How Does Place Affect Access To "What Works?": Knowledge Usage In Urban And Rural Ngo Intervention Design

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HOW DOES PLACE AFFECT ACCESS TO ‘WHAT WORKS?’: KNOWLEDGE USAGE IN URBAN AND RURAL NGO INTERVENTION DESIGN

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
The University of Mississippi

by

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ABSTRACT

As a state often ranked last in health rankings of note, Mississippi stands to benefit greatly from health interventions developed and implemented by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs depend on governmental and private foundation support, and, precipitated by recent legislation, these funding sources increasingly require “evidence-based practices” (EBPs). NGOs must cope with and adapt to the added expertise, data collection, and evaluation necessary to meet these requirements, tapping into their social networks to gain access to capital across ties. However, urban and rural environments present different concentrations of institutions and organizations, perhaps resulting in unequal abilities for urban and rural NGOs to cope. To investigate the ways Mississippi NGOs are utilizing data to inform health interventions, I conducted in-depth interviews and surveys with NGO leaders in Jackson (n=6) and in the Delta region (n=10). While the findings do indicate rural NGOs have smaller social networks, navigation of these ties and capital exchange across them is complex. Rural organizations use their cultural capital within the community to negotiate the EBP boundary with funders, while urban NGOs align themselves with funders to reinforce the boundary. More than just individual interactions, NGOs develop social networks with different numbers and strengths of ties with different compositions of stakeholders as a consequence of their surrounding environments.
Organizations share realities with proximate parties who influence, provide resources and knowledge, and hold organizations directly accountable for their actions drive the construction and maintenance of these networks, and shape the ways that rural and urban NGOs navigate their environments to carry out their missions.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Mississippi is notorious for being last (or second to last) on most rankings of desirable qualities of US states, particularly health, and thus stands to benefit the most from a strong nongovernmental (NGO) sector to support efforts to improve people’s lives. NGOs depend heavily on governmental and private foundation support to carry out their vital work, and in recent years, precipitated by the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“No Child Left Behind”) in 2001 (Biesta 2007) and in the Affordable Care Act of 2010 (the ACA), these funding sources have swiftly moved toward requiring “evidence-based practices” (EBPs). This movement has put pressure on NGOs to incorporate expert-designed interventions that have been evaluated using formal, typically quantitative, evidence in the place of traditionally locally derived intervention models. However, it remains unclear how NGOs are currently utilizing data to design their interventions, and what kinds of knowledge these data are derived from. Moreover, the shift from localized program planning that capitalizes on locally-available resources and incorporates staff and community knowledge about the community’s particular needs to an expert-driven, evidence-based intervention model. In an EBP model, programs are designed and evaluated in a controlled setting, which requires guidance, ability to adapt interventions to local constraints and opportunities, training, and technical assistance.
Bebbington’s 2004 examination of the geographical aspects of NGOs and uneven development indicates that social networks in place can be a determining factor in the ability of NGOs to garner resources, informing my project’s exploration of difference in both organizational partnerships and knowledge usage to cope with the EBP requirement across urban and rural areas in Mississippi.

This thesis project explores the ways health-focused urban and rural Mississippi NGOs are currently developing their program interventions, whether these processes incorporate the use of data obtained from academic research, local or “lay” knowledge, or a point somewhere along a continuum of research process formality. It further examines how partnerships play a role in directing knowledge usage, and compares urban and rural NGO groups to examine the relationship between place and knowledge type. The study focuses specifically on health-related NGOs, as the evolution of the EBP movement began in the field of medicine, and research is readily available regarding the effectiveness of many health interventions. Moreover, health interventions are of particular interest in Mississippi, a state with some of the lowest rankings for health-related national outcomes, and currently embroiled in controversy regarding the decision not to expand Medicaid following the passage of the ACA. The study findings inform recommendations for NGOs to cope with the changing expectations of funders to incorporate EBPs, and to potentially utilize formalized research processes in innovative ways to bestow credibility on other types of knowledge utilized for intervention design. The study also provides guidance to funders in critically examining their adoption of EBP requirements and standards for evidence, and offers suggestions on ways to support NGOs in meeting the requirements.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The “Gold Standard”

As social actors seeking to keep the poor afloat in areas plagued with generational poverty, and in the context of government disinvestment in poor communities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are often formed and tapped to provide services for low-to-no cost, creating a safety net for those hovering over the brink of survival, and in some cases, working to build the capacity of the poor to thrive. The nature of these organizations, specifically those that are not-for-profit, depends upon a skillful navigation of different kinds of capitals: they depend on funding and resources generated both internally and externally to provide resources to attempt to fill a capitals void for the poor. Bourdieu defines capital as “accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated’, embodied form), which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (1986:280). Bourdieu identifies three types of capital: economic (“immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights”), cultural (“convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications”), and social (“made up of social obligations…which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be..."
institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility”) (Bourdieu 1986:281). The Community Capitals Framework (Flora, Flora and Gasteyer 2016) provides a model for using the capitals concept in a community setting, defining “capital” as resources present in a community that are invested to create new resources. The framework recognizes seven capitals, expanding on Bourdieu’s three: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built. As Flora et al. note, “Although some scholars study these capitals as characteristics of individuals, when working with a group seeking to improve their collective well-being, it is useful to see them as community or group properties…capitals individually and together contribute to or detract from sustainable communities…” (2016:15). CCF can further be used to understand capital flows and interactions in a community setting, offering “a way to analyze community and economic development efforts from a systems perspective by identifying the assets in each capital (stock), the types of capital invested (flow), the interaction among the capitals, and the results impacts across capitals” (Emery and Flora 2006:20). Emery and Flora further show that investment in community capital of one type can increase assets and capital in other forms, demonstrating a “spiraling-up” effect. The opposite is also true: divestment of capitals can result in a “spiraling-down” process (2006). This framework is thus useful in understanding how capital flows mediated by NGOs can create community change.

Applying the concept of capitals as a medium of value exchange in an organizational context, NGOs utilize economic capital in obtaining supplies and administrative necessities to employ a consistent workforce, cultural and human capital to build internal staff expertise and employ outside consultants to design and deliver effective services, and social capital to participate in the complex network of organizations and institutions involved in development work. Because most NGOs do not reap economic profits for their work, as for profit corporations
do, in order to function they engage in exchanges of financial capital through grant funding and donations, and develop a complex network of cultural, human, and social capitals to access the skills, expertise, and manpower to carry out their missions. Although some NGOs engage in fee for service operations, financial capital is generally gained by NGOs who are also nonprofits in two ways: one is the process of grant acquisition, usually a competitive process, and the other is through fundraising by soliciting private donations, or holding special events or campaigns. For those competing for grants, in order to gain status as an organization capable of managing public and private funding while maintaining trust and legitimacy in the community, acts that are sometimes directly opposed in areas with a history of oppression from the wealthy and the state, NGOs must constantly build their social capital. Among NGOs and funders, social capital directly facilitates the exchange of economic capital, requiring mutually beneficial relationships of varying formality that center on the idea that NGOs receiving funding will carry out effective interventions, and funders will reap the reputational benefits of affecting positive community exchange (Portes 1998). Lastly, funding organizations must be able to assure their donors, or the taxpayers in the case of government funders, that they are good stewards of their dollars, requiring standards to be developed for decisions on who to fund. Within this field of capital exchanges, one major source of economic capital for NGOs, government and private foundation grants, has recently undergone a gradual movement toward the requirement of evidence-based practices (EBPs), an attempt by funders to assure donors, the public, and political leaders that their money is being spent to implement “what works.” Precipitated by the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“No Child Left Behind”) of 2001, and the Affordable Care Act of 2010 (the ACA), major sources of funding for educational and healthcare NGOs, EBPs are increasingly required in program design for grant proposals, along with stringent
evaluation and performance measurement standards for funded programs (Biesta 2007). Private foundations have also begun to show stronger preference for proposals that include more rigorous evidence and evaluation, with organizations such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2006) pioneering extensive training and technical support on concepts such as the logic model to shape NGO intervention development to accommodate increasing evaluation expectations. The definition of “evidence” in this context is conceptualized as a value scale of information derived from program evaluation impact studies, with the “gold standard” of evidence set by many government funders defined specifically as randomized control trials (RCTs). Donaldson traces the evolution of this standard back to the 1970s as a movement toward an “experimenting society:” the concept “involved rational decision making by politicians based on hard-headed tests of bold social programs designed to improve society. The hard-headed tests [Campbell] envisioned were called randomized experiments and were focused on maximizing bias control in an effort to provide unambiguous causal inferences about the effects of social reforms” (Donaldson 2009:3). Within the NGO sector, an entire knowledge infrastructure has been constructed to accommodate the supremacy of RCTs:

The increased push to use only programs and practices ‘that work’ (meaning those for which evidence of effectiveness has been shown by way of at least one RCT) has catalyzed the proliferation of evidence clearinghouses, which establish criteria for what counts as credible evidence and then rank programs or other interventions accordingly (Archibald 2015:138).

The language and emphasis around RCT as a “gold standard,” as Donaldson points out, is an attempt to minimize “bias” in decision making regarding social policy; it can be deduced that “non-scientific” knowledges about what interventions are effective are flawed or contaminated.

The choice of RCT as the “gold standard” can be understood as boundary work (Lamont and Molnar 2002) within the field, with funding agencies using the requirement of EBPs to both
establish their role as arbiters of “what works,” and to reassure donors that their dollars are being stowed responsibly. Gieryn describes a parallel process within science: as scientists construct a boundary between what is considered “science” and what is not, they ensure their role as scientific experts, control the distribution of resources delineated for scientists within the group, and protect the bounded discipline from interference from non-scientists (Gieryn 1983). As public scrutiny of funding sources increases with the persistence of social problems NGO interventions are supposed to be solving, the state, followed by large private foundations, relies more strongly on this scaffolding of science to justify continued funding, maintaining that funding decisions are valid because they are made utilizing objective evaluation (Gauchat 2015). “Objectivity” confers an air of morality to the RCT standard (Brekhus 2015), insinuating that NGOs and funders should not contaminate their decisions and program design with subjective, irrational, unscientific elements, another mechanism to reinforce the boundary.

Adoption of EBPs is encouraged throughout the ACA, and several grant opportunities governed by this act require a majority of grantees implement EBPs within their programming (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 2010). This movement has spread among other governmental funding sources that support NGOs’ work in the health care sector, such as the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which states explicitly in their Notice of Funding Opportunity for AmeriCorps State and National grants that “AmeriCorps grants are awarded to eligible organizations proposing to engage AmeriCorps member in evidence-based or evidence-informed interventions to strengthen communities” (CNCS 2014). CNCS specifically identifies, and prioritizes funding for, program proposals citing the highest tier of evidence, defined as “one or more well-designed and well-implemented experimental studies conducted on the proposed program with positive findings on one or more intended outcomes” (CNCS 2014).
By adopting the RCT standard into these federal grant application requirements, the symbolic science boundary established by funders becomes a social boundary, restricting resources to NGOs that enact and confirm the primacy of RCTs in their programming (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Viewed through Jackson’s Global Power lens, as the beneficiaries of NGOs can be coerced and surveilled by NGOs, funders can serve the same role for NGOs. The funders are able to set the agenda for NGOs, as they are the distributors of the economic resources NGOs depend on to function, and the enactment of EBPs and required program evaluation sets the expectation that NGOs will be surveilled by the funders, and by proxy, the donors (Jackson 2007). As Jackson notes, “Surveillance involves decisions regarding what to look at, how to view it, and the ability to mold our understanding of social reality through this act of ‘seeing’” (Jackson 2007:133). The boundary is then reinforced by NGOs, who comply with the requirement, often reconfiguring their resources, and building social networks of partnerships with other agencies that also embrace this social reality. The likelihood of forming ties is higher between two parties who share a similar view of reality, and as a social network is built upon the view that science is superior, this network collectively produces novel interventions, evaluation procedures, and funding opportunities that mutually reinforce the primacy of the “gold standard” (DiMaggio 2011). NGOs that make a place for themselves within the network have an advantage in garnering the resources and influence of the network over NGOs that reject the scientific standards, and are better able to navigate the field successfully (Bebbington 1997). This advantage might be understood as cultural capital in the sense defined by Flora et al.: “Cultural capital determines a group’s worldview, how it sees the world, how the seen is connected to the unseen, what is taken for granted, what is valued, and what things a group thinks are possible to change” (2016:15).
Problems with the “Gold Standard”

Archibald characterizes the seemingly-logical adoption of scientific standards of evidence for social interventions well in his opening lines: “Community education and outreach programs should be based on evidence. On the face of it, this dictum seems at once warranted, welcome, and slightly platitudinous” (Archibald 2015:137). However, as he soon alludes, the “gold standard” of RCT is not as straightforward as it seems, particularly within the field of NGO interventions. The transfer of EBPs from the realm of medicine to social problems faces two major stumbling blocks. First is the question of whether the logic of cause and effect assumed in medical intervention applies in the same way to social interventions. Second is the intervening factor of community acceptance and participation in social interventions, where EBPs hamper the ability of NGOs to flexibly respond to needs in unstable and diverse community settings, disabling efforts to build trust among community members. These two challenges, which put the ability of NGOs to function effectively in jeopardy, raise substantial questions as to the appropriateness of RCT as the “gold standard” for social programs.

Even among evaluation professionals, experts within a subfield developed in response to the demand for scientific evidence, conflict abounds regarding the requirement of EBPs in social fields. Donaldson and Christie (2005) documented the rift among members of the American Evaluation Association that occurred at the AEA annual meeting in 2003, with one group of evaluators siding with the Department of Education’s decision to prioritize applications including experimental design over other types of research in their funding competition, and another group opposing it. Both sides composed and submitted statements to the Department of Education (DOE) outlining their positions. Those opposed pointed out that (1) types of studies
other than RCT are sufficient for determining causality, and in fact RCT can be misleading, (2) that other, newer methods had been developed and accepted within the evaluation field as sufficiently scientifically rigorous, and (3) that the requirement would put undue burden on evaluators and practitioners to carry out the method in a community setting (Donaldson and Christie 2005). These arguments question whether RCT is necessary or appropriate when other effective methods exist, and highlight the high cost of meeting this standard, which can demand extensive economic and human capital, and potentially pose ethical conflicts as maintaining a control group necessitates denial of services to part of a population in need. Meanwhile the supporters of the DOE’s position interject that RCT is indeed possible and appropriate in social settings, with careful design and implementation.

