

# Where Your Agency Came From and Where It's Going

## LEARNING ABOUT YOUR SOCIAL AGENCY

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We begin this chapter with some definitions, and then move on to review the historical contexts—from colonial times to the present—within which social agencies developed. Next, we identify many of the internal and external challenges agencies face in conducting their operations and sustaining themselves. In tandem with Chapter 2, which focuses on the application of organizational theories, Chapter 1 provides a foundation for *Understanding Your Social Agency*.

### Social Agencies—What They Are and What They Do

Social agencies are formal organizations whose primary business is the provision of social services that contribute to social well-being of clients.<sup>1</sup> *Direct services* are intended to provide assistance to and empower clients and client systems to cope more effectively with the social conditions that affect their well-being. *Indirect services* are focused on managing direct services, or on changing those social conditions.

Agency *clients* are usually individuals, families, and groups. The term *client systems* is often used to refer to organizations, interorganizational alliances, and communities that receive agency services.<sup>2</sup> Social agencies are formal organizations with relatively stable

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<sup>1</sup>*Well-being* refers to how people perceive their health, happiness, and economic circumstances. It can be measured in self-esteem, vitality, resilience, and a sense of belonging and/or purpose. See European Social Survey (2009).

<sup>2</sup>Lippitt, Watson, & Westley (1958).

### Some Terms and Their Equivalencies

**Nonprofit** social agencies were initially referred to as **voluntary, private, or independent** to designate their auspices.

The term nonprofit is shared with many educational, scientific, and service organizations that are tax exempt and can offer tax advantages to donors of charitable gifts.

**Public** social agencies are government departments that provide social services.

**For-profit (proprietary)** social agencies are privately owned or corporate businesses that offer publicly mandated social services, generally for a fee.

The term **human service organization** is sometimes used in lieu of social agency as well as for other organizations that provide a range of social and complementary services (e.g., recreation or health).

structures, clear boundaries, and standardized rules. They can be distinguished from informal organizations such as social networks and friendship circles. Informal organizations often complement the work of social agencies, and may be enlisted by them in service provision.

Although, today, most American social agencies are nonprofits, others operate under government (public) auspices or are proprietary (for-profit) businesses. Nonprofits generate income from such sources as charitable gifts and grants, contracts, fees, and third-party payments. Public agencies receive their income primarily through fees and government funding.

Proprietary agencies generate much of their income through fees and other payments from users and third parties (like Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance agencies). This mix of public and private is very American.

The creation of social agencies under voluntary auspices in Colonial America long preceded the development of local, state, or national governments in what became the United States. In contrast to European nations, where most social services were initiated and continue to be provided by the state, many of our social agencies were established through voluntary initiatives.

## Chapter Contents

In the next section of this chapter, we explore the social, political, and economic contexts within which American social agencies developed. You may be surprised about how much a bit of history can reveal about your own agency's current purposes and practices. We conclude by addressing the challenges that many agencies face today, including greater demand for services and increased competition for resources.

Topics covered include

- The beginnings—volunteering and voluntarism
- The Progressive Era—activism and professionalism
- Midcentury—the New Deal, War on Poverty, and Great Society
- Welfare reform
- Agency performance and accountability
- Governance and trust
- Voluntarism, social capital, and civil society
- The limits of philanthropy and the challenge of resource procurement

You'll find all these issues revisited in subsequent chapters. Jot down any questions you have as you read Chapter 1. Then look for the answers as you continue your reading.

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## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOCIAL AGENCIES IN THE UNITED STATES**

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### **Voluntarism and Social Agencies**

What began in colonial times as a response to poverty and want, observed historian Daniel Boorstin, has emerged as a “national belief in the profound importance to society of individual and collaborative initiative” in addressing social need.<sup>3</sup> This belief is a response to the needs of the general public and to those specific ethnic and faith-based communities.<sup>4</sup> It is expressed in service to those with insufficient resources to overcome poverty, dislocation, health, and other problems.

#### **Early Beginnings: Compassion and Stigmatization**

**A Frenchman Visits America** Differences between Europe and America were first noted by French philosopher and observer Alexis de Tocqueville. What he found, on a tour of the United States between 1831 and 1832, was a culturally sanctioned and institutionalized process by which Americans initiated pro-social projects. In France, de Tocqueville noted, the government took responsibility for building museums and funding religious congregations. In America, he wrote, the initiative comes from the banding together of people in association and for common purpose.

Americans of all ages, all conditions and all dispositions continually form associations . . . religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. [They] make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes. In this manner they found hospitals, prisons and schools . . . to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling through which they come to comprehend who they are as individuals and as collectivities.<sup>5</sup>

These patterns were born in an immigrant and frontier society. With minimal external governmental or church authority, early American settlers perceived themselves to be both self-reliant and willing to trust that neighbors, co-religionists, and others, with whom they shared common interests, would be available to help when need arose—a perception that has become an accepted part of American social mythology.

**From Compassion to Stigmatization** The coincidence of compassion and common need led to the development of grassroots and other shared endeavors. What had begun as informal

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<sup>3</sup>Boorstin (1974).

<sup>4</sup>Cnaan (1999), Garvin & Cox (1987).

<sup>5</sup>de Tocqueville (2001).

acts of mutual aid in villages and small communities was, over time, converted into more institutionalized programs of social services.<sup>6</sup> In some settings, this change was accompanied by a shift in perception in which the less fortunate were no longer seen as victims of circumstances. Instead, they were often objectified and stigmatized, defined as morally inferior and responsible for their own circumstances.

**From Stigmatization to Control** In the early days of nationhood, dependent and destitute populations were often clustered into almshouses, debtors' prisons, orphanages, homes for wayward children, and asylums for the insane. Where such institutions were unavailable, out-of-favor populations were often forced into less desirable parts of towns and cities.

In the mid- and late-1800s, social reformers expanded the numbers of institutions to accommodate need. In the case of children's programs, in particular, they attempted to promote the goal of character building rather than warehousing. Nevertheless, most institutions continued to treat stigmatized groups harshly. What their managers defined as an expression of caring<sup>7</sup> was, in practice, a policy of isolation and control.

The most isolated were people of color. Native Americans were relegated to isolated *Indian reservations*. Even those "Indians" who lived in cities rarely qualified for local social services.<sup>8</sup> African Americans were denied access to many services available to whites, long after Emancipation. Designated quarters were set aside for the Chinese and Japanese immigrants who helped build the railroads and run the salmon canneries in Alaska. When their work ended, many were forcibly returned to their countries of origin.

**From Control to Professionalization** The mass immigrations and internal migrations of the late-19th century were accompanied by a parallel process of industrialization and urbanization. Most immigrants were ill prepared by experience, skill, or culture to work in factory settings. In response to the growing numbers of people in distress, and in the spirit of the times, this led to the creation of new and more "scientific" approaches to giving aid. It was also the period in which the concept of social justice, as a driving force for social services, took root. Charity Aid Societies attempted to institute scientific methods in appealing for charity, and recruited large numbers of "friendly visitors"<sup>9</sup> to provide guidance to new Americans and to administer "relief" to the "deserving poor," case by case. Some services were specialized to address the needs of children and youth, adults, families, and the elderly.

## The Progressive Era—Social Action and Social Work

**Muckrakers and Reformers** By the 1890s, an emerging collaboration of social activists and muckraking journalists succeeded in legislating reforms and in creating innovative social programs. These activists, who defined themselves as social *Progressives*, were to

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<sup>6</sup>Smith (2000).

<sup>7</sup>Jansson (2008).

<sup>8</sup>Many treaties between the U.S. Government and various Indian nations specified that government services were to be provided only on national reservations.

<sup>9</sup>They were, generally, white, well-to-do, and English-speaking women.

have a long-term impact on public policies and social services. Their legacy was a body of legislative breakthroughs and a complex of social programs and agencies to conduct them.

