization means they are expected to do more work with fewer resources.

The bureaucratization of the not-for-profit sector has become progressively more extensive as the funding regime has evolved and become institutionalized. This can be viewed as a necessary response to demands for increased accountability and evidence of value for money when investing in social programs. However, it is not without consequences. The changing structure calls for a higher volume of professional, paid staff for positions such as financial auditing, evaluation consultant and/or fund development. Increasing professionalization means that more funding must be dedicated to paying individuals to meet requirements. Alone, this is not a substantial concern; professionalization of the sector could mean an increase in capacity to deliver and evaluate services. The concern lies in the limited and restricted funding available in the current environment forcing organizations to make crucial decisions regarding where funds

will be allocated.

Increased professionalism often means significant shifts in both mission and structure (Hwang & Powell, 2009), challenging the base values of the sector itself. These types of challenging decisions could mean sacrificing individuals with client service experience for those with professional evaluation or fund development experience. If it is not within an organization's capacity or budget allotment to retain professional staff to carry out grant requirements, program staff are left with the task of performing these responsibilities in addition to their service duties. Misperceptions surrounding the amount of resources necessary to maintain an effective organizational infrastructure perpetuates a cycle of being stuck simply keeping up with current demands instead of being able to focus on and build a strong sustainability plan (Burd, 2009). Under these circumstances, although some social service providers try to resist these demands and remain responsive to their service users, they nonetheless feel increasingly restricted in how they offer services to those who come to them seeking help (Woolford & Nelund, 2013, p. 300).

4.3 Equitable Partnerships? Negotiating Power Imbalances in Funding Relationships

This section will explore the concept of partnership as well as describe the technologies of power used to govern the not-for-profit sector, demonstrating how control over not-for-profit operations is shaped and maintained by the state from a removed position. Neoliberalist philosophy promotes the idea of the state as an equitable partner in community work, facilitating the conditions for effective service delivery. Themes articulated by the participants in this study demonstrate the imbalances and distributions of power stemming from the relationship established by funding arrangements. Key to this theme is the notion of government funding bodies acting from a position of power in the funding relationship to dictate how the not-for-

profit sector operates, indicating that this is not an equitable partnership.

4.3.1 Partnership

Organizations with similar goals and clientele are more effective when they are working together and have open lines of communication. Brinkerhoff (2002) argues that what is meant by the term "partnership" needs to be clearly articulated by all parties involved in addition to a clear strategy in place for realizing the goals of the partnership. Brinkerhoff's (2002) definition of partnership describes a relationship between actors with mutually agreed upon objectives and influence with a balance of collaboration and autonomy in decision-making and accountability (p. 21). A trend identified in funding strategies includes the increased requirement of the demonstration of partnerships in order to receive project funding. However, the reflected sentiment from the not-for-profit sector is that the term "partnership" is nebulous and not well articulated by government when requiring evidence of partnerships in funding applications. A community participant expresses frustration with the lack of clarity: "I'm just saying if you're gunna use the word as a funder, say what that means to you. Or what are its elements or it's attributes, so that people understand it, as opposed to just using the word." The term can therefore be used rather loosely, and it can be difficult to judge the functionality or level of commitment required.

The common sentiment among not-for-profit organizations towards partnership development was positive. While recognizing its challenges in terms of relationship development, ultimately partnerships were deemed to benefit both their organizations and the clients they served. Funders preferred for organizations to have partnerships in place before applying for project funding. A trend in the new funding regime has been the requirement to

demonstrate partnerships through joint applications or through letters of support to meet eligibility criteria (Scott, 2003). Amalgamating skills and strengths to deliver services where it makes sense to do so is a key feature of the current granting system. This requirement serves the dual purpose of encouraging organizations to deliver services more effectively as well as reduce funding costs for government grant programs. In many cases, this requirement has bred success with not-for-profit organizations, as indicated by a participant, "so we've had more communication around government grants so that there's less competition so that we can, and if there is competition we'll sit down and say: 'do you want to sit down and we'll do this piece, and you do this piece, because we'll look way better than if we each apply separately', so creating that cooperation."

The successes of partnerships are largely contingent upon relationships people build with each other and local political dynamics. The current funding model can hinder organizations' ability to sustain partnerships, as identified by a community participant: "so, part of the challenge with the new funding environment is everybody's talking about partnerships and doing stuff together, but we're still practicing the old RFP [request for proposals], annual cycle, well I can't form a partnership – what kind of partnerships can you form on a 12 month cycle? And so the practices haven't kept up with the ideology." Building partnerships, especially for the purposes of a program takes a significant amount of time. Once established, the benefits of active partnerships between not-for-profit organizations are innumerable. As another community participant identifies, "we realized as we were working together that we are more powerful as a cohesive group and if we apply for grants together it creates that non-competition." Linking resources ultimately benefits clients, but also saves money, reduces duplication and increases

effectiveness. Organizations can also benefit from mentoring partnerships with other organizations, ultimately building capacity throughout the sector as a whole.

While the partnerships in place between not-for-profit organizations in the community are typically the focus of concern, the partnerships between government and not-for-profit organizations merit assessment as well. Neoliberalist governance dictates the notion of a 'partnership' between the state and non-state actors. The role of government is publicized as a "partner, animator and facilitator" for independent agents, exercising limited authority opting to regulate rather than provide (Rose, 2000, pp. 323-324). Though government repeatedly describes its relationship with the not-for-profit sector as a 'partnership', this terminology disguises the devolution of state responsibility for social services onto the not-for-profit sector. As Evans, Richmond & Shields (2005) state "the benign language of "partnership" hides a steeply hierarchical and centralised relationship of power embedded in a contractual arrangement between the state and those agencies increasingly responsible for the delivery of public goods and services" (p. 78).

The majority of government funders and not-for-profit service providers held opposing views about the status of this partnership. From the government's perspective, the community not-for-profit groups are their partners in delivering on their respective mandates, in one funder's words, "to get what I have described then, requires in my view a partnership between the provincial government and the community out there, I see them as partners, I see them as very important." The perception of the not-for-profit groups, however, was that government's goals did not align with those in the community and did not provide mutual benefit. As described by a

community participant, government "isn't really structured to really partner with us on an initiative in a staff to staff way."

A true partnership is where partners maintain their specific organizational identity and a sense of mutuality exists (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Participants have an idea of what this could look like in practice, but generally acknowledge that it has not been achieved. This idea is expressed by a community participant who said: "maybe it's really about someone who's more broadly engaged in the entire piece of work, as opposed to engaged with us in the context of our reporting. Reporting is just a point in time – here's our report. What's all the stuff that's led up to that, all the challenges faced, decisions made, conversations had, mistakes made. Be a part of that."