The objections of the first AEA sect reflect the issue of whether RCT as a standard is an appropriate demarcation of “science” in the realm of social interventions. Biesta (2007) argues in detail that the logic of adopting EBPs is not appropriate for an educational setting, nor is it “neutral,” as the justification for EBPs as an “objective” form of evidence insists. Biesta points out that requiring EBPs assumes that: (1) change in educational outcomes operates in the same way as in medical interventions, (2) that research findings will necessarily predict outcomes in future iterations, and (3) that there is only one way to apply research to practice (Biesta 2007). Stoecker echoes these concerns in advocating for a participatory approach to research in community settings, noting that applications of research in the real world may not be as straightforward as EBPs requirements assume:

Isn’t it possible that any research can be made useful by someone applying its findings? That is possible, but it requires making a leap from a context in which the research originally done to the context where you want to apply the findings…the probability that extensive research applies to any particular situation is difficult to know, and therefore such research is risky to rely on (2005:30).
Archibald uses Biesta’s criticisms of EBPs to analyze three case studies of NGOs applying EBPs in community contexts, and finds that, indeed, the logic underlying the EBP requirement does not hold in a community setting, as programs are faced with addressing issues affected by complex, sometimes uncontrollable intervening variables. Programs also find it difficult to implement interventions with fidelity, as the setting interventions are designed and tested in rarely matches the setting programs are implemented in. And lastly, program staff are rendered unqualified to modify interventions, both disempowering staff and frustrating beneficiaries when interventions are ineffective or culturally inappropriate. (Archibald 2015). These findings allude to the second stumbling block for the RCT gold standard: the priority on “expert” over “lay” knowledge, a multifaceted effect that ultimately undermines NGOs’ ability to build trust in the community.

In Biesta’s 2010 theoretical expansion on his 2007 paper, he concludes that “these deficits not only raise some important questions about the very idea of evidence-based practice but also highlight the role of normativity, power, and values” (Biesta 2010:493). There is a clear power imbalance within the field that NGOs operate within, where funders control the economic capital NGOs need to provide services and remain relevant, and beneficiaries depend on NGOs to deliver services and resources. By requiring EBPs and privileging RCT as a standard, NGOs must surrender control over their interventions to experts, who control the mechanisms for producing “evidence” (Wynne 1996). This limits NGOs’ authority and credibility, leaving them unable to effectively respond as needs develop and conditions change in the field, which casts doubt among the community that NGOs are effective, and have their best interests in mind. These constraints interfere with NGOs’ ability to build social capital in the community, while
perpetuating and reinforcing a power structure privileging those with economic capital. Funders control the mechanisms to produce the “objective evidence” needed to secure funding, and dictate the ways in which poverty should be addressed, regardless of local knowledge and community customs. As Harding notes in her critical view of social science research methods using standpoint theory:

...a requirement [of value-naturalness] blocks the deployment of politics that increase the inclusiveness, fairness, and accountability of research. If research is to be accountable only to disciplinary conceptual frameworks and methodological requirements that in fact service ruling institutions but not the ‘ruled’, more research will succeed in further entrenching such ruling conceptual frameworks and increasing the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ (Harding 2003:303).

The development of the EBP standard has not developed uncontested among community practitioners, researchers, or even among funders themselves, and these criticisms of EBPs are reflected in the development of another movement, under the umbrella of community-based research. CBR, which also includes participatory action research and may also be referred to as community-based participatory research (CBPR) in the literature, shifts the power dynamic of research from the investigators to the observed, meaningfully engaging the community as participants and generators of academic inquiry. Minkler and Wallerstein actually invert the term “evidence-based practice” as “practice-based evidence,” and describe the goals of CBPR thusly:

In contrast to more traditional investigator-driven research, CBPR begins with an issue selected by, or of real importance to, the community, and involves community members and other stakeholders throughout the research process, including its culmination in education and action for social change...CBPR is not a method but an orientation to research (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995) that emphasizes mutual respect and co-learning between partners, individual and community capacity building, systems change, and balancing research and action (Israel et al. 1998) (2011:2).
Stoecker characterizes the CBR approach as a combination of action-oriented research and community organizing, not only crafting research questions with the resulting actions and strategies for addressing change in mind, but also empowering formerly “passive recipients of knowledge [to] become participatory knowledge producers, whose knowledge can inform action and build power” (2012:92). The effect of employing CBR in the settings currently subject to increasing EBP standards described in this study would refocus research on the issues identified as crucial by communities, help to clarify and understand the mechanisms of change in the community because local experts are engaged and able to supplement observations and elaborate on changed behaviors, and begin to shift the balance of power among funders, practitioners, and “experts.” Rather than simply hypothesizing a cause and effect that may not be applicable in all settings, engaging in CBR encourages use of research as a local investment in a sustainable tool for community betterment. As Kleiner, Kerstetter and Green detail: “To implement a community-based research project, participation by members of a community or an organization in each step of the research process is critical for maintaining the authenticity of the research as a process of empowerment and a tool for positive social change” (2012:3).

*Coping with and Adapting to the “Gold Standard”*

Regardless of arguments challenging the appropriateness of RCT as a standard in community settings, or the impact of privileging “expert” knowledge over lay knowledges, major sources of funding for NGOs have solidified their commitment to requiring EBPs, setting the gold standard of evidence as RCTs. Although certainly criticisms of this standard should continue to be made, and its impact on NGO effectiveness and on communities analyzed, NGOs must react to this development in real time. Funding cycles are typically one to three years, and
while research is being conducted and disseminated, and legislation and grant requirements
drafted and debated, NGOs are left to either comply with the standard, or resist. Strategies can be
understood as reconfigurations of capital exchange, both within the NGO and between NGOs
and other organizations. Because NGOs are not often structured as profit-generating entities,
exchanges of economic, human, and cultural capital are often moderated by exchanges of social
capital across networks. As Baker (1990) notes, the ways that organizations navigate and
construct ties with other organizations is a form of social capital, with both entities bringing
cultural and/or economic capital to bear through relationship building. Woolcock applies the
social capital concept to development work, locating internal and external dimensions to which
social capital exchange is applicable. Internally, structures “establish and perpetuate capacity and
credibility,” while externally, social ties concern “clients and constituents” (Woolcock
1998:170). Social capital exchange can be observed within these realms as “integration and
linkage at the micro level, integrity and synergy at the macro level” (Woolcock 1998:170).
Nahapiet and Ghoshal introduce the concept of a “cognitive dimension” of social capital, which
“refers to those resources providing shared representations, interpretations, and systems of
meaning among parties” (Cicourel 1973, as cited by Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:244). This
dimension of organizational social capital allows for streamlined exchange of knowledge among
connected parties, increasing the likelihood of collective innovation that surpasses the capacity
of the individual members (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; DiMaggio 2011). As NGOs react to
EBP requirements, they manipulate and shift social capital within these realms to access the
necessary resources to comply or resist.

*Complying with the “gold standard.”* Complying with the RCT gold standard means
NGOs must access, read, and apply research findings, as well as measure and evaluate their own
fidelity to intervention design and outcomes, in addition to the many tasks of running their organizations and existing programs. Many of these processes require expertise and time beyond the staff and resources NGOs typically have on hand, which are focused on the challenges of program implementation, service delivery, and organizational management. This gap can be understood as a “structural hole” within the field: gaps in social networks of contacts with specific, non-redundant knowledge (Burt 1992). Walker, Kogut, and Shan describe how firms build social network structure internally and externally, and can use these structural holes as opportunities to bridge the gap by building social capital: “First, network structure is a vehicle for inducing cooperation through the development of social capital. Firms draw upon network structure as a system-level resource to facilitate the governance of their relationships. Second, however, gaps in the pattern of information flows reflect potentially profitable opportunities for establishing connections between unlinked firms” (1997:110). The requirement for EBPs creates a structural hole within the field NGOs are operating in, where organizations who are not currently connected to social science research methods and existing evidence supporting interventions may cope with the hole by developing new connections in response to funding requirements. NGOs may seek out partnerships with other NGOs to share resources and collaborate, expanding both groups’ capacity. They may seek out mutually beneficial partnerships with other organizations, such as institutions of higher learning, to engage with academic researchers and evaluators for non-monetary exchanges, including course credit or research projects. Particularly if NGOs embrace the value of EBPs and evaluation, and incorporate measurement and research into their organizational objectives, the symbiotic benefits of these connections may be of even greater magnitude as they generate new ideas, tools, and practices (Gautam 2000). As NGOs comply with and incorporate EBP requirements into their
practices via social capital exchanges, the network of these partnering organizations reinforces measurement culture, perpetuating the EBP standard along with innovative partnerships and collaboration, and increasing the likelihood that organizations that embrace EBP will have more access to the network.

NGOs may also build their internal capacity to meet EBP requirements, by adjusting position descriptions, hiring new staff with applicable expertise, or by acquiring training resources for internal staff to gain new skills. This typically requires funding to achieve, which is more of a possibility for NGOs that already have a larger budget and staff, or relationships with funders that allow them to expand. In some cases, they may turn to their social capital and deepen their relationship with the funders themselves, as many funders do offer training and technical assistance to their grantees to assist them in compliance. Typically, for small-to-medium size NGOs, they do not have the financial capacity to hire a staff member or create a department specialized for intervention development and research, as this is not usually the mission for NGOs and requires a high amount of cultural and human capital. The current trend of the public scrutinizing NGO budgets and demonizing those with a high “overhead” budget (including staff salaries) has affected both donations to NGOs and the structure of grant applications, which now focus on carrying out programs instead of designing them, ironically reinforcing the EBP requirement and limiting NGOs’ ability to effectively carry them out.

**Resisting the “gold standard.”** If NGOs chose to resist the EBP requirement, they must also rely on their social capital to either negotiate the requirements, or garner new sources of funding with fewer requirements. Although EBPs are a growing standard for government and larger foundation grants, NGOs can also seek out smaller state, regional, or local foundation grants, which tend to give smaller grants with less stringent evidence requirements. Some NGOs
may choose to forego grant funding altogether, relying on private donations or fee for service to sustain operations to be able to operate more freely and flexibly in alignment with their mission. Organizations that choose to piece together smaller grants and donations may be more limited in their capacity to hire and sustain staff or facilities, depending on the structure of their organization. In my previous work as a program development officer with a federally funded granting organization, I also observed NGOs decide to downsize or reconfigure their organization to cope with losses of funding resulting from increased requirements such as EBPs, jettison projects that fall within areas with advanced EBP traditions such as education or health, or pursue projects in areas with less formally documented evidence, such as mentoring (as opposed to academic achievement), food insecurity, or disaster response.

For those that chose to seek out larger funding opportunities that do have EBP requirements, NGOs may utilize their social capital with funders to attempt to negotiate or redefine EBP requirements. As Portes points out, NGO-funder relationships are mutually beneficial. Funders provide economic capital, but it is in exchange for a “later repayment”: “...the donor’s returns may come not from the recipient but from the collectivity as a whole in the form of status, honor or approval” (1998:9). Funding organizations build their community reputations upon supporting and participating in the transformative work, and resulting positive changes, achieved by NGOs. Thus, it is to their advantage to cultivate productive relationships with NGOs doing effective work in communities, which are likely to be the ones with good standing in the community. Jeopardizing the NGO’s existing standing in the community by enforcing stringent EBP requirements also compromises the ability of funders to be successful, and organizations with high social capital in the community are able to push back on these requirements. Bebbington’s work suggests that individuals living in rural poverty depend on
social capital as a resource that allows them to combine and transform other capitals, and even are able to “change the dominant rules and relationships governing the ways in which resources are controlled, distributed and transformed in society” (1999:2021). It follows that NGOs would similarly be able to utilize strong social networks within communities and with funders to negotiate the terms of implementing and measuring EBPs to accomplish positive outcomes for both NGOs and funders.

**Place and Social Networks**

Comparative work on types of social capital exchanged across networks indicates that both connections, and types of capital flows across these connections, are different in urban and rural settings (Fischer 1982; Beggs, Haines and Hulbert 1996; Hofferth and Iceland 1998; Lannoo et al. 2012). Thus, as NGOs marshall social capital to cope with EBP requirements, their physical location may serve as a determining factor as to which strategies they are able to employ. In my previously mentioned work with a federally funded granting agency, at the same time EBP requirements and the RCT standard have been established within our agency, addressing struggles with increasing subgrants to rural areas has been a priority for training and technical assistance, the impetus for my interest in why rural organizations seem to have more difficulty successfully accessing these funds. Understanding how social capital and networks differ across location may provide some insight into the challenges, and help identify how rural NGOs may be able to purposefully direct their network growth strategies and access new types of capitals.

For individuals, location can increase the likelihood of having certain types of social connections. Beggs et al. (1996) find that rural residents tend to have more long-term (greater
than six years) and multiplex (one connection with multiple relations such as kin, neighbor, or coworker) relationships based on kin and neighborhood solidarity than urban residents. Reciprocally, Fischer’s exploration of the societal transition to modern urban life on the quality of personal relationships suggests that urban environments allow for a wider diversity of kinds of social ties beyond kin ties (Fischer 1982). Although some sociologists, particularly scholars of the “Chicago School,” have suggested that increasing urbanism is a degrading factor in the social fabric of society, and less dense social connections lead to increasing crime and poverty (Fischer 1982), different kinds of ties allow for exchanges of different kinds of capital, not necessarily representing a decline in quality of ties. Hofferth and Iceland (1998) also note that rural residents are more likely to exchange exclusively with kin than urban residents, and additionally find that rural residents are more likely to receive money help via these kin connections. Lannoo et al., in comparing social capital among urban students from rural and urban home communities, find that moving to urban areas provides opportunities to increase social connections, and that natively urban students had social networks of “higher average occupational prestige level than the networks of students from more rural municipalities” (2012:386). Although they do not seem to control for socioeconomic differences between the urban and rural areas, and suggest further research to investigate the nature of social ties in more detail, the study provides an additional piece of evidence that social networks and capital exchanges differ in urban and rural areas.

The implications of differing types of social ties and capital exchanges for organizational social capital may be one source of variation in urban and rural NGOs’ ability to cope with the EBP requirements. Bebbington’s 2004 study of NGOs and uneven development provides a spatial dimension to consider the effects of NGO interventions, focusing on the surrounding environments NGOs operate in. One of his findings is that social networks among staff and
institutions such as funders and political leaders, and the local availability of resources, tended to strongly affect NGO presence within a community, and to direct distributions of resources, in some cases even to the detriment of impoverished communities lacking vital institutional stability (2004). Urban areas tend to have a higher concentration of NGO national or statewide headquarters, opportunities to partner with and recruit staff from institutions of higher learning, and centralized training opportunities, whereas rural areas can be more isolated from robust social networks, institutions, and monetary resources. As this review of the literature indicates, as NGOs seek to utilize social capital to garner the necessary economic and cultural capitals to cope with the spread of EBP requirements and the RCT gold standard, these differences among localities present a potential inequality of NGO growth potential and viability, an effect trickling down to the urban and rural communities served by NGO interventions, further exacerbating place-based inequality. My interviews with six urban (Jackson, MS) and ten rural (upper Mississippi Delta region) NGOs explore the types of knowledge accessed and used to design interventions, and how partnerships play a role in directing knowledge usage, technical assistance and evaluation practices in NGO intervention design, shedding light on what social network exchanges are salient in current NGO decision making, and how these differ between urban and rural settings. The study addresses the research questions:

1. Is there a difference in social networks between urban and rural NGOs in Mississippi?

2. If so, how do those differences affect knowledge usage in intervention design?
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

Design

Mississippi’s NGO sector is active across many social issues, such as youth development, health, poverty alleviation, and workforce development, as well as across urban and rural settings. As the evolution of the movement toward evidence-based practice began in medicine, and research is currently readily available regarding the effectiveness of many health interventions, the sample was selected from NGOs addressing health problems and disparities.