On the legislative side, the reformers succeeded in passing the constitutional amendments that brought into being the income tax and extended voting rights to women; enacting legislation to regulate the banking, meatpacking, and railroad industries, among others; and promoting other laws to restrict child labor and fortify antitrust regulations. Although unsuccessful in their efforts to enact an Americanized version of Germany's national old age and disability insurance programs,<sup>10</sup> the reformers did manage to pass industrial accident insurance laws in a number of states. These were accompanied by restrictions on child labor, factory safety regulations, and minimum wage legislation for women.

**Settlements and Social Workers**<sup>11</sup> Progressives also initiated direct services to help people help themselves, an earlier version of what we currently call *empowerment*. They did so by creating new social agencies—settlement houses and community centers—where volunteers and paid social workers provided skill and English-language training to new immigrants. Agency services were designed to prepare local residents for entry into the workforce and for participation in community life. Over time, they came to be identified with the fields of *informal education* and social *group work*, training for which gravitated to university settings. Educator and philosopher John Dewey understood the methods used to be instruments for nurturing the development of democracy in America.<sup>12</sup>

Among the leaders of the settlement house movement were Jane Addams, who established Chicago's Hull House, and Lillian Wald, who headed the Henry Street Settlement in New York's Lower East Side. Together with other social agency pioneers, they helped *grow* the number of settlements from 6 in 1892, to more than 400 in 1910, and from a few urban centers to communities of all sizes. With Dewey's support, Addams's colleague, Edith Abbott, helped establish what would become the University of Chicago's School of Social Services Administration. She was also a founder of the *Social Services Review*, for which she became the first editor in 1927.

Her older sister Grace, an early advocate for immigration reform, helped establish the field of child welfare. Stanley Coit, director of Manhattan's University Settlement, drew on Felix Adler's *Ethical Culture*<sup>13</sup> to promote the reduction of social separations by class, religion, race, age, gender, and politics. Mary Parker Follett collaborated with Eduard Lindeman on the promotion of adult education and the creation of a "community movement," promoting development of local networks that included social agencies, trade unions, youth groups, churches, and civic associations.

**Advocacy and Mutual Aid** The Progressive Era was also witness to the rapid development of labor unions and of rights and advocacy organizations representing women and many

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<sup>10</sup>Similar to those created under the leadership of Kaiser Otto von Bismarck in 1889.

<sup>11</sup>Fisher (2002).

<sup>12</sup>Dewey (1916/1966), Castelloe & Gamble (2005).

<sup>13</sup>Kraut (1979).

discriminated-against minorities.<sup>14</sup> Among them were the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Women's Trade Union League, and the Immigrant Protection League. Community-based self-help and mutual aid groups addressed the needs of a variety of ethnic and religious communities.

In eastern and midwestern states, these included immigrants from Italy, Ireland, Germany, and Slavic countries who congregated in specific cities and neighborhoods.<sup>15</sup> Asian groups emerged on the West Coast. Among them were such benevolent associations as Chinese *tongs* and Japanese *Ken* networks. Mexican American groups followed similar patterns in the barrios of the Southwest.

**Direct and Indirect Services** Social agencies of this era tended to distinguish between direct and indirect services. For example, in the Jewish community, YMHAs (Young Men's Hebrew Associations) focused on personal and cultural development (direct services to members), whereas the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League focused on combating anti-Semitism, racism, and other forms of discrimination (indirect services that reduced discrimination against individuals and groups). In many cases, social services for specific national groups were provided by faith-based agencies. Thus, a Catholic archdiocese might provide services for the Italian, Polish, or Irish immigrants and their descendants through the congregations that served specific neighborhoods.

**Professionalization** In recognition that the proliferation of new social agencies required trained personnel, in 1898 the New York Charity Organization Society established a Summer School in Philanthropic Work. It was to become the New York School of Philanthropy, a full-time graduate study program. As the Charity Organization Society (COS) movement matured, it shifted from training caseworkers, to providing instruction to agency and program managers in planning, services coordination, and fundraising.

Their graduates were among the first directors of *Community Chests*,<sup>16</sup> councils of social agencies, and community welfare councils. The New York program was soon joined by other study programs. Among them were the University of Chicago graduate program in social administration and Western Reserve University's School of Applied Social Sciences. In 1940, the New York program became affiliated with Columbia University and was transformed into the Columbia School of Social Work.

The Progressive Era was witness to the emergence of modern social agencies, the social work profession, and the effort to integrate social justice and scientific rigor into social programs.<sup>17</sup> These were primarily voluntary, nongovernmental organizations. There was a strong expectation that they would continue to grow and to move from strength to strength.

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<sup>14</sup>Garvin & Cox (1987).

<sup>15</sup>Among Jewish immigrants, these were known as *landsmanschaften*, through which immigrants from the same areas could provide each other with mutual assistance, often supported via the letters-to-the-editor column in the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward*.

<sup>16</sup>*Chests* were fundraising bodies that used voluntary "payroll deductions" as a means to generate income from individuals; the dollars were then redistributed to member agencies in the communities served.

<sup>17</sup>Fabricant & Fisher (2001).

## Government Social Programs

What was unexpected was the Great Depression. At its depth, one of three Americans (a total of 16 million people) was unemployed. Between 1929 and 1933, the gross national product declined from almost \$104 billion to just under \$56 billion. Many American farms and homes were foreclosed, rendering thousands homeless. The migration of *Okies* from the Oklahoma dust bowl to California was documented in novel and song.<sup>18</sup>

### The Expanding Role of Government and Reassertion of the Voluntary Sector

**The New Deal** To address the Depression's catastrophic impact, a *New Deal* was established in 1933 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Initially, emergency government funding was kept outside the federal budget so as to bypass conservative objections. The money was applied to what pundits called the "three Rs"—Recovery (of the economy); Reform (of business, banking, and financial practices); and Relief (programs for devastated farmers and the unemployed).<sup>19</sup>

With passage of the Social Security Act in 1935, emergency relief programs were terminated and new national welfare programs were established. A more long-term, work-oriented relief program, the *WPA* (Works Progress Administration),<sup>20</sup> was created with strong trade union support.

Within the context of Social Security, a number of welfare programs were passed into law. Among them were Aid to Dependent Children (later renamed Aid to Families With Dependent Children), Old Age Assistance, Aid to the Blind, and Unemployment Insurance.

Many of these programs appeared to be too radical for some conservative lawmakers. A number of Roosevelt's programs were declared unconstitutional. Others were made redundant by the full employment that resulted from America's involvement in WWII. Nevertheless, the New Deal had shifted much of the initiative for social services development and delivery, perhaps irrevocably, from the voluntary to the public sector. It created vast entitlement programs that were unlinked to the federal budget and that promised support to all those individuals who qualified for benefits.<sup>21</sup> By the 1950s, government funding had become available for student scholarships and faculty positions in professional schools whose programs reflected public priorities (e.g., child welfare and mental health). Government policies and funding appeared to be dominating the development of social programs.

**The 1950s** The voluntary sector reasserted itself, however, in the 1950s. A number of independent social work professional associations reassembled into a single National Association of Social Workers (NASW). NASW's mission was complemented by creation of the Council on Social Work Education, designed to accredit the study programs in professional schools of social work and other professions relevant to the work of social agencies.

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<sup>18</sup>For example, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Woody Guthrie's collection of dust bowl melodies in a 1963 Folkways album, re-released by Buddha Records in 2000.

<sup>19</sup>This was in deference to the, then, prevailing notions of Federalism, with clear divides between the rights and responsibilities of the states and the federal (federated) government. See Drake & Nelson (1999).

<sup>20</sup>Jansson (2005).

<sup>21</sup>Jansson (2008).



The United Way of America and its local affiliates replaced the Community Chest's outdated Red Feather campaign with a new and more inclusive Torch Drive.<sup>22</sup> Local Chests and United Ways were federated structures of voluntary social agencies that agreed to pool their fundraising efforts during annual campaign periods and to limit their independent fundraising efforts at other times of the year. United Way agencies—in as many as 1,200 communities—succeeded in setting practice standards for fundraising, in generating systematic planning efforts to address unmet needs and plug service gaps, and in coordinating the delivery services of member agencies, where appropriate.