With the increasing mandatory accountability requirements imposed on not-for-profit service funding agreements, the sector has growing questions around the level of accountability the government is in turn responsible for. Funders acknowledge that they have a responsibility to be accountable for the taxpayer funds that are distributed and cite the various government mechanisms in place to ensure due diligence. The feedback from not-for-profit participants however describes a relationship where in-depth and complete transparency is required from them without any indication of how their information will be used, or if it is used at all. This sets up the perception of a double standard for the not-for-profit sector, illustrating again that their funding relationship is not an equitable partnership. This perception has created an environment where not-for-profit participants reported being unable to trust in government funders to deliver as promised, or share information with them. One specific community participant described their

struggles with access to information from government as frustrating, and as a result has minimal faith in the level of transparency. This participant states: "It becomes a process that isn't as transparent as it should be. It's built on a formula that allows too much subjectivity in it. When you ask people for hard facts as to what it's based on, it's difficult to get those hard facts, you can get some, but there are still lots of pieces of the jigsaw puzzle missing and you can never really determine." Despite formalizing requests for information through a formal Freedom of Information and Protection (FOIP) application, questions remained unanswered. This experience speaks to the larger collective experience of the frustration of lack of information about how decisions are made and how programs and organizations are internally evaluated.

The not-for-profit services funded by the provincial government typically relate to specific ministry mandates and goals. Without these organizations, government would be responsible for providing these vital services. In order to effectively deliver their programs, the not-for-profit sector deserves the right to know how and why funding decisions are made, how much money is available, how this money will be allocated and how the reports provided will be used. In the current environment, not-for-profits are in a constant state of unease, never knowing for certain how long they will be able to sustain a needed program, impacting things like staff employment security, client relationships and quality of service.

One of the key reasons for the clouded transparency of government is the risk culture that has permeated the funding environment. One participant from the not-for-profit sector describes the shift from "a high level funding agreement – go forth and do good – to a much more detailed agreement, a more protective agreement, lots more references to liability issues and the privacy

issues, etc., access to information [and] indemnifying the government." Such professionalized language with vague specifics pervades publically available information. The imposition of higher levels of accountability while disclosing limited amounts of information allows funders to avoid as much risk as possible, with the trade-off of ambiguous direction hampering the capacity for service delivery and new development.

Not-for-profits described feelings of mistrust and expressed the perception of an authoritative relationship. Brinkerhoff (2002) cautions that imbalanced partnerships, or "bureaucratic creep", can lead to diminished capacity and autonomy of the subservient organization (p. 26). If not conducted mindfully, government – not-for-profit partnering relationships are at risk of bureaucratizing community groups. One community participant who described the disconnects in partnership presented their idea for reaching a more equitable partnership by saying, "we need to sit down together and come up with a common goal, which I think it's very possible. Once you have that common goal, then you need to use that common goal as the central focus as to why we exist. And then you base your policy central to that goal." The challenge for not-for-profit groups will be to negotiate relationships with their funders such that they can maintain autonomy in substantive service delivery decision making while also acquiescing to the bureaucratic requirements of government.

Realistically, decision-making power ultimately lies within government, and the not-for-profit sector is subservient to the will of the political decisions that are made. It is not an equitable partnership between the two sectors if the decision-making power and authority rests wholly with the funder. This idea can be summarized in one not-for-for leader's statements: "I

don't get it, what are we doing that's partnership? You're a great funder, like you're the best funder in terms of how you treat us and how you see things, you're progressive, we think about things together, but, you tell me what my funding will be, we don't negotiate anything, we're not operating in a partnership, so let's talk about how we could do that. I'm happy to do that. What does a partnership really look like? Partnerships look like to me, mutual responsibility, mutual decision-making, mutual benefit, right? It doesn't mean equal benefit, but mutual benefit; you get something out of the partnership, as am I, right? So let's talk more about that. So part of the clarity you get out of a new way of doing funding, is the language we use, and what kind of meaning it has."

4.3.2 Competition

There are concerns associated with the underlying motivations of governments partnering with communities to deliver services and with the side effects of this governance model on the not-for-profit sector's functionality. Creating competitive activity and the production of inequality are valued positively under neoliberalism (Davies, 2014, p.2). The decision to contract out frontline service delivery is meant to spur a healthy competition among not-for-profits, encouraging them to increase efficiency while providing a market approach for government to negotiate the best prices for service delivery (Milward & Provan, 2003, p. 6). For optimal effectiveness, many services require the networks of collaboration. Services requiring a continuum of care that cut across a range of services are jointly produced among various not-for-profit agencies. There is a notable paradox between the concepts of 'collaboration' and 'competition'. In order to survive in a climate of fiscal constraint, organizations must compete with one another for limited funding allocation, which in turn reduces any incentive to collaborate with one another (Milward & Provan, 2003, pp. 5-6). Instability within organizations

as a result of competitive practices is one way that inefficiencies occur in service delivery (Milward & Provan, 2003, p. 10). This produces a counterintuitive side effect to the neoliberalist agenda of increasing effectiveness.

With the growing number of not-for-profit organizations and increasing complexity of social issues, funders are recognizing increased demands for funding dollars, and as such, increasing competition between not-for-profit agencies. As one funder describes, "given that there's an excessive amount of non-profits in our jurisdiction … you're gunna have winners and losers, it's a competitive process and groups and organizations have to demonstrate their worth … it's feast or famine if you're a non-profit." Government is described as facilitating this competition by offering limited and targeted funding opportunities. The reality of competition has driven some agencies to adopt businesslike practices to gain an edge over their rivals (Trudeau, 2008, p. 2808). Such practices are often not so much a choice as they are a necessity in order to secure program funding.

While the competitive environment has forced not-for-profit groups to develop innovative programming and enhance accountability techniques, it also has the detrimental effect of reducing collaboration between organizations. A not-for-profit service provider states, "you don't see a lot of collaboration because sometimes you're competing for the same funding pools so it's easier to stay in a silo and keep funding your program like this instead of sharing funding out across a prevention spectrum." Working in collaborative partnerships is recognized as being more effective for service delivery, but partnerships can be challenging to develop and maintain in the midst of competition for funds.

Not-for-profit service providers do not want to have to compete with one another. Past and current funding practices have defined a system where organizations are forced to compete with one another for survival. Not-for-profit participants stated that they believe in the work their competitors are doing, recognizing its value in the community and for their shared clientele. However, as a result of the competitive nature of the funding environment, many have become territorial. Modifications to competitor mandates that encroach on another agency's territory often result in inter-agency hostility as both compete for the same revenue stream. The threat of competing organizations often results in agencies working in isolation, only demonstrating superficial partnerships for the purposes of obtaining funding.

4.3.3 Control from a Distance

There are benefits to contracting social service delivery to the not-for-profit sector. Neoliberalism assumes that community agencies are better equipped than large bureaucracies to develop trust-based relationships with clients. They have a greater capacity to stretch funds through the use of volunteers and community networks. One participant referred to their function as "cultural brokers", effectively bridging gaps in service or access to service for various cultural groups. In addition, not-for-profits play a substantial role in the development of social capital, by creating opportunities for advocacy, leadership development, community building and community engagement (IMI Strategics, 2010, p. 4). In this way, they mobilize individuals to find solutions to their issues and leverage the existing talents of those who are involved. The influence of the not-for-profit sector is profound, as it consists of over 24,000 charities and not-for-profit organizations employing approximately 176,000 Albertans, engaging 1.4 million

volunteers contributing around 9.6 billion in revenue to the Alberta economy (Alberta Culture and Tourism, 2014).