To explore the current practices of NGOs based in both urban and rural settings, I used a comparative case study approach, using on-line survey and in-person key informant interviews with six high level staff members from Jackson-based NGOs and ten high level staff members from Delta-based NGOs to develop detailed profiles of the organizations’ decision making and program design processes. The survey questions (see Appendix A) were designed to provide an overview of organizational attributes such as staff size, budget, scope of services provided, and basic partnering and programming practices. The interviews (see Appendix B) were structured to provide more context and detail to how organizational decisions on program design are made, and to understand what kinds of information, and what information sources, are regularly utilized by NGOs to design, implement, and adjust interventions. The interviews were audio recorded.
and transcribed, survey responses were combined with interview answers and entered into a spreadsheet to create profiles for each NGO, and the profiles were analyzed. Urban and rural NGO attributes were aggregated into two composite profiles and contrasted to investigate similarities and differences in partnership strategies, funding sources, decision making processes, and data collection and usage.

Sample

I first intended to use purposive sampling to select respondents from NGOs based in Jackson and in the Delta that address health disparities as a high organizational priority, signified by the use of language about health or wellness in their mission, vision, or values. NGOs categorized as “urban” were specifically located in the metro Jackson area, Mississippi’s capital city in the central region of the state. “Rural” NGOs were based in the northern part of the northwest Mississippi region known commonly as the Delta. I sought respondents by including a recruitment message (see Appendix C) in the Mississippi Center for Nonprofits (MCN) monthly membership newsletter, communication to the statewide Volunteer Center network, and my own contacts resulting from my previous work in the Mississippi NGO sector. Due to low response rates from these methods, I also sought the assistance of the Center for Population Studies to reach out to their partners, and submitted an addendum adding a snowball sampling procedure to the approved IRB application. As Small (2009) notes, “Snow-balling almost always increases the number of respondents, because people become more responsive to a researcher when the latter has been vouched for by a friend as trustworthy” (2009:14). I found this to be particularly true in the Delta, thus the larger proportion of respondents from that area; nine respondents were recruited from the Delta and six respondents from Jackson, with one additional respondent based
out of Oxford but serving the entire state. The Oxford respondent was included in the rural group. Although I intended to interview 20 total respondents, the added referrals from snowball sampling, as well as time restrictions, allowed me to complete 16.

**Survey**

The online survey, consisting of 24 questions total, was designed to collect information on each organization’s size and scope, as well as their partnership types and strategies, funding types and strategies, and program design and evaluation practices. Many of the questions were replicated from the Mississippi Delta Leaders Empowering Youth project, a partnership between the Mississippi Center for Nonprofits (MCN), Delta State University (DSU) Center for Community and Economic Development, and the DSU Institute for Community-Based Research. Others were conceived based on my own experience providing technical assistance for program development. Each respondent, once they agreed to participate in the project, were assigned an 8-character unique identifier number, to keep their identity confidential through the data collection process. They then received an email with a link to the survey, and their ID number, the only identifier used throughout the survey. They were given one week, or until the interview date, whichever came first, to complete the online survey.

**Exploratory Interviews: Current Landscape of NGO Data Use Practices**

The in-person interviews were conducted between September 2015 and April 2016, and were scheduled at a date and location chosen by the respondents, most often in the town where the organization was based. Some respondents chose public locations such as coffee shops or cafes, as they did not have separate office space. Each interview began with a review of the
information sheet (see Appendix D) and the release form authorizing me to audio record the interview (see Appendix E), as well as a script detailing the respondents’ rights as a participant of research (see Appendix B). I then proceeded to ask the respondents 12 questions exploring the data collection, data usage, and program design processes of the organization they represent, using pre-approved prompts where necessary to clarify meanings or steer wayward conversation back to the questions. I used the interview guide to take notes throughout the interviews. Most of the interviews took between 45 and 60 minutes to complete.

Data Collection

Respondents’ contact information, interview status, and unique identifier numbers were entered and tracked in a password-protected spreadsheet accessible only to me. The survey responses were collected (with a few exceptions due to miscommunication) before the interviews were held, the responses downloaded as PDFs and stored in a password-protected database. All interviews were audio recorded, and I created a standard form for each interview with the interview questions, to take note of non-verbal reactions or other observations. Each audio recording was transcribed after completion, although I experienced some difficulty with two in particular: one was recorded in a location with background noise that made comprehension of the respondent’s answers difficult. Most of the interview was transcribed as accurately as possible, but for some responses I summarized the answer in my own words using what was discernable and my notes. For another interview, the respondent did not adhere to the standardized interview questions, instead relating several stories about the history and evolution of the organization. I also realized that the respondent was hard of hearing halfway through the interview, and tried to adjust my questions to use more concise wording. I used the responses to approximate the
answers to as many questions as was appropriate based on the conversation, but several remained unanswered when our time ran out.

Once interviews were transcribed, I analyzed the transcriptions question by question, and summarized the answers to the questions either in my own words or using succinct quotes where possible. Using a password-protected data entry form, I combined survey responses and transcribed interview responses into a database that was used to construct profiles of each NGO represented.

To compliment and contextualize the information respondents offered regarding funding sources, requirements for grants, and partnerships with funders, I also reviewed applications from two regional and local foundations, two international and national foundations, and two federal government funding sources. I created a spreadsheet to track information from the most current available grant application instructions. I recorded the applicant eligibility requirements, additional documents required for submission, if prior contact with the funder is recommended or required before submission of the application, if grants had a geographical or issue area focus, the average amount of awards, the maximum and minimum award amounts, number of awards given per year, number of deadlines per year (or if there were rolling deadlines), what types of outcome measurement and/or evaluation were required, what the reporting requirements were, and what technical assistance was offered pre- and post-award.

*Data Analysis*

The data entry form produced a large spreadsheet of all survey and summarized interview answers, organized by the unique identifier numbers of each respondent. This format allowed me to sort data by organization location category (rural or urban), and to aggregate the answers to
each question, creating composite profiles for urban and rural organizations, and comparing trends across the two. The questions were divided by relevance into four sub-categories: partnerships, funding, decision making, and data collection and usage. I approached the data analysis as a comparative multiple case study, first using pattern matching (Yin 2014) to compare survey and interview answers to theoretical propositions gleaned from the research described in the literature review: that urban organizations would have more robust and diverse social networks than rural organizations, and would utilize those resources to cope with EBP requirements. As I reviewed and considered the data, new patterns and insights emerged beyond the original propositions, and I developed codes to denote and compare these developments across place as well.

For partnerships and funding analysis, I analyzed the diversity of types of partnerships and funders, and observed procedures and motivations in seeking partners, types of assistance received from partners and funders, and noted insightful quotes about the nature of NGO-funder relations. Moving forward through the categories, I developed codes for the qualitative interview answers, which were mostly in the decision-making and data collection and usage categories, which allowed me to group types of tools used for different processes, types of information used, and sources of information. It became clear that NGOs repeatedly specified both types of information and “influencers” in their answers, and I used these trends to code most of the qualitative questions. I then counted the average frequencies of different types of codes across rural and urban respondents to observe patterns of most common responses in each group. The codes for influencers fell into five categories: internal stakeholders (staff, clients, volunteers), community stakeholders (the local public, community leaders, other organizations in the community, and the target population), programmatic peers, academic research or
evidence-based practices, and funders (actual funders and political leaders who influence funding). Meanwhile, three categories of information sources tapped in decision making processes emerged, which are based on how systematic the collection of data was, and whether the practices, tools, or knowledge were shared across other organizations or institutions within the field: informal (internal perception, internal communication, conversations, feedback and negotiation with funders), internally-collected systematic (survey/questionnaire, needs assessments, internal data collection, quality control, pilot testing), and externally-informed systematic (evaluation, evidence-based practice, research and professional training). I created these categories to focus on the locality of influencers to the organization and the standardization of observations, providing a descriptive basis for categorizing types rather than a stratified one privileging any type of information over another.

**Researcher Positionality**

In conducting this research project, it was important to recognize my own positionality, experience, and professional interests, as they have shaped the research questions and my interactions with interviewees throughout the process. In addition to my graduate work in sociology, I have served as the Director of Program Development for a federally funded agency since 2009, tasked with training and technical assistance for program staff working in Mississippi communities, and developing new programs with Mississippi organizations. Since the passage of the Serve America Act in 2009, our agency has become increasingly focused on standard performance measurement across all programs nationwide, and on prioritizing evidence-based practice, including the “gold standard” of randomized control trials. I received basic instruction on the concepts of logic models, theories of change, utilizing peer-reviewed
research studies as “evidence,” and performance measurement through the agency, and sought additional training through professional associations and web-based classes. I also previously served as the Director of Programs for an NGO in Mississippi, and experienced some of the challenges of implementing standards of performance measurement and evaluation concurrently with managing programs and providing services in a resource-strapped environment. As I provided assistance and received feedback from our grantees and grant applicants, it became clear that not all organizations were equally able to address evidence-based and performance measurement criteria, with rural organizations seeming to be a larger disadvantage. Ultimately, I sought out the Masters program in Sociology at the University of Mississippi specifically to gain research skills and theoretical training to better understand the science-based approach to social programs, the culmination of which was the development of this research project.

In selecting respondents, I tried to avoid organizations that received funding from my agency during my tenure there, as my affiliation with the agency, particularly my responsibilities with grant review, training on performance measurement, and compliance, would likely have skewed responses. One respondent had received a planning grant from my agency after I became a full-time student, but was not operating a program at the time of this study, and did not participate in technical assistance I conducted. I found this respondent to be fairly candid, and seemed unconcerned with my professional status. The content and language used in the questions hinted that I had experience in the nonprofit sector, and I was open about my experience if asked; no respondents had a visible negative reaction, most either relayed familiarity with the agency, or seemed neutral. I also made an attempt to either avoid using jargon, or to openly acknowledge terms commonly recognized as “buzzwords,” as in my experience these tend to identify one as a funder. This sometimes served as a conversational icebreaker, as NGO staff tend to recognize
and disdain buzzwords. My professional experience and knowledge about the areas studied helped to develop the series of questions and probes for the interview guide; however, it also made it easy to carry on side conversations, which I tried to keep to a minimum without making the respondent uncomfortable.

Although they were not asked to identify their place of origin, race or gender, most of the respondents presented as white women; two men were included, and four women of color. Many also mentioned they were not originally from Mississippi. Unless specifically asked, I also did not disclose any of these personal details, although it was common for respondents to ask where I am from, as I do not have a distinctive Southern accent. As far as I could tell, based on the responses and the demeanor of the respondents, my race, gender, or place of origin did not seem to negatively influence the interviews in any meaningful way.

Throughout this project, because of my professional position, graduate student volunteer status, and as an Innovation Fellow with the University of Mississippi McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement, I was able to utilize observations and findings often in the development of various projects. My Fellowship project was completed with an NGO in the Delta (not a study participant), where I researched and designed a survey that will be used to design a new program. The research I completed for this thesis project informed the development of the survey questions, and I was conscious of balancing the rigor of the data collection tool with maintaining respect for the respondents’ time and comfort. I worked closely with the NGO staff to edit the language and tone of the survey, and to carefully design the survey application. This involved me completing several tasks beyond the survey implementation, including helping to check meeting attendees in, handing out materials, and directing attendees to their meeting rooms and to the catered dinner. These tasks were necessary to facilitate successful completion
of the survey, but also to put the survey respondents at ease with me, and to build rapport with the NGO staff, an example of the necessity of conscientious relationship building for data collection and usage. We were also very careful to explain who would have access to the data, and what it would be used for, as the survey contained questions that might compromise some of the respondents’ ability to gain employment and maintain their community status.

My affiliation with the University of Mississippi Center for Population Studies also allowed me to apply this work to the development of two evaluation plans, an unexpected requirement with a quick turn-around deadline, added by an international private foundation for two local NGO grant recipients. The plans required gaining a basic working understanding of the project activities, then articulating a logic model, measurable outcomes, and data collection and analysis plans based on previous project design decisions. I worked closely with the evaluation team and project staff to clarify their outcome measures, data sources, and the mechanisms of collecting and analyzing data and communicating results to stakeholders. My role was similar to an interpreter, framing the plan as conceptualized by staff working in the field within the framework of the evaluation plan laid out by the funder. My interviews especially helped to inform the way I communicated with each party and asked questions; I was able to use the terms I observed in my respondents to gather the information funders were looking for, and to make sure the plan was reasonable and achievable for the NGO and evaluation team.

Finally, I was able to use this research to redesign the training and technical assistance (TTA) program for my agency’s own grantees, securing over $110,000 in federal funding for the program. Our federal funder has identified rural outreach as a TTA priority for the 2016-2017 program year, and I, in partnership with the Center for Population Studies, will be designing capacity building workshops in four rural communities focused on accessing public data and
academic research, making program design decisions based on diverse data sources, and using the logic model planning tool for program design and articulation of theories of change. The objectives of these workshops will be to empower rural NGOs to diversify the information sources and influencers they tap to make program design decisions. I have also redesigned our TTA program for our current grantees (both urban and rural), creating one year-long track to improve data collection tools and procedures, and another track to lead grantees who already have solid data collection practices in using their own data to develop and implement internal evaluations. The goal of both of these tracks is to encourage grantees to adopt data practices that allow them to accurately observe progress, diagnose programmatic flaws, and develop data collection and analysis strategies that accommodate their work while building an evidence base for their program models. The ideal long-term outcome of this project would be to assist grantees in producing peer-reviewed research on both the process and the program outcomes, adding to the body of research on NGO interventions while also demonstrating the success of these locally developed programs in meeting the disparities faced by Mississippi communities.

I have been fortunate to be able to observe NGOs’ data use practices from a variety of standpoints, and to have the opportunity to immediately apply them in my own work. My position as a student, field practitioner, technical assistance provider, and development professional has allowed me to address practice as I analyzed the research data, to brainstorm with my colleagues ways to change our approach to our work, and even to pilot projects such as the rural outreach workshops and TTA tracks to see if the implications of this study hold in practice.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Participating Organizations

Respondents for this project represented 16 total NGOs, nine from various locations in the Mississippi upper Delta region, six from the Jackson metro area, and one from Oxford, MS (see Table 1, Appendix F). Organizations varied widely in the area served (ranging from one or two counties to statewide, 82 counties), in their average number of clients, the different types of services provided, and in the size of their staffs. All respondents confirmed that health was a main focus of their organization, and offered at least two different types of health-related services, with educational programming and preventative care/awareness being the most common services.

Rural group. The nine organizations in the Delta area, and one from Oxford, were classified as rural organizations. These organizations tended to have smaller budgets than the urban organizations; only two out of ten respondents had budgets of $1M or greater. They also served slightly smaller areas than urban NGOs with eight respondents indicating they served eight or fewer counties, although one organization served the whole state (82 counties), and another served 19 counties. Seven out of ten organizations had five or less full time staff members. Six out of ten indicated they were an affiliate organization of a larger national,
statewide, or regional organization. The survey responses indicate that these organizations provide an average of 4.5 services each, with educational programming, nutritional instruction, preventative care/awareness, and outreach/referrals being the most common. Three organizations were community health centers or clinic-based multi-service programs providing direct healthcare services. Four of the organizations focused on partnerships and coalition-building, with two developing healthcare referral networks and two providing issue-specific coordination and support services to partners. The remaining three provided mainly educational programming and health-related instruction to community members on a local scale, focusing on one or two communities. Two of the respondents selected Hernando, in DeSoto county, as the location of their organization. DeSoto county has recently transitioned from a rural to an urban county, as the metro area of Memphis, TN has expanded. However, I still elected to include these in the rural group, as the organizations are based out of a small town within DeSoto, did not mention accessing Memphis-based institutions or resources in the interviews, serve primarily rural areas, and focus their program offerings specifically to rural communities. Some urban NGOs did serve rural counties, but all focus on the Jackson metro area as a main service delivery area.