The United Way continued the Community Chest's innovative method of fundraising through payroll deductions. However, it used more inclusive approaches to engaging donors and other players in decisions about community funding priorities, and increased the range of organizations and programs that qualified for local United Way support.<sup>23</sup>

### Social Justice and Social Services<sup>24</sup>

**The War on Poverty** By the 1960s, it was clear that earlier efforts to professionalize direct and indirect services (like fundraising) fell far short of addressing all of America's social and economic inequalities. Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962) contributed to the growing awareness of America's enduring poverty and inequality. His was one of the many voices that helped set the stage for the federal government's War on Poverty, which included John F. Kennedy's New Frontier and Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs. The civil rights movement,<sup>25</sup> which had taken root after the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, pushed the federal government into adopting programs of social and legal reform aimed at equalizing opportunities for all Americans. Many of the new programs required extensive citizen participation and consumer involvement in program governance.

Discriminated-against minorities were encouraged to participate in change efforts. Kennedy's Office of Economic Opportunities (OEO) required community participation in the governance of OEO-supported Community Action Agencies (CAAs). CAA boards were expected to set aside one third of their seats for elected representatives of the populations served. The other two thirds were to represent collaborating agencies, funders, and other community interests. The notion of having a "three-legged stool" on which agency governance rests was also incorporated into the Model Cities and other programs during the Johnson years. It was replicated by many nongovernmental social agencies, such as local United Way affiliates<sup>26</sup> and other federated as well as independent social agencies.

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<sup>22</sup>Both the *Red Feather* and the *Torch* symbols were efforts to generate brand recognition for each organization's fundraising campaigns.

<sup>23</sup>Brilliant (1990).

<sup>24</sup>The historical contexts that gave rise to and shaped many of the programs described in this section are addressed in Jansson (2008).

<sup>25</sup>Dierenfield (2008).

<sup>26</sup>The three-legged stool approach was adapted (not adopted) by many local United Ways in an effort to further shift community policy making from member agencies to the broader community.



Model Cities and Community Action Agencies trained and employed community residents as paraprofessionals in the delivery of services. In other public social agencies, however, client participation in governance was not achieved without a struggle. For example, in the mid-1960s, clients organized into *welfare rights* groups that pressed for a voice in the governance of county, state, and local public welfare agencies.<sup>27</sup>

**Pharmacology and the Continued Demise of Institutional Care** The Community Mental Health Act of 1963 was an integral component of JFK's New Frontier package. Like other programs, it focused on community care and involvement as the key to intervention. However, the deinstitutionalization of mental patients it promoted could not have succeeded without the use of powerful new drugs to control many of the symptoms of mental illness. Although it fit nicely into the Kennedy belief in the power of community-based caring and change, it was underfunded. Promoted, in part, by the promise of cost savings, deinstitutionalization efforts were never sufficiently endowed to cover necessary community supports.

**Civil Rights and Community Empowerment** Great Society programs generated a complex of civil rights legislation that increased job and educational opportunities for minorities, women, and the disabled. Few social agencies were untouched by these reforms. They vastly increased funding for both public and voluntary agency programs,<sup>28</sup> redefined areas of service priorities, opened professional education to formerly excluded populations,<sup>29</sup> and expanded occupational opportunities by creating *para-* and *semiprofessional* job categories. None of this would have been possible, at least not at this time, had there not been grassroots and other political pressure. It had been galvanized, to a large extent, by appeals to morality, fair play, and social justice by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference and other civil rights groups and their supporters.<sup>30</sup>

Both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson attempted to channel youth activism and social commitments through national volunteer programs such as the Peace Corps and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). VISTA volunteers were often assigned to social agencies and to grassroots social development and advocacy projects. Antipoverty programs increased the cultural diversity of both clients and practitioners in social agencies. By the late-1960s, conservatives had become alarmed over the rapid expansion of social program costs and the growing concentration of power in the federal bureaucracy and in local programs that received direct funding from Washington.

The 1974 Title XX amendments to the Social Security Act enacted in Richard Nixon's first term were an effort to shift some decision making away from federal agencies. They provided for the allocation of funds through block grants to states rather than program grants to local communities. Although formulated to reflect federal priorities, block grants

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<sup>27</sup>See Grosser (1973), Warren, Rose, & Bergunder (1974), and Scott (2007).

<sup>28</sup>Matching every dollar of state appropriation for social programs with \$3 of federal funds, and leading some states to broadly expand both the locations and range of services.

<sup>29</sup>Excluded by dint of race, nationality, gender, and disability.

<sup>30</sup>Carson (2001).

left the states with considerable discretion on how available funds could be used. They also served Nixon's political constituency, thereby blunting conservative opposition.

Title XX transferred decision making from large cities with their concentrations of Democrats (with Democratic mayors), to state governments, where Republicans were more likely to hold the governor's office and the majority of legislative seats. The principle of citizen involvement was maintained through such instruments as statewide Developmental Disabilities Boards and regional Area Agencies on Aging. However, the *citizens* were more likely to be middle- or upper-income, rather than lower-income, and selected on the basis of interest and expertise rather than residence or proximity to the populations to be helped.

**Grants, Contracts, and Entitlements** In addition to grants to states, which could be used for contracts and grants to service providers, Title XX also furnished *entitlements* to individuals. This meant that designated individuals were entitled to grants or services based on illness, disability, and/or lack of financial resources and agencies could apply for additional funding. With support coming to both ends (to providers and to consumers), some agencies found themselves with a significant infusion of new dollars. Entitlements were often covered through payments by "third parties" (like Medicare and Medicaid). Federal transfers to state agencies were often reallocated as grants or *purchase of service contracts* (POSCs) to approved social agencies and other providers.<sup>31</sup>

This period also coincided with some disenchantment with community planning structures (such as those promoted by the antipoverty programs), which some viewed as ineffective and overly political. The planning process had become more professional.<sup>32</sup> Conversely, it had also begun to move to a more market-oriented and competitive approach to service development and funding.

### **Ambivalent Reforms—Looking Forward But Walking Backward<sup>33</sup>**

**Cutting Back Federal Support** The growth in federally supported social and health care service was curtailed by President Ronald Reagan's Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981,<sup>34</sup> which led to deep cuts in social programs. Unfortunately, these cuts coincided with newly recognized or expanding social problems. Among them were AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, substance abuse, family violence, the growth of single-family households, and homelessness. With funding in short supply, some agencies turned for support to charitable sources, while others restructured or cut back on costly services. Many agencies hired less highly trained personnel, partnered with other agencies, or sought other ways of reducing costs.

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<sup>31</sup>Grants permit recipient organizations considerable latitude in deciding what to do and how to do it. In contracts, the funding agency specifies what is to be done, how, and when.

<sup>32</sup>Lauffer (1978), Kotler (1973).

<sup>33</sup>For an outstanding analysis of this transformation, see Fabricant & Burghardt (1992).

<sup>34</sup>This was due in great measure to a conservative Congress's support for supply-side economics, which presumes that cutting taxes stimulates spending and investments, thereby growing the economy (i.e., cutting taxes, the theory goes, increases tax revenue).

**Welfare Reform** William J. Clinton’s strategy to stave off attacks by congressional conservatives was to give with one hand and take away with another. He’d learned a lesson in his first term, when efforts to design a program to provide health care to all Americans were scuttled early on by a Republican majority that both disagreed with its premises, and rankled at not being involved in the design process. In his second term, Clinton did succeed in making federal dollars available to states to provide health coverage to uninsured children. As he may have expected, some states—to save money—chose not to enroll all their eligible children.

But even that modest success would have been impossible if Clinton had not fulfilled his 1992 campaign promise to transform “welfare as we know it.” That required scuttling AFDC (Aid to Families With Dependent Children), a 60-year old entitlement program, in favor of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a block grant program. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, a cornerstone of the Republican Contract With America, was signed into law by a Democratic president.

**Compassionate Conservatism** Although George W. Bush campaigned as a *compassionate* conservative, his first term was consumed by efforts to reduce the federal budget. His assumption was that the nonprofit sector could do more, and that faith-based organizations could mobilize missions of volunteers in programs of compassion and caring that government could not succeed in, or should not be engaged in. As governor of Texas, Bush had drawn on the “charitable choice” section of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act.