Although funders acknowledge that they rely heavily on the not-for-profit sector to deliver necessary services, they retain a high degree of control over the process. All of the funders interviewed for this study affirmed that the not-for-profit is better equipped to both identify and resolve social issues within the community. The role of the government was described as "empowering" community agencies to do the work that the government is unable to fulfill. One of the funders interviewed stated, "I'm a firm believer that these programs are the stewards of this money for a reason, they know their clientele, they know the area they're delivering the program in and I don't know how much you really want to interfere. They've become very unique for a reason, and I think we have to honour that." Although the general attitude is one of empowerment, not-for-profits report often feeling undervalued by the government despite their immense contributions to their communities.

Funders have the power to be prescriptive with regards to service delivery and shape funding models determining who and what is eligible. For example, specific grant program requirements can persuade agencies to twist their mandate to be eligible for funds. This creates an environment where not-for-profits inevitably conform to funder agendas and are placed in a marginalized position of power. From the stance of the government, their primary mechanism of control when contracting out services is the ability to control contractual terms and requirements, essentially the paperwork associated with a grant. They cannot outwardly dictate to community organizations how to run their programs, so the focus has become shaping program operations

through the documents and requirements associated with the grants provided. Due to the dearth of direct control, control from a distance is becoming more refined, consistent with the principles of neoliberalism.

In order for programs to be successful; not-for-profit organizations must be afforded a certain degree of autonomy when it comes to the service delivery component. Not-for-profit organizations largely originate from community mobilization, as an individual or group of individuals recognize a need and take action. From this vantage point, credibility is developed with the target population and the most effective practices are developed. One funder interviewed for this study sums up this sentiment by saying: "We never want to be in a position of where 'you will do program x, y, and z and you're gunna run it like this' … really just using the community agencies as an empty vessel by which to run our own programming… we've really lost our way when we become overly prescriptive and just say we know best, because the reality is we don't. There's not a funder in the world that knows what's best." Recognizing not-for-profit organizational autonomy and trusting in their ability to deliver the services appropriate for their community and clients is important for the maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships.

Funding priorities not only exert power over the not-for-profit sector, but they also dictate what social problems are important. As funding becomes more targeted, once autonomous entities are faced with the threat of survival. This creates a tension between the two sectors, as those working in the community do not feel like their voice is being heard. While funders acknowledge undertaking consultations with communities to assess need, the perception held by

this not-for-profit participant is in contrast: "They've called it a consultative process, but it wasn't consultation, it wasn't consultative. It was information sessions where they tell people this is what you have to do which isn't very consultative."

Though the general consensus among funders was that government allows the not-for-profit sector to maintain autonomy in terms of program design and governance, perceptions of individuals representing the not-for-profit sector were inconsistent. Manipulating grant proposals to present a program in a way that would meet the strict criteria set out by government is described as a common occurrence. The sector views this manipulation as a way to hold on to their autonomy while still meeting the requirement to obtain funding. Altering organizational mandates and program goals in order to align with funding priorities was cited as an outcome of reduced autonomy, producing detrimental results. This view is expressed by one community participant who states, "you can easily get programs, I think in the province, that forget why they exist – they're there to meet people's needs, they forget that because they get too wrapped up trying to meet these government goals. Which isn't really their goal, they kind of forget it because we get so caught up in 'we have to do this for the funding' you forget what you're there to do in the first place." Funding priorities are seen as dictating what organizations' goals are and how they are operationalized. In an environment where to survive, agencies must adapt to funder priorities, an unequal power dynamic is created where not-for-profits are put in a position where they are dictating what services the population needs rather than responding to them.

4.3.4 Engagement

Relationships between funders and grantees are paramount for success in achieving social impact. Research by Buteau, Buchanan & Chu (2010) argues that grant making policies and

procedures are often biased towards the interests of funders. In addition to the influence of these policies and procedures, the effectiveness of the funding relationship is contingent upon the individuals within the funding institution and their level of engagement within the community (Buteau et. al., 2010).

Grantees recognize a shift in the government's approach to funding in recent years. Community consultations and working with the community to identify issues and increase collaboration is becoming more common. As not-for-profit work is dynamic, recipients appreciate flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. While meaningful change has been slow, not-for-profits acknowledge that increasingly, their voices are being heard. Funders are working with communities to develop program outcomes and common measures, and to a certain extent, consulting with them on salient issues and funding priorities. When funders do engage with groups at the community level, the support was described as being just as valuable as funding dollars.

However, once an organization receives government funding, the perception of funder engagement is reduced. Not-for-profit participants reported a lack of communication with their funding program officers, stating that feedback on program reporting and site visits were rare. Some groups expressed frustration with the inability to develop long-term relationships with their funders, especially after years of demonstrated credibility. Due to long standing histories with their funders, these organizations felt as though they should not have to go through the lengthy process of re-applying annually for grants. As one community participant suggests: "I think one of the things maybe the government could look like … is to start seeing your people

who are dealing with groups like us not as grant administrators or scrutinizers, but as animators for partnerships, more of someone who engages us in our work. As opposed to, who's looking at our forms, who have no connection to what we do." Providing meaningful and timely feedback, conducting frequent site visits to understand the scope of programs and offering on-going support and training are all key to creating meaningful engagement between funders and recipients.

The type of support provided to not-for-profit organizations from their funders is typically highly instructive. Funders described developing training or coaching around program delivery based on government knowledge. This supervisory form of support is illustrated in the funder's statement: "we've worked to develop a model, our model identifies the high level outcomes that we want them to focus on…we [funders and recipients] collectively came up with what we thought were the most important outcomes and indicators for their program so they've got that as a guide and we've provided them with measures that correspond to those outcomes and indicators." This speaks to the government's need for control over how programs are operated and how and what type of data is collected. One not-for-profit participant describes this approach, "so they did provide support, but it's not really support it's telling us what we need to do with service delivery when it's not in the best interests of the people that we assist." Conversely, some not-for-profit groups report receiving little to no support or guidance in how to run his or her program or complete evaluations. Neither end of the spectrum is ideal. It is an on-going challenge for funders to negotiate the balance between an over-bearing or hands-off approach. As one community participant states, "sometimes it's just a guessing game and you hope for the best."

4.3.5 Sustainability

The issue of sustainability in funding is a core concern. Both grant and not-for-profit managers describe the issue of sustainability as being fundamental to the quality of services. A long-term sustainable program is well positioned to collect evaluation data to contribute to the pool of evidence-based practices. Qualified staff can be retained, meaning that gaps in service or data collection are less likely and consistency in service delivery is maintained. In the current funding regime, organizational ability to plan long-term and invest in staff and training/development is hindered by the lack of financial security inherent to the structure.

Currently, the majority of funding programs have terms between one and three years. Some funders preferred only offering one-year grants as it reduced risk of programs floundering and allowed for easier monitoring. However, the overwhelming sentiment from not-for-profit participants indicated that one-year and short-term grants were inefficient. These grants were cited as sometimes doing a disservice to their clientele, as offering a service for only a short period of time sets up an expectation in the community, sometimes causing more harm by its inevitable termination than the gains it produced. One not-for-profit participant states, "these seed and one year pilot projects are not helpful, we already know what works in the community and what doesn't work. We know what's needed, we need to have proper funding for them and so what we've found, it actually creates, in some ways, more harm for clients, so we don't do these one off things anymore." Another not-for-profit interviewee described a situation where a valuable, one-year program was terminated due to lack of sustainable funding. A vulnerable client in crisis came to the organization with the belief that the program was in operation. Unable to provide the service the client required, the organization was forced to turn the client away,

resulting in an already vulnerable client relapsing and negating the progress that had been made in their likelihood of engaging in domestic violence.