_Urban group._ These six organizations in the metro Jackson area had larger budgets: four had budgets of $1M or greater. It was difficult to gauge the average number of staff, as two out of six respondents did not answer this survey question. The respondents that did answer indicated their full time staffs ranged from 1-45 staff members. The urban NGOs served an average of 23 counties, although one did not answer and one served all 82 counties. Half of the respondents stated their organization was an affiliate of a statewide or national organization. Urban organizations provided an average of six services, also with preventative care/awareness and educational programming being most common. Three of the urban respondents represented
community health centers or clinics providing direct healthcare services. One NGO was a large, multi-site organization with several initiatives and projects across many communities. One was a statewide organization focused mostly on youth programming in fitness and nutritional instruction. The remaining was an organization focused on creating a pipeline of services among housing and environmental partners in the metro Jackson area.

Social Networks for Urban and Rural NGOs

NGOs’ partnership networks with other organizations provide vital support in accessing the economic, social, and cultural capital necessary to successfully carry out programming in the community. Comparing NGOs based in urban and rural areas, respondents showed differences in the formality and types of partnerships they formed, organizational strategies in forming partnerships, the most common types of partners they reported receiving assistance or guidance from, and the types of assistance received from partners. Partnerships were defined as “formal” or “informal” in the survey questions (see Appendix A) using examples. “Formal” partnerships included “signing an MOU, receiving funding, collaborating on regular programming or grant applications, membership in a formal alliance, co-sponsoring events,” while “informal” was comprised of “attending same training/networking events, participation in a common professional organization such as the MS Center for Nonprofits, sharing ideas and best practices.” Urban NGOs tended to have more diverse types of informal partnerships than rural NGOs (see Table 2).
Table 2: Informal Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Govt</th>
<th>Foundations</th>
<th>Nonprofits</th>
<th>For-profits</th>
<th>K-12 Education</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Informal Averages (n=10)</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>7.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Informal Averages (n=6)</td>
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<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>9.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meanwhile, formal partnerships were fewer, on average, than informal partnerships (see Table 3). Similar to informal partnerships, urban NGOs showed more diversity in their partnerships, except for with other nonprofits. The disparity of total types of partnerships between urban and rural NGOs is less pronounced with informal partnerships than for formal partnerships, and the difference in total number of partnerships between formal and informal is greater for rural NGOs than for urban NGOs. This suggests that rural NGOs are more likely to have informal alliances than formal ones.

Table 3: Formal Partnerships

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Govt</th>
<th>Foundations</th>
<th>Nonprofits</th>
<th>For-profits</th>
<th>K-12 Education</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Formal Averages (n=10)</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>4.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Formal Averages (n=6)</td>
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<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies for forming partnerships showed slight variations between urban and rural NGOs. More respondents from urban NGOs than from rural NGOs stated their organizations belong to networks that link different community organizations, have a plan or strategy for forming alliances or partnerships, and have standards by which alliances could be evaluated. In the survey question exploring what kinds of organizations respondents would seek out partnerships with, respondents from urban NGOs selected more types of partners than respondents from rural NGOs in all categories except nonprofits, perhaps indicative of a wider awareness, openness and/or availability of potential alliances among urban organizations.

Respondents from both urban and rural NGOs indicated their organizations primarily sought new partnerships to expand current services, followed by seeking new funding opportunities and recruiting new board members for urban NGOs, and developing new programs, seeking funding opportunities, and evaluating current programming for rural NGOs.

*Resources exchanged across networks.* The interviews delved into the nature of these alliances, and what kinds of resources are exchanged across them. Respondents were asked to describe assistance or guidance received from partners on program design processes in an open ended interview question. Interviewees from urban NGOs named programmatic peers, organizations that carried out similar programming but not necessarily in the same community, most frequently as a source of assistance, followed by community peers (organizations in the same community), and funders. Meanwhile, those from rural NGOs cited funders most often, followed by programmatic peers, community peers, professional associations, and advisory boards as sources of assistance. Rural respondents identified a wider range of types of partners, offering more types of assistance than those from urban NGOs.
Both groups indicated the most common type of assistance was implementation assistance, referring to guidance on how to launch new programs or carry out existing program designs. One rural respondent explained: “…other people who have implemented that program...I’m actually planning on calling KL, the girl who actually designed that program, and talking about what we’re doing and asking if she has any suggestions for evaluating and designing future follow ups.” Another described: “They’ve already done this, they’ve basically...know inside outside upside down, and they have already designed best practices. So contracting with them, they are basically walking us through the best practices on the youth serving organization side.” For urban interviewees, implementation assistance was followed by troubleshooting or brainstorming, then program design, directed toward helping solve specific challenges and develop new projects through peer to peer discussion. Rural respondents noted formal training, program design and issue expertise second, followed by acquiring funding, community context, and organizational development.

Funders. Urban and rural respondents described varying patterns of funding source acquisition at their organizations, with differing types and multiple sources across place. Rural respondents reported fewer sources of funding than those from urban NGOs, and also noted less diverse types of funding within organizations (see Table 4). Rural NGOs also had smaller budgets than urban NGOs.
Common sources of funding. Although respondents were not asked to disclose their funding sources to protect their privacy, some mentioned specific funders, or funders’ websites or press releases listed respondents as grantees. I reviewed applications for two regional and local foundations, two international and national foundations, and two federal government funding sources who either mentioned by respondents, or who fund projects in Jackson or the Delta, to explore how funding requirements and assistance provided might shape NGOs’ practices. Federal funders offered webinars and workshops both pre-application and post-award, while foundations did provide some technical assistance, but not as extensively. This is an interesting finding considering rural NGOs, with fewer federal funding sources, cited funders as the top provider of assistance, and formal training among the most common types of assistance.

International or national foundations and federal grants require, at the least, both outcome measurement and evaluation, while regional and local foundations required one or the other, and did not have very specific requirements. Grant application instructions also varied in their guidance for documenting the proposal planning processes. Half of the funders provided, recommended, or required some form of logic model for demonstrating the program planning process in the application. Others simply restricted uses for funding. None of the grant applications discussed the process of managing the award between funder and grantee. A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>Foundations</th>
<th>Govt</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Rural Source Averages (n=10)</td>
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<td>0.60</td>
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<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Source Averages (n=6)</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>1.33</td>
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<td>5.17</td>
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description of post-award management was not necessarily expected, but many interviewees noted that the particular individual serving as a grant officer or representative of the funder was a determining factor in the assistance they received.

**NGO-funder relations.** Several interview respondents discussed their relationships with funders, and how they affected the way their organizations functioned. Both rural and urban interviewees discussed positive relations with funders that helped support their organization’s objectives, but could also constrain the way they operated. In some cases, as reflected by the survey responses, funders provided much needed guidance and support for organizations to carry out their programs. One rural respondent noted, “[I have had an] extraordinary experience with our funder…it empowered me and changed me. Made me a much more effective person…I don’t know how much is institution and how much is the particular person.” Another respondent, from Jackson, detailed how their funder provides flexible support so they are able to respond to the emerging political situation:

[Our funder provides us with] backbone funding. They are supporting us so we can leverage greater integration of the [A] model in the Jackson housing programs, so we’ve had to adjust for example our expectations and objectives on that project because we’ve had 5 different mayors in you know 4 years in Jackson… with support from our funder in that case, we’ve discussed the barriers, identified and described them, and come up with recommendations for adjustments based on the culture and the climate of what’s on the ground, and they’ve been receptive to that but they could also very easily say, try again or let’s have a better dialogue about this or what have you, but I think that they’ve been aware of some of the challenges we’ve faced.

Interviewees from rural NGOs detailed how important flexibility is to program success, which affected their strategies in seeking out funding. One rural respondent spoke about the difficulty in maintaining the freedom to carry out program design at a reasonable pace: “…it’s challenging to find a funder that’s as flexible as we want to be. And that get the idea of the, sort
of the road less traveled I like to call it. It can be very slow.” Another spoke about balancing the benefits and costs of some funding partnerships:

But I mean, stuff like that, that is the moving and shaking that enables places like this to keep going. The rural medicine people, have a lot of rules and regulations that you have to do, and you have to toe the mark and you have to do what they tell you or you can’t stay in the group, but in the meantime you get a little more Medicaid money. But because we have so few Medicaid patients, you know, it doesn’t make a big difference in one sense.

Lastly, urban respondents acknowledged how competition for funding affects partnerships and programming decisions. Two stated that while their organizations focused on program quality, fit with their mission, and internal capacity over “chasing dollars,” they described an environment where NGOs are pitted against each other for financial survival. One respondent admitted: “…sometimes I think in the nonprofit world, we try to bend the scope of the grant too much, to say, well I know it’s this, but we’re gonna do this to make it fit.” Another interviewee explained:

And in Mississippi, because people have been so desperate for dollars when it comes to research and program implementation, we do have a history of not working together. Because everyone comes to the table, and everyone wants the dollars. And it’s not a selfish thing, it’s about the fact that you have different NGOs that are working in different populations, and you’re seeing intimately what the barriers are, so you’re coming back to the funding table saying, we need support so we can either address this issue with an intervention, or clarify this barrier with community-based, participatory research. And in the past there has been a grab, a cash grab per se, and it has not profited us at all.

Maintaining partnerships. With fewer available local agencies to develop partnerships, rural NGOs must maintain good working relationships with the partners they have. Rural respondents each had stories about shifting program offerings to accommodate new partners and to avoid duplication, and stretching resources to make room when partners ask to bring on additional beneficiaries. Some rural NGO staff fretted over which directions to grow in, as the
needs in the community were frequently presented to them by clients, and there were few organizations in the area able to meet those needs. One interviewee spoke of struggling to find local organizations with the capacity to meet a dire need, drug rehabilitation:

We tried to work with [a regional mental health center]. There is a lot of domestic violence, there is child abuse, and drug abuse, and the [center] did not have enough counselors to be able to come out here. But we’re trying to work with local organizations, and next year we’re going to be under the auspices of [a broader organization]. Which will be able to provide mental health services and social services in our building. So we can really expand services. Because we need a drug [counselor]...we need a clinic.

Another respondent from a rural organization discussed the constant pressure to expand their services:

...there’s so many gaps in services here, we just took in a family of nine children whose parents went to jail, and their little puppy, for a week. They had no family, nobody to like, be with. And three, the oldest three kids are in our program. And there’s no shelter. The closest shelter to Clarksdale is an hour and 20 minutes away in Southaven. So there’s a huge need there, and [we have] often wondered, could we run a shelter? Could we run a school? People have asked us, you know why don’t you guys start a school? You guys have some part of the expertise, but you have the relationships in the community, you have the integrity of running an organization, you have been fundraising. Like this is something that you could do.

In order to ensure their clients have access to the services they need in an environment with few organizations to meet those needs, rural NGOs often choose to forge and maintain good relationships with community partners, and do not feel they can afford to jeopardize those relationships. This approach requires more than just flexibility in programming and resources to maintain partnerships – it also requires additional labor. Even rural organizations that have large staffs and fairly stable funding sources expend a good deal of extra work to build local partnerships: “Even down to the cultural activities that happen in the Mississippi Delta. We serve
on boards, and we provide transportation for a lot of the festivals, and things like that.” Although urban NGO respondents did mention the importance of partnerships, they did not often discuss the detailed negotiation involved in working with local partners to attempt to provide a holistic environment for their clients that rural organizations did. Thus, more than just a limited number of available social ties in the community, rural NGOs are also expending more resources to build and maintain good partnerships where possible with the few organizations that are present locally, adding an additional strain to their own abilities to meet increasing programmatic requirements such as EBPs.

Urban respondents described the competitive air of their environment, characterizing the NGO sector as a “money grab,” and lamenting “work[ing] in silos.” My professional experience affirms that rural NGOs also compete for grants, even among the few partners in the area, but they did not emphasize this as a feature in their work. Another representative of an urban NGO detailed an experience where even when she sought out partners, she found it difficult to secure a partnership:

And then the second part is, even if you know that there are services that are there, trying to work with them collaboratively is oftentimes impossible. There is a behavioral health private organization that works within the school. The feedback that we get, we don’t [solicit]...I’ve never met them...but the feedback that we get from the faculty is that they don’t do anything. They don’t see the students. But for us to be able to kind of work with them and find out what they’re doing so that we’re not stepping on each other has been very difficult because of responsiveness.

The same respondent also characterized urban organizations as working in “silos.” While frustrating, these silos did not seem to affect urban NGOs’ ability to garner funding, utilize data, or incorporate EBPs within their programs. Although the interviews did not explicitly reflect this, it follows that competing with other NGOs for funding might also encourage actively
seeking to develop better relationships with funders, and utilizing resources to align with the demands of funders. The interview and survey questions were designed to explore what kinds of information and sources NGOs accessed, but did not explore why they made these choices, and respondents did not offer this information. Further exploration of the reasons behind these choices in future studies may shed light on whether they are motivated by relationship building with funders.

How NGOs Manage their Organizations

Decision making. When asked, “What are some reasons that a new program might be introduced by your organization?”, urban and rural NGOs showed similar patterns of influencers and sources. Both cited the community public as the most influential, and informal sources as most common. Answers often reflected convenience polling of local residents to gauge interest in new programs, rather than a formalized survey of the intended beneficiaries specifically, or review of academic research or data. However, some urban respondents did include academic influencers such as evidence-based practices or researchers, whereas rural NGOs added community partners (other local organizations) and programmatic peers (organizations that had carried out similar programming). Regarding information sources, only urban NGOs included academic or professional sources such as evidence-based practices, professional training and research, while only rural NGOs included programmatic peers’ best practices and existing resources in the community. These information preferences support rural NGOs’ deference to peer relationships with other community and programmatically-similar organizations, while urban NGOs sought to bolster their decision making processes with “expert” sources.
Another interview question, “What are some of the factors that you would consider in deciding to address identified needs or gaps in services?”, also revealed similarities across the groups. Both urban and rural NGOs listed internal capacity (time, expertise, or human capital) and funding most often, and included community capacity (the presence of partners and local resources), mission-match, and public interest. Notably, the gap between the frequency of “internal capacity” and of “funding” was much larger for rural NGOs than for urban NGOs. This may have been due to the way that rural NGOs discussed funding; sometimes it was synonymous with internal capacity, while urban NGOs made the distinction more often between “funding” specifically and general “capacity.”

For example, one rural respondent intertwines funding, staff time, and partnerships in describing capacity: “And then funding is...one of our disadvantages with determining what we can move ahead with, is a very small staff and a large geographic area. So it may be that it would meet all the criteria, and be very important to do, but be too big of a drain on funds.” Another specifically included funding and time in capacity: “And then from there, the next big thing is, do we have the capacity, both financially and time.” Meanwhile, urban respondents very clearly divided capacity and funding:

…our capacity to do it. Our expertise in the area, you know there’s some issues that we’ve never worked in, and that doesn’t mean we won’t take on something totally new, but it’s easier for me to provide programs where I already have some infrastructure. And then of course budget. How is it gonna be funded, and a lot of our programs are grant funded.

