

Representation and Public Engagement:
A Study of the Experience of Non-Profit Leaders as Representatives of the
Communities They Serve

by

Corina Ganton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Community Engagement

School of Public Health

University of Alberta

© Corina Ganton, 2022

Abstract

Public engagement has recently become increasingly important to local governments. Public engagement provides opportunities for relationship development and better informed and supported decision-making and policy development. To create better decisions and more informed policies, governments aim to hear from many populace segments, including underserved and marginalized communities. As part of public engagement, non-profit organizations and non-profit leaders are invited representatives for the clients and communities they serve. This research aimed to examine the role of non-profit leaders' representation. Specifically, the study looked at representation by examining the experiences of leaders of non-profit social service organizations who participate in public engagement in Edmonton, Alberta, on behalf of the clientele they serve. Using a grounded approach, the research developed an understanding of how non-profit leaders comprehend and perform their role as representatives. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with five participants, all leaders in the non-profit sector in Edmonton, Alberta. Three key themes emerged from the interview data: *standing in place, giving voice and providing protection*. These three themes are further broken into subthemes that help understand how non-profit leaders experience, understand, and feel about their role as representatives for marginalized communities in public engagement activities.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Corina Ganton. Research ethics approval for this research project was received from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board as #00097304, September 29, 2020.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the following people who have contributed to completing this thesis.

All the interview participants for their interest in being part of this research project, their insights, openness about their experiences, and their inspirational dedication to the communities they serve.

Dr. Jorge Sousa, who agreed to sit on my thesis committee, I value the guidance and insight he brings as an expert in community development and interest in the non-profit sector.

Dr. Mary Beckie, who also agreed to sit on my thesis committee, I have valued her leadership and insights during my time with the MACE program. She has helped many of us through the MACE program with a professional, gentle and caring demeanour.

Dr. Kyle Whitfield, who serves as my graduate supervisor. I thank her for her mentorship, guidance, and support. Our discussions and visits were invaluable to finding my way through this process. I will forever be indebted to the patience, understanding and insights she has shown through my master's program. Without her, I would not have been able to make it through.

To my bosses, in particular, Sandi Kossey & Krystyna Lloyd. As a part-time student, the time, money and guidance that was invested by the organizations I have worked for have been essential to allowing me to achieve the goal of putting M.A. behind my name. I know the time dedicated to this work will make me a better colleague and more of an insightful engagement practitioner.

To our brand-new little girl Zayah, who has arrived at the end of the journey towards achieving my master's and whose presence makes this accomplishment even more meaningful.

And finally, to my partner Erick, who has always been my most significant support and inspiration. Many of our discussions, the ideas we contemplated, and the professional challenges we have both faced are essential to this research project. He has helped me push myself, shown great patience, and been by my side through this process.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Representation.....	2
Positionality	5
Thesis Overview	7
Chapter 2: Literature review	8
Representation and engagement	8
Relational power	12
Relationship between non-profits and government	13
Chapter 3: Methodology	16
Grounded theory approach.....	16
Research Characteristics	17
Recruitment, Data Collection and Sampling	18
Memo writing.....	21
Data analysis	22
Constant comparative method.....	22
Rigour	23
Chapter 4: Findings	25
Standing in Place.....	26
Privilege	29
Discomfort	30
Giving Voice.....	33
Translator	34
Filter	35
Providing Protection	38
Shield	40
Barrier	42
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions	46
Non-profit efforts to represent their clientele	46
Governments use of non-profit relationships.....	47
Experience of acting as the middleman	48
Creation of a gap between government and community	50
Marginalization of communities due to representation	50
Considering impact on non-profit organizations	52
Relationship building as underlying concept.....	53
Study Limitations.....	53
Future research.....	54
Concluding remarks	54
References	56
Appendix A: Project Information and Consent Form	61
Appendix B: Recruitment Email	64

Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past few decades, public participation, public engagement and deliberation have become critical practices believed to build more stable and responsive governments (Held, 1995). Public engagement allows for relationships between policy makers (i.e., policymakers) and laypeople (i.e., community). This allows each side to understand better each other's worldview, exchange knowledge and consider decisions through negotiation, persuasion and action. In turn, public engagement aims to address and avoid established patterns of hierarchy and power (Pateman, 2012).

With the growth of public engagement and decision-making that includes public input, there has been a flurry of research, analysis and opinions about what constitutes effective processes and practices (Cho et al., 2020; Flower, 2008; Nabatchi & Amslery, 2014; Petts, 2008). Part of these analyses is an exploration of the ways to adequately and effectively provide equitable opportunities for the perspectives and experiences of marginalized communities and community members to be heard. A customary practice for marginalized perspectives to be included in public engagement is to connect with non-profit organizations and their staff. Rather than having dialogue directly with marginalized community members, governments connect with non-profits to provide input about and for the marginalized communities which they serve. This practice, known as representation, aims to hear from marginalized communities that are deemed challenging to invite into direct dialogue. These difficulties may stem from barriers to participation including capacity, time and language, or uncertainty or discomfort with public engagement processes. These representative practices can make the power dynamics of an engagement unclear and murky. Representation places certain groups or individuals as stand-ins

for others. These stand-ins act as translators and advocates at the center of conversations between governments and marginalized community members.

Local governments have embraced the importance of public engagement. Municipalities often have engagement departments and engagement advisers employed to direct their efforts. The City of Edmonton, Alberta, has a defined policy that guides the ways that the organization aims to collect input on its policies, programs, projects and services. These activities, driven by the public engagement policy aim to live up to the guiding principle that the organization values engagement and aims to utilize these practices to provide city council and administration with the best possible information about community perspectives to support decision making (City of Edmonton - Communications and Engagement, 2017). To achieve this, the City may use the practice of representation to facilitate gathering perspectives from marginalized communities. The City approaches leaders such as executive directors and chief executive officers of community and non-profit organizations to provide insights into the lives and lived experiences of their clientele. These insights are then used by the City to help develop policies, programs, projects and services to address the needs and concerns of marginalized communities. This practice creates a complex dynamic of influence and power relations. Gaining insights into the perspective of marginalized communities by creating a multi-layered process with government at the top, non-profits sitting in the middle and marginalized communities at the bottom and often not actually present in the 'room.' This creates a delineation of the ways that information is gathered and shared.

Representation

Representation in public engagement usually means the act of an individual or organization speaking and providing input on behalf of a particular segment of the population.

Representation is a way in which people interact with their government and a way that governments can invite the input of the community (Rao, 2000).

Identifying representatives from non-profits and service agencies that serve segments of the population to participate is a tactic that is used with the hope that it can break down obstacles that make it difficult to hear from marginalized communities. Governments aim to hear about their experiences, through conversations with organizations that have a well-developed relationship with these segments of the population. Governments recognize the marginalized communities can face significant barriers to participation and use the practice of representation to try and collect perspectives of the marginalized and mitigate obstacles to getting these perspectives.

Several terms will be used throughout this thesis. Provided below in Table 1 is a list of terms and definitions that are relevant to this study.

Table 1. Definitions

Term	
Public Engagement	Public engagement is defined as a general term that includes the broad range of methods through which members of the public become more informed about and/or influence public decision. (Institute for Local Government, 2016)
Marginalized Communities	Marginalized groups are frequently excluded from decision-making, public institutions, basic services, and even citizenship. They are more vulnerable to poverty, are more likely to be afflicted by life-threatening diseases and are more likely to be victims of violence and exploitation. (Government of Canada, 2017)
Representation	The act of an individual or organization speaking and providing input on behalf of a particular segment of the population. (Rao, 2000)
Non-Profit Organization	Self-governing organizations that exist to service the public benefit, generate social capital but not distribute

	<p>profit to members, depend to a meaningful degree on volunteers, involve participation on a voluntary basis, and are independent or institutionally distinct from the formal structures of Government and the profit sector. (Government of Alberta, 2018)</p>
--	--

The purpose of my research was to examine the practice of representation and its use within public engagement initiatives in Edmonton, Alberta. More specifically, my goal was to understand how non-profits and non-profit leaders, the group in the middle, experience and understand their role as representatives for marginalized communities. In the context of engagement scholarship this study aims to: (1) understand the representation of marginalized communities by non-profit leaders, and (2) generate a deeper understanding of public engagement and the power dynamics that are part of this representative practice.

Using grounded theory methodology, I identified a series of themes which emerged from the data. This allowed for a better understanding of the process of non-profit leaders' representation in public engagement initiatives on behalf of marginalized communities. Grounded theory is a methodology typically used when a broad explanation for a process or phenomenon is needed (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Specifically, it is most appropriate to use this methodology when existing theories do not accurately address the problem or the population of people that are being studied. In the current study, data originated from individual interviews with non-profit leaders who had prior experiences acting as representatives for their clientele in public engagement initiatives conducted by the government. The themes that emerged provide an explanation of the complex and interrelated process of this specific representational practice. The study focused on the epistemological importance of the

experience of the individuals who participated as representatives and the ways that they described their experiences.

The approach to this work included data collection through one-on-one interviews with leaders in the non-profit sector in Edmonton, Alberta via the Zoom platform. These interviews were conducted virtually to ensure safety and comfort of participants during the Coronavirus pandemic. The participants represented organizations that support or focus their efforts on marginalized communities. Audio recordings of these virtual interviews were transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and a coding scheme developed by myself.

The research and analysis led to the identification of opportunities, benefits, issues and challenges regarding this form of representation being used as part of public engagement initiatives. The research provides insights to explain and understand the role of representation and engagement.

Positionality

Thinking about my own context and place within the subject that I studied is an important part of reflecting on the research, its content and its conclusions. I work full-time as a community engagement professional. My career has focused on supporting municipalities to conduct efficient and effective dialogues with community members to bring together perspectives about a variety of subjects, including infrastructure policy programming and other subjects. This work has put me at the driver's seat when it comes to developing plans and practices to hear from the breadth of a community's perspectives and has let me experience the obstacles that occur when aiming to gather input from marginalized communities.