One-year grants for "seed funding" or pilot projects can be useful for testing new ideas or establishing groundwork. According to not-for-profit service providers, one-year or short-term grants dominate the majority of what is available from government funders. For established organizations with recognizably effective programming, short-term grants are frustrating and often perceived as a waste of time and money. A participant sums up this sentiment in her statement: "is it really good to get a program up fully running and then pull the rug out from under it, which is more painful? Doing it really fast before you have made a difference or had time to make a really big difference or do you let some differences happen?"

In addition to the impacts one-year grants have on clients, not-for-profit participants described additional challenges to short-term funding models. One year was noted as not enough time to adequately develop, implement and run a program. Especially in the human services sector, it takes time for program staff to establish relationships with clients and collect usable evaluation data. Reapplying yearly for programs disrupts both staff and clients, and often results in gaps in services and/or backtracking progress. Participants reported that often, despite positive results from one-year programs, sustainable funding was not available. While short-term grant programs have their place in exploration pilot programs and research-based projects, three to five year terms were reported to be ideal for properly executing and evaluating a program.

The vast majority of the not-for-profit participants stated that they don't believe that true sustainability in the not-for-profit sector is even possible, or they had yet to experience it. The reality of these organizations is a constant state of flux, always striving for, but never able to fully achieve stability. For many not-for-profits who rely heavily on provincial grants, the reality is that programs end once funding has run out, despite efforts to secure on going funding from other sources. Currently, the provincial government is one of the largest sources of funding for not-for-profit services, and with the volume of the sector, there are simply not enough alternate sources of funding to sustain the majority of "seed funded" programs.

4.4 Risk Management and Evidence

Throughout this study, the concept of risk management was apparent in discussions of accountability and reliance on evidence in decision-making. The following section will outline how new accountability techniques celebrated by neoliberalism can create unintended consequences on the ground for the not-for-profit sector. The sub-themes of evaluation and decision making relate to what is meant by the term 'evidence', how evidence is accumulated, the cost of accumulating and the repercussions and uses resulting from gathering evidence. An analysis of these sub-themes indicates that the current funding regime is highly risk averse, promoting evidence-based and standardized practices over innovative programs. This relates to a key aspect of neoliberalism which is the rising importance of numeracy, or quantitative assessments. The Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluation technique will be explored as evidence for the importance financial assessment plays on the accumulation of evidence. Results from observation of the decision-making process are detailed, with a focus on how the ostensible primacy of evidence plays out in practice. Lastly, the technique of diversifying responsibility for funding across multiple funders will be explored as a method for mitigating risk for funders.

Funding relationships between the Government of Alberta and the not-for-profit sector involve a certain degree of risk for both parties. Within a climate of fiscal constraint, the biggest risk for government funders is spending money on ineffective programs and wasting limited funds. As one funder describes, "we wanna lay our chips on the programs that we know are more likely to either yield results or yield knowledge around what works or what doesn't work with a particular client group." However, not-for-profit groups face more diverse and higher degrees of risk. The risk of failing one or more of their key stakeholders, whether that is clients, partners or funders and the risk of not being able to sustain funding for an effective program are among the key on-going concerns. Not-for-profit organizations feel the collective impact of governmental risk avoidance. One participant describes the risk avoidance techniques with the grant application process, "I just did an application for the government that was just ridiculous, there was one question where we had to identify six risks of things that could go wrong in the project and come up with a mediation plan for each of them… funders are holding people to a higher level of accountability because you know they've seen things go off the rails and they are trying to control that, which I'm not sure is possible."

Increasingly, both funders and not-for-profit organizations are discouraged from engaging in risky behaviours and being instructed to ground decision-making in evidence obtained from extensive evaluation. Laforest & Orsini (2005) view the pursuit of sophistication in evidence-based decision making as potentially problematic as it relates to the voluntary sector in Canada. Their study revealed a notable shift in the types of individuals employed in voluntary organizations, from social workers and activists to professional researchers who may not have

ties to communities (Laforest & Orsini, 2005, p. 490). Further, their study demonstrates a bifurcation of the not-for-profit sector as a result of the shift to evidence-based policies. On one side, a group of privileged organizations enjoy access and influence as they have the necessary resources to conduct research and influence policy, versus those left behind for reasons such as ideological opposition and/or lack of skills and capacity (Laforest & Orsini, 2005, p. 492). Laforest & Orsini (2005) argue these shifts have potential implications for democratic participation and citizen engagement as the not-for-profit sector becomes increasingly disconnected from its community roots (p. 494).

4.4.1 Accountability Techniques

In 2003 the Canadian Council on Social Development published a report entitled "Funding Matters" illustrating the status of the not-for-profit sector post-1990s funding cuts, in a climate where the government was dedicated to rebuilding its relationship with the sector under the new funding regime. This new funding regime has been characterised by the transition to project-based funding, enhanced accountability with reduced amounts of funding (Scott, 2003). However, as one not-for-profit participant highlights, "the levels on accountability that government funders are bringing in … it's not that I have an issue with it. The issue is that they're not paying for it and they're sort of saying well you've got to figure it out. They're saying well there's no new money but we're going to need you to figure it out."

New accountability techniques are becoming more narrowly focused on specific outcomes rather than overall effects of programs. As a result, funders can often miss out on impacts not-for-profits have by focusing too narrowly on certain aspects of a program. Participants noted that the questions asked by funders and consequently what is reported on only

addresses small and often insignificant areas of their overall work. Recipients often have to make a judgement call as to what and how to report. As one recipient describes the process, "it's a bit of a game, the reporting, that's what it feels like. You know the first report is the worst because you look at how they're describing what it is that they want, and your challenge is to try to figure out what it is they really want, so it's a little bit like going in and writing an exam." Other important work can also get missed or devalued. A bias for what is easy to translate into a report and what government officials in public communications can easily represent develops in project oversight and data collection. The consequence of this bias is the perpetuation of a cycle with a narrow funding focus. The challenge for funders is to ask the right questions to properly capture the scope of the work being done, without imposing onerous requirements.

Often, it can be difficult for groups to see the recognition of the value of their work within government. This leaves the people in the field feeling undervalued and acts as a disincentive for the sector to create meaningful reports. This feeling was summed up by one participant who states, "it's just a tick box to them, it's just a tick in the box, that's what you've done, but it's very meaningless, yet it's very labour intensive for us to provide that level of detailed analysis, it takes us away from our work." This perspective highlights one of the key concerns with the enhanced accountability. Without increasing support to match the increasing requirements, community organizations are challenged with striking a balance between dedicating resources to proving their worth and conducting the project work.

Funders were aware of the challenges faced by not-for-profits in terms of accountability. While the relationships grant managers have with their grantees is no doubt important, the

driving force behind what is experienced by both granters and grantees is the institutional processes in place guiding accountability measures. Funders don't want to ask irrelevant questions or overburden their grantees, as one funder states, "we certainly don't want to be asking them questions that we don't use the information, unless it's impacting us", yet at numerous points, not-for-profit interviewees often felt that many of the questions and requirements were excessive and not used by the funder. The general feeling expressed by not-for-profit interviewees is evident in one participant's statements: "obviously there needs to be accountability in reporting, I have no issues with that. I'll be honest with you, I don't know to what extent all the questions that government asks, if they really relate to any bigger plan."