Another urban interviewee noted: “Money. Do you have the money to do the thing? Money is number one. Time. Resources. I mean that’s...that’s our world. And money is the one that runs it all.” These distinctive definitions emerged in the answers to “How would you decide whether or not to address an identified need?”, providing important insight into the NGOs’ decision making.
processes, but also how they characterize the resources they have available, what they might decide they need to seek out to implement programs, and the strategies and partnerships they use to seek those resources.

Concluding the exploration of decision making processes, respondents were asked, “When making changes to a program, how do you decide what changes are needed, and what strategies to use?” Again, although both urban and rural NGOs shared similar most common influencers, clients and internal staff; urban NGOs included academic sources, while rural NGOs cited community representatives, including the community public, leaders and partners. Information sources for urban NGOs cited internal data most often, and included evaluation, evidence-based practices, professional training, and research, while rural NGOs cited informal sources most, and included surveys/questionnaires, internal monitoring, needs assessment, and pilot testing. Rural NGOs’ responses suggest that programmatic efficacy is mostly monitored internally and fairly informally, with decisions discussed and made by internal stakeholders with varied involvement from the community, while urban NGOs strove to systematize their decision-making with data collection and involve “experts.”

Data usage. Most of the interview questions, and some of the survey questions, addressed organizations’ program design processes. The questions explored how information would be gathered to prepare for and inform program design and implementation, how programs would be monitored and outcomes measured using data collection, and how the data collected would be used in practice. Often, respondents qualified their answers by saying that the design process varied depending on the particular program being designed, but seemingly were able to articulate how the process would typically unfold in a general way.
Monitoring the community climate. When asked “How do you identify new or emerging needs among your target population?”, urban and rural NGOs sought out similar sources of information and influencers, but mentioned them with different frequencies. The community public and clients influenced both urban and rural NGOs most, followed by funders for urban NGOs, and community partners and the target population for rural NGOs. Most urban NGOs accessed public data sources such as surveillance data, collected by federal, state or other external agencies, or peer reviewed research, to monitor changing needs. Meanwhile rural NGOs relied more often on informal interactions, including conversations and feedback from the community at large, clients, and partners.

Urban and rural NGOs had similar tactics in identifying complementary or similar services offered to their target population. Both urban and rural NGOs used networking most often, followed by needs assessments or resource maps, and informal conversation or feedback, to monitor the resources available to their target populations. They also tapped community partners first, then programmatic peers and the community public to identify these sources. Although the sources and informants were similar, NGOs utilized them in distinct ways. Within this segment of the interviews, rural NGOs mentioned easy familiarity with other organizations because of their mutual presence in small towns. Two urban NGOs reported that they learned about complementary or similar services via competition for funding, something none of the rural NGOs noted. Meanwhile, several respondents, mostly rural with one urban exception, spoke about intentionally working with organizations offering complementary or similar services, to circumvent competition or duplication, and to create a “pipeline” of services for their clients.
One respondent from a rural organization discussed the organization’s response to a new similar program starting in the community: “And going back to the afterschool program, right down the street from [our organization], a community leader has started her own afterschool program, and she has 27 children there. And it’s great. So we gave her a lot of our afterschool materials that we didn’t need anymore.” Rural NGOs also reported using formal and informal referral networks, as well as negotiating with other organizations to adjust their programming or to help clients access other needed services, sometimes through bartering services. For example, one rural health clinic noted extensive collaboration and resources sharing with complementary partners:

And then with our other partners in the community that we work with…we work together. And so they may have an event like Infant Mortality Month, they have a car seat clinic, and so we let them use our parking lot. Or we helped, I had a table at their Baby Buggy Walk. So I guess there’s communication up to where we’re not duplicating each other’s things, and then trying to work together to do that.

Another rural organization described collaboration among partners to ensure clients received needed services:

…we’ve had the schools reach out and say, there’s a student, we’re absolutely despairing, we don't know what to do, will you please take the student into your program? Our official process is that when we have spots, we can approach the schools and say who are your students right now with the strongest needs? But we have been approached by the school proactively when we didn't necessarily have spots. And then given our situation, we can either stretch ourselves or we can’t. So we definitely with the schools we have a lot of collaboration. And they’ve also tried to like kind of bend themselves to help us, by trying to run a bus a different route so the bus could go by our building and drop off students. One time, we said we couldn’t take a student because we didn’t have any additional spots in our car, so it was already stretched beyond the limit. And the teacher said, I will drive the student to your program myself every day, he needs this that badly. So there’s a lot of, I think in a small town like this I think there’s a lot of room for…flexibility.
Program design. Concerning information usage, urban and rural NGOs showed differences in what tools they use to plan programming, and in the ways they use knowledge to inform their work. A series of eight questions within the interview focused specifically on the process of designing a new program intervention. All NGO respondents confirmed that they had access to current research to inform program planning or implementation. When asked if respondents used tools or processes regularly to plan new programs, rural NGOs reported utilizing informal conversation most often. For urban NGOs, standard planning models were processes used regularly to plan new programs. One example of a model mentioned was SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, a common business planning tool. Others mentioned frameworks from other organizations and funders, such as the Center for Disease Control. Because the answers varied so widely, I grouped the answers into two categories. “Organization-centric,” entailed tools based on internal mission alignment or resource distribution, and included informal conversation, strategic plans, staff expertise, work plans, or timelines. “Program-centric” tools focused on program-specific elements or theory, including needs assessment, pilot testing, logic models, or planning models. When organized this way, rural NGOs cited organization-centric tools almost twice as much as program-centric tools, while urban NGOs cited both types equally.

Respondents were asked directly what kinds of information would be gathered for new program development, and where it would come from. Rural respondents reported they access information via peer exchanges with community and programmatic peers (e.g., talking to programmatic peers, site visits, using materials from other programs) more often than from academic or research sources, followed by public data, and general internet research. Urban
NGOs ranked how they access their information in the following order: 1) public data, 2) academic research, 3) peer exchange and internally-collected data, and 4) internet research.

Interview answers were classified by how respondents used information in program design, utilizing the “research use typologies” framework from Nutley, Walter and Davies (2012). I grouped the use of information as instrumental—“direct impact of research on policy and practice decisions,” conceptual—“comprising the complex and often indirect ways in which research can have an impact on the knowledge, understanding and attitudes of policy-makers and practitioners,” or “both” (Nutley et al. 2012:36). The analysis showed that rural NGOs’ information usage was evenly divided across the three categories, with “instrumental” and “both” slightly more common than “conceptual.” In addition, urban NGOs were most likely to use information in a conceptual way, followed by instrumental. Rural NGOs tended to emphasize partnerships with community and programmatic peers in their development of new programs, while urban NGOs again turned to academic and professional resources and public data sources.

When the tools and ways information was used were more closely inspected, it seems that rural NGOs were focused on information that would inform the design of the program and how organizational resources would be distributed, while urban NGOs balanced between a more holistic understanding of the social issues they addressed and the target population as well as design. These differences were subtle, and certainly further exploration to see if these differences are persistent and significant is warranted. If tools are used to organize known information, and we understand information usage as a technique to fill gaps of unknown knowledge, it seems urban and rural NGOs are using different theoretical perspectives to make program design decisions. Urban NGOs are seeking out more information about the conditions surrounding the
issues their programs address than about design decisions, and considering both theoretical and logistical information via planning tools. Meanwhile, rural NGOs are seeking both conceptual information about the issue and instrumental information informing logistical design, and primarily utilizing tools to organize internal resources. Perhaps this difference might be attributed to rural NGOs’ existing familiarity with the issues they address due to their proximity and embeddedness with the communities: if rural respondents feel confident they know what issues and conditions their clients face, they would be less motivated to conduct formal research into the issues. Or, perhaps the necessity of flexibility in programming in rural areas precludes investigation into any one particular issue. This initial attempt to classify information usage suggests that further research may be useful in determining whether these different approaches persist, and in investigating the circumstances influencing differences, as these research use typologies and tools play an important role in the ability to utilize evidence in program design.

Accountability to Stakeholders and Proximity

The closeness to institutional headquarters and funders has been presented, to this point, as a potential added resource for urban NGOs, but there is, of course, another side to this proximity. Although urban NGO staff are able to network and forge personal relationships with these institutions, and more easily access training, they are also subject to direct oversight, as well as potential limitations of the services they are able to provide, as a result of these closer relationships. Proximity to funders and institutions can, together with the perceived field of competition with other NGOs for funding, create an atmosphere where urban NGOs are under pressure to fall in line with the evolving requirements of these funders and institutions. As one Jackson respondent mentioned, working closely with politicians, particularly in the capital city,
brings benefits and funding opportunities, but also requires enough flexibility to cope with rapid changes: “…we’ve had to adjust, for example, our expectations and objectives on that project because we’ve had five different mayors in, you know, four years in Jackson.” Two urban NGOs had close relationships with a major medical center also based in Jackson, and interestingly, when asked what the mission of their organization was, instead of discussing their individual projects, they recited verbatim the mission of the parent medical center as their own, and had to be further prompted to discuss the objectives of their own distinct entities. This does not indicate limitations in programming per se, but hints at the level of independence these NGOs may feel to meet the needs of the community as they encounter them.

In some instances urban NGOs did note they were limited by their parent institutions, such as in the case of dispensing contraceptives. One respondent relayed:

Because we are a school based clinic, and because the attorney general put out some ruling that says school nurses, even though we’re all nurse practitioners, the university’s legal department has decided to go with the attorney general with this, that says school nurses cannot dispense contraception on campus. So our hands are tied. And that’s a huge gap.

Another urban respondent from an NGO affiliated with a university detailed:

Because I might think that something is a good idea, but for any reason, it may be even political reasons, that’s not the stance we want to take. Or that’s not a program that we want to implement right now. It may be a need, but being an institution that serves the community, and us having our own separate identity as [a college], does that fall in line with what we are doing? So those, everything is vetted through the cabinet and the president, and faculty because we are an institution of higher learning, so some things have to be vetted through faculty.

More frequent interactions with these overseer agencies builds and reinforces the social networks urban NGOs are entwined in, also increasing the likelihood that these NGOs will adopt the “shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal
1998:244) as the funders. This may result in a tendency to work toward anticipating and complying with funder standards, one example being EBP, even as it might compete with other priorities.

Respondents from rural NGOs described a different type of accountability. Their answers regarding influencers and sources of information hint at a consistent consciousness of the residents and local organizations within their community, but the anecdotes they told revealed how intimately they are connected to their beneficiaries, and how they are held accountable daily for their organization’s activities. One rural interviewee related her organization’s history and activities almost solely through personal stories about her clients: instead of answering most of the interview questions, she spent all of the time allotted for the interview telling detailed stories about babies born and lost, a prisoner escaping briefly from the clinic after the guard fell asleep during an informational video about STDs, chasing down another patient who refused to leave his tractor for cancer treatment. Another spoke about how their organization recognizes the need for a new program:

…specifically seeing the siblings of several students that we had already in the program, and just making that need very personal. Not just kind of abstract, oh we know there are kids in this community that need what we do, but like, knowing those kids. They come to our potlucks with their parents already, and the parents are asking us, when can our younger kids join your program? And the kids will wait in the driveway every night when we drop off their siblings, and say when can we go to [the program]?

Rural respondents spoke often about working in a small town, affirming the familiar trope of “everyone knows everyone,” and their proximity to their clients makes them immediately and directly accountable for their programs’ impact on the community. The effect of this kind of rural social network contrasts in one obvious way to urban networks: interactions with clients and community members may precipitate different priorities than interactions with
funders and institutions. There are a few ways this might manifest in rural NGOs’ usage of information in program intervention design.

The findings indicate that urban NGOs tended to incorporate public data, such as surveillance and census data, to inform intervention design, while rural NGOs almost always consulted the community at large. One reason for this difference may be due to the timing of data collection as well as the geographic distribution of collection. Rural NGOs are more likely to receive immediate and frequent feedback directly from the community in a variety of ways, and they serve communities with smaller populations, while formalized data may not be available at the geographical scale or timeframe necessary for rural NGOs to respond to community feedback. Research and census data takes time to collect, process, analyze and interpret; meanwhile, rural NGOs must answer to the siblings at the end of the driveway and the parents at the potluck dinner. This closeness to residents gives rural NGOs steady access to information about evolving needs as well, providing timely information about their specific target population without the time or resource cost of generating or accessing data from other agencies, but also decreasing the likelihood of proper documentation or consistent collection of data. This may be adequate for internal program monitoring and decision-making, however, the increasing requirements for grant applications presents a stopping block to these rural NGOs seeking new or continued funding. Additionally, one rural respondent vocalized a sentiment that seems common in rural communities, particularly the Delta: “[Tracking data] interferes with relationships, people feel used, they feel like you’re being paid to do something they could do on their own...that is the biggest mess.” As local relationships are a prominent and crucial element to rural NGOs’ ability to provide services and thus carry out their missions, jeopardizing those
relationships with copious data collection demands may seem like a riskier gamble for rural NGOs.

The desire for flexibility was also evident in respondents’ reflections on how they would decide the ideal outcome of a new program. The most common outcome mentioned by both rural and urban NGOs was “outcomes based on program goals.” However, several rural NGOs noted that outcomes should be flexible, while none of the urban NGOs mentioned flexibility specifically, reflecting the priority rural NGOs put on being able to adjust programming and respond to needs. Additionally, rural NGOs included more informally-derived outcomes, such as “positive feedback” and “positive impact in issue addressed.” Rural respondents emphasized being able to observe holistic change in their beneficiaries. One described:

It kinda depends on the program as far as our goals and what we’re measuring is the outcomes. But I guess yeah. [We] sat down and chose them. Based on knowing what we needed, we felt like we needed to do as part of the process of getting this community healthier.

Another rural interviewee discussed using informal conversations to gauge success: “…that they made a difference. How different, what changes, changing their lives. And they’ll tell you…Conversations. They begin to change their pattern of eating. They continue to exercise and work out. And then they come ask you questions that they’re not sure about.” Urban NGOs were more likely to incorporate specific outcomes as part of the program design process, in some cases even exceeding what was required by funders. For example, one urban respondent explained:

Though the goals guide the entire development of the program, the objectives...have to be smart. Because you’re wasting money and time if you have not created these very details parameters about how you’re going to approach this particular program or this particular research. Because you have to be able to evaluate it the entire time. Because you can’t just focus on a deliverable, or an outcome, and say this is, when it’s all said and done in 5 years, then we’ll gauge the success…You have to be very purposeful
when developing...whatever your plan is. If it’s not detailed enough, then you can’t gauge the process. Even if the funders don’t request...because we have a lot of funders that don’t request those detailed work plans. We do them anyway, internally. So that everyone can be on the same page, and we can constantly gauge if we’re successful. We have an internal quality assurance process. That is one of the final steps before a program can be approved.