Our work often aims to develop tactics to invite diverse community members to share their insights and perspectives with varying levels of success. One of the tactics that is often employed is using relationships with service agencies and non-profits to promote engagement opportunities amongst their clientele and to learn from non-profits directly about the perspectives of their clients on a subject.

In 2018, I was supporting an engagement process as a consultant hired by the City of Edmonton to gather community perspectives on the future of recreational ice (i.e., ice rinks and ponds used for skating) in Edmonton's River Valley. As a stakeholder list was developed, I began to see a trend where several non-profit leaders, CEOs and Executive Directors were identified to provide the perspectives of several segments of the community.

The list made me think about what perspective community service agencies and non-profit leaders could provide for such a specific topic. This questioning pushed me to be interested in learning more about how often these types of representations are used and the perspectives of those that were identified on the stakeholder list. What were their thoughts about their invitation to such a specific engagement? After a few conversations with friends and acquaintances in the non-profit sector, I became quite interested in the topic and decided to pursue it as my thesis research. I also hoped that by learning about representation as a tactic that we often use to hear from marginalized communities that we could learn more and develop opportunities for improvement.

Thesis Overview

Following this introduction, Chapter Two provides a review of literature pertaining to public engagement, representation and the role of non-profits in this practice. The methodology is outlined in Chapter Three with details provided about steps taken to ensure that this study was conducted ethically. Chapter Four provides details about the results of this study, providing insights into four themes based on the words and experience of the non-profit leaders interviewed for the research. These themes include the role of non-profit leaders in engagement, limitations and benefits of non-profit representation, best and poor practices for engaging marginalized community members, and details about power dynamics. Finally, Chapter Five provides a discussion of why these results are relevant and significant in community engaged research and how non-profits and engagement practitioners could consider the conclusions.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The following is an overview of literature that is available and is related to the topics of representation and engagement, relational power, and the relationship between non-profits and governments. The topics and literature related provide key understandings and information to inform this work.

Representation and engagement

In her book, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Iris Young (2000) reserves a chapter to specifically discuss the topic of representation in government led public engagement activities. Young describes and critiques the use of representative practices, providing a discussion of the benefits and limitations of one individual acting as a representative for a whole community group. In Young's analysis the representatives ideally are leaders or spokespeople from the communities. Young contends that critics of representation can be too idealistic in their views, do not recognize the barriers that governments and communities face in interacting with each other and expect too much from the use of representation. This is different from my work which looks at representation from someone outside the community.

Young (2000) describes this critique of representation as based on other scholars' assessment that representation is not an effective way to hear from groups of people because no one person can understand the perspectives and beliefs of a whole community. According to Alcott (1991), no one person should be able to stand in the place of a whole community. Further to this critique, the only way to get a broad spectrum of perspectives is to gather input from all members of the community through direct engagement with a multitude of specific individuals and even all members of the community. Young, however, debates this premise and contends that these critiques are naïve and do not consider practical obstacles that occur in the real world.

According to Young, striving for direct input from the totality of a community is unachievable, and that representatives are not asked to “speak as,” a whole community, but rather to, “speak for,” the community (Young, 2000, p. 128). These representatives can and should be informed about the needs, values, ideas of a community through relationships and interactions with the group. Subsequently, they can lend their voices as advocates on behalf of the group they represent. In other words, their role is not to be the community but to serve as a voice for the community.

Representation is a practice that governments and engagement practitioners use to try and create processes where a diversity of voices are represented and considered. However, Judith Petts writes, “Engagement is often by necessity a fleeting affair focusing on a specific context and with a limited set of participants (i.e., experts, decision makers) as well as the public” (Petts, 2008, p. 831). Petts writes about her experiences as a facilitator and participant in public engagement in her article titled “Public Engagement to Build Trust: False Hopes” (2008). Here, she examines the role of representation in the design and implementation of community engagement. She speaks about how representation is often necessary because engagement is often a quick, fleeting process where governments ‘pop-in’ to extract information from a group. The information is considered but long-term relationship and trust building is seldom possible due to constraints related to time, budgets and decision-making processes. She suggests that the lack of relationship building is a widespread problem with recruiting engagement participants as governments often go back to the “well” of participants they know - leaders and staff of organizations rather than individual community members (Petts, 2008). Petts describes this problem and the need to employ specialized recruitment and strategies as a way of ensuring representation from diverse communities. But she also is aware that these specialized processes

often cost more in terms of time, money and effort, which makes the process difficult for all parties involved (governments, participants and engagement practitioners) (Petts, 2008).

Like Young (2000), Petts (2008) suggests that engaging an entire community, particularly a marginalized community is impractical; in her words, “the next best thing is to focus on recruiting people as, ‘gatekeepers,’ of knowledge, concerns and values” (Petts, 2008, p. 825). The gatekeeper role is like the role which non-profit leaders are invited to fulfill. They, engaging on behalf of their clientele, are acting as a conduit of information or gatekeeper for the perspectives of the communities they serve. According to Petts (2008), one of the key benefits of the use of gatekeepers is that governments can tie into the relationships that non-profit leaders have developed, and the trust and knowledge that non-profit leaders have helps to boost trust of government amongst marginalized communities.

Smith and Pekkanen (2012) speak to the role of non-profits as gatekeepers and relationship holders. These authors specifically focus on the role of non-profits as advocates for the communities that they serve. Their article, “Revisiting Advocacy by Non-Profit Organizations” in the *Voluntary Sector Review*, provides an examination of representation as an essential function of community focused non-profit organizations. Smith and Pekkanen (2012) indicate that non-profits are asked by the government to perform the critical function of advocacy and voices for communities. If non-profits do not participate, they risk the chance that the views, perspectives and needs of their clientele being absent in the development of policy and programming. Thus, advocacy is a critical aspect of the role of non-profits and a crucial part of the service they provide to the community. Their participation aims to contribute to government policy and programming that is informed by their knowledge of those that are marginalized in the hope that this input will lead to better outcomes for their communities. Smith and Pekkanen

conclude that when the government approaches non-profits the leaders must participate to give voice and advocate for marginalized people who are not invited to partake in the decision-making process.

DeSantis (2010) conducted a qualitative study that looked at the role of non-profits as advocates in policy and programming development. The study involved 39 non-profit organizations that advocate using their relationships with government on behalf of the communities they serve including marginalized groups. The study explores policy advocacy processes that are led and directed by social service and non-profit organizations. A series of interviews with non-profit staff revealed that advocacy is considered one of the most important roles for these groups. They also revealed that advocacy and comfort with this role differs in both visibility and scale across the sector. As well, the way that each of these non-profits perform and prepare for this role is inconsistent, ad-hoc and often without rigour. The staff indicated that steps could be taken to be informed about the needs of clients (e.g., conversations with front line staff or clients) or the representative may instead rely on their own knowledge or expertise as information. The amount of internal engagement and engagement directly with members of the marginalized communities to help inform advocacy efforts and goals varies widely. This spectrum of engagement, DeSantis concludes, creates potential gaps in the information that is provided to governments about the experience of marginalized communities. DeSantis suggests standardizing advocacy processes to create a better understanding of an organization's relationship with the community before inviting them to be advocates (DeSantis, 2010). This will help to ensure representatives are well informed and close to the people governments are aiming to hear from.

Relational power

In “Community Organizing for Education Reform”, Mark Warren (2011) writes about the power of relationship building between communities and policy makers. He refers to the implicit power and relational power that is experienced in interactions between governments, non-profits and other community groups. This power is important to consider in the examination of engagement of governments with non-profits and the community. Warren writes, “if unilateral power involves power ‘over’ others, relational power emphasizes power ‘with’ others, or building power to accomplish common aims” (2011, p. 147). This relational power is a principal element in the ways that governments engage and that they employ to connect and understand marginalized communities. Governments often focus their energy on developing relationships with community organizations, community representatives and non-profit organizations instead of directly engaging with members of the communities themselves. Relationship building and developing this relational power is according to Warren essential to effective and fruitful engagement (Warren, 2011). Thus, governments focus on where their relationships already lie (i.e., with organizations) rather than extending efforts to develop wider reaching relationships with marginalized communities.

Table 2 below summarizes the terminology that different authors use to describe the role of representatives in engagement. Each author provides important insights into the ways that representatives perform their roles and their key responsibilities.

Table. 2: A Summary of Different Roles of Representatives in Public Engagement Activities

Representative’s role	Author
Speak for a community	Young (2000)
Gatekeepers	Petts (2008)
Advocate	Smith and Pekkanen (2012)
Advocate/Advocacy	DeSantis (2010)
Relationship keeper	Warren (2011)

Relationship between non-profits and government

When considering the role non-profit’s play in engagement for their organization’s clients it is important to consider the relationship between non-profits and government. In 2011, the Wellesley Institute commissioned study which was conducted by Carter and Speevak Sladowski to look at the relationship between Canada’s non-profit sector and governments across the country (Carter & Speevak Sladowski, 2011). Lead authors Susan Carter and Paula Speevak Sladowski interviewed 14 representatives from the non-profit sector to inform this work. The report identified three categories that the relationship between the non-profit sector and governments can be placed into. They suggest that non-profits can experience and be part of each

of these three types of relationships with the government at any given time depending on the interactions occurring.

The first category is ‘service delivery or contracted agency’ where non-profits are contracted to carry out government programs. This means the government is providing funds and direction for an organization to deliver something on their behalf. The second relationship is ‘partnership’ where government support is provided to an organization and each partner in the relationship contributes according to their expertise or resources. In both relationships government holds the power through the provision of resources that allow the non-profit to conduct work or provide programs. The third category is where advocacy comes into play through policy involvement, when governments engage the sector to develop policy approaches and design ways to address issues (Carter & Speevak Sladowski, 2011). It is the third relationship where engagement mostly resides. However, it cannot be forgotten that the other two types of relationships are also at play, keeping the “lights on” (i.e., government resources, funds, influence) while non-profits are participating in public engagement activities.