Not only are these techniques costly, critics of the preference for clearly auditable practices note that while data is seemingly precise, it may be meaningless depending on the methods used to collect data (Power, 2007, p. 167). If pushed to an extreme, the obsession and reliance on risk management may perhaps be risky itself if not used properly. Risk management and auditability practices lend themselves well to certain disciplines, where outcomes are easily quantified. Where value of social service organizations is largely based on the outcomes of the people they serve, auditable outcomes measures are more challenging to demonstrate, making these organizations appear inherently more risky.

In seeking to mitigate risk, it is not only necessary to measure what an organization did in terms of problems fixed, but also to measure the problems that were avoided. While it is not so difficult to measure reactive strategies, it is difficult to measure or predict what could have happened but for the work or interventions of a particular organization (Sparrow, 2008).

Common sense suggests that it is more cost effective to prevent problems from arising in the first place rather than trying to correct them after the fact, but the present model of evaluation seems to favour what is concretely measurable. Hence, pressure for measureable results that can provide evidence of effectiveness has the potential to bias the types of services or interventions that agencies will offer (Sparrow, 2008, p. 141).

Consistently, both government and not-for-profit interviewees acknowledged that accountability is directly tied to future funding potential and outcomes. Accountability requirements are intrinsically linked with the funder's risk management practices. Funders admit that an organization's history with meeting accountability requirements will haunt them if done poorly and decrease their chances of obtaining future funds. This attitude towards accountability and risk were demonstrated during a grant committee meeting I observed, where organizations with inconsistent accountability backgrounds were passed over for funding because this singled them out as a risk.

Funders admit to erring on the side of risk avoidance. One funder describes this process using a gambling metaphor of placing strategic bets, relying on past funders of an organization as an indication as to whether or not an agency is a risk. When granters are tentative about funding a particular organization or program, additional accountability requirements are added to the contractual agreements. Grantees have observed this trend as well, indicating that funding contracts are more and more focused on risk avoidance techniques rather than the actual service delivery component of the initiative. Some agencies also believed risk avoidance is used as a blanket approach to all funding agreements, even in cases where organizations have a strong

track record. This sentiment is expressed by one grantee that states, "When you develop policy based on worst case scenario, you have little choice than to be left with the worst case policy. So you treat everybody as if they're the worst possible scenario." Risk avoidance has its place; but program managers believe it is necessary to assess the costs associated with this approach. An overly cautious approach can inhibit innovation as well as create a sense of mistrust between not-for-profit and the government when everyone is treated as a risk to be managed.

One method introduced by funders to promote evidence within the past 10-15 years has been the move to outcomes-based evaluations. Outcomes are viewed as a way to measure success and as a way to illustrate up front what a program is expected to achieve. More frequently, outcomes are tied to project-based funding contracts, expecting specific outcomes to be met within the finite time period of program operation, typically 1-3 years. Outcomes are useful in determining and focusing funding on priorities and providing a framework from which program reports can be based. Government outcome priorities are often broad based statements such as reducing crime or bullying or improving the wellbeing of a population. However, for a program which in operation for only one to three years (as is the norm), realistically, the outcomes that can be achieved and measured are of a much smaller scale. Though it is intuitive that they will ultimately contribute to larger, long-term outcomes, it is challenging to be able to concretely state such things. This struggle between reporting on measureable outcomes and demonstrating long term impact was a concern among many not-for-profit participants. One states, "I think that's just a struggle in human services, our narrative reports are awesome, I can tell you stories about community impact but how … it's not like we're an oil company that you can [measure] revenues and base, we don't have a lot of solid, concrete data, because we work with people."

The shifts in accountability requirements and the positioning of not-for-profit groups in the funder arrangement again speak to growing sensitivities around risk. As Laforest & Orsini (2005) point out, the reliance on results-based accountability "conveys an image of a policy process that is depoliticized and in which information and data can speak for themselves" (p. 484). Not-for-profit organizations are forced to turn to more privileged forms of evidence, including statistical and quantitative research rather than the qualitative client and community feedback. Not-for-profit participants are concerned about this accountability strategy, making it abundantly clear that the complexity of their work merits tailoring evaluation approaches to not only include diverse methodologies, but also encompass the diversity of their programs and clients. One participant describes the challenges with fitting into standardized reporting requirements, "once you get into that conversation, that kind of depth around fitting your work into a model, I think inhibits innovation, so you know, let's get a little more realistic about what the results are that we're trying to achieve and not spend so much time creating this matrix of complexity you can't roll out across a community."

4.4.2 Social Return on Investment (SROI)

Evolving accountability tactics have led to attempts to find new ways to measure and value the intangible benefits of social service agencies. As previously discussed, the rising importance of quantifiable measures for program evaluation is a key tenet of neoliberalism. The social return on investment (SROI) analysis is a prescribed way to quantify an organization's operations by monetizing social impact. SROI has its roots in the private business sector as it has been adapted from the commonly used financial return on investment (ROI) analysis, describing the dollar value a stakeholder can expect back when making an investment in a company

(Lingane & Olsen, 2004, p. 2). When dealing only in monetary terms, the ROI analysis can be a useful tool in the evaluation of a company's success and efficiency. However, adapting this form of analysis into the realm of social welfare work where the outcomes are often intangible, presents challenges and contradictions. One community participant describes their frustrations with SROI, "[it] is just stupid, like how do you gauge the knowledge that you give somebody, can I say that because they came to my course they will no longer make bad decision, and no you can't say that right?" Although SROI is a relatively new and emergent evaluation technique, the majority of participants have been exposed to it in some form. The basic premise and challenge of SROI, is summed up by a community participant, "it's more about proving that their government money is spent well because the outcomes have improved right? It's tricky, because quantifying mental health is really difficult … I have no idea how they calculate it, because you're talking about non-tangibles in many cases."

The key question funders are looking to answer through various accountability requirements in one funder's words is, "how can we enhance the productivity of the finite resources that any government has?" The expectation of organizations undertaking an SROI evaluation is to enhance communication between the agency, the funder and other stakeholders or potential future funders. It is also seen as a vehicle for increasing an organization's accountability and transparency (Arvidson, Lyon, McKay & Moro, 2010, p. 8). Organizations are expected to assign a value through the use of financial proxies in order to reduce their outcomes to a monetized SROI ratio. This ratio communicates how effective a given organization or project is by describing how much money is saved or reallocated for every dollar invested (Arvidson et al., 2010, p. 6).

Practitioners have developed databases containing the financial proxies for numerous intangible benefits to be used in the creation of an SROI analysis. Although it is conceivable that there may be some verifiable social proxies, many of these values are arbitrary and organizations describe struggling with this abstract form of evaluation. Assigning financial proxies means standardizing specific human outcomes, and as Timmermans & Epstein (2010) caution, as these standards have been established, the manipulation and uncertainty inherent in their development is masked (p. 83). Discretion is often employed in identifying the indicators used for an SROI, and given the uncertainty of the future, SROI indictors are often influenced by the preferences of the stakeholders involved (Arvidson et al., 2010, p. 9). Therefore, the assessment runs the risk of manipulation to fit the current stakeholder agenda and come to resemble a more theoretical, arbitrary rather than actual representation of the organization (Arvidson et al., 2010, p. 8).