Although the interviews seemed to skirt the issue of “trust” in rural communities, I’m cautious to use the word here, because urban respondents were equally aware of the need to elicit trust from their clients and the community they work in. An urban respondent spoke of needing to counteract the “Tuskegee effect”\(^1\) with their beneficiaries:

A lot of people still suffer from the Tuskegee syndrome, here, understandably so. So that’s another approach that we have. I can’t speak for any other community-based organization or NGO, but we know for a fact that we’re not gonna be effective just showing up. We gotta be there. That’s the reason we set up, you know, other offices in other cities, we have to be there. We have to establish rapport with the community, always leading with respect for community, not going in with a solution, but going in with a very “state of the science” approach to listening.

It is clear in this quote that building trust with beneficiaries is a task all NGOs must accomplish to effectively provide services. But the way this urban NGO talks about “entering” a community is interesting – the respondent seems themselves as an outsider to the community, alluding again to the position urban NGO espouse in their interview answers. While rural NGOs are networked tightly with their clients, the community public, and other local organizations, urban NGOs may have more, and sometimes conflicting, ties to attend to.

\(^1\) The Tuskegee Study was a public health project conducted by the Public Health Service from 1932 - 1972 to study the “natural history of syphilis”. Six hundred black men (399 with syphilis, 201 without) were monitored without proper medical treatment, even after penicillin became the recognized treatment of choice. The men were offered “free medical examinations, free meals, and burial assistance” in exchange for participation. The study ended in 1972 after an advisory panel concluded the study was “ethically unjustified”. (http://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/timeline.htm)
Controlling for Types of Organizations in Urban and Rural Groups

Looking at the composition of the urban and rural organizations, it is reasonable to question whether the nature of the organizations themselves, rather than the setting they are based in, contributes to these differences. To try to control for some of the factors of size, services offered, and scope, I compared the six community health centers/clinic-based multi-service providers, three from urban settings and three from rural. These organizations all had similar budgets, number of clients, and area served. Their staff sizes were difficult to compare, as two urban respondents skipped this question in the survey. Both groups also had a similar number of partners and funding sources, contrary to the larger group findings. This is likely due to the fact that the clinics tend to be one of the main, and most-well-funded, service providers in rural areas, attracting many diverse partners in the area.

Although it is a very small sample, some of the differentiating trends between urban and rural did hold among the clinics. Two of the three rural clinics emphasized the necessary flexibility to meet needs and change programming, with one even eschewing funding sources and partners to maintain the ability to remain flexible. Another was the respondent who detailed the extra involvement in the community the organization seeks out, including providing transportation at festivals, attending and hosting frequent community events, and serving on several boards in the community to build relationships and influence in the community. The respondent who related all of the interview answers with personal stories about clients, and detailed individual instances and stories to illustrate community involvement, was another leader in a rural clinic. Although their size, scope, and services provided were similar to urban clinics, rural respondents spoke differently about the way they approached their outreach and collaborative work with the community, being very conscious about local traditions, interests,
and events, and deliberate about participating in them. It is likely the case that in rural communities, regular public events are fairly limited, and also probably draw a large number of residents out, making them a one-stop shop for organizations to raise awareness about their services, build relationships with new clients and other participating organizations, and connect with current clients.

For the urban clinics, competition for funding was not an issue prominent in the interviews, unlike for the group overall. However, one urban respondent did detail difficulty with working in silos, relaying the challenges of identifying and successfully partnering with all the other organizations providing similar or complementary services in the area. Additionally, all urban respondents mentioned the limitations on their independence to provide certain services due to their parent institutions, which they identified as “statewide” affiliations (one did not identify as an affiliate, but in the interview disclosed the organization falls under the jurisdiction of a college). Two of the respondents from rural clinics identified their organizations as affiliates of national or regional organizations, but discussed their relative freedom to develop and implement programming without mention of stringent oversight; in fact, they emphasized the opposite. This effect may certainly be due to proximity to the parent institution; the urban parent organizations were also based in Jackson, while the rural respondents did not detail the location of their parent organizations, although I am aware that one is in the same town. It may also be due to the parent institutions recognizing the importance of flexibility described by many of the rural organizations, as funders seemed to acknowledge as well.
Findings Summary

Overall, the findings do indicate some interesting potential differences between urban and rural NGOs, and allude to the ways that place can strongly influence NGOs’ strategies and capabilities in coping with EBPs. Urban NGOs reported more overall informal and formal partnerships, as well as funding sources, than rural NGOs, and more diversity across types of organizations they partnered with and sources of funding. These patterns suggest that urban NGOs have access to a wider array of economic and social capital than rural NGOs, potentially limiting rural NGOs’ ability to cope with increased demands.

As NGOs detailed their relationships with stakeholders, two nuanced differences in the environments surrounding the organizations emerged. Rural NGOs emphasized the difficulty in maintaining the necessary programmatic flexibility to respond to community needs while meeting funding requirements, while urban NGOs described an environment fraught with competition among NGOs for funding, and “chasing dollars.” Rural NGOs often included community partners and the local/community public as influencers in decision making, while urban NGOs were more likely to consult public data, academic sources and experts. In using different types of information, rural NGOs sought information related to program design and organizational resource distribution, while urban NGOs also utilized sources to inform their understanding of the social issues and target population addressed by programs. These differences were persistent across cases, which suggests that urban and rural NGOs navigate their environments and relationships in unique ways.

The differences between urban and rural environments necessitate different strategies for NGOs’ program design and development, and manifest in various practices. While urban NGOs develop formal systems to track data and manage resources, rural NGOs approach their
organizational structure in a more fluid manner, reflected in their constructs of resources and capacity. Subtle differences also appear in NGOs’ information usage, with urban NGOs more often using data in a conceptual way while rural NGOs balanced between instrumental and conceptual, and urban NGOs using both organization- and program-centric tools while rural NGOs focused primarily on organization-centric tools. These differences, though subtle, may suggest that place can affect how NGOs approach program design.

The sheer difference in the number of organizations present in these areas has consequences for partnership seeking: rural NGOs must dedicate time and resources, as well as maintain flexibility, in order to maintain good partnerships with the few organizations they can to provide adequate services. Meanwhile, urban areas seem more like a field of competition between NGOs for funding, encouraging urban NGOs to forge alliances with funders to build favor. Proximity to different stakeholders can result in conflicting accountability, and thus priorities, for rural and urban NGOs as well: while rural NGOs interact with and must answer to community residents and clients in formal and informal settings daily, urban NGOs are intertwined in a network of funders, institutions, and political agents, in addition to any exposure to clients. These ties require different tactics, one being urban NGOs’ alignment with funder priorities and requirements, increasing the likelihood that urban NGOs will dedicate resources toward meeting these requirements and their chances of coping successfully. For rural NGOs, these requirements can directly conflict with the network they are most directly accountable to, interfering with their ability to cope and leaving them at a distinct disadvantage in an environment increasingly demanding incorporation of EBPs.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This study sought to expand on research examining how NGOs use their social networks to navigate a complex matrix of capitals (Bourdieu 1986, Flora et al. 2016) to achieve their missions and meet funding requirements in place. The recent development among funders to increase their requirements to incorporate and produce evidence of effectiveness, with the gold standard of implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs), introduces a challenge to NGOs to garner new economic, cultural, human, and social capital to meet this challenge. Urban and rural environments contain differential opportunities to network and build mutually beneficial relationships with potential partners, with fewer funding, academic, and business institutions located in rural areas. Although it was proposed that the sheer numbers of available partners would disadvantage rural NGOs in their ability to meet increased evidence requirements, I found that effort to provide technical assistance specifically to rural agencies, along with the availability of information via the internet, has lessened the disparity in access to experts. However, as this study indicates, adopting EBPs and generating more traditional scientifically rigorous evidence is not simply a matter of access to assistance to do so. Urban and rural NGOs must navigate the surrounding complex web of connections with varying priorities and perceptions. They must balance competing, and sometimes conflicting, pressure from funders,
beneficiaries, partners and the community at large to access the resources they need to carry out their missions.

Funders incorporate EBPs as a means to establish themselves as neutral arbiters of “what works” (Gieryn 1983, Brekus 2015) to build trust among donors and taxpayers. This standard could result in the creation of both a symbolic and social boundary separating potential grant applicants from symbolic status, and well as financial capital (Lamont and Molnar 2002). However, my findings show that distribution of capital is not simply a top-down interaction, and grantees use their own cultural capital, as Flora et al. 2016 defines it, to push back on, as well as place themselves within, those boundaries. As NGOs are able to build relationships reinforced by frequent interaction with funders, they adopt and confirm the value of EBPs, gaining common cultural capital with funders, strengthening their common social networks and exchanges of knowledge and innovation (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998, DiMaggio 2011), and reinforcing the boundary. Other organizations are able to parlay their cultural capital in the community, another important capital of value to funders as a source of credibility as well as a necessary factor in carrying out effective work, as a bargaining chip with funders. Still others did approach EBPs as a “structural hole” (Walker et al. 1997), seeking out alliances with other partners locally and virtually to garner needed human and cultural capital to meet the requirement. The exchanges of community capital among funders, organizations, and communities is dynamic and multidirectional, complicating the attempt to establish RCT as a “gold standard.”

Proximity and Building Networks

As the data reflect, NGOs are enmeshed in a matrix of connections, across which they exchange different kinds of capital, but can also be constricted by institutional rules and mores.
Some network connections are deliberately chosen to build alliances that allow them to offer more services, effectively reach out to the community, or collaborate on projects and funding opportunities; NGOs utilize these connections to bridge “structural holes” in the field of exchange (Walker et al. 1997). For urban NGOs, more frequent interaction between staff and funders, academic institutions, and political leadership encourages the development of robust network connections that precipitate a common perception affirming the value of scientific and academic research and adoption of EBPs, expressed by funders and institutions (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998, DiMaggio 2011). Once staff and leadership accept and embrace EBP standards, a culture of measurement can be built within the organization, incorporating research and evaluation into practice, and aligning internal resources to complete the work and bring the necessary expertise to the organization. The concept of “performance culture” is already a trend in the nonprofit sector, an example being Morino’s 2011 book Leap of Reason, detailing the steps organizations can follow to build their organizational culture to mirror the type of performance management utilized by for-profit corporations. The interviews reflect elements of this culture of measurement, with urban NGOs growing their internal research departments and building evaluation partnerships, consistently naming academic research and public data as commonly tapped information sources, and hiring staff with academic expertise. When this movement toward performance measurement and incorporating EBPs is confirmed and supported by the network connections urban NGOs interact with frequently, it is easy to align with the network. None of the urban respondents questioned the applicability of EBPs, and seemed focused on building their own evidence for their interventions, aligning resources and partnerships to complete this task. Their placement in an urban setting, similar in many ways to the environment EBPs are developed in, may provide even less reason to resist an organizational
culture of measurement. Although research cited by Archibald (2015), Biesta (2007, 2010) and others questions the applicability of EBP in social settings at all, urban settings may provide a closer match for many intervention designs than rural locations, as proximity to academic and government institutions allows for greater access to urban NGO interventions. Urban NGOs noted among the most common types of assistance troubleshooting, brainstorming and program design directed toward solving specific challenges and developing new projects, which suggests that either the interventions are already an appropriate fit for the community and only require minimal adjustments, or that the organization has the internal resources necessary to make any major adjustments. Also, urban NGOs operate in the same or similar environment as most funders and institutions, who tend to be located in urban environments. Many of the funding sources and institutions mentioned specifically by all respondents have their main, or a state-level affiliate, office in Jackson. These organizations can all be expected to have some familiarity with the environmental reality faced by the target populations of urban NGO interventions, such as public transportation systems, available public assistance, and the locations of their respective offices, and the general NGO landscape of the area. Urban NGOs did not detail individual level interactions with clients the way rural NGOs did, but they share a common organizational climate with funders and institutions, which may facilitate common understandings of what interventions are effective, and shared approaches to challenges among stakeholders.

Rural NGOs are embedded in a different environment. The data confirm that rural NGOs have fewer and less diverse formal and informal network ties with funding, academic, and political partners than urban NGOs. Meanwhile, rural respondents often noted individual interactions with clients and beneficiaries, where they are directly and constantly pressured to expand their services and reach in the community. In a rural environment, NGO staff seem to
have more frequent interaction with residents and beneficiaries, peppered with occasional site visits and trainings from funders or institutions. Although there are indications that rural NGOs are beginning to bridge the gap using the internet to increase interactions with partners, it seems clear that face-to-face interactions are necessary to build a robust social network, and for rural organizations, their social networks are more inclusive of beneficiaries and community members than urban NGOs’ networks. Rural respondents’ interview answers point out that the influencers of decisions and information sources are more often local partners and community members than for urban NGOs. They spoke often of the importance of community buy-in and respect for community values; the discourse reflected more of a holistic, community-focused culture than the culture of measurement urban NGOs worked toward. Rural NGOs’ proximity to community residents, clients and partners focuses their robust network connections on these parties and their organizations rather than the inclusion of funders and academic institutions that urban NGOs have access to. These networks reinforce the primacy of community priorities and values over those of academic or funding institutions, and in cases where residents resist measurement and the outsider influence embodied by EBPs, rural NGOs must invest extra time and resources to negotiate between these priorities to maintain their status within the community and among their local partners. More than just simple access to partnerships and resources, rural NGOs must also invest additional resources to navigate their environment.

Rural organizations face the additional strain of setting mismatch with EBPs. As urban NGOs enjoy an aligned environmental reality with funders, academic and political institutions, rural NGOs must cope with potential misunderstandings of the unique challenges they and their clients face in a rural setting. Chambers’ 1997 work highlights how ignorance of the particular environmental conditions and community practices can result in not only ineffective programs,
but policies that perpetuate and even exacerbate poverty. In detailing a World Bank program designed to address a wrongfully-projected “woodfuel crisis” in Africa, Chambers notes, “The learning is that central planners, cut off from local conditions, confined with their computers, uncritical of bad data and ignorant of how people live, are prone to construct for themselves and their colleagues costly worlds of fantasy, prophesying doom and prescribing massive programmes which are neither needed nor feasible” (Chambers 1997:23). While the data suggest that NGO-funder relations are more reciprocal than this example, the instance highlights how removal from the situation can prevent effective training and technical support for rural NGOs because the mechanisms of how social problems manifest in the community, and what is a reasonable intervention or adjustment to an evidence-based intervention are not readily understood by funders and institutions. This reality mismatch serves as another source of interference in forming robust social networks with providers of the economic and cultural capital necessary to cope with the additional requirements of implementing EBPs for rural NGOs.

This not to say than rural NGOs reject measurement or the importance of research and evidence – rural NGOs had systems in place to measure outcomes, partnered with outside organizations to conduct evaluation, and utilized and even conducted academic research as well. Rural NGOs’ ties with rural community members also present a form of social capital that is valuable to funders and institutions: in this case, the NGOs serve as the “experts” on what works in their rural communities, to which the funders are outsiders. For this to happen, the standards dictating who is the expert must be negotiated or relaxed by funders and in order to maintain the perception of “objectivity” projected by funders’ adoption of EBP standards in the first place. The study data indicate that even EBP standards are not a simple top-down directive, but are
negotiated and resisted by NGOs. Additionally, it can be assumed that urban NGOs interact with community members and are accountable to their clients as well, although perhaps receive feedback in more formal settings that do not allow for or encourage much critique. The Jackson area is also certainly large and segregated enough to reduce the frequency of everyday informal interaction among staff and clients much more than in rural areas, where there is only one grocery store or bank that serves the larger area. More than just individual interactions, NGOs develop social networks with different numbers and strengths of ties with different compositions of stakeholders as a consequence of their surrounding environments: shared realities with proximate parties who influence, provide resources and knowledge, and hold organizations directly accountable for their actions drive the construction and maintenance of these networks, and shape the ways that rural and urban NGOs navigate their environments to carry out their missions.