Using the same approach as president, he signed an executive order in 2001 that established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) to manage the program. The order also required states to include faith-based organizations among those eligible to provide contracted social services.<sup>35</sup> Religious organizations could now more easily apply for and receive government grants and contracts, so long as the services provided would be nonsectarian in nature and open to all.

On assuming office, President Barack Obama signed another executive order extending the Bush initiative, but renaming it the White House Office of Faith-Based and *Neighborhood Partnerships*. In doing so, Obama signaled a continued respect for faith-based organizations, but placed them within a broader framework of grassroots and neighborhood organizations.

**The Consequences of Welfare Reform** One of the consequences of welfare reform was a shift in the relationships between public and nonprofit social agencies.<sup>36</sup> It was actually a four-part shift that included

- shifting some decisions from the federal level to the states,
- moving some of the responsibility for funding from the public to the private and voluntary sectors,

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<sup>35</sup>Refer to Section 104 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996. See also Cnaan, Wineburg, & Boddie (1999), Chaves (2001).

<sup>36</sup>Austin (2003).

- transforming some entitlements into annually budgeted services, and
- instituting a range of cost-cutting approaches.

Title XX established the principle of setting general guidelines at the federal level, but awarding significant discretion to the states on how and where to allocate grants and contracts. The amount of funding available for service delivery was, by design, less than needed, with the expectation that additional funding would be available from the private and voluntary sectors.<sup>37</sup> Philanthropic sources (such as foundations and United Ways) were recruited to cover some of the cost of service provision.

**Cost-Containment Methods** Cost-containment measures included deprofessionalization and purchase-of-service contracting, both of which reduce the cost of personnel, plus a variety of rules about how and when payments can be made, for what service, how those services may be delivered, and for how long. For example, TANF and the Personal Responsibility Act reduced government entitlements and restored congressional budgetary decision-making authority for certain services.<sup>38</sup> TANF also used case management, service contracting, managed care, and outsourcing, often in tandem, as ways of reducing expenditures. For example, the apparent success of case management in quality improvement in the social services, when combined with outsourcing (contracting with agency outsiders), contributed to rapid growth of managed care approaches to service delivery. However, the jury is still out on whether managed care actually improves the quality of the services provided or even achieves cost savings.<sup>39</sup>

The *privatization*<sup>40</sup> of safety net programs aimed at the most vulnerable Americans accelerated rapidly during the (G. W.) Bush and Clinton administrations. Privatization is a process of transferring a program's infrastructure (management and service delivery) from public agencies to nongovernment entities, like for-profit companies and such nonprofits as social agencies, community-based organizations, and religious organizations. In contrast, *outsourcing* can be used by public, voluntary, and for-profit organizations to transfer specific programs (not total operations) to organizational or individual contractors. Unfortunately, neither privatization nor outsourcing appear to be achieving the stated aims of cutting program costs while also improving services, at least not everywhere.

For example, few states were able to fully privatize the TANF operations due to civil service regulations. State audits of the Wisconsin welfare-to-work program found major abuses by contractors during its first 5 years. Many of those have been eliminated through tighter state controls. Nevertheless, the majority of those who were successfully trained and placed in the workforce were earning below-poverty incomes. Inadequate cost reimbursement procedures led to serious abuses. For example, some contractors received reimbursement for services under rules similar to those used in HMOs (e.g., reimbursement for services rendered).

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<sup>37</sup>Mandeville (2007).

<sup>38</sup>Entitlement programs do not require annual budgetary approval. Because the dollars allocated are based on the number of people who qualify, and the costs of the benefits provided by law, annual costs are more difficult to control. Social Security is an example. Nonentitlement programs require annual decisions about services and allocations to service provision.

<sup>39</sup>Gittell (2008).

<sup>40</sup>Bandoh (2003), AFSCME (2006).

## Reclaiming Consumer and Local Initiatives

**Self-Help** Given the social activism of the time, it is not surprising that the 1970s and 1980s also witnessed growth in the self-help movement.<sup>41</sup> Some of the functions of mutual aid associations at the start of the 20th century were now performed by self-help groups, many of which emerged spontaneously in local communities. Others were local branches of national organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous, and the Hearing Loss Association of America. Although some social agencies may have initially perceived self-help as a challenge to their professionalism, over time most embraced and encouraged the self-help process.<sup>42</sup> Today, many community Web sites and telephone Yellow Pages list scores of self-help groups in communities all over the United States.

**United Ways and Other Federated Approaches** The reduction of direct federal funding to localities at the end of the Great Society programs provided a new opportunity for United Way agencies to play a leadership role in their communities. They attempted to do so not only by funding social service programs, but also by standard setting, reviewing programs and budgets, coordinating local agency services, conducting community needs assessments and priority setting, and otherwise engaging in long-term planning.<sup>43</sup> However, local United Way agencies were never able to generate more than a fraction of the funds needed. Other federated fundraising efforts both competed with and complemented United Way efforts. Among them were

- Sectarian and ethnic federations like local Jewish welfare federations and Black United Funds
- Women's Funds
- United Services Agencies (composed of members agencies whose services are national in scope like Traveler's Aid, and others that do legal advocacy or provide specialized services for the disabled)
- United Arts Funds
- The Environmental Federation of America
- Health-related, federated, fundraising associations such as the Combined Health Appeals, the National Voluntary Health Agencies, the American Cancer Society, and the Muscular Dystrophy Association

Along with the United Way, many of these agencies were listed as gifting options for federal employees in the Combined Federated Campaign signed into law by President Reagan in 1987.<sup>44</sup> The Combined Campaign, which includes many of the specialized federations listed above, was soon opened to employees of state and local governments. A significant number of Americans can now choose to donate to their local United Way agencies and/or to other federations that provide services at the local or national levels.

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<sup>41</sup>Powell (1987).

<sup>42</sup>Yoak & Chesler (1985), Powell (1990).

<sup>43</sup>Brilliant (1990).

<sup>44</sup>Lauffer (1997).

## Community Foundations

The 1980s and 1990s also witnessed a growth in the number of private and community foundations. Private foundations are often formed by individuals or families to reflect the interests of their donors. Community foundations are designed to address the interests of people living in a specific geographic area. Drawing on a model pioneered by Cleveland, Ohio, in 1913, some community foundations attempt to orchestrate a planning process that includes local corporations, school districts, government funding bodies, banks, neighborhood associations, and other groups representing local or regional interests.

Some communities were able to leverage extraordinary sums to address specific situations like quality education (Los Angeles and San Francisco) or urban and economic renewal (Cleveland).<sup>45</sup> By 2010, some community foundations had become major players in bringing local governments, school boards, parent groups and community associations, professional associations, and voluntary social agencies into coalitions organized to engage in actions aimed at improving schools, reducing crime, providing cultural enrichment, and boosting the economy.

**Volunteerism** Many social agencies benefited from both Clinton's and Bush's efforts to expand opportunities to volunteer in service to society. Bush consolidated these programs under the umbrella of the USA Freedom Corps, which included vestiges of JFK's VISTA and the Peace Corps. By the end of Bush's second term, nearly 600,000 Americans had participated in a wide range of part- and full-time volunteer efforts under Freedom Corps auspices. The Freedom Corps represents a serious effort to engage the business and nonprofit sectors in collaborations with the public sector in promoting volunteering and participation in civil society.

**Membership Associations** Membership associations, like mutual aid societies, congregations, unions, professional associations, and fraternal or civic groups, tend to be primarily oriented toward serving the social and economic needs of their own members. In contrast, social agencies tend to define their service recipients as clients and client systems rather than members. Some agencies operate as hybrids, somewhere between membership organizations and formal social agencies. Hardina and her associates<sup>46</sup> describe these as *alternative* social agencies, although one might argue that they are emerging as more mainstream than it initially appeared. Among them are some faith-based, ethnicity-oriented,<sup>47</sup> feminist,<sup>48</sup> and social movement organizations.<sup>49</sup>

**Democratization of Philanthropy** By the end of the 20th century, about 1 dollar of every 5 expended by American nonprofit social agencies was derived from philanthropy.<sup>50</sup> That

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Hardina, Middleton, Montana, & Simpson (2007).