Despite the concerns with the use of SROI, the increasing demands for specific, measureable impacts in the social service sector has led to the desire to apply this form of standardized measurement. Concepts of 'doing good' are being transformed as the purpose of much of the work by social service agencies becomes reducing individuals' risk factors. Agencies that offer support to these individuals do so in the hopes that the likelihood of future use of social services is minimized. Power (1997) describes these contingent events as a special kind of uncertainty (p. 87) making auditing and evaluation a difficult and abstract task.

Further limitations with the use of SROI include the belief that proxies cannot capture improvements in personal utility, e.g. self-esteem, and the dollar values assigned do not represent

actual cost savings or return to investors since benefits are intangible. As stated by one not-for-profit participant "sometimes when you use the business model in human services, the human piece gets lost." As articulated by another community participant, standardizing and valuing potential outcomes is nearly impossible: "that is really hard because you know emotional wellbeing whether it is youth, or adults grieving … so let's say you helped them with their emotional wellbeing which in turn prevents them from becoming an addict, which in turn prevents them from becoming a criminal and going to jail and costing the system money … how do you … [measure]."

It was argued that caution must be exercised when using measurements such as SROI, as it can be easy to mislead or inflate results. One not-for-profit participant states, "as I see it going through the whole process, in some ways it can be valuable but it can also be really easy to mislead. You could have a program of 500 people and you say well ten got employment well that's great that saves this much money but it's not looking at well what about all the other ones here." Not-for-profit leaders contend that when assessing the total value of a given program, funders need to look at the big picture to ensure that what is funded is not assessed solely through a financial lens.

SROI provides funders with a method for standardizing non-standard activities. Standardization of anything is a challenging, time and resource intensive endeavor (Timmermans & Epstein, 2010, p. 81). However, the standardization of humans and human behaviour is a slippery slope. The appeal of SROI is its ability to translate the diversity of the work done by not-for-profit agencies into financial terms understood by funders and social investors. SROI

reduces people, their successes and avoidance of failures, into dollar figures and ultimately a single ratio. Working through the steps of completing an SROI on a project was described by some not-for-profits as a valuable process, as they were able to view their work through a new lens. SROI evaluations certainly have value and a place within the funding regime, however participants caution over "jumping on the SROI bandwagon" and relying too heavily on this methodology for the demonstration of social value. One of the not-for-profit participants sums up the general sentiment towards SROI evaluations with a caution: "if you're not careful that can become just all financial measures and that's part of the picture, it's not the real reason why groups like us do our work. We do our work because there are people who are homeless, people who are hurting. And so, even if it costs the same, as it costs the police for us to be on the street 24/7 we would be saying 'yea but its better, it's better for these people.' So you've gotta be careful with SROI and results based funding, I'm not against it, but let's not go crazy with it and make it over complicated."

4.4.3 Evidence-Based Funding

The overarching shift to greater accountability and risk avoidance is driven by a specific concept of what this looks like. Organizations are expected to both base their programs on evidence as well as conduct outcomes evaluations. This is expected to contribute to the growing body of evidence in the social service field as to what methods are appropriate for various social problems. This process is validated by the need for funders to be able to see the value of the money invested in the not-for-profit sector. There is a general consensus among both funders and their recipients around the importance of investing in what works. One funder states, "we are seeing more of a movement in the last few years to focusing on programs that are embedded in

research, so at the local level I think agencies and the municipalities certainly recognize the value

in investing your money in practices and programs that work and are proven to work, based on

what they're finding in research." Similarly, as expressed by a not-for-profit organization,

appreciation for the evidence-based approach is articulated in the sentiment, "we can increase the

number of programs and we'll still see demand and need increase, so looking at the very big

broad strokes around it that way, one of the things that can be done to accept certain kind of

outcomes and to focus the resources on things that are working so that seems like pretty

reasonable approach."

All funders interviewed acknowledged that funding models are moving in the direction of

evidence-based as a requirement, as applications become more sophisticated. Though different

grant programs may be at different stages in this process, reporting requirements are also

becoming shaped around evidence, coaching agencies to offer their services based on what the

government knows to be effective. As articulated by one funder, "we are cognizant of research

that will show us what is more likely to yield benefit over something that's not." In response to

the increasing sophistication of grant requirements, this funder acknowledged, "the

demonstration of that knowledge and the ability to act upon that knowledge is usually a little bit

more rigorous than some of the intervention conceived in the past. So I've seen the application

process get a little bit more sophisticated."

One of the primary concerns with new requirements is the amount of resources consumed

by not-for-profits in gathering evidence. In order to procure funding to deliver core services,

agencies must divert resources from programming into evaluation "in order to meet increased

government requests for more and better data on the merits and demerits of their programs"
(Howlett, 2009, p. 155). This leads to a secondary concern; these requirements imply that in
addition to having the training and skills to deliver the core services related to the mandate of
any particular organization, individuals working in not-for-profit organizations must also have
the capability to undertake research and evaluation responsibilities or must hire additional staff
to specialize in this area. Recent research suggests that the analytical capability required to
collect data and report it in a manner that it is usable for informing policy decisions is quite low
in both governmental and, specifically, non-governmental actors (Howlett, 2009).

The burden of providing these evaluative tasks for the funder is perceived among some
organizations to be the funders' way of outsourcing more responsibility onto the not-for-profit
sector (Bearman, 2008, pp. 13-14). The primary objective of the not-for-profit agencies is to
serve the individuals within their communities, and they tend to view reporting and evaluation as
a necessary evil required for them to carry out their mission. The primary objective of
government, however, is to demonstrate to its population that tax-dollars are being spent wisely,
to enhance policy decision-making and reduce or mitigate policy failure (i.e. risk) (Howlett,
2009, p. 157). Requiring already stretched agencies to conduct rigorous research and evaluation
to support government agendas of public accountability and risk management is problematic.
Those affected most by this trend are the individuals who rely on the services provided by these
organizations as more of the time and resources previously dedicated to service delivery are
being consumed by the added burden of producing evidence. Without adequate funding support,
this burden can become crippling for many agencies and their staff, often resulting in decreased
levels of service delivery.

The concept of evidence-based policy makes intuitive sense. It adds depth to informed decision making practices and provides transparency when communicating the rationale of decisions to the general population. If done properly, it can enhance the effectiveness and influence of policy practices. However, what policy makers and funders need to be aware of are the ramifications that these practices have on the not-for-profit sector and associated stakeholders. Within the funding context, evidence of the effectiveness of a funding program is gleaned from the organizations that have been funded to deliver services. The quality of this evidence is heavily reliant on the capacity of the organization to conduct thorough evaluations using relevant and meaningful performance measures. If evaluation knowledge capacity is low and/or funding to undertake this type of work is constrained, the evidence provided to the funders and used to inform funding decisions and released for public consumption is likely to be either incomplete, biased with easy to measure outcomes or insufficient. From this perspective, power runs unilaterally from the funder to the recipient, suppressing their autonomy and placing them in a marginalized position within the funding relationship. It is under these conditions that the costs of obtaining evidence must be weighed with the benefits and intended use of it.