Another important detail to consider as we aim to understand more about the role of representation performed by non-profits in government engagement is the relationship that these two groups have are not always harmonious. Sometimes these relationships may not draw on the best of what each side has to offer and that each side may be considering how to improve, adjust or modify the relationship. Non-profit organizations are likely to think of governments as their primary funding source. According to the Wellesley (2011), non-profits also often see governments as creating policies and making rules that are arbitrary, non-well informed, inappropriate or ever changing. As further explained by Carter and Speevak Sladowski, “Sector organizations often view governments as custodians of the treasury, poorly informed about the

reality of the issues on the ground” (2011, p. 11). Bearing this in mind, it isn’t surprising that non-profit roles as advocates and engagement participants have a lot to consider as they perform that role. Governments hold power through funds and resources, non -profits feel responsible to provide information about the ‘realities of the issues on the ground.’ These come together to complicate and play as part of the representative role that non-profits and non-profit leaders perform for marginalized communities.

It is evident from the literature that the non-profits are fulfilling various roles as representatives for communities they serve. It is also evident that this role comes with complexities. Few studies have engaged the non-profit leaders as research participants to help create an understanding of how these individuals navigate these complexities and how their own perspectives on their role in representation. What do non-profit leaders think about their own role in this advocacy? This question will be addressed through my exploration with leaders from non-profit social service organizations based in Edmonton, Alberta.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Grounded theory approach

Grounded theory is a methodology developed in the middle of the 20th century by Anslem Strauss and Barney Glaser. The grounded theory approach helps to develop new hypotheses and theories based on data collected from research participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is an alternative to traditional research approaches which verify and test previously developed theory. Strauss and Glaser suggest that traditional approaches resulted in the stagnation of theory. As described by Strauss and Glaser, grounded theory provided researchers with a systematic and rigorous method for developing theory directly connected to the phenomenon being studied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It allows for generating ideas through the research process rather than using data to confirm a hypothesis.

Grounded theory helps to understand a social phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); Rennie, Phillips & Quartaro, 1988). It is rooted in the philosophical assumptions of symbolic interactionism. This concept, developed by George Herbert Mead (1934), argues that an individual's ability to take the perspective of others has considerable influence over their self-understanding. Symbolic interactionism, which Hermer Blumer developed and was influenced by George Herbert Mead, suggests that there is an ongoing interaction between the individual and the world (Blumer, 1969). In other words, we play a role in shaping our world, and the world also shapes us around us. We as individuals can interpret our world, and we prescribe meaning to it based on our experiences. Also, that these meanings are changeable as we continue to reflect and understand our world through ongoing social interactions and new experiences.

Researchers can use grounded theory to understand the relationships between perceptions, ascribed meaning of these actions and the action of participants as part of society.

To do this, the researcher aims to explain and understand the world from an individual participant's perspectives. This can lead to understanding the socially shared meaning amongst participants regarding the phenomenon being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017; Rennie et al., 1988).

Grounded theory is recommended when a broad explanation for a phenomenon is needed. It is appropriate to use when existing theories about a phenomenon do not address the problem or population. Grounded theory is suitable for the study of public representation by non-profit leaders, given the current lack of understanding from the perspective of these engagement participants. The lived experience and experience of the non-profit leaders is central to understanding their role as representatives speaking on behalf of marginalized communities and any theories about this practice. These practices bring together key stakeholders and government in a complex context of social interaction. The act of participating as a representative has implications at both an individual and social level. This grounded theory study focuses on the epistemological importance of the experience of the individuals. This approach will privilege the participants' feelings, thoughts, and understanding to develop a theory about this phenomenon. This will allow for a rich understanding rooted in the symbolic interactionism of non-profit leaders as representatives for marginalized groups in citizen engagement initiatives.

Research Characteristics

In this study, the lived experience of non-profit leaders and how they describe their experiences is central to developing an understanding about their role as representatives. Public engagement initiatives occur to bring together members of the public and key stakeholders to provide input that informs the development of policy, programming and services. This grounded

theory study focused on the epistemological importance of the experience of the individuals as representatives.

Recruitment, Data Collection and Sampling

My study focused on leaders of non-profit organizations in Edmonton, Alberta. Their roles include the titles of Executive Director, Chief Executive Officer and Senior Manager. No more demographic information is provided in this study to protect the identity of participants.

The study included participants who met the following criteria: (1) non-profit leaders based in Edmonton, Alberta; (2) lead organizations that primarily provide services to marginalized communities; (3) have participated in public engagement activities hosted by a government; and (4) have participated in public engagement initiatives as a representative for their clientele. Participants were recruited through email (see Appendix B). I sent out recruitment emails to six potential participants. These participants were known to me as leaders in the non-profit sector in Edmonton. I had a previous relationship with four of these potential participants, having met them through my professional work. The remaining two potential participants were suggested to me by colleagues as they would have relevant experience and be able to provide information related to my research project. Of those six, five people responded and agreed to participate in my study.

While developing plans for and conducting my research, the inevitable question that every researcher must consider arose—I needed to assess the appropriate sample size given the topic and the grounded theory approach. In his book *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, Michael Quinn Patton (2002) indicates “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 311). Yet, there is much literature examining methodology that aims to prescribe established norms and suggestions for sampling (Morse, 1994; Mason, 2010; Cresswell et al.,

2007). These sample size suggestions range widely and consider the theoretical framework and objectives of the potential studies.

However, the literature agrees that the most crucial element to determining appropriate sample size in qualitative research is the concept of theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is the point at which “no additional data is being found whereby the researcher can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances repeatedly, the researcher becomes empirically confident that the category is saturated” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 65). Theoretical saturation is vital to generalize findings to a population meaningfully. In *Basics of Qualitative Research*, the authors state that saturation is a ‘matter of degree.’ If a researcher looks long enough, they could inevitably find additional dimensions or concepts. Truly the researcher needs to ensure they feel comfortable with the sample size and feel satisfied with the level of examination.

For my study, I interviewed five individuals. This sample size allowed for representation from various non-profits in Edmonton who serve a diversity of clients from marginalized communities. For this master's research project, the sample size feels appropriate, and I reached theoretical saturation when several similar themes appeared during interviews. The number of participants allowed for the inclusion and description of a diversity of experiences that pointed to similar themes.

Identification of appropriate non-profit leaders was guided by the following definition for marginalized groups:

“Marginalized groups are [those that are] frequently excluded from decision making, public institutions, essential services and even citizenship. They are vulnerable to

poverty, are more likely to be affected by life-threatening disease and are more likely to be victims of violence and exploitation” (Government of Canada, 2017).

One of the key aspects and important connections to my research is the exclusion from decision-making and public institutions that marginalized peoples experience particularly because this exclusion may be remedied by the representative practice of involving non-profit leaders instead of community members.

Using previously developed personal relationships within the non-profit sector, I used purposive sampling to identify participants. According to Welman and Kruger (1999), purposive sampling is the most effective non-probability sampling for research studies. Data collection for this study involved primarily semi-structured interviews.

After participants were recruited by email invitation, they were asked to participate in an hour-long, semi-structured interview. All interviews occurred via the Zoom platform to ensure the safety and health of all participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the interview began, participants were asked to read an information sheet and sign an informed consent form (See Appendix A). This information sheet outlined the topic and purpose of the research, data collection strategies, details about voluntary participation and confidentiality, the benefits and risks involved in participating, and the participant’s ability to withdraw from the study should there be any concerns. After participants read the information sheet, they completed a consent form.

Semi-structured interviews are discussions between two individuals that follow a loose script but may deviate depending on the situation. They are recorded and transcribed for data analysis (Berg, 2001). The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The following questions guided the discussion:

1. Tell me about your experience when you are a representative of the people you serve at your organization at citizen engagement activities organized by government agencies.
2. What is it like to be asked to represent the community you serve in citizen engagement activities?
3. How do you feel about being asked to represent the community you serve in citizen engagement activities?
4. If you could provide advice to someone leading engagement about how to hear from marginalized communities what would you say?

Memo writing

An important aspect of some qualitative research is memo writing. For grounded theory, it is a useful process to allow the researcher to write down thoughts as they occur, before, during, and after data collection and analysis. It provides an important analytical step to contemplate and explain the data, think about gaps, understand personal positionality and better understand the research process. Memos allow the researcher to capture thoughts, create connections and contemplate the meaning. Memo writing is an interactive space to discuss with yourself codes, ideas and hunches (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162)

I developed my memos at the outset of my research process as I began to contemplate and finalize my research topic. The memos helped me solidify a research question, identify potential research participants and think about methodologies. During the data collection and analysis phase, I also wrote memos to reflect on what the participants said during interviews and how they said it. During coding, memos helped to think about what specific codes, themes, and concepts mean and reflected in the data. It also helped me contemplate on my assumptions about

the topic and helped me to focus on the data itself and avoid using my thoughts about the topic to direct the findings. The memoing process gave me a space to contemplate the research in a structured way.

Data analysis

My data analysis used a grounded theory approach. Interviews were coded line by line, using the constant comparative method. The goal of this process is to generate theories that explain how aspects of the social world work. The theory is developed by allowing it to emerge from the data and is intricately connected to the reality that the theory is developed to explain.

Constant comparative method

In the constant comparative method, data points are constantly compared to other data points to form categories and concepts. Constant comparison allows for “emerging codes, categories, properties and dimensions as well as different parts of the data to be viewed to explore variations, similarities and differences in the data” (Hallberg, 2006, p. 143). Constant comparison means that while the researcher analyzes data, she continues to go back to other data to contemplate and investigate similarities and differences. This forces the researcher to constantly reflect on the data to avoid undue bias and ensure that all data is analyzed equitably regardless of its place in the process. The constant comparative method allows the researcher to see and discover patterns and themes that may not have been previously obvious and shows “exquisitely tuned capacity for pattern acquisition and recognition” (May, 1992, p. 18).