<sup>47</sup>Iglehart & Becerra (2000).

<sup>48</sup>Hyde (1989), Martin (1990), and Bricker-Jenkins, Hooyman, & Gottlieb (1991).  
MacKinnon (2006).

<sup>49</sup>Tilly (2004).

<sup>50</sup>Philanthropy refers to a process of collecting and disbursing charitable funds.



figure, significant as it might be, does not fully reflect its importance: *How much* philanthropy may be less important than *where it is coming from*. At one time, American philanthropy was the purview of a few wealthy industrialists and others with inherited fortunes. Over time, the expansion of wealth in the United States appears to have been accompanied by a democratization of philanthropy.

Today, 7 out of 10 American households make charitable contributions, most of which go to or through nonprofit organizations. More than half of all American teens and adults volunteer more than 20 billion hours per year. You no longer have to be wealthy to be a philanthropist. In the last decade of the 20th century, a growing number of people created their own philanthropies. Among them are family and other independent foundations, private family trusts, and even gifting programs managed by mutual funds and brokerage houses that provide a gift-making opportunity that can be used to reduce income from sales and dividends. Community foundations, United Ways, Jewish community federations, and other fundraising and funding bodies created special departments to both manage the donor's finances and consult on charities to support.

### **Economic Collapse and Reconstruction**

Just before the end of the 2008 presidential campaign, the American economy took a nosedive—the most precipitous drop since the Depression. Hundreds of thousands of Americans lost their jobs, homes, and life savings. The unraveling of the economic structure quickly spread around the globe. Social agencies were no less affected than corporations, governments, and private citizens.

Charities were hit by the economic downturn, resulting in lowered levels of donations and a number of huge losses in their endowments. In some cases, the endowments of well-known nonprofits were poorly and even fraudulently invested by money management firms, calling into question the lack of proper vigilance on the part of agency executives and board members. The weakness of the economy also created pressures that overwhelmed some agencies, but led others to respond with flexibility and creativity.

The year 2010 was witness to two opposing phenomena: the passage of a (relatively) comprehensive health insurance package that increases coverage to most Americans, and the emergence of a loose coalition of opponents to government programs who identified themselves as members of the American Tea Party.

### **Social Agencies Today**

By the start of the second decade of the 21st century, the United States could boast of the most varied complex of social agencies and services on the globe. These agencies

- operate across the nonprofit, for-profit, and public sectors;
- provide both direct services to clients, and such indirect services as social advocacy, policy planning, and fundraising; and
- serve a wide variety of clients and client systems, from the very young to the very old, in agencies that may be faith based or secular, and multicultural or culturally specific.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>We'll have a chance to examine this diversity later in the chapter and then, again, in Chapters 2 and 7.



However, while many agencies are ready to undertake or to create new opportunities for themselves, others may be less well equipped for the challenges facing them.

### Taking Stock

1. Do you agree that there is a peculiarly American style of voluntarism and volunteering?
2. What similarities and differences do you see between the voluntarism expressed by Tea Party activists and the voluntarism of those activists who organized to support passage of the 2010 health legislation?

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

*The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created—created first in the mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them, changes both the maker and the destination.*

John Schaar, Futurist<sup>52</sup>

Historically, social agencies have adapted to the environmental challenges presented by changing social and economic conditions, public policies, and the preferences of consumers and other stakeholders. Adaptation can be passive or active. The Progressives were hardly passive. The Great Society programs required imagination and drive to initiate and to conduct.

For many social agencies, current challenges will provide new options. Those unable to adapt may be marginalized or become absorbed into other systems.

In this section, we will explore the potential impact on social agencies of (1) increases in pluralism and diversity; (2) changing perceptions of social justice; (3) the prominence of professionalism, growth of volunteerism, and expansion of civil society; (4) opportunities to transform and improve services and operations; and (5) pressures to clarify issues of governance and accountability.

### Pluralism and Diversity

In the United States, the terms pluralism and diversity are used to describe a society populated by people who differ on the basis of national origin, ethnicity, race, religious affiliation, and other designations like age and gender. In popular usage, the term *pluralism* appears to refer primarily to religious diversity, whereas *multiculturalism* refers to cultural diversity.

<sup>52</sup>Schaar (1961).

## Age and Gender

**Gender** Social agencies are gendered. About 4 in 5 social agency practitioners are women. This overrepresentation may be associated with feminist management perspectives that emphasize consensus and collaboration over hierarchy in decision making in some agencies. Although discrepancies in pay and differential job assignments between men and women continue, a glass ceiling in management and board leadership positions appears to have been breached, if not fully removed. Some agencies currently face the challenge of recruiting more men into practitioner roles, especially where the lack of male role models may contribute to the perception that agency services are female oriented.<sup>53</sup>

**Generational Differences** In many social agencies, paid employees and volunteers may represent as many as four distinct generations. Those born before the end of World War II may be aware of the impact of the war years and the Great Depression on friends, families, and social programs. Some may have played leadership roles in the development of their professions and social agencies. *Baby Boomers*—born between 1946 and 1964—experienced the unrest surrounding the Korean and early Vietnam wars. They shared the hopes expressed in the civil rights and women’s liberation movements. Many defined themselves through Woodstock, the sexual revolution, and the folk and rock music of the times.

Although many *Generation Xers*, born between 1965 and 1981, take the civil rights and sexual revolutions for granted, they benefited from broadly accessible higher education and the availability of computers, cell phones, and other technological innovations. A new generation, the *Millennials*, born after 1982, may be the first of the networked generations. Although Generation Xers and Millennials are sometimes referred to as an *emergent* workforce, that label is perhaps less associated with specific generations than with a mind-set characterized by self-reliance, a distaste for hierarchy, and a preference for new experiences over job stability.

Whatever their chronological ages, members of the emergent workforce are more likely than others to redirect their loyalties from employers to consumers and clients and to seek a more spiritual workplace. They are less likely to accept traditional gender roles, and are more apt to want to take charge of their own career directions. Theirs is a mind-set that appears to be growing at an accelerating rate.<sup>54</sup> If so, it is likely to have a significant impact on agency board and management practice.

## Cultural and Religious Diversity

As is true of their client populations, social agencies have become increasingly multicultural and religiously diverse. Although most agencies are nonsectarian, some orient their services to specific faith-based communities. Confronted with changing community demographics, some have made special efforts to expand their ethnic diversity. Reaching out to underserved or more needy minorities may require recruiting professional staff members and board members who are familiar with minority cultures and proficient in their languages.

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<sup>53</sup>For a general analysis of jobs and gender, see Acker (1990).

<sup>54</sup>Harding (2000).

**Sectarian Agencies—Diversity and Pluralism** Until the mid-20th century, Americans could comfortably refer to their Judeo-Christian heritage, although Jews made up less than 3 percent of the population, and Protestant denominations predominated among Christian populations in all but dense urban centers. Since the early 1970s, however, the American religious landscape has become settled by a wide variety of imported and homegrown alternatives, among them Islam, Hinduism, Mormonism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Scientology, Animism, and others. Among all industrialized societies, Americans are the most likely to be religiously identified and/or to participate in congregational activities.

Religious *diversity* (a descriptor) is not the same as religious *pluralism* (a goal), which is actively pursued by some social agencies. Those agencies may view religious diversity as enriching society, and/or as supportive of personal and spiritual growth and contributing to tolerance and social harmony.

Because the first settlers in the 13 colonies that became the United States were predominantly Protestant, Williams notes, American organizational frameworks were premised on an institutional logic that parallels the values expressed in Protestant denominations. They share a predilection toward voluntarism, locality orientation, and freedom of choice. He questions whether today's new immigrants—many with non-Western religious traditions—can adapt to these cultural forms, or if American civil society will be able incorporate new Americans' traditional approaches of social participation.<sup>55</sup>

**Multicultural Agencies and Multiculturalism** *Multiculturalism* in the United States is generally about both ethnicity and race. The term is used both descriptively and prescriptively. *Descriptively*, it refers to a number of cultures, generally existing side by side or in interaction within society, and within such specific organizations as social agencies. *Prescriptively*, it refers to a doctrine (or at least a norm) that celebrates the coexistence of multiple cultures, or provides for the support for the promotion of cultural continuity.