Implications

Regardless of the appropriateness of applying evidence-based practices in social program settings, the trend shows no sign of abetting, particularly for government funding. NGOs must seek strategies to address this climate that focuses on utilizing and producing evidence using experimental approaches if they are to remain relevant. This study, in investigating the factors driving differential success in meeting these standards for urban and rural NGOs in Mississippi, revealed some of the different tactics these organizations use to deploy their resources to cope with and adapt to evidence standards, primarily their relationships with community members, other organizations, and funders. Relationships among NGOs, funders, the community, and other actors were complex and multidirectional; while the adoption of EBP as a standard is one shift in
the funder-NGO dynamic, this study provides insight into the ways that NGOs navigate their surroundings to accomplish accountability to their stakeholders, build partnerships with each other to meet goals and needs, and even use their standing in the community to push back on and negotiate funders’ standards. These findings point to several potential areas of change to not only reduce disparities between urban and rural areas, but to strengthen the NGO field as a whole to provide more effective social programs.

NGO practices. In my analysis of the interview and survey responses, I categorize the types of partnerships, information, and sources tapped to make program design decisions: NGOs might consider conducting similar examinations of their practices to identify their own gaps and strengths. A systematic internal audit of the formal and informal relationships the organization maintains, along with the articulation of organizational priorities and accountabilities to direct outreach as part of a regular strategic planning process, may aid NGOs in identifying and bridging partnership gaps. One approach might be to conduct an asset inventory of local institutions, a model from Asset Based Community Development (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993), to identify potential partners. Another might be to develop a diversity matrix to analyze board membership, staff, or partnerships. Daley (2002) details one potential process for accomplishing board diversity, but this approach could be utilized across different organizational aspects.

Knowledge usage practices are another area that could be systematically analyzed. One limitation of this study is that the questions focus on types of information, sources, and to a certain extent, the stage of program development that knowledge is utilized in, but not the reasons why each source was chosen. Some grant applications and funders specify what information must be cited in the application, and many respondents noted common sources they
tapped regularly, such as surveillance or census data, annual needs assessment results, or internal outcome measurement. But it is unclear how deliberate the choices were, or if there was potential to incorporate multiple sources. One way to approach data usage analysis might apply the “research use typologies” framework (Nutley et al. 2012) to categorize information gathered, helping program designers to better balance knowledge usage. “Instrumental” and “conceptual” usage descriptors could be incorporated into planning tools such as the logic model to organize known information, identify gaps in knowledge and direct information gathering. Daigneault and Jacob (2009) offer an analytical framework to measure participatory evaluation, which could be used as is, or adapted to analyze stakeholder participation in program design as well as evaluation. The framework provides three scaled dimensions to measure participation in evaluation: control of the evaluation (decision making power available to participants), diversity (types of stakeholders engaged in the evaluation), and extent of involvement (number of actual tasks stakeholders complete within the evaluation process). When used to analyze participatory evaluation (PE) in five Finnish education projects by Pietilainen (2012), the framework provided valuable insight into the challenges to incorporation of PE at each stage of evaluation planning and implementation, and allowed for targeted strategy development. Developing a similar tool for analysis as part of a project timeline or work plan would help NGOs approach stakeholder inclusion in a more deliberate way.

Rural and urban environments each offer unique opportunities to build social network ties with different stakeholders. Acknowledging types of partnerships may be a helpful first step, and NGOs can also work to incorporate new methods of data collection and usage to diversify their capacities as well. For rural NGOs, challenged to increase their usage of EBPs while maintaining trust and relevance in their community, a solution might be formalizing their existing data
collection practices by developing guides, scripts, or surveys. This would provide consistency across respondents and time periods to increase the scientific rigor of their data collection, while allowing the organization leeway in tailoring the language and procedures to their target population to respect relationship building. Ideally rural organizations would begin to generate their own evidence-based practices, perhaps through university-community partnerships, alleviating some of the pressure to adopt EBPs tested in non-rural environments. My project with the McLean Institute developing the survey to inform program design might serve as an example of joining research procedures and skills with the practice of community organizations. Our research project was designed to complement organizational practice, rather than detract or distract from it, and to ensure the research findings were relevant and applicable to the organization’s needs. Meanwhile urban NGOs might enhance their community involvement using participatory methods to collect data and make organizational decisions, such as designing focus groups to gather input, or engaging community members for advisory boards or evaluation teams. The Daigneault and Jacob (2009) framework would be helpful to guide and evaluate this work. Divergent strengths for urban and rural NGOs may also provide an exchange opportunity: where each place has a comparative advantage, organizations might use discourse and peer exchange to articulate why their strategies work in each setting, and build each others’ capacities to apply tactics in their home setting.

Funders practices. Although it might be assumed that funders have most of the power to impose change on grantees, many respondents described more reciprocal relationships with funders. NGOs worked with funders to redefine outcome measures and indicators, troubleshoot programmatic issues, and develop new projects, although the ability to negotiate with funders seemed to be contingent upon a good relationship with individual program officers. Funders do
recognize that NGOs’ activities and interactions with beneficiaries are important determinants for reputation in the community – both for the NGO and the source of funding that supports them. NGOs’ work puts them in a position to develop expertise about the community, another precious resource funders recognize, especially for rural NGOs operating in communities removed from the often urban-based funding agency. Therefore, NGOs may have more sway with funders than one might initially assume, and perhaps the EBP requirement as it is evolving now is not on a predetermined path of escalation.

One obvious action for funders to take to alleviate place-based disparities is to move away from the “gold standard” of randomized control trials as evidence. Provided the amount of literature on why the standard is inappropriate for social programs, backing off the standard seems like a reasonable direction for funders to move in. However, for government funding, this may involve changing legislation, a lengthy and sometimes politically risky process. Funding agencies do provide training, and in some cases even hire consultants to provide intensive technical assistance to grantees on meeting evaluation requirements. But often these resources do not focus on meaningfully engaging NGO staff in building their own capacity to utilize academic research as evidence to inform their programs, or to work to generate their own EBPs. In my experience, the researchers are rarely specifically tasked with building the NGOs’ capacity to conduct research, but to design and conduct the research themselves. This approach can leave the NGO with an evaluation report that they are not clear on how to interpret or use for their own program development, and dependent on successive contracts for future research, a sizable expense. However, as Flora and Emery (2006) note, some funders, including the same Kellogg Foundation mentioned in the findings, have embraced community-based participatory research, and funded initiatives that engage researchers in partnering with agencies to conduct research.
Approaching research as a community-based, participatory project does not preclude conducting rigorous research. If funders are able to critically assess the value of requiring RCT specifically, and perhaps include CBPR approaches as another valid way to produce evidence of intervention effectiveness, not only would NGOs have more avenues to demonstrate and document the impact of their work, but more innovative and inclusion modes of understanding social change would ensue.

Building capacity for NGOs to document, examine and adapt their programming based on outcomes could be a stepwise project: after conducting an evaluability assessment, funders could build support in their grants for logic model development, data collection procedures, outcomes measurement and data usage, empowerment evaluation, and even conducting RCT for advanced NGOs. This is the approach I have chosen to take with my own grantees: based on the findings from this project, I will be working for the next year on developing two technical assistance curricula, one to improve data collection and one to lead grantees in an empowerment evaluation process, using their own data to evaluate their outcomes and make program changes accordingly. Working with NGOs in this way will not only benefit grantees, but could lead to development of new procedures, engage organizations in the development of best practices generated from their own work rather than from projects conducted in a controlled, remote setting, and build a more diverse evidence base. Funders are in a unique position to not only support their own portfolio in meeting their requirements and outcomes, but to contribute research to a variety of social science fields, document new evidence-based program models, and build a stronger NGO sector that can rise to meet the increasingly complex human challenges we face.
Directions for Future Research

This project serves as an entry point for critical analysis of NGO practices in Mississippi, applying literature on spatial inequalities, social networks, community capital, and sociology of knowledge to explore work designed to address poverty and alleviate health disparities. Further research conducted within this realm should serve not only to extend the literature on the subject, but to benefit the communities and organizations carrying out the important work being done in the field, in real time. Considering my own experience and motivation to seek out formal training in social science research methods, these tools and practices are particularly powerful in designing, measuring outcomes for, and augmenting interventions to affect sustainable social change. One avenue of future research might more closely examine social network composition and capital exchange across ties. Mapping ties, including examination of types of partners, strength of ties, and what kinds of capital are exchanged across these ties, would help inform strategic development for NGOs. Although I did not directly observe respondents completing the survey that identified connections, most surveys were totally complete within 15 minutes, which indicates only a cursory reporting of these ties. Providing NGOs with mapping tools, and jointly developing processes to create network maps and document capital exchange as part of a regular strategic planning process would elaborate this knowledge. Taking a CBPR approach to engage respondents in their own examination of their organization’s work is crucial to producing complete knowledge. The small sample size of this study also limits its applicability across settings. Examining social network maps and capital exchange for a larger number of organizations in urban and rural areas would add to this area of knowledge, and inform whether the trends observed here hold true.
Another direction might be to examine the reasoning for why NGOs consulted the influencers and information sources they did for program design, where in the design process specifically the information was applied, and how the knowledge influenced the process, applying the research use typologies framework. I used the interview conversations to prompt recall of these processes, but I think a more effective method of gaining this information would be to engage NGO staff as participant observers of the process. If researchers and NGO staff work together to develop tools to record the process, and develop commonly understood terms and classifications with NGO staff, the participants would be able to observe and document the process as it unfolds in real time. The results would not only inform research about how knowledge is used, but would allow organizations to note their own tendencies and sources, and devise strategies to diversify their knowledge and practices.

My interviews revealed that relationship building and capital exchange across networks is complex, with many other factors beyond place driving network formation, resource distribution, and knowledge usage. One particular attribute that strongly affected partnership strategy, as well as organizational practices such as data collection and use, was the professional background and training of staff members, especially director-level staff. Some respondents noted specifically that their approach to data collection, research, and evaluation was driven by public health or nursing educational training, or by previous employment in measurement-driven professions. Directors were able to build measurement culture within the staff they managed, setting and monitoring data collection procedures, assisting staff in gaining the skills to collect consistent and rigorous data, and utilizing data and evaluation results to make organizational decisions. Rural organizations, and the institutions that fund them, are beginning to realize the value that specialization in data collection, usage and management bring to the organization. Some focus
their recruitment, and offer incentives such as higher pay and workplace benefits such as
wellness centers, to attract and/or retain professionals from fields that have a focus on data use.
Further studies might examine the effectiveness of recruitment strategies in changing
organizational culture around data collection, research, and evaluation, or the composition of
social networks and partnerships sought by staff with data-driven professional backgrounds.

One more factor that seemed to complicate the analysis was the issue of “presence” in the
community. Rural respondents spoke often about what it meant, and how they carried out, being
part of and serving the community, and urban respondents who provided services in rural
counties acknowledged their status as outsiders, specifying the techniques and approaches they
use to deliberately enter a community. The social capital of individual staff, the effect of their
affiliation with the organization on their ability to build or exchange social capital in service to
the NGO, and where staff actually lived were variables that were beyond the scope of this
project, but may have played a role in facilitating, or preventing, social and cultural capital
building for the organization. Interestingly, anecdotes and personal knowledge about respondents
indicate that many are not originally from the communities where organizations were located, yet
the community engagement strategies of urban and rural organizations still follow distinct place-
based patterns. Some of the examples shared by rural respondents detailed how their interactions
with beneficiaries outside of their organizational duties drove accountability to those community
members, while Jackson respondents did not mention similar experiences. One reason may be
that simple proximity in Jackson does not necessarily result in actual interaction: Jackson is
densely populated, and historically segregated, with different communities accessing different
facilities such as grocery stores, churches, restaurants, and recreational facilities. Simple
proximity does not result in the same likelihood of interaction that, for example, a small town
with one or two grocery stores would experience. An interesting study might explore whether NGO staff consider themselves community members in common with the beneficiaries they serve, or observing extra-organizational interactions with beneficiaries and the resulting sense of responsibility to the community, elaborating on the effect of accountability to the community as a function of “presence.”

The aim of this study was to elaborate on why there may be differences between urban and rural NGO knowledge usage. The findings point to many factors, some of which are place-based, and some are not. The complexity of NGO operations, from the individuals involved, the capital available for access, the particular issue being addressed, and the strategies and priorities that drive partnership formation and intervention design are intersected by variables active at the individual, community, state, and even nation and global levels. The findings of this study support broad conclusions about differences in approach to community engagement, and the organizational consequences of those approaches, but also illuminated several directions for new research. I look forward to expanding on this work through both research and practice, adding to the body of sociological knowledge about social change, and helping organizational to build stronger practices based on this knowledge to engage communities in this change.
LIST OF REFERENCES


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS
Does Place Affect Access to ‘What Works’?: Knowledge Usage in Urban and Rural NGO Intervention Design

Survey Questions

Confidentiality Statement: Your personal information will not be collected in the survey or interview forms, and will only be used to arrange in-person interview time and location. Your organization’s name and location will be collected to assign a unique ID number, which will be used to match surveys and interviews. Pseudonyms will be used to describe organizations in subsequent written materials.

Organizational Characteristics

1. ID number: ____________________________________________

2. In what city/town and county is your organization located?

3. In what MS counties does your organization provide services?

4. Would you characterize your organization as mainly serving urban, suburban, or rural populations? Choose one.
   a. Urban
   b. Suburban
   c. Rural
   d. Other:___________________________________________

5. Are you an affiliate of an international/national/regional/statewide organization?
   a. No
   b. Select all that apply: International, National, Regional, Statewide

6. Tell me about the personnel in your organization:
   a. How many full time (35+ hrs/week) staff?
b. How many part-time (less than 35 hrs/week) staff?

c. How many regular volunteers (at least weekly)?

d. How many episodic volunteers (special events, etc.)?