Rigour

Aiming to meet the criteria rigour, I used Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a guide. The measures laid out by Lincoln and Guba include four points: transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability. These guidelines help to the accuracy, trustworthiness, and rigour of a study, particularly a qualitative research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 195).

Transferability refers to the idea that the findings and concepts developed from a study can be used to understand other settings and situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Governments in other jurisdictions include public engagement in decision-making and policy development; it is crucial to understand how this research might prove helpful in different settings. This study focused on the non-profit sector in Edmonton, Alberta. The variety of non-profit leaders involved and the diversity of clients they serve helps to ensure that the results apply to other, similar settings, including non-profit sectors in other communities.

The concept of credibility suggests that results make sense and that both the data and the participants are accurately represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure my research was credible, I used the strategies of member-checking during my interviews, through checking in with interviewees that I had heard their feedback correctly and accurately. Member checking can occur during an interview, where the researcher will restate or summarize information and then question the participant to determine accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability ensures that the study's findings are repeatable and consistent in conclusions when repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability means that the research process can be 'trackable' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A strategy I used to ensure reliability was to create an audit trail in my memos, which helped to provide an accounting for my decisions and

allowed me to better understand why, when, and how I made decisions during the research process (Mayan, 2009, 112).

Finally, confirmability speaks to the concern of research objectivity (Lincoln & Guba). Confirmability is used during the data collection and analysis processes to ensure that the findings are logical (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of memos again helped to work out the trail for decision making and understanding how data analysis decisions occurred.

Chapter 4: Findings

This research garnered results that indicate how non-profit leaders experience, understand and feel about their role as representatives. Following five interviews with non-profit leaders in the Edmonton area the data was analyzed, and themes were identified. The results of this study are categorized to highlight three themes that emerged from the data. Two subthemes for each theme also emerged. The subthemes are two pairs of ideas that illustrate the conflicted feelings and understanding that non-profit leaders expressed about their role as representatives. Each pairing of subthemes leads to a better understanding of some of the benefits and limitations of inviting non-profit leaders to act as the voice for harder to reach and underrepresented communities.

In this chapter, I will explain and provide details on key themes that emerged from interviews related to the experience and understanding of participants' roles as representatives. These key themes are reflected in three concepts that indicate both the benefits and limitations of representation. Participants provided many descriptions and accounts of both specific instances and general experiences related to being representatives of their clientele. Each pairing of theme and the accompanying subthemes leads to a better understanding of some of the benefits and limitations of inviting non-profit leaders to act as the voice for harder to reach and underrepresented communities.

Table 3 below outlines the themes and subthemes identified during participant interviews.

Table 3. Findings and Themes

Themes	Subthemes	
Standing in Place	Privilege	Discomfort
Giving Voice	Translator	Filter
Providing Protection	Shield	Barrier

Standing in Place

Research participants provided detail about specific experiences and more generalized descriptions of engagement when they represented marginalized communities. Participants spoke of experiences that felt positive and valuable as well as other experiences that caused discomfort or felt like ‘bad engagement.’ It was clear that these non-profit leaders stand in place for marginalized communities in a variety of engagement activities and to provide feedback related to a wide range of topics.

The first question asked in each interview allowed the non-profit leaders to think of and center themselves in a specific memory or experience related to engagement. This first question was: “Can you describe an experience where you acted as a representative for a community you serve during public engagement?” This question garnered the description of a variety of instances, some of which are described below.

One participant described an invitation by a government body to speak on behalf of those experiencing poverty related to access and use of Edmonton’s River valley and river valley amenities. The participant spoke about understanding that the organizers were asking for their

representation out of a genuine interest in the experience of marginalized communities related to the topic. The participant described it in the following way:

The City of Edmonton was doing an engagement on river valley access, I got an email, and the email was sweet. It was prefaced by saying something like, 'I understand that you've got other priorities right now but was that ever an understatement.'(C1)

The same participant went on to describe some of the priorities that their organization was facing including reacting to the outset COVID-19 pandemic, feeding hundreds of clients that were out of work, supporting youth who did not have access to technology and were trying to access school resources. The request from this government body was inconvenient, caused additional stress to the organization, and the topic was not of any priority to their clients and organization.

Research participants described several similar occurrences that involved governments reaching out, often unexpectedly to ask for involvement in extremely specific engagements. One participant described an occasion where they were asked along with a few front-line staff members and community leaders to meet with an elected official to speak on several instances related to the newcomer experience in Edmonton. The participants were invited to City Hall where questions were posed by these officials. This request came unexpectedly, with only a few days for participants to prepare:

We went to meet with the mayor with myself and a few informal community leaders...We worked hard to prepare ourselves and the community members, but availability was within a week. So, it was quite a challenge to get ready and to help our community members to feel comfortable. (C4)

One participant spoke about specific topic areas that they are often asked to provide input about which may be more appropriate for community members to comment on directly:

There are situations in which we are asked to participate that we struggle with. For example, if the topic was around the needs of Indigenous seniors, we don't feel we have that experience or feel comfortable to speak for these folks. So, we try to defer and urge the government to defer to the community or other organizations that can better participate. It can affect our relationship with the government, but we aim to be mindful and do what we can to change the voices at the table (C5).

The *standing in place* theme revealed that at various times non-profit leaders are asked to participate as if they were part of marginalized communities. They are asked to be the representative of various communities and marginalized groups. They are asked to *stand in place* for these communities and take space in these engagement activities on behalf of these groups. Government bodies tap into these community resources frequently and as one participant put it, "I have been involved in a ton of meetings and events. It is hard to point to one, but some are good, some I feel awkward for being there" (C1). As the interviewees described their role of *standing in place* for these communities, they expressed the ways that this specific role makes them feel and how they experience this role. The following sections will illustrate the sub themes that were identified that expand on the details related to how non-profit leaders described their feelings about *standing in place*. As the previous quote highlights, the participants provided many descriptions of both awkwardness and feeling privileged to act in the role of representative.

Privilege

Individuals who work for and lead non-profit organizations can develop an essential connection to the community they serve. As one research participant stated, “We do what we can to know and understand our clients and I really aim to do what I can to help the people who come to us for help” (C2).

The participants often spoke about how as they *stand in place* for marginalized communities. They feel privileged to be provided with the opportunity to give voice to the needs and experiences of marginalized clientele. They spoke about how providing advocacy as they *stand in place* for clientele creates the opportunity for improvements. This was identified by the participants as an important part of their work and an essential aspect of their role as leaders in the non-profit community. During discussions, a participant noted: “There are good days when you’re like me, doing this is going to make a difference, and you know that you’re probably in the best position to make that difference” (C3).

Making a difference and seeing positive change for underrepresented and marginalized communities is the aim of the non-profit organizations that the participants lead. A participant expressed their experience with the reaction of community members to their role as their representative:

They are almost excited that somebody can do that for them, that there is somebody who can get in the room and speak about their needs and their wants and what would benefit their community. It feels like a real honour sometimes. (C3)

The work that these non-profits do helps them, and their organizations build relationships with the government. All the participants I spoke to represented organizations that could be

described as trusted advisors to the government. Some participants indicated that this relationship development is key to creating improvement for their clientele. This allows them to have the opportunity by speaking for people and communities that they care about which makes them feel privileged to be the representative, as one participant noted:

It feels like a huge privilege, but I feel like I have the opportunity because of the way we [their organization] approach advocacy. It's about building trusting relationships with governments...as a trusted advisor so we are asked to those tables to provide those perspectives and insights. (C5)

The honour and privilege that was highlighted seems to be offset by other feelings of unease, awkwardness and guilt. The following section provides an accounting of the negative feelings non-profit leaders expressed about their role of *standing in place*. This will show the dichotomy of experience that these people often encounter during their experiences and the feelings they have of fulfilling the role of *standing in place*.

Discomfort

On the other side of the coin, participants noted that the privilege they must be invited to *stand in place* for marginalized communities comes with awkwardness and uneasy feelings. They acknowledge that they are not members of the groups that they represent. As individuals who express concern for marginalized communities and leaders of organizations that aim to lift these communities, they expressed recognition of the inherent awkwardness and misfortune that they must step in and *stand in place* representing the concerns and needs of these groups. A good example of this discomfort was expressed by a participant in the following way:

When you're asked to do that [represent] there is always a degree of discomfort in that you're speaking on behalf of who aren't you and being asked to represent a position that isn't your actual experience, it's your understanding of what other people's experiences are. (C3)

These leaders understood that their presence is in place of people whose experience they are trying to represent and translate it to the government. Many of the participants rationalized why they are asked to *stand in place* rather than community members because it makes it a lot easier and less effort for the government. Therefore, these non-profit leaders believe that they are invited to participate in lieu of members of marginalized communities.

It's a lot easier to come to me to sit down than it is to sit down with the Nigerian community. Way easier to have me say, 'here's what's going on with Somali youth,' than it is to sit down with Somali youth and have that conversation. (C3)

This causes discomfort for these individuals as it is the relationships, they have built with the communities that are being used to gather this information. These leaders spend considerable time and effort developing these relationships. It is only through their relationship with the communities they serve that they can gather the information needed to advocate for the needs of their clientele. It is these relationships which the government leans on rather than making the effort to build their own effective relationships.