The promotion of cultural continuity appears to be replacing an earlier emphasis on the values of the *melting pot*. The melting pot (which some refer to as a *smelting pot*) is a metaphor for a process integrating a heterogeneous population into a new identity, in effect leading to assimilation and loss or rejection of former identities. The melting pot, as an ideal, is rejected by proponents of multiculturalism who prefer the metaphor of a *salad bowl* with its distinct separate components, all of which contribute to and enrich the whole.

Describing America as a melting pot or salad bowl is a matter of perception. Prescribing one or the other is another matter—one that can generate conflicting and contradictory practices in social agencies. According to sociologist Nathan Glazer,<sup>56</sup> the apparent prominence of multicultural doctrines in some schools may actually disadvantage those they are designed to help. Celebrating difference, he notes, can actually prolong disadvantage and rob specific groups of their legitimate pride in “making it” in American society. Glazer admits his ambivalence in coming to this conclusion and describes his somewhat contradictory efforts to strengthen multiculturalism in some New York schools. Many social agencies may be experiencing a similar ambivalence.

<sup>55</sup>Williams (2007).

<sup>56</sup>Glazer (1997).

## Advocacy and Social Justice

### Cause Advocacy and Advocating for Specific Populations

Social agencies often advocate for populations and causes, sometimes in collaboration with other agencies, and with a variety of other players. Among them are environmental and civil rights groups, faith-based organizations, neighborhood councils, unions, corporations, foundations, and professional associations.

Social advocacy is often aimed at righting some wrong, at promoting social justice by overcoming the consequences of inequities in access to income and services. These inequities are often based on discrimination against persons or groups stigmatized by age, gender, race, ethnicity, place of birth, religion, disability, or other factors.<sup>57</sup> However, not everyone agrees on what to advocate for. The melting pot/salad bowl is a case in point.

### When Cause Advocacy Runs Into Opponents of Helping Those in Need

A recent book by Harvard economists Alesina and Glaeser demonstrates that the disparity in government expenditure on social welfare between the United States and Europe can be explained by America's greater ethnic diversity. They marshal evidence that shows a higher degree of political conservatism and less income distribution in countries with large ethnic and racial minorities.

It is too early to assess the impact of the economic downturn of 2008. The Obama administration's initial advocacy of health benefits for all, to be paid for by higher taxes on the rich, ran, initially, into resistance from members of the grassroots *Tea Party* and others who could most benefit. The reason may well be found in a fear that benefits to the underserving (i.e., minorities) would be paid for by the more deserving. Although the Great Depression led to passage of social security and a host of entitlements, it appears unlikely that the downturn will lead to a European style of social democracy which includes more entitlements and more income redistribution between the very rich and the less affluent.

Ongoing difficulties in achieving national consensus (or major reforms in the political system) appear to have been assured by the nation's Founders. They not only committed the nation to religious freedom by refusing to endorse a single religion, but also set the stage for American voluntarism by decentralizing decision-making authority in their political system.<sup>58</sup>

Today, the American Constitution continues to support a form of governance that distributes power between national, state, and locality authorities, and between their executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. Both the separation of church and state and the political system were designed to protect citizens against the abuse of power. Against this background, social advocacy is both necessary and exceedingly difficult.

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<sup>57</sup>For an analysis of social justice programs in the social and health services, see Wronka (2007). For a range of philosophical and social science perspectives on social justice, see Craig, Burchardt, & Gordon (2008). For an analysis of the systematic discrimination against minorities in social welfare, see Jimenez (2009).

<sup>58</sup>Lipset (1996).

## Professionalism, Volunteerism, and Civil Society

Social work and social agencies appear to be inextricably linked. However, in many social agencies, the mix of personnel includes social workers and nonsocial workers, paid staff and volunteers, professionals and nonprofessionals.

### Professionalism and Professionalization

The kinds of work conducted by professionals in many social agencies—casework, group work, community organization, and social administration—parallel the specializations that emerged in many university-based schools of social work. As the issues addressed by social agencies become more varied and complex, and the technologies used require new areas of expertise, many social agencies employ professionals from a wider variety of occupations.

Increasing an agency's professionalism can be costly. Because of their specialized education, professionals can command higher incomes than persons with less training. Hiring professionals from different occupations may require differential salary rates for persons assigned to similar tasks. Hiring highly trained professionals and investing in their continuing education, both of which can be used as measures of agency professionalism, come at a price. The price can be calculated in dollar costs or in degree of separation between professionals and clients, especially when training and cultural experience creates distance between them.

Some agencies address the cost issue by simultaneously pursuing strategies of professionalization and deprofessionalization. They do so through shared practice arrangements that involve highly trained professionals working in collaboration with paraprofessionals, volunteers, and self-help groups, which are used to reduce cultural and psychological distances between helpers and those in need of assistance.

### Commitment and Careers

**Commitment** Both paid and volunteer staff members are often highly committed to their agency work and the clients they serve. Commitment is reinforced when paid and volunteer staff perceive that what they do makes a difference for those they intend to help, when they feel that they themselves benefit in terms of personal and professional growth, and when they perceive their efforts to be part of and enhanced by shared responsibility.

Many agencies encourage staff participation in decision making. Team efforts may be used in program planning and in service provision. Job satisfaction is enhanced when the work done complements an employee's or volunteer's personal or professional values and when good work is recognized by others—clients, coworkers, supervisors, members of the community. However, satisfaction at work—and commitment to the workplace—can be subverted by inadequate remuneration, poor working conditions, and the indifference of persons whose approval is valued.

**Careers** A hundred years ago, there were few career opportunities in social agencies. By the mid- to late-20th century, there were a great many opportunities for professionals, with the right training and experience, to move up the occupational ladder or to make lateral moves between agencies and types of work assignments. However, those

opportunities appear to have been short-lived. Today, that may be less true. The rapid transformations in service methods and priorities, instability in funding, and changing perceptions of needs have created work environments that do not always ensure either job longevity or career continuity.

The rise in outsourcing, when combined with cutbacks, shutdowns, mergers, and buy-outs, has, for many, unhinged professional careers from social agency employment. Aware that they may have some responsibility for supporting the career interests of employees, some social agencies are beginning to address this situation. However, most appear to be unaware of these changes or uncertain of how to respond to them.<sup>59</sup>

### **Volunteerism and Civil Society**

Historically, many social agencies have been associated with voluntarism and committed to volunteerism. *Voluntarism* refers to the reliance on voluntary action to initiate, maintain, and carry out a program or policy to achieve an end. *Volunteerism* refers to the willingness of people to work on behalf of others without the expectation of pay and/or other tangible gain.

It is no stretch to conclude that voluntarism and volunteering enrich American civil society and participatory democracy. The term *civil society* applies to the arena of uncoerced,<sup>60</sup> collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values. It is distinct from the state, family, and the market (including commercial service providers). The quality of civil society is often shaped by the extensiveness of voluntary involvement in the community or wider society. Voluntary social agencies are not only contributors to civil society but critical to its support and development.<sup>61</sup>

### **Social Capital**

Volunteerism, in democratic societies, is associated with the growth of social capital.<sup>62</sup> *Social capital* can be thought of as the social equivalent of *economic capital*. It is generated through the networking of individuals, groups, and more formal associations. Robert Putnam refers to two approaches to networking: (1) *bonding*, which occurs in social networks between relatively homogeneous groups of people; and (2) *bridging*, which occurs in social networks between socially heterogeneous groups.<sup>63</sup> Unlike money and property, which are depleted when expended, social capital actually grows through use. Networking increases the availability of social resources (such as friendship, trust, and mutual obligations) available to individuals and groups.<sup>64</sup> Recent research has found that electronic

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<sup>59</sup>Spherion (2005).

<sup>60</sup>In this definition, the term *coerced* refers to government or legally required behaviors, or to the ability of employers to require action by the threat of withholding remuneration.