4.4.4 Decision Making

A supplemental component of the data collection process for this study involved a one-day, unobtrusive observation of a grant committee meeting. The purpose of this approximately six hour meeting was to decide on which grant applications will be recommended for funding. The overall intent of the process was to reach a group consensus on an assessment of risk and value for each individual proposal. Certain attributes were observed as either adding risk or value to a program. If an application did not have strong demonstration of evidence or information to

justify the effectiveness of the proposal, committee members were less likely to support it. Conversely, proposals with strong evidence from rigorous evaluation and research, specifically quantitative data, were favoured. Though anecdotal data was accepted, it did not appear to have the same persuasive effect as evaluations based in quantitative methodology. Modest requests were also preferred as opposed to larger ones because it was assumed they could achieve more outcomes with fewer resources through efficiencies and fiscal restraint.

Organizations applying to the fund were expected to have demonstrated partnerships by means of joint programming and written confirmation of support. Organizations that did not demonstrate such partnerships or were offering a similar service as another organization were viewed as a red flag. Duplication, or perceived duplication, of services was not supported. The committee also had concerns about the risk of allocating funding to new projects or capacity development as it may set precedence for future funding commitments from a scarce pool of resources. Concerns were raised over establishing equity and fairness across the already established organizations and their respective programs, and that the addition of new commitments would be a risky venture. Targeting eligibility criteria to a small range of services further served to eliminate applicants from the competition, leaving only specialized programs eligible.

One way the committee sought to reduce their risk was to only offer funding for a portion of a program rather than fund it 100%. This forces the organization to diversify its funding sources and spreads the risk of the program across multiple funders. If the committee decided to fund a program despite noted risk, additional conditions and requirements were attached to the

conditional offer of funding. For example, additional reporting, clarification or breakdown of financial information could be delineated in the contractual agreement.

There was a discussion as to what constituted a "good investment". When differentiating between good and bad investments, committee members were looking for strong results, consistency, community buy-in, established networks and support. Well-known groups with established reputations were generally recommended for multi-year funding. Therefore, if a committee member had personal insight or knowledge about a given organization, other members deferred to their knowledge.

A strong demonstration of community need was an important consideration, but evidence of planning and value for dollar was necessary. What was overwhelmingly evident throughout the observation process was that the current funding regime discourages organizations from taking risks in service delivery. While this limits the liability of funders, it also stifles opportunities for innovation.

One of the main frustrations for community organizations is that the decision making process is not entirely clear to them. Unsuccessful organizations are given general feedback and tips for improving their application, but the rationale for why one organization or project received funding over another is not publically disclosed. Organizations are encouraged to collect as much evidence as possible to support their applications and reporting, but are often cited as being unsure how this evidence is being used and how it will weigh into the decision making process. It can sometime outwardly appear that the evidence gathered does not play as

big a role in the decision making process as funders advertise, bringing up questions regarding the importance and influence of other factors on the distribution of grant funds. One participant succinctly highlights these frustrations with gathering evidence in his comments: "there are questions you kind of scratch your head at and say 'why does that matter?' For example, 'how many volunteers did you have last year, how many did you have this year, how many do you think you'll have next year?' And the implication is it should rise every year. And so, I'm thinking, what does it matter how many volunteers I have? What are you going to do with that number? Are you able to tell me that you think that's a good number or a bad number? Or I should have more? Or now I finally have enough. It's totally meaningless data. There's no touchstone to say why are you collecting that information and how is it being used."

4.4.5 Multiple Funders

While individual funders are working towards streamlining their processes to make application and reporting processes easier, it is rare that a single funder will fund a program in its entirety. Not-for-profits described the challenges of drawing from multiple funding sources to ensure a program is fully operational: "there's no integration, there's no common funding practices, no common funding principles … different interpretations of what outcomes might look like, and how you would ask for outcomes, different interpretations of financial matters, like what's administration and what isn't administration and so forth, so that's a systemic problem, it's not any one department's issue." Holding multiple funding sources means that not-for-profits are often submitting reporting for the same program to each funder, complying with each funder's templates and requirements. Not only does this result in duplication of efforts, but also it is time consuming, stressful and costly to maintain multiple data collection techniques. As

stated by one community participant, "every funder has a different spin in what they're looking for."

Each funding area develops their own policies around how their grant will be administered. In this way, each funder can retain control over the projects they support. The result for not-for-profits balancing multiple funders is their focus is pulled in multiple directions as a result of competing priorities. As one funder acknowledges, "depending on who is in political power and the business plan set forth by those who are in political power, its constantly shifting in terms of directives of what we should fund and what we shouldn't fund." In this neoliberal climate, surviving in the not-for-profit world often means being consigned as a dependent and subservient sector to the government's will, often facing dilemmas of how best to operate while mitigating the unintended consequences of the outcomes of such decisions.

These funding arrangements have essentially transformed not-for-profit mandates, changing not only what they do but also why they do it. While there's an assumption in neoliberalism that these are equitable partnerships, in fact what this research shows is a process of dependency where many of their programs would not exist unless government continues to fund them. In this way, such funding relationships are both an enabling and limiting resource (Trudeau, 2008, 2812). Government grants allow organizations to offer a higher degree and broader range of services that would otherwise be possible, but this dependence fundamentally challenges their independence. Hence, as research by Trudeau (2008) demonstrates, through contractual funding relationships, funders are affecting how not-for-profit organizations operate and what practices they engage in and avoid (p. 2819).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This research began by questioning the funding relationship between the Government of Alberta and the not-for-profit sector within the context of increasing accountability requirements and the push towards evidence-based policies and programming. This question has been guided by a social constructionist emphasis on the current funding regime which has been shaped by a combination of social forces, policies and decisions. By drawing on the narratives of key individuals representing the institutions involved, the underlying issues driving the existence of established funding programs can be explored.

In order to answer the research questions posed, interview and observational data was collected from key provincial government and not-for-profit stakeholders in Alberta. Participants spoke about their organization's experience in either distributing or receiving grant money for the delivery of social service programs. Observations from a grant decision making committee have also been incorporated into the findings. A number of themes were identified, and were clustered into two broad categories: Equitable partnerships and risk management.

Existing research demonstrates the consequences and challenges faced by the not-for-profit sector as a result of the past and current funding administration. Evans et al., (2005) describe these challenges as the "paradox of centralised decentralisation" resulting from neoliberal restructuring (p. 74). The neoliberal model emphasizing the market approach has the effect of shifting not-for-profit focus away from communities to competitive and professionalized service approaches, consistent with business model tactics (Evans et al., 2005).

This research has revealed a clear imbalance of power between institutions involved in the funding structure, suggesting that the relationship between the two sectors is not an equitable partnership. Funders are ultimately in a position of power, enabled by their ability to decide grant conditions, impose restrictions and advocate for policy decisions. This places funders in an advantageous position, as they are able to retain power, and thus credit, for program and community successes while mitigating risks of failure or mismanagement. Furthermore, this study has demonstrated that the operation of social service programming involves a certain degree of risk and that the responsibility for these risks is being downloaded onto not-for-profit organizations and communities. Increased accountability, the emphasis placed on evidence and evaluations as well as the diversification of revenue sources are discussed at length as confirmation of the impacts risk aversion has on the funding structure.