It sorts of causes dueling pianos in the brain, you know, sort of highs of accomplishment and shame that we live in a world where those who are going to be affected by the policy being developed, by the program are not part of conversations that can affect their future. (C3)

These opposing feelings can cause distress for these leaders. It can also be combined with having to deal with discomfort from within the community that they are being asked to represent. These leaders can be seen as an “outsider” who should not be speaking for these groups. Some of the participants indicated that they often need to take extra steps to make the community feel more comfortable about their participation. These leaders indicated that Indigenous communities are becoming increasingly concerned with representation that is from outside their community:

I’m aware [of the tensions] and I’m also aware that my representation can negatively impact our organization from our colleagues in the community and can affect our reputation in the community. We must be very clear when speaking on indigenous issues that my participation represents only my organization and not the Indigenous community as a whole. However, it can be hard to have the government hear and understand this message. (C2)

Another spoke about the specific discomfort that comes with being asked to speak on indigenous issues:

Indigenous people have a tradition of nothing about us without us. They want to be their own voice, so when myself as a non-indigenous person is asked to represent them, the community is not jazzed about that. It feels uncomfortable and awkward and doesn’t feel right. (C3)

The participants involved in this research noted that when they are asked to *stand in place* for their clientele, they would see this as a privilege. They were honored to advocate for the needs of communities which they serve and which they care about. However, within the role of *standing in place*, participants also identified an unease and awkwardness in being asked to take the place of members of marginalized communities. They believe that their participation

provides an easy point of connection between governments and marginalized communities. This, according to these non-profit leaders, can mean that governments do not make efforts to develop direct relationships with marginalized communities. This lack of effort can make it difficult for members of these communities to participate directly in engagement activities. Non-profit leaders must constantly navigate tensions. Tensions they feel within their own experience and emotions, as well as tensions that may develop related to their relationships with the community. It is an arduous process that they navigate on behalf of government, because as mentioned the government relies on the relationships that non-profits have built with their clientele communities. In conclusion, as non-profit leaders *stand in place* for marginalized communities they experience and understand this role in ways that can feel conflicted.

Giving Voice

One of the significant aspects of the role of representative during engagement for non-profit leaders is the idea of being a voice for marginalized communities. Participants spoke about their role as advocates for the needs and experiences of their clientele and of providing a loud voice directed at the government voicing these needs. All participants saw this as an essential aspect of their work as leaders in the non-profit sector. It was clear that they felt the need to voice the concerns and experiences of the communities they serve to garner policy support, gather resources and do what they can to ensure that their organizations can adequately serve the community: "On one hand, part of the mandate is to give voice so that it is what we aim to do. It is to be at decision making tables." (C1)

This role is something that these participants take seriously. This relationship with policymakers and decision-makers provides space for the needs of these communities to be considered and heard. This role, however, comes with nuance. Participants spoke of both the

positive aspects of providing an opportunity for the government to hear these messages while at the same time the negative aspect of not hearing these messages from the people that will be affected. The following sections will provide more details about the two sub themes identified that help to further provide understanding of how participants experience and feel about their role of *giving voice* to the needs of marginalized communities. These subthemes are categorized as translation and filter.

Translator

As non-profit leaders *give voice* to the needs and experiences of marginalized communities, they utilize their understanding of the machinations of government to translate their feedback into understandable and actionable content. The first subtheme of the *giving voice* theme is translation. Participants spoke of the importance of recognizing the needs and expectations of governments in these engagements to help create a cohesive message. They indicated that through experience and participation in various engagements, they have learned that while they *give voice* to the needs of their clientele it helps to translate that input into a message recognizable as a potential policy or programming action. In other words, they indicated that providing raw input without ‘dressing it up’ or proposing it in a particular manner could lead to confusion or misinterpretation: “I’ll do it in a way that the policy maker or funder or whoever can affect change, that person finds it palatable and understandable. ” (C4)

This role can be that of a *giving voice* as a translator. The non-profit leaders feel comfortable in a government-minded space and know how to play the game of government. These actions taken by non-profit leaders can make it so that the needs of marginalized communities are more likely to be actioned:

I can do it in a way that is quite palatable to decision makers, in a way that also speaks to their political leanings. I can say things in a way that our community members might not be able to say. (C3)

Interviewees recognized this role as translator to be essential to creating opportunities to help their clientele and create change for the communities that they serve. By *giving voice* through translation or interpreting for the government to allow for understanding so that policy and programming changes are informed about the experiences of the people they will help. It can take a step out of the process and remove the need for the government to translate the raw experience of community members into a potential change or action.

I'm a person that has a relationship with the community, and I'm a person who policymakers see as comfortable and safe. I will provide feedback that says we need to create a program that helps people with resume writing. Where a community member might simply say we can't get jobs, no one wants to interview us. (C5)

These translations can be essential and help move change forward. However, the participants also noted that their words are not those of community members. They are representing these groups. Their representation of the community puts a layer between government and marginalized communities. Participants categorize this as a filter.

Filter

The second subtheme that provides further understanding to the theme of *giving voice* can be categorized as filter. As a voice for the marginalized, the leaders of non-profit organizations work to learn from these communities, synthesize this information and create an acceptable narrative for governments to hear. The research participants noted that this leads to some of the raw aspects of community members' experiences being filtered from the message.

Interviewees pointed out that their role as representatives could make it so that some elements of the marginalized experience may be filtered, in other words, details may be lost, misinterpreted or downplayed. "My representation can be comfortable and safe with the policymakers. But that creates an intermediary that you really shouldn't want but it's so convenient." (C5)

It was noted that conversations directly with communities could be far more complex and challenging for governments to conduct and understand, "It can be difficult for governments to go into the community and have lots of useless conversations, lots of conversations that you don't understand, lots of conversations that hurt your brain, hurt your heart." (C3)

This difficulty is seen by the leaders as a necessary discomfort to create meaningful and direct connections with the community. This direct connection could allow governments to hear more detail and gather input through unfiltered means. Several the participants spoke of specific examples when connecting directly with the community is the most appropriate or could provide more unfiltered information than non-profit representation. A direct connection is most appropriate related to topics that are very personal or specific topics. These topics center on the experiences of individual community members as they live, work, play and interact with the surrounding society. One participant spoke of an initiative that asked them to talk to people in poverty about recreation and connection to Edmonton's River Valley.

My thoughts on the needs of our clients related to how, when and where they want to access the River Valley would not be very informative or helpful. This is something that we as an organization don't focus on understanding. So, it would make way more sense to talk to our clients, have some direct conversations. (C1)

Another participant spoke of an experience where the government wanted them to talk to a specific subset of their clientele's experience. The participant urged the involved government

representatives to go directly to the group or allow their organization to gather a group of community members for a direct conversation. However, due to the time constraints of the project, this conversation directly with the community wasn't possible:

An example of when they wanted to speak to us about queer seniors and their experiences. I encouraged them to speak directly to the group. But the time wasn't available, and I wasn't able to give them easy answers about this. (C5)

Some participants believed that the gap between government and the community that non-profits fill could lead to gaps in service or proper understanding of need. All participants hoped that the government would make more effort to connect directly with the community. They also indicated that their organizations could be utilized as resources to help this happen. “My ultimate wish is that we could work with the government more to help bring together groups that they could then connect with directly, that they would have some of these harder conversations.” (C4)

By *giving voice* for the communities that their non-profit organizations serve the non-profit leaders work to advocate for marginalized communities for and share their knowledge of these groups with the government. As they fulfill the role of *giving voice* to the participants, they expressed that their representation could act both as a translation for government and as a filter of the true experience of their clients. The representation of non-profit leaders in engagements can allow for these individuals to interpret and translate the needs of this group into terms and input that governments can understand, recognize and act upon. However, as they *give voice* to the needs of the marginalized, interpretation of these needs could lead to the loss of details that may be shared directly from the community. The loss of these details and other aspects of the true experience of the marginalized is therefore filtered out, making the input that is provided to

governments less fulsome. The participants expressed that their role of *giving voice* could also cause a barrier between marginalized communities and government. Their role as representatives makes it so that governments do not have to work to connect or create dialogue directly with community members. Governments are provided with input from non-profit members which they can easily understand, recognize and act upon. However, this means that governments are not providing opportunity for members of the marginalized community to provide direct and unfiltered input. As non-profit leaders *give voice* to the needs of marginalized communities they experience and understand this role as both a potential benefit to the engagement practice of representation through their role as translators but also as a potential limitation of representation through filtration of the pure experience of the community.

Providing Protection

The non-profit leaders that participated in this research project spoke about the effort they take to develop meaningful and positive relationships with marginalized communities. These relationships allow these non-profit leaders to better understand the clientele that their organizations serve, as well as develop a caring attitude toward these communities. This attitude leads to these individuals and their organizations feeling protective toward these communities. The participants spoke about how their role as representatives in engagement can provide protection to the community. As non-profit leaders represent marginalized communities, they can protect these groups from some of the discomfort, misunderstanding and frustration that can come from engaging with governments. These discomforts were described by a participant in the following way:

Governments don't seem to consider the effect that their engagements can have on the participants. They can be highly emotional places and can be incredibly uncomfortable

for some people, especially when people are being asked to talk about things that are traumatic or difficult. (C1)

Non-profit members utilize their knowledge of government needs, practices and processes to understand how community members may experience engagement activities. Governments may create engagement spaces that are not appropriate or comfortable to community members, does not consider the needs of the community, does not consider discomfort with sharing painful/difficult information or will not appropriately respond to the input provided by the community. With these considerations not being built into engagement processes non-profit leaders believe that their own participation can protect the community from difficult situations. This was expressed by a non-profit leader using the following description:

A lot of these spaces are uncomfortable, and my clientele often already have lives with a lot of discomfort. I feel like I can help by stepping into these uncomfortable spaces to provide the information needed but to make sure that our clients don't have to experience more uncomfortable things. (C2)

The role of *providing protection* is something that the non-profit leaders fulfill on behalf of their clientele. Non-profit leaders' understanding of government, the needs of policy makers and the experience of marginalized groups allow them to understand in what way and how to *provide protection*. The role of protector was also described by the participants as something that they experience and understand as a significant role to fulfill that also comes with discomfort. As they protect marginalized communities, they shield these groups from discomfort, but the participants also recognized that this can be a barrier to relationship building between community and governments. The following sections will provide more details about two sub themes related to *providing protection*. These subthemes as described by the participants include

acting as a shield and sometimes becoming a barrier. These subthemes are described and explored further in the following sections.