<sup>61</sup>This definition of civil society is similar to de Tocqueville's (who coined the term) but differs from the United Nations definition, which includes the business sector. See United Nations (2006), and Cnaan & Milofsky (2006).

<sup>62</sup>A term used, but not fully defined by philosopher John Dewey. See Dewey (1899/1991).

<sup>63</sup>Putnam (2000).

<sup>64</sup>The concept is closely allied with *exchange theory*, which you will encounter in later chapters. See also Coleman (1988).

networking is generating new forms of social capital that may soon outstrip face-to-face networks.<sup>65</sup>

Like economic capital, social capital can be used positively and productively, as when a citizen group organizes to create a new social service for the elderly, or when staff, or board members from several organizations use their personal contacts to explore collaborations. Social capital, however, can also be used negatively, as when racist organizations or criminal gangs use their networks to harm others or the public, or advantaged groups in society use their connections to get ahead while blocking paths to advancement for others. Just think about *old boy* networks, the glass ceiling, and other ways in which advantaged populations collectively stigmatize others and deprive them of equal status or opportunity.

## Transforming and Improving Services and Programs

Like all organizations, social agencies are confronted with opportunities to improve and transform their services and operations as well as pressures to do so. They don't necessarily respond to opportunities and pressures in similar ways.

### Responding to the Promise of Technology

Technology not only influences what agencies do and how, but reshapes their very structures. Following are a few examples you may already be familiar with.

**Health Care** We've already witnessed the dramatic impact of new pharmacological tools in the transformation of mental health services from an institutional to a community base. These may be dwarfed by emerging medical cures for formerly incurable diseases, like AIDS, and by the use of stem cell research to address genetic disorders, or to alter cognitive capacities.

**Transportation** Improvements in transportation have made it possible to commute to far distant locales for health and educational services. The railroads of the 19th century and automobile and highway system of the 20th century opened up the vast territories of North America and linked neighborhoods and communities. More recently, the advent of low-cost flights has led some Americans to seek health care abroad (health *tourism*), increased opportunities for professional exchanges, and enabled a rapidly expanding complex of international aid service programs that involve both paid professionals and volunteers.

**Information and Communication Technologies** By the late 1990s, advances in information and communication technology had begun to influence the location of services and the means of their delivery. The Internet expanded information exchanges between agencies in need of donations and potential donors in search of attractive funding opportunities. It also impacted the organizational structures of many social agencies.<sup>66</sup> For example,

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<sup>65</sup>Pierce & Lovrich (2003).

<sup>66</sup>Cortes & Ratner (2007).



advances in distance learning have begun to be applied for coaching and counseling. Staff members and contract workers can work out of their homes or distant offices.

Perhaps even more dramatic, the accessibility of information has changed the dynamics of agency management and program design. The broad availability of information shifts much of the decision making from the organization's center to its periphery,<sup>67</sup> often blurring the boundaries between agencies and between programs. Variations of today's digitally based social networks have already found applications in education and counseling. Agencies that are insufficiently techno-savvy may find themselves left behind (at best), or left altogether out of the race for resources.

### **Boundary Blurring, Cost Cutting, and Creative Destruction**

**Boundary Blurring and Cost Cutting** Since the 1960s, there has been a progressive blurring of the boundaries between social agencies and between agencies and their suppliers. This process has been driven by economic realities. For example, funders and regulatory agencies often require interagency collaboration to reduce service duplication and other inefficiencies. Outsourcing further blurs the lines between service providers and between funders and providers. Some agencies deal with income shortfalls by cutting back on services, sometimes to the most vulnerable (and expensive to serve) populations. Many agencies partner with other providers in service development and delivery. Others change their services or approaches to service delivery in response to funding opportunities. Others reduce costs through outsourcing direct or indirect services, thereby changing the relationship between the agency and its client populations.

**Creative Destruction** The recent economic downturn has encouraged the weeding out of outmoded programs and failing agencies.<sup>68</sup> The death and/or replacement of services and programs are hardly unusual in social agencies. In public agencies, the changes in priorities between presidential administrations often lead to the disappearance of once well-funded programs. Economist Joseph Schumpeter noted that under capitalism, institutions are inherently unstable. They undergo an incessant process of entrepreneurially driven transformation, which he referred to as a *perennial gale of creative destruction*.<sup>69</sup>

*Creative destruction* occurs when the elimination of one program leads to arrangements that are more productive, when at least some of those affected by the elimination of social programs or even entire agencies benefit through new arrangements. For example, the caseload of a no-longer-viable agency can be picked up by another, leading to cost savings and more effective services. In some cases, one agency can transfer its services to others in whole or in part through a merger process. In the short run, however, a program's disappearance can have a devastating impact on agency clients, staff, and others.

**Mergers** Unfortunately, even in the corporate world, mergers do not always live up to their promise. Half or more corporate mergers lead to major stock devaluations, and many lead

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<sup>67</sup>Heckscher & Donnellon (1994).

<sup>68</sup>Meyer & Zucker (1989).

<sup>69</sup>Schumpeter (1942).

to divestment of some units. Efforts to integrate operations between two or more organizations are generally only partially successful. Anecdotal evidence suggests that nonprofit mergers suffer from many of the same difficulties as corporate mergers.

Among these difficulties are the challenges of finding appropriate roles for former CEOs, discharging tenured staff, or finding meaningful roles for members of merged boards. Integrating parts of one agency with components of another is not just an engineering task. People bring some of their former organizational cultures with them to a merger. Those may include shared assumptions about what works in given situations and strong feelings about the correct way to perceive and deal with those situations. Organizations that cannot adapt are likely to become obsolete, lose their sources of support, and/or disappear.

### **Fundraising and Resource Development**

As is true in most fields of service, philanthropy and fundraising have undergone a process of transformation from an enlightened and committed amateurism to a competent professionalism.

**The Professionalization of Philanthropy** As many donors are aware, it is no longer sufficient to *want* to do good by giving gifts, no matter how generous. It is increasingly important to know *how* to do “good.” Smaller foundations, philanthropic trusts, and individual donors often need special assistance in defining their giving priorities, just as they need assistance in managing their financial portfolios.

An increasing array of consultants is available to help deal with these issues from such specialized organizations as the National Committee on Planned Giving, as well as various private contractors. Academic programs now offer degrees or specializations in both philanthropy and fundraising.

**The Professionalization of Fundraising** Fundraisers have also become more sophisticated and professional in the methods they use. Among these methods are grant seeking, sales, grassroots and celebrity fundraising events, the use of “planned” giving approaches (such as deferred giving and the use of charitable trusts), a variety of campaigns (annual events or one-time efforts to raise funds for a new building), and the substitution of noncash for cash gifts (like technical assistance, or useful equipment). All of these include some elements of nonprofit marketing, such as fitting a program or product to the interests and capacities of funders.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Challenges of Accountability, Governance, and Leadership**

Over the next few decades, agencies will find themselves under increasing demands for transparency and accountability. Their ability to self-govern (and maintain a degree of independence from government control) may be largely a matter of the trust they can engender from clients, collaborators, funders, and other constituencies.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Lauffer (1997).

<sup>71</sup>Panel on the Nonprofit Sector (2005).

## Trust and Transparency

Although there appears to be a broad societal disposition to trust social agencies, high expectations can also lead to disappointment when that trust appears to have been misplaced.<sup>72</sup> The issue of transparency—making relevant information on true purposes and on performance available—is as important for social agencies as for government and business enterprises. Agencies will be required to apply procedures that protect the public against the possibility of accidents, malpractice, and malfeasance.

Trust is eroded when due diligence procedures are not in place. For example, boards and executives may not have been paying attention when thousands of foundations, charitable trusts, and nonprofit agencies lost all or large parts of their endowments during the 2008–2009 global financial collapse. Others may have turned a blind eye to nonprofit CEO salaries of upwards of \$400,000 for executives!

## Governance and Accountability

Agency governance, in voluntary and nonprofit sectors, refers to the process of setting policy, seeing to it that policy—what is to be done and for what purpose—is translated into programs and services, and overseeing the role of management in achieving policy objectives.