To conclude this research project, what follows is a review of the central findings and contributions of this study for both academic literature and funding programs. The limitations inherent to this research will be detailed followed by a discussion of how future research could potentially build upon these findings to better understand the complexities of government and not-for-profit funding relationships.

5.1 Review of Central Findings and Contributions

The findings presented in this study are important because they lead us to question what is, and what should be the relationship between funders and the not-for-profit sector. The not-for-profit sector plays a unique and important role in society drawing on volunteer capacity and other charitable means to fill a gap in public social services at a community level. The

government relies on the services of the not-for-profit sector because it can not only offer more suitable services, but also because it can do so for a much lower cost. Both sides agree that service delivery is better suited within the sphere of the not-for-profit sector. The challenge is determining the role and level of commitment, financially and otherwise, government will have to ensure these services are available to Albertans. Previous research and the data collected for this study suggest a decline in government acknowledgement for direct responsibility in financing the not-for-profit sector. Alberta's Social Policy Framework clearly articulates a marked shift from government as funder to government as facilitator of fund development. Hence the institutional stance portrayed is that it is not government's role to either provide social services or be the main contributor to funding these operations. Responsibility for these services is placed on individuals and communities, encouraging community fund development and private and corporate contributions.

While neoliberalism values the promotion of individual and community responsibility, partnerships with community and the significance of evidence, I have argued that there are numerous concerns and unintended consequences with these approaches. The relationship between the government and not-for-profit sector has been examined and the notion of an equitable partnership has been interrogated. This research suggests that some of the key, esteemed neoliberal assumptions look different in practice and have consequences on the operational realities of the not-for-profit sector. The relationship between the state and the not-for-profit sector is not an equitable partnership; it is in fact a process of dependency whereby the not-for-profit sector is subservient to the will of political decisions. In attempts to mitigate risk through the reliance on evidence, services are strained and bias becomes prevalent. The cost of

accumulating evidence and the repercussions resulting from the process of gathering evidence often outweigh the benefits for the not-for-profit sector. An analysis of these themes indicated that the current funding regime is highly risk averse, promoting evidence-based and standardized practices over innovative programs. This has demonstrated consequences of a key aspect of neoliberalism which is the rising importance of quantitative and evidence-based assessments.

In recent years slow changes have been witnessed as participants note a difference in government approaches, including more consultation and open conversations with communities. However, these techniques are only useful if feedback is actually used to affect change. Ultimately, to achieve systemic change, open and equal collaboration is required among all stakeholders involved. As participants in this study have clearly articulated, achieving a true partnership with their funders is challenging as a result of the institutional barriers presented by the structure of the funding system and its repercussions on the not-for-profit sector.

There is no doubt that the politics of funding have serious implications on the overall functioning of the not-for-profit sector. Despite innovative fundraising strategies, provincial government revenues are still relied on heavily, with an average of 60-80% of the funding base dependent on state funds (Evans et al., 2005, p. 80). How government chooses to operate will in turn dictate how not-for-profit organizations will allocate the majority of their budget and how they will operate. The implications of the described power imbalances include reduced advocacy on behalf of the community, instability, reduced autonomy and tough decisions regarding determining accountability priorities.

As funding relationships have evolved, organizations within the not-for profit sector have adapted a variety of strategies for negotiating the balance between their varied stakeholders. Research by Trudeau (2008) describes not-for-profits demonstrated ability to negotiate their multiple accountabilities and continue to excel at what they do. This finding is certainly consistent with the findings of this research. Despite the noted challenges and concerns over the current funding structure, the organizations represented in this study have a demonstrated ability to leverage their communities' capacity, find new ways of supporting their programs and advocate on behalf of themselves and the clients they serve. It is common knowledge these individuals do not do what they do for the money or any other self-serving purpose: it is their internal motivation to help people inspiring them to keep going.

Increasing aversion to risk influences how the not-for-profit sector operates and may fundamentally change the institutional structure of the sector. Increasing professionalization and accountability requirements have been evidenced to force a shift in staffing requirements and time commitments. Paradoxically, as increased efficiencies and risk management is sought, if implemented too far, these techniques have the adverse effect of increasing the risk of project challenges, inefficiencies and poor service delivery. Risk aversion and the burden of providing evidence also impacts the sector's ability to be innovative and for newer organizations to develop to respond to emergent community needs.

In terms of academic contributions, this research offers a contribution to literature on risk culture, power and not-for-profit organizational studies. These contributions are understood

within the overarching theme of neoliberalism and social construction which have influenced and shaped the evolution of funding arrangements.

5.2 Limitations

In the interests of feasibility and gaining access, this study did not focus on one specific funding program or service area. Some initial concerns with undertaking such specific research were the inability to gain access to and/or cooperation from key individuals. A focus on one particular program increases the likelihood of critique that could not be guaranteed to be entirely confidential or anonymous. By widening the scope of the study to the general relationship between the government and the not-for-profit sector, it allowed for greater confidence in confidentiality, permitting participants to speak more candidly.

Though participants were made aware that the scope of this study was limited only to funding programs administered by the Government of Alberta, experiences with federal government, foundations (such as the United Way) and/or private/corporate funders have inevitably influenced overall experiences with the funding environment. Particularly for not-for-profit participants, it can be difficult to distinguish and separate their experiences with only their provincial government funders. As such, it must be recognized that these other experiences invariably influence the data presented in this study.

While it is recognized that perspectives of frontline workers in not-for-profit agencies would have also been valuable in illustrating the relationship between government and the not-for-profit sector, this level of analysis was beyond the scope of this project. Because this research addresses the topic at the organizational level, this type of analysis would be incongruent.

Interviews were conducted with five Government of Alberta employees and eleven not-for-profit individuals. The observational component of this study was only conducted for one grant funding cycle, and took place over the span of one day. As such, this relatively small sample size makes it difficult to draw conclusions for other populations or programs in other jurisdictions.

5.3 Directions for Future Research

Existing research on the not-for-profit sector is vast and multi-faceted. This project has only addressed a small segment of potential research avenues in terms of government and not-for profit funding relationships. Further research in this area could focus on the clients who use not-for-profit social services to assess their perceptions of the funding structure and how it relates to research at the institutional level. Additionally, future research could assess small and large organizations in isolation, comparing experiences with issues of partnership and risk.

There is a need for additional research to examine how not-for-profit leaders weigh the competing demands of different stakeholders and funders, and the role of evaluation in such decisions. Ebrahim & Rangan (2010) assert that impacts are difficult to measure because they involve systemic change over long periods of time that generally are not attributable to one specific organization or intervention. Therefore, there is also a need to compare and assess different tools for measuring social impact so funders and non-profits alike can be fully informed as to what is the best fit for a specific project.

In Canada, funding for not-for-profit organizations is predominantly the responsibility of provincial governments, and therefore each province has the jurisdiction to develop their own funding programs, policies and legislation. The conclusions drawn regarding the experiences of the funding relationships in Alberta will likely differ from other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States. Future research could build upon findings in Alberta to do comparative research with other provinces in Canada, or with funding structures in the United States or European countries. Additionally, it may also be worth considering the funding strategies of federal government programs as well as quasi-governmental programs and foundations to determine how they align with provincial grant programs. It is anticipated that as the research in this area is further defined, a greater opportunity will exist not only for further theory development, but also for a better understanding of best practices in funding arrangements.

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