Shield

Non-profit organizations provide service to marginalized communities to help them learn, develop skills and navigate a society they are often excluded from. Non-profit leaders spoke of their role as representatives for these communities to protect community members from activities and processes that may cause grief, frustration or further marginalization. Active participation in some engagements was described to shield marginalized individuals from partaking in processes that may not be genuine, may cause individuals to recount experiences that could re-traumatize them or cause increased frustration with the inaction or unresponsiveness of government.

The participants indicated that the venue, activities and goals of engagement could be unwelcoming or uncomfortable for some communities, "I think, personally, these spaces can be quite intimidating. Community members were very nervous because they had not experienced anything like this." (C4)

The role of the non-profit leaders is described as someone who is more comfortable in these spaces, someone who can attend to the community and shield them from this discomfort and stress. Interviewees spoke of an aspect of their role being to help maintain a positive feeling and relationship between community and government. This is due to the non-profit leaders understanding that expectations related to engagement goals and outcomes often need to be tempered. One participant stated:

With engagement it depends on what the government wants, and I think many of the public consultations are simply a validation of something that is already decided. And if

that is the case, I would rather it be me than one of my community members who might have expectations of the process. (C5)

This shielding from disappointment and frustration could help to make sure that marginalized community members are not wasting their time, resources or efforts, all of which for marginalized individuals can often be limited.

The non-profit leaders spoke of the need to build understanding among the community that some processes may not be worthwhile or genuine. The efforts that they and their organizations take to prepare community participants to engage with the government should be reserved for times when feedback is genuinely sought, and potential action is possible, "Our organization does what it can to understand the opportunities for engagement that are presented before we involve community members to try and prevent resentment and frustration from inaction" (C1).

Another issue that worries the non-profit leaders is asking community members to speak about experiences that may be traumatic or difficult to recall. Some of the participants spoke of aiming to shield their community members from being traumatized or sharing difficult experiences that may not result in action or change. One participant stated:

The other thing is how much do we retraumatize people, asking them to talk about issues. If we're asking about mental health, if we're talking about addictions, they're happy to talk about it in theory. But how many times can these stories be shared before something happens about it. (C1)

This issue is particularly concerning when marginalized people who have struggled within a system have to speak to representatives of that system; for example, speaking to the government to provide evidence for their marginalization due to actions taken by the

government. "Think about how a bunch of racialized people needed to sit in front of police and government to tell them that their experience with police and government is difficult." (C1)

These are the types of highly emotional or potentially traumatizing experiences that non-profit leaders speak about shielding their clients from by acting as a representative that can share these stories and experiences on their behalf.

Barrier

As non-profit leaders and their organizations do what they can to protect their clientele, they recognize that this can also create an obstacle to relationship development between marginalized communities and their government. As the government continues to utilize the relationship non-profits have with the community, it makes it so that the government may put less effort into developing their own direct relationships. This can position non-profits as a barrier between these two groups. One non-profit leader expressed this by stating, "When I am there and available it makes it, so the conversation is easy for the government. But they aren't developing relationships with community members. It causes a gap between these communities and their governments." (C3)

According to the participants the gap results in governments not fully understanding these groups, and these groups never fully understanding government. As one participant shared, it would be much better if some of the difficult and uncomfortable conversations happened between the two of them. Although challenging, this could lead to improved understanding between these two parties.

The non-profit leaders recognized that their place in engagement with government often takes that opportunity away from community members; hence, these conversations between government and marginalized communities do not happen. As one participant explains: "Because

I'm there as a palatable and comfortable person, the tensions don't occur. Tensions that would probably make everyone try to make it a bit better" (C3). Input during engagement is seldom firsthand, and thus, the day-to-day realities of the community may never adequately be considered. Another participant commented: "I do what I can to bring light to their world, but the truth is it is never going to be perfect or really accurate. Because they are not my experiences, it's not my life." (C1)

Interviewees described the ongoing tension and decoded how they felt during their experiences as engagement participants. These tensions help to illustrate how engagement with marginalized groups through non-profits comes with both benefits and limitations. Their experiences and understanding of their role can help to highlight these realities and allow engagement practitioners to better understand their work and the methods and tactics that they use to engage with marginalized communities.

Non-profit leaders aim to provide protection from discomfort, trauma and frustration by acting as representatives during public engagement activities. As they described their experience as protectors, the participants noted that this work can act both as a shield for the community from discomfort inflicted by the government, as well as a barrier to relationship development between the two groups. The representation of non-profit leaders in engagements can allow for these individuals to interpret and translate the needs of this group into terms and input that governments can understand, recognize and act upon. However, as they Give Voice to the needs of the marginalized, interpretation of these needs could lead to the loss of details that may be shared directly from the community. The loss of these details and other aspects of the true experience of the marginalized is therefore filtered out making the input that is provided to governments less fulsome. The participants expressed that their role of Giving Voice could also

cause a barrier between marginalized communities and government. Their role as representatives makes it so that governments do not have to work to connect or create dialogue directly with community members. Governments are provided with input from non-profit members which they can easily understand, recognize and act upon. However, this means that governments are not providing opportunity for members of the marginalized community to provide direct, unfiltered and uninterpreted input. As non-profit leaders Give Voice to the needs of marginalized communities they experience and understand this role as both a potential benefit to the engagement practice of representation through their role as translators but also as a potential limitation of representation through filtration of the pure experience of the community. As is evident, non-profit leaders that participate in public engagement activities understand and experience this role in a variety of ways. It was clear through the interviews that aspects of their role as representatives in engagement are experienced in ways that are complex. In other words, as they participate as representatives there can be both positive and negative connotations to the experience.

The three major and sub themes described above evolved from the interview data. These themes highlighted key aspects of non-profit leader experience and understanding of acting as representatives. These three major themes include Standing in Place, Giving Voice and Providing Protection. Further exploration of these themes highlights that each was described in both negative and positive ways by the participants which were described here as subthemes that help to expand our understanding of the experiences and understanding of the participants. As participants described Standing in Place, they illustrated that this aspect of the role can be experienced both positively as a privilege while on the other hand it can also feel quite awkward to fulfill this role. Further, as the interview participants talked about Giving Voice for

marginalized communities during public engagement, they note that this role can be understood as both acting as a useful translator to help make the input provided by community more understandable to governments, as well it was noted that Giving Voice can cause filtering of input. As non-profit leaders aim to make information more understandable to governments, this can also strip some of the details and authenticity of the information that is provided related to the experience of marginalized communities. Finally, the data collected from the interviews with five non-profit leaders showed that Providing Protection is an important function of the role of representative. This protection was described as coming in the form of a shield that keeps members of marginalized communities away from discomfort, misunderstanding and frustration that can occur due to interactions with the government. This protection can also be experienced as a barrier. As non-profit leaders represent marginalized communities, they can stand in the way of community members and governments becoming more comfortable with interacting and become an obstacle to relationships development. The three themes of Standing in Place, Giving Voice and Providing Protection provide an understanding of the experience of non-profit leaders as they represent marginalized communities in public engagement activities.

The following section will further discuss these themes and expand on my thoughts related to the results of this research project. This discussion will be informed by literature related to this topic.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter is grounded in the research question: what is the experience of non-profit leaders as they represent their clientele in public engagement? Overall, the study's purpose is to understand the experience of this group as they are invited to speak for marginalized groups and communities. Insights gathered from this research can provide thoughts about the benefits and limitations of the engagement practice of inviting non-profit leaders to represent the individuals and communities that they serve. Informing this chapter is literature as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. As previously presented in Chapter 4, from the analysis of the five interviews three themes and six sub themes emerged. The following chapter will discuss the implications of these themes considering findings from previous studies.

Non-profit efforts to represent their clientele

As participants spoke of their work, acting as representatives was described in several ways by participants. By considering the literature, the descriptions provided help to support and build on some of the key concepts presented by previous academic work. For example, Iris Young (2000) provides guidance to representatives by suggesting that during the role of representative that participants in engagement should 'speak for a community,' and not attempt to 'speak as a community.' In other words, it is important for non-profit leaders acting as representatives to understand that their role is to stand in place for the community that they serve as a well-informed partner in these efforts.

Throughout this research it became clear that non-profit leaders who represent their clientele must make significant effort to fulfill their role. It is also clear that these individuals understand this effort is an important aspect of their role in the non-profit sector and the work that they do. This could be juxtaposed with the effort that governments take to create these

engagement opportunities. As Petts (2008) writes, “engagement is often a fleeting affair.” (831) Efforts made by government to engage with the community are characterized by using the easiest tactics, with minimal effort and involving the easiest to contact participants. Interviewees spoke about how this minimal effort on behalf of the government can cause them discomfort because they recognize that it leads to them having to stand in place for their clientele.

Governments use of non-profit relationships

Interviewees articulated the importance of this effort to create lasting and meaningful relationships with community groups and members. This effort, which is not fulfilled by the government, is downloaded onto non-profit organizations, where relationships are built, information is gathered and where efforts are made to prepare community members to participate in engagement activities when they may be invited. By making greater effort and developing more meaningful relationships engagement could move beyond the fleeting and become more meaningful, the interviewees also indicated that their efforts as representatives for the community can allow the government to continue to shirk responsibility by providing opportunities to engage about the needs of the marginalized without the necessary effort to build relationships and developing opportunities for direct interaction. In other words, governments use their relationships with non-profits and use the relationships that non-profits have built with the community as a resource of information. Governments do not work to build meaningful relationships directly with members of marginalized communities. Governments will often ‘pop-in’ to extract information from marginalized communities by utilizing their working relationships with non-profits organizations. The participants spoke of engagement opportunities directed at marginalized individuals that often come with short timelines, limited resources and significant reliance on the efforts of the non-profit staff. As one interviewee indicated: “If there

is a genuine desire to really reflect the voices of the people we serve, policy makers need to deconstruct what they need, ask understandable questions and put in genuine effort to get that input.” (C1) As non-profits and their leaders stand in place for their clientele, they must use these relationships and make significant efforts to represent and advocate for the needs of the marginalized.