7. On average for the past 12 months, how many clients has your organization served monthly?

8. Please indicate the general sources of funding for your organization in the last 12 months, in ranked order of most contribution to the operating budget to least:

   a. Fee for Service
   
   b. Investments
   
   c. Membership Dues
   
   d. Fundraisers
   
   e. International or National Private Foundations
   
   f. Regional or Community Foundations
   
   g. Other Private Foundations
   
   h. Government Grants
   
   i. Government Fees or Contracts
   
   j. Other

9. What was your organization’s annual operating budget for 2014?

   a. Less than $49,999
   
   b. $50,000 - $99,999
   
   c. $100,000 - $249,999
   
   d. $250,000 - $499,999
   
   e. $500,000 - $999,999
10. What is your organization’s annual operating budget for 2015?

a. Less than $49,999
b. $50,000 - $99,999
c. $100,000 - $249,999
d. $250,000 - $499,999
e. $500,000 - $999,999
f. $1M - $1,999,999
g. $2M - $4,999,999
h. $5M or greater

Partnerships, Networking and Alliances

11. What types of organizations does your organization formally partner with (i.e., signing an MOU, receiving funding, collaborating on regular programming or grant applications, membership in a formal alliance, co-sponsoring events)? Select all that apply.

a. Federal Agencies
b. State Agencies
c. Municipal Agencies/City Government
d. International or National Private Foundations
e. Regional or Community Private Foundations
f. Other Private Foundations

g. Nonprofit Agencies

h. For-Profit Service Providers

i. Educational Institutions (K-12)

j. Community Colleges

k. Public Universities

l. Private Universities

m. Other (Please describe:____________)

12. What types of organizations does your organization **informally** interact with (i.e., attending same training/networking events, participation in a common professional organization such as the MS Center for Nonprofits, sharing ideas and best practices, etc.)? Select all that apply.

a. Federal Agencies

b. State Agencies

c. Municipal Agencies/City Government

d. International or National Private Foundations

e. Regional or Community Private Foundations

f. Other Private Foundations

g. Nonprofit Agencies

h. For-Profit Service Providers

i. Educational Institutions (K-12)

j. Community Colleges

k. Public Universities
1. Private Universities
   
   m. Other (Please describe:_________________)

13. Does your organization belong to networks that link different community organizations?
   
   Yes/No

14. Does your organization have a plan or strategy for forming alliances or partnerships?
   
   Yes/No

15. Does your organization have standards by which such alliances can be evaluated? Yes/No

16. In what scenario(s) does your organization most often seek out or rely on partnerships?

   Choose one.
   
   a. Seeking New Funding Opportunities
   b. Developing New Programs
   c. Expanding Current Services
   d. Evaluation/Performance Measurement of Current Programming
   e. Special Events
   f. Board Membership

17. What types of organizations would you seek out new partnerships, alliances, and collaborations with? Select all that apply.

   a. Federal Agencies
   b. State Agencies
   c. Municipal Agencies/City Government
   d. International or National Private Foundations
   e. Regional or Community Private Foundations
   f. Other Private Foundations
g. Nonprofit Agencies
h. For-Profit Service Providers
i. Educational Institutions (K-12)
j. Community Colleges
k. Public Universities
l. Private Universities
m. Other

Programming

18. Does your organization enroll clients/participants with an intake or enrollment form? Yes/No

19. Does your organization have a community needs assessment process? Yes/No

20. What kinds of services does your organization provide to clients or the community? Check all that apply:
   a. Direct Healthcare Services
   b. Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns
   c. Outreach and/or Referrals
   d. Educational Programming
   e. Fitness Instruction
   f. Nutritional Instruction
   g. Community Gardens
   h. Other (Please describe)

21. Does your organization evaluate the quality or results of programs? Yes/No
22. Does your organization collect data on client outcomes? Yes/No

23. Do you have a regular process for reviewing your programs’ evaluation results? Yes/No

24. Does your organization have access to industry research to inform program planning or implementation? Yes/No
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE
Does Place Affect Access to “What Works”?: Knowledge Usage in Urban and Rural NGO Intervention Design

Interview Guide

ID #:__________________________________________

Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in an in-person interview today. The following questions are in reference to your current organizational practices. At any time you are able to skip questions, or decline to participate in further questions. This information will be used to create an informational profile of your organization, which will be analyzed and contrasted with other organizational profiles of other NGOs in Mississippi as part of this study. This information will be used to learn about your organization, how the leaders of the organization make program decisions, and what kinds of information are used to make these decisions. Although you will be asked to provide the name of your organization, this information will be kept confidential, and the unique ID number you received will be used to match your survey responses and your interview answers. This interview should last between 1-1.5 hours. This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

1. How would you describe the mission of your organization, in your own words?
Possible follow up/prompt: Either your official mission verbatim, or a generalization of your organization’s main objectives.

2. How do you identify new/emerging needs among your target population including both short- and long-term needs?
3. How does your organization identify what similar or complementary services are offered to your target population?

4. When making changes to a program, how do you decide what changes are needed and what strategies to use?

5. What are some reasons that a new program might be introduced by your organization?

6. What are some of the factors that you would consider in deciding to address identified needs/gaps in services?

7. Describe what the process for designing a new program would look like.
   a. Are there tools or processes you regularly use, such as a Logic Model?
   b. What internal staff would be involved?
   c. What outside partners might be involved?
   d. What kinds of information would be gathered for this process, and where would that information come from?
   e. What information would inform the design of the program (i.e., what curriculum used, how often sessions would be held, how long sessions would be, etc.)?
f. How would you decide what successful outcomes of the program would look like?

g. How would the program idea be presented for final approval?

h. How would you evaluate program outcomes?

8. How would you describe any assistance or guidance you receive from partners (funders, national affiliates, professional organizations, etc.) on program design processes?

9. Is the process described used for the majority of programming at your organization?

10. In submitting reports to funding organizations and donors, do you report program outcomes?

   a. If yes, please explain.

   b. Do you ever receive feedback from funding organizations and donors concerning program outcomes?

      i. If yes, please explain.

11. Please describe any evaluation data that you currently regularly collect.

12. Does your organization collect its own evaluation (using organization staff resources), partner with other outside evaluation organizations, or both? Please describe.
Thank you again for your participation in this interview. You may be contacted by Ms. Brooking in the future to complete a second in-person interview further detailing the program design process of your organization.
APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT
Recruitment Script (for inclusion in newsletters or email communication):

Seeking 20 survey and interview respondents from Mississippi health-related NGOs for a study about data usage in decision making: “Evidence-Based Solutions” and “Big Data” are becoming increasingly important staples for nonprofits to utilize to gain corporate, private and government grants, but what does program management using this data look like in practice? I’m seeking NGO leaders in Mississippi to help answer this question, by participating in survey and interviews about the ways Mississippi nonprofits are using empirical data, evaluation and locally-based knowledge to make operating decisions, develop new programs, and address emerging needs. In a competitive environment for limited funding, incorporating data collection and evaluation to craft community solutions and demonstrate improvement can provide the edge you need to demonstrate effectiveness, acquire new funding sources, and move the needle on the issues your organization and your community are most passionate about. The online survey will take approximately 30 minutes, and interviews (you may be asked for an additional second interview) will take between 1-1.5 hours. If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact Caitlin Brooking, Masters Student in Sociology at the University of Mississippi, at cbrookin@go.olemiss.edu, or 601.583.0441. This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).
APPENDIX D: INFORMATION SHEET
INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Does Place Affect Access to ‘What Works’?: Knowledge Usage in Urban and Rural NGO Intervention Design

Investigator          Advisor
Caitlin Brooking      John J. Green, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology and Anthropology Department of Sociology and Anthropology
510 Lamar Hall        537 Lamar Hall
The University of Mississippi The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7421        (662) 915-7295

All participants in the study must be 18 years of age or older.

Description

The purpose of this research project is to determine how NGO leaders make programmatic decisions. We would like to ask you a few questions, first a survey and then one or two in-person interviews, about your organization, how the leaders of the organization make program decisions, and what kinds of information are used to make these decisions. Although you will be asked to provide the name of your organization, this information will be kept confidential, and you will receive a unique ID number to match your survey responses with your interview responses. The survey portion will be conducted online via Qualtrics, and in-person interviews will be audio recorded. The online survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete, and each in-person interview will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours.
**Risks and Benefits**

You may not feel comfortable answering all of the questions regarding your organization’s decision-making or data-use practices. We do not think that there are any other risks. Your input will provide valuable insight into the resources and support currently available to NGOs in developing programs, and will help to indicate areas where these resources could be enhanced and improved.

**Confidentiality**

Your personal information will not be collected in the survey or interview forms, and will only be used to arrange in-person interview time and location. Your organization’s name and location will be collected to assign a unique ID number, which will be used to match surveys and interviews. Pseudonyms will be used to describe organizations in subsequent written materials.

**Right to Withdraw**

You do not have to take part in this study and you may stop participation at any time. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, all you have to do is to tell Ms. Brooking or Dr. Green in person, by letter, or by telephone (contact information listed above). You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

**IRB Approval**

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read and understand the above information. By completing the survey/interview I consent to participate in the study.
APPENDIX E: RELEASE
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

RELEASE

For valuable consideration, I do hereby authorize The University of Mississippi, its assignees, agents, employees, designees, and those acting pursuant to its authority ("UM") to:

a. Record my participation and appearance on video tape, audio tape, film, photograph or any other medium ("Recordings").

b. Use my name, likeness, voice and biographical material in connection with these recordings.

c. Exhibit, copy, reproduce, perform, display or distribute such Recordings (and to create derivative works from them) in whole or in part without restrictions or limitation in any format or medium for any purpose which The University of Mississippi, and those acting pursuant to its authority, deem appropriate.

d. I release UM from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such Recordings including any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, rights of publicity, or copyright.

Name: ____________________________________________

Address:____________________________________________

Phone No.:________________________________________

Signature:__________________________________________

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18):______________
Table 1: Basic Characteristics of Participating Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of organization</th>
<th># counties served</th>
<th>Are you an affiliate of a parent organization?</th>
<th># full time staff</th>
<th>What kinds of services does your organization provide to clients or the community? Select all that apply.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coahoma County</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>National, Statewide</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Educational Programming, Fitness Instruction, Nutritional Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeSoto County</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallahatchie County</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>National, Regional</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Direct Healthcare Services, Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Educational Programming, Fitness Instruction, Nutritional Instruction, Community Gardens, Chronic disease self-management, youth programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tallahatchie County</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Direct Healthcare Services, Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming, Fitness Instruction, Nutritional Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lafayette County</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming, Nutritional Instruction, Community Gardens, Farm to School Procurement Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DeSoto County</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Programming, Community Gardens, Local Food system development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coahoma County</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coahoma County</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Direct Healthcare Services, Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming, Fitness Instruction, Nutritional Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coahoma County</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming, Fitness Instruction, Nutritional Instruction, Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coahoma County</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Nutritional Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinds County</td>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming, Technical Assistance, Coalition Building, Workforce Training to Support Programs Promoting Home Health, Safety and Energy Efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinds County</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>Direct Healthcare Services, Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming, Fitness Instruction</td>
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103
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Covering</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hinds County</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>Direct Healthcare Services, Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming, Fitness Instruction, Nutritional Instruction, Community Gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinds County</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Direct Healthcare Services, Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming, Fitness Instruction, Nutritional Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rankin County</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Educational Programming, Fitness Instruction, Nutritional Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madison County</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Direct Healthcare Services, Preventative Care and/or Awareness Campaigns, Outreach and/or Referrals, Educational Programming, Nutritional Instruction, Community Gardens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Caitlin Brooking
734a Clearbrook Dr. • Oxford, MS • Phone: (617) 513-7389 • E-mail: cbrookin@go.olemiss.edu

EDUCATION
University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
Masters Candidate, Sociology
Anticipated Graduation: August 2016
Thesis Title: “Does Place Affect Access to ‘What Works’?: Knowledge Usage in Urban and Rural NGO Intervention Design”
Thesis Advisor: Dr. John Green

Boston University, Boston, MA
BA in Psychology with Distinction, May 2004
GPA: 3.46/4.0
Senior Thesis: “Critical Band Spatial Frequency Processing of Emotional Expressions”
Thesis Advisor: Dr. David Somers

RESEARCH INTERESTS
Spatial inequality, poverty, NGO organizational development and intervention design, program evaluation

RESEARCH AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE
Thesis Research Project
- Conduct 16 online surveys and in-person interviews with key informants in rural and urban Mississippi NGOs
- Conduct comparative analysis of organizational profiles of intervention design processes
- Identify differential patterns of partnership strategies, information utilization and intervention design strategies among rural and urban located NGOs

McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement
CEED Innovation Fellow, August 2014 – Present
- Developed entrepreneurship project to engage adults in career betterment in Coahoma County with TriCounty Workforce Alliance
- Designed and implemented Career Aspirations Survey to identify needs within target population (parents of current participants)
- Creating proposal to engage parents in college completion and career advancement in healthcare and education (in progress)
- Mentored 2 undergraduate students in developing entrepreneurship projects in Coahoma County
- Managed learning content for CEED Innovation Fellows and Scholars
AWARDS
Larry W. DeBord Award, 2016
Graduate Achievement in Sociology, 2016
Honors Fellowship, 2015 - Present
University of Mississippi Graduate School
Innovation Fellow, 2014 - Present
McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement, University of Mississippi

CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS
Community Development Collaboration through Applied Research
Delta Regional Forum, July 2015
The Catalytic Role of Simmel’s The Stranger
Catalyzing Entrepreneurship and Economic Development Program, April 2015
Building Organizational Capacity for Social Development in the Mississippi Delta: A Panel Discussion on Research and Practice for Community-University Partnerships
Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association Annual Conference, February 2015
Tools and Strategies to Manage Spontaneous Volunteers [in Disaster]
National Conference on Volunteering and Service, June 2014
Creating Community Partnerships
Positioned for Progress Conference, May 2012

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND CERTIFICATIONS
Certificate in Program Evaluation (in progress), University of Mississippi, Anticipated May 2017
Member, Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association, 2014 – Present
Member, American Evaluation Association, 2016 - Present
Graduate, National Service Executives Leadership Summit, June 2013
Graduate, American Express Leadership Academy, October 2012
Member, American Society for Training and Development, December 2010 - Present
Certificate in Designing Learning, American Society for Training and Development, December 2010

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service
Director of Program Development, August 2009-Present
· Developed and implemented training strategy for AmeriCorps*State Program Directors
· Managed training events for staff and AmeriCorps members, including 4 statewide national service orientations for members
· Created and executed 5-part virtual technical assistance curriculum for organizations applying for AmeriCorps State programs
· Wrote and managed budget for program development and training grant from Corporation for National and Community Service
· Created statewide Cross Stream Council to develop partnerships among national service programs, culminating in the first annual statewide Cross Stream Conference
· Developed and implemented spontaneous volunteer management strategy for 6 major disaster events
· Developed and implemented statewide outreach strategy for national service resources

Hands On Gulf Coast
Acting Director & Director of Programs, May 2008-April 2009
· Determined impact areas, program goals, and strategic initiatives for HOGC programs and created comprehensive program plan
· Created and implemented impact data tracking system to measure program efficiency, adherence to performance measures and
goals, and volunteer demographics  
- Successfully secured over $150,000 in corporate and state grant funding  
- Recruited, hired and managed staff of 3 Full-Time employees and 1 Consultant  
- Recruited, developed and managed founding Board of Directors  
- Managed operating budget and reporting for approximately $1.2M, including $400,000 AmeriCorps State program  
- Directed application process to obtain 501c3 nonprofit status  
- Oversaw fundraising strategy development and implementation

_AmeriCorps Program Coordinator/Manager, March 2007 – May 2008_  
- Managed over 70 AmeriCorps Project Coordinators, including administrative oversight, project guidance, and training  
- Developed effective partnerships with over 10 community organizations  
- Oversaw 10 unique program areas, including youth development, green spaces, community outreach and volunteer engagement  
- Managed AmeriCorps NCCC Host Site team placement, site orientation, training and regular check-ins  
- Managed budgets, progress reports and applications for project-specific grants  
- Coordinated cooperative management of volunteer