Governance functions are conducted by boards. In the public sector, many of these functions are integrated into government agencies. However, oversight committees or commissions may play a critical advisory role. Board and commission members serve as trustees who oversee quality and mission accomplishment. A balanced board might include trustees who are representative of the community's make-up and whose expertise and experience contribute to the work of the board. How they are chosen may contribute to or detract from the trust with which the board is regarded.<sup>73</sup>

## Leadership and Management

Managers are responsible for the day-to-day operations and transactions that make up agency programs. Management is positional; managers are appointed or assigned to managerial roles at various levels or work units within an agency. Effective managers *keep the agencies going* by assuring that all key players—staff, clients, donors, and others—feel they are getting at least as much from the relationship as they are contributing. They keep the agency balanced in its current reality.

In contrast, leaders get the agency moving by raising expectations, creating a vision, and inspiring others to participate in collective actions to achieve it. Leaders focus on what could or should be.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Eichler (2007).

<sup>73</sup>Drucker (2006).

<sup>74</sup>The terms *transactional* and *transformational* leadership are defined in Chapter 8. See Burns (2004).

### Taking Stock

1. Are there additional challenges (*additional* to those mentioned above) that your agency is facing?
2. Which five challenges are the most pressing for your agency?
3. How do these challenges connect to each other (or are some unconnected)?
4. Which chapters in this book might be helpful in addressing these challenges?

## PURPOSE AND POLITICS

Social agencies are both purposive and political, goal-driven and consensus-oriented organizations. Both of these perspectives are embedded in many of the concepts addressed throughout this volume, and what is embedded can be hidden from view. I'll explain.

### Social Agencies as Purposive Systems

#### The Purposive Perspective

From a purposive perspective, social agencies, like all organizations, are in their very essence goal oriented and goal driven—designed to achieve given purposes. Social agencies, like other organizations, have *official* (and generally stated) goals and *operational* (often unstated) goals. The official and the operational do not necessarily coincide.

#### Official and Operational Goals

Agencies use their *official* goals to say something about where they are headed. These goals are used to explain agency purposes and to gather support and legitimacy for their operations. They are often found in such formal documents as agency mission statements, incorporation papers, Web sites, annual reports, and promotional materials.

In contrast, *operational*<sup>75</sup> goals are likely to be inferred from actual practices. Operational goals can be explicit or implicit. They are explicit when spelled out in departmental program objectives, project proposals, or program priorities. They are implicit when inferred from staff and departmental behaviors.

Regardless of what an agency may claim to be its official goals, an examination of its ongoing activities and programmatic emphases often reveals it is pursuing ends that may nullify or weaken its ability to achieve those goals. Social agencies rarely function in a fully unitary fashion. Each of their subunits may have goals that do not fully complement each other.

<sup>75</sup>Different terms are sometimes used for “operational.” For example, Perrow (1961) uses the terms “operative” or “real” goals.

Given that resources are likely to be in short supply and/or there may be competing claims between units or departments within an agency, allocation choices may say a lot about the agency's real or operational goals. These choices are often the outcomes of interdepartmental and interagency negotiations or set by default as when agencies pursue the money flow, in effect defaulting to the preferences of donors.

### **Impact of the External Political Economy**

Because social agencies are not closed systems, their goals are influenced by environmental expectations—especially those expressed by outside organizations and individuals with significant access to both needed resources and to legitimacy. This becomes clearer when we expand the notion of goal consensus to what J. D. Thompson (1967) calls *domain consensus*. Agency legitimation is dependent on the consensus of key publics—clients, professional associations, donors, licensing bodies, partners in service delivery, and others.

## **Social Agencies as Political Systems**

### **Domain Consensus**

Achieving *domain consensus* is a political process. Consensus requires continued renegotiation between stakeholders and other claimants. The terms *stakeholders* and *claimants* are often used interchangeably, although there are some differences in nuance. The term *stakeholders* refers to those who are potential beneficiaries of the organization's activities or potential losers if their expectations are not met. *Claimants* are persons or organizations who are perceived to have the right to have their expectations met.

Domain consensus is achieved when the stakeholders and claimants come to an understanding about what the agency is expected to do. Its goals become the labels<sup>76</sup> that define an agency's direction once it has committed to it, rather than the drivers of that direction. From this perspective, goals are not arrived at rationally; they are used to rationalize a complex of decisions and actions already made.

### **Purpose, Politics, and Moral Work**

Social agency work is not morally neutral or value-free. It includes decisions about those services and other resources that will be allocated to client services and which clients qualify for those services. The rules and norms that govern such decisions become a kind of moral classification system that also spells out deservedness, benefits, and obligations.<sup>77</sup>

These moral decisions are shaped by your agency's institutional environment, its political economy. The choices made by your agency are likely to be, in large part, a response to legal requirements, professional standards, and the expectations of your agency's varying stakeholders and claimants.

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<sup>76</sup>Weick (1977).

<sup>77</sup>Hasenfeld (2010).

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## SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

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In this brief accounting of the historical context within which American social agencies emerged, we explored a number of themes that influence agency behavior. These include the tensions between

- Compassion and control
- Voluntarism and public support
- Conservation and reform
- Direct and indirect service
- Diversity, pluralism, and multiculturalism
- Professionalism and self-help
- Individualism and shared social responsibility
- Goal and circumstance orientations

These themes, rather than canceling each other out, have created an interesting patchwork that may be peculiarly American. For example, take individualism and shared responsibility for the disadvantaged. In this case, espoused values and actual behaviors may diverge. That may be why Americans appear to favor individualism and personal responsibility (ideological conservatism), yet support programs for the less fortunate (liberal solutions to concrete problems).<sup>78</sup>

We concluded by examining a number of pressing challenges that most agencies appear to be confronted with. These include

- recruiting and developing both their human and financial resources,
- shifting boundaries between agencies and sectors, and
- leadership, accountability, and governance.

You may find the exercise that follows helpful in applying what you've learned, so far, to understanding your social agency. Think of it as an appetizer—one that gets the juices flowing and prepares you for the content that's coming. Actually, it's only one of two appetizers. Chapter 1 provided you with some basic information about social agencies and the challenges they face. Chapter 2 will introduce you to organizational theories that explain how most organizations work and how you can apply these theories to better understand your social agency, as well as suggest a typology of social agencies. Both chapters provide the context for what is to follow and introduce you to a number of issues you will be exploring in greater depth in Parts II and III of *Understanding Your Social Agency*.

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<sup>78</sup>Swidler (1992).

## LEARNING EXERCISE

The exercise can be completed individually or in a small group. It is designed to help you connect what you've read with what you already know about your social agency.

### Exercise 1.1 The Critical Issues Your Agency Faces

#### Steps:

1. Review the Brief History and Challenges and Opportunities sections of this chapter.
2. Jot down the key words that describe issues that your agency is currently addressing. Hint: You might get some insights from the headings and subheadings used. For example, the historical review of social agencies includes such terms as *citizenship*, *mutual aid*, *professionalization*, *social justice*, *federal involvement*, *reform*, and *volunteerism*. Some of these reappear in the Challenges and Opportunities section, which also includes terms like *diversity*, *gender*, *advocacy*, *careers*, *boundaries*, *governance*, and *leadership*.
3. Whittle your list down to a reasonable number. You can do this by consolidating those that fit together and dropping those that are questionable. Then do something a bit more difficult. Divide them into three piles.
  - Very Important (keep this to 4 to 6 items)
  - Important
  - Unimportant
4. Review the Very Important list. Why did you select these? On rethinking, should some items on the Very Important and Important lists be moved up or down?
5. Using the Critical Issues Chart (you might want to photocopy and enlarge it) or one of your own design, describe *what* the issue is and discuss *why* you think it is important. Use no more than one paragraph for each *what* and *why*.

Critical Issues Chart

<i>Critical Issue</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Why It Is Important</i>



If you are working with a group, ask each member to do the exercise independently, then consolidate all the responses into a single list (Steps 3 and 4) before working on the description and reasons for your selections.

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