Petts (2008) also describes a similar role to this representation as identified by the interviewee as, ‘gatekeepers.’ These gatekeepers hold the relationships with the community and come to engagement with knowledge about the concerns and values of the community. Non-profits who engage on behalf of their clientele act as the key conduit or gatekeeper of information related to the perspectives of these communities.

Experience of acting as the middleman

The interviews conducted during this research project reveal more first-hand knowledge and context related to how non-profit leaders experience the role. They spoke of being the go between or conduit of information between community and the government. Their descriptions reveal that they can feel this role is a privilege and are honoured to bring the perspectives of marginalized communities to the forefront in conversations with the government. Interviewees indicated that they are honoured and motivated to build and maintain relationships with the communities they serve and to honour those relationships through speaking for these people. However, on the other hand the participants revealed that the role can end up in discomfort. They realize that they can fulfill this role due to their place of privilege and that their presence can be taking the place of community members themselves. They revealed that their role as gatekeepers and standing in place can become a barrier for people to participate that are community members and can speak directly to their experience.

From the interview data it is apparent that the role of standing in place is not taken lightly by non-profit leaders. They put much effort into preparing for and fulfilling this role. They hoped that governments would begin to put in similar effort - first, to begin to build their own relationships directly with the marginalized, and second to ensure that engagements are designed to provide space for community members to participate directly. Interviewees indicated that they are interested and willing to assist the government with this work with the aim of having more community members involved in public engagement.

Advocacy is a principal element of the representation that is fulfilled by non-profit leaders. Acting as advocates is highlighted by Smith and Pekkanen (2012) as an important part of the work of non-profits. The concept of advocacy as described by these authors is like the role identified during interviews which is highlighted in the results as giving voice. Non-profit leaders represent marginalized communities by giving voice to the needs, concerns and values of marginalized communities that they serve. These leaders do this by using well informed arguments and their knowledge of government to advocate for changes that the government will understand and can envision being implemented. These changes could include action articulated through potential policy action, program implementation or service delivery. Non-profit leaders can often give voice and articulate how the needs of the community could be fulfilled through government action related to policy, programs and service. This can make public engagements that utilize non-profits as representatives quite an effective and fruitful way that is more difficult when community members with direct experience participate because they may not be as successful in articulating the actions needed by the government to respond to the needs and wants of their community.

Creation of a gap between government and community

The non-profit leaders participating in this research acknowledged several aspects to the role of giving voice to their communities. The interviewees identified translation as an aspect of the role. As translators the non-profit leaders take in information from the community, analyze it and translate that information into feedback that the government will understand. By providing recognizable information, actions are more easily identified. The translation information takes about the needs of the community and translates those needs into actions which the government can do to create change. This is quite important, according to these interviewees, as a way of helping to move the government towards taking action that considers and is informed by the needs of the marginalized.

On the other hand, interviewees also alluded to feeling like they act as a filter to the true experience of marginalized peoples. This can cause a gap between governments and marginalized communities. In other words, the work they do to provide relevant and recognizable input to governments can also cause distillation and filtering of the true experience and needs of the community. Interviewees indicated that their views towards and understanding of the details they gather from the community may cause adjustments and skewing of the reality that marginalized people experience and the input that governments hear. The interviewees feared that this filtering may make the decisions and actions made by the government not responsive to the reality of the needs of the marginalized. This filtering can cause gaps and limitations in the representation that non-profit leaders fulfill.

Marginalization of communities due to representation

The concept of filtering and the limited interaction directly between government and the community harkens back to one of the topics that interviewees spoke about. That is, that

governments must begin to put more effort into relationship development to move engagement beyond ‘a fleeting affair’ and work to create their own meaningful relationships with the community. Without this effort the gap between community and government can grow and expand causing further marginalization of these groups. This is related to the concept known as relational power (Warren, 2011) that was discussed in the literature review. By avoiding or not making the effort to develop direct, meaningful relationships with the community, governments must rely on their relational power over community organizations and non-profits to gather understanding. They exploit their relationships with these organizations and rely on the organization’s relationship with the community to achieve their engagement goals. This ongoing dynamic can and does put strain on non-profits to continually be the conduit of information and voice for the communities for which they care.

Interviewees alluded to an ongoing struggle they experience and that is to ensure that their clients and the communities they serve are protected. The representation of non-profits for communities can expand the gap between them and governments. However, they also spoke about issues related to the efforts the government put towards engagement and the many times that the government falls short when creating authentic and meaningful opportunities for communities to provide input. This, in turn, can create further distress in the relationship between community and governments, again causing marginalization.

These non-profit leaders pointed to their own experiences and their recognition that engagement activities may be conducted by the government not to genuinely gather input that will be used in decision making but rather as meaningless exercises to ‘tick a box’ or as further confirmation of a decision that has already been made; engagements that do not lead to meaningful change and input that is not genuinely considered can lead to frustration,

traumatization of marginalized individuals and discontent amongst community members.

Community members expect action or consideration of the input that they provide.

Government's lack of effort or disingenuous practices can cause further alienation between these communities and government institutions. Non-profit leaders noted that they often feel that their role is to recognize engagements that are not genuine and step in to participate to shield the community from further marginalization through these processes.

Considering impact on non-profit organizations

Interviewees spoke about their relationship with the government, including their personal connections with government officials, as well as their organization's relationship with these institutions. Similar ideas related to the complex relationship dynamics that non-profits must navigate with government bodies were identified by Warren (2011). During engagement activities and in preparation for these interactions non-profit leaders must consider the consequences, power dynamics and relationship implications that are wrapped up in these activities. As Carter and Speevak Sladowski (2011) contend, the relationship between government and non-profits is a complicated web that includes funding, policy, resources and partnership. Thus, non-profit leaders must think about and consider how feedback and input provided during engagement activities will be interpreted by the government and how that feedback could affect their funds, partnerships and collaborations on multiple fronts.

It was highlighted that this complex relationship navigation can modify and affect the type of input and the content of feedback that they provide during engagements. The leaders need to consider the ramifications of their input on their organizations, government programs and on the communities they serve. They must also consider how governments will interpret their input and reactions to input that is critical of government officials and decisions. Non-profit

leaders must consider these relationship dynamics which may lead them to participate in engagement opportunities that may be more appropriate for community members to ensure control of messages shared with governments. This continual need to evaluate and respond to engagement activities puts strain on these non-profit leaders, which can modify the thoroughness and honesty of feedback, further marginalized communities and have negative impacts on the effectiveness of engagement activities.

Relationship building as underlying concept

Throughout this research, along with the key themes that emerged, the impact of relationships and relationship building was an underlying concept that tied the feedback together. Relationships and relationship building were highlighted both within the literature (Carter & Speevak Sladowsky, 2011; Warren, 2011), as well as through the interview data. It is clear from this research that though relationship building between governments and the community may take significant effort and resources, non-profit leaders see it as a key step for more effective engagement. These interviewees spoke of the effort that they and their organizations take to develop meaningful relationships with marginalized communities and hoped that governments would begin to put in similar efforts. This could, along with the work that non-profits already do to understand and advocate for their clients help to create more authentic and meaningful engagement with these communities. As a result, it could help to alleviate some of the marginalization that these communities experience, during engagement activities and during their interactions with government bodies.

Study Limitations

This study has several limiting factors. The sample size is small at five participants and all the non-profit leaders participating in the research acknowledged to having a positive,

constructive relationship with their government partners. Research that includes interviewees that may have a more tenuous or difficult relationship with government may bring different, significantly more critical views to this subject.

As well, further exploration of this topic could be conducted to include the thoughts and ideas of members of marginalized communities who are represented by these non-profit leaders. This could help to understand how the practice of representation is understood by these groups and their thoughts on its impact on their relationship with governments.

Future research

There are several areas in which future research about this topic could take place. Further exploration of how to build meaningful relationships between government and marginalized communities could be conducted. This could include non-profit organizations' role in stewarding this meaningful relationship building.

Further understanding could be developed about the implications of non-profit representation of marginalized communities as well as how this practice modifies the ways that governments understand the experience of marginalized communities through further research. An example of this further research could include a comparison of outcomes of engagements that include non-profit representation and direct community involvement could provide deeper insights into the differences of how each type of engagement is conducted and the outcomes for each could provide interesting insights.

Concluding remarks

Through this research it was identified that the role of representation causes non-profit leaders to often have conflicting emotions. As public engagement has become increasingly

important to local governments engagement provides opportunities for relationship development and opportunities for better informed and supported decision-making and policy development. These better decisions and more informed policies come from governments hearing from and using information from the citizenry, including underserved and marginalized communities. To hear from marginalized communities' governments often connect with non-profit organizations and non-profit leaders to speak about the needs and experience of these communities.

This thesis has explored the experience of non-profit leaders as they are involved in public engagement activities as they represent marginalized communities. Through 5 interviews with non-profit leaders in Edmonton, Alberta a better understanding of this representational practice has been developed.

Participants noted that as they *stand in place* for marginalized communities, they feel both privileged and discomfort. In *giving voice* for the marginalized, they see themselves both as a translator and as a filter. As they *provide protection* to these communities that they care about, they act both as a shield, as well as a barrier. From these interviews we learn that relationships and relationships building between all groups involved (i.e., marginalized communities, non-profits and government) underlies how engagement is experienced by non-profit leaders. We have also learned that this representational practice can create a barrier to meaningful relationship development between governments and marginalized communities.

This thesis has provided an understanding of how utilizing non-profit leaders and non-profit organizations as representatives for marginalized communities can affect public engagement activities.

References

- Alcoff, L. (1992). The Problem of Speaking for Others. *Cultural Critique*, 5-32.
doi:10.2307/1354221
- Berg, B. L. (2001). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Boston: Allin & Bacon.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Bolderston, A. (2012). Conducting a Research Interview. *Journal of Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences*, 66-76. doi:10.1016/j.jmir.2011.12.002
- Carter, S., & Sladowski, P. S. (2011). *Deliberate Relationships Between Government and Non-Profit Sector: An Unfolding Picture*. Ottawa: Wellseley Institute.
- Cho, M., Schweickart, T., & Haase, A. (2014). Public engagement with nonprofit organizations on Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 565-567.
- City of Edmonton - Communications and Engagement. (2021, June). *Council Policy - Public Engagement*. Retrieved from City of Edmonton: <https://www.edmonton.ca/public-files/assets/document?path=PoliciesDirectives/C593A.pdf>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Cresswell, J. W., & Cresswell, J. D. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). (S. Publications, Ed.) Thousand Oaks.
- Cresswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 236-264.
doi:10.1177/0011000006287390

- Dempsey, S. (2009). Critiquing Community Engagement. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 359-390. doi:10.1177/0893318909352247
- DeSantis, G. (2010). Voices from the Margins: Policy Advocacy and Marginalized Communities. *Canadian Journal of Non-Profit and Social Economic Research*, 23-45. doi:10.22230/cjnser.2010v1n1a24
- Flower, L. (2008). *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance. *Public Administration Review*, 66-75. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667.x
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Mill Valley: Sociology Press.
- Government of Alberta. (2018). *Profiling the Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector in Alberta*. Culture and Tourism. Edmonton: Government of Alberta.
- Government of Canada. (2021, June 5). *Government of Canada*. Retrieved from Inclusion of marginalized people: https://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/inclusion.aspx?lang=eng
- Guo, C., & Musso, J. (2007). Representation in Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations: A Conceptual Framework. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 308-326. doi:10.1177/0899764006289764
- Hallberg, L. (2009). The “core category” of grounded theory: Making constant comparisons. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 141-148. doi:10.1080/17482620600858399

Held, D. (1995). *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Homer, A. (2019). *Engaging People with Lived/Living Experience*. Toronto: Tamarack Institute.

Institute for Local Government. (2012, January). *Institute for Local Government*. Retrieved from What is Public Engagement?: https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/what_is_public_engagement_jan_2012_1.pdf?1395852191

Isaac. (2015, June 9). *Weloty*. Retrieved from Intelligent Verbatim Transcription: <https://weloty.com/intelligent-verbatim-transcription/>

Liamputtong, P. (2009). *Qualitative Research Methods*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. (1st, Ed.) Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11-13. doi:10.17169/fqs-11.3.1428

Mead, G. H. (1938). *The Philosophy of the Act*. (C. W. Morris, J. M. Brewster, A. M. Dunham, & D. Miller, Eds.) Chicago: University of Chicago.

Morse, J. (1994). Designing funded qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 220-235). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Mosley, J., & Grogan, C. (2013). Representation in Nonelected Participatory Processes: How Residents Understand the Role of Nonprofit Community-based Organizations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 839-863. doi:10.1093/jopart/mus043
- Nabatchi, T., & Amsler, L. B. (2014). Direct Public Engagement in Local Government. *American Review of Public Administration*, 63-83.
- Oxford. (2021, June). *Representation*. Retrieved from Oxford Learning Dictionary: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/representation?q=representation>
- Pateman, C. (2021). Participatory Democracy Revisited. *Perspectives on Politics*, 7-19. doi:10.1017/S1537592711004877
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishing.
- Petts, J. (2008). Public engagement to build trust: false hopes? *Journal of Risk Research*, 821-835. doi:10.1080/13669870701715592
- Rao, N. (2000). The Changing Context of Representation. In *Representation and Community in Western Democracies* (Nirmala Rao ed., pp. 1-9). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rennie, D. L., Phillips, J., & Quartaro, G. (1988). Grounded theory: A promising approach to conceptualization in psychology? *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 139-150. doi:10.1037/h0079765
- Smith, S., & Pekkanen, R. (2012). Revisiting advocacy by non-profit organisations. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 35-49. doi:10.1332/204080512X632719

Stevens, M., Vitos, M., Altenbucher, J., Conquest, G., Lewis, J., & Haklay, M. (2014). Taking Participatory Citizen Science to Extremes. *Pervasive Computing*, 20-29. doi:

10.1109/MPRV.2014.37

Stonewall, J., Fjelstad, K., Dorneich, M., Shenk, L., Krejci, C., & Passe, U. (2017). Best Practices for Engaging Underserved Populations. *Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting* (pp. 130-134). Ames: Iowa State University.

Swartz, N. (1988). *The Blue Guitar: Political Representation and Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching Lived Experience Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Warren, M. R. (2010). Community Organizing for Education Reform. In J. Rogers, & M. Orr, *Public Engagement for Public Education* (pp. 139-172). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Welman, J., & Kruger, F. (1999). *Research methodology for the business and administrative sciences*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Young, I. (2002). *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Appendix A: Project Information and Consent Form

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

3-300 Edmonton Clinic Health Academy
11405 - 87 Ave Edmonton, AB T6G 1C9
<https://www.ualberta.ca/public-health/>

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Representation and Citizen Engagement:
A Phenomenological Study of the Experience of Non-Profit Leaders as Representatives of the
Communities They Serve

Research Investigator: Corina Ganton

Research Supervisor:

Kyle Y. Whitfield PhD., RPP, MCIP
Associate Professor
University of Alberta, School of Urban and Regional Planning
1-26 Earth Sciences Building
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2E3
E.kyle.whitfield@ualberta.ca

Research Study Background

You are being invited to participate in a research project about the experience of non-profit leaders (i.e., Executive Directors, Chief Executive Officers, Senior Managers) when they are asked to represent marginalized communities (i.e., their clientele) during public engagement initiatives.

This study is being conducted as part of a Master of Arts in Community Engagement (MACE) program and is being led by myself, Corina Ganton. The results of this study will be used to support my thesis.

You have been identified for this research because you have been identified as a non-profit leader who leads an organization that primarily provides service to marginalized communities.

Before you make a decision to participate in a one-time individual interview, I will go over this form with you. You are encouraged to ask questions if you feel anything needs to be made clear. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to better understand how non-profit leaders feel and experience their role as representatives of marginalized communities during public engagement. By developing an understanding of this experience, we may know more about how marginalized communities are represented during public engagement and identify different ways to approach this process.

In the past this topic has usually been looked at from the perspective of government and/or marginalized communities. I believe that my research will address a gap and by exploring how non-profit leaders feel, experience and understand their role as representatives for marginalized communities that they serve and support we will better understand how the process of representation works and identify some of the benefits and limitations of this approach.

Research Study Procedures

- One interview will be conducted with each participant.
- Each interview will be approximately 1hr in length.
- All interviews will be audio recorded
- As the researcher I will also be taking notes that record my thoughts and observations during the interview.
- Data collected during these interviews will be used exclusively for this research study and will not be made available to other researchers.

Research Study Benefits

Your participation in this research is truly appreciated.

I hope that the information gathered during this study will help us to better understand how marginalized communities are represented in public engagement and perhaps identify elements that can be further explored and may allow for improvement. Improvement that will allow public engagement to be more inclusive and open to the voices of marginalized communities. This work will also help non-profit organizations understand more about their role as representatives for marginalized communities in public engagement initiatives.

Cost of Participation (if applicable)

The cost of participating in this research will be 1 hour of your time.

Reimbursement or Remuneration (if applicable)

There is no reimbursement or remuneration for participating in this research study.

Voluntary Participation

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Participation is completely voluntary. You are also not obliged to answer any specific question during the interview process.

If you agree to participate in this study, you can change your mind at any time. You can also request to withdraw your interview data up to one week following the conclusion of our conversation.

If you would like to withdraw your data from the study following the interview process you can call me directly at 780-991-6612 or email me at cganton@ualberta.ca. You will receive a confirmation email when your data has been removed and destroyed.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

The primary use of this research study is as the thesis component for my MACE program. The research results will also be presented following completion. If the research to students and faculty in the MACE program. If the research results are promising I may also organize a presentation of the conclusions to representatives in Edmonton's non-profit sector through an in-person seminar or online webinar.

As a research participant your participation will never be disclosed and identifying information including your organization's name will never be used. Some identifying details about your organization may be used to help analyze the research data. These identifiers may include organization size, and community served. All efforts will be made on my part to keep anonymity and confidentiality for research participants.

Interview recordings, transcriptions and my researcher notes will be kept confidential. Research data will be accessed only by myself.

Efforts will be made to ensure anonymity however the identifying features used about your organization including your area of work, the size of your organization, or the clientele that your organization serves. may make it so that anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed.

All research data will be stored in a secure location for a minimum of 5 years. Interview transcripts and researcher notes will be saved in an encrypted folder on my personal desktop computer. Following the 5-year data retention requirement all research data will be deleted confidentiality.

Following defense of my thesis you will be provided with a copy of an executive summary and can request a meeting for us to discuss my conclusions if necessary.

Researcher Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the information you have reviewed, you can contact me at any time using the following information:

Corina Ganton
cganton@ualberta.ca 780-991-6612

University of Alberta Research Ethics Board

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers."

Your Consent Statement

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature Date

Researcher Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear XXX:

I am currently working towards completing a graduate program and conducting a research project for my Master of Arts in Community Engagement Program with the University of Alberta. I think you'd be a great participant in my research.

My research will be exploring the experiences of non-profit leaders when they are asked to represent their clients and/or their client's community during engagement conducted by governments (i.e., the City or province). I think this may be something you've been asked to do over your career and would be really interested in your perspectives on the subject.

If you are interested in learning more, and the possibility of an individual interview let me know, and I can send you an official scheduling request, project details, and consent form. I am hoping to conduct interviews via Zoom on December 3 & 4.

The University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board (REB 1) has approved this study.

Thanks, and I hope you're doing well,

Corina Ganton

Research Supervisor

Kyle Y. Whitfield PhD., RPP, MCIP

Associate Professor

kyle.whitfield@ualberta.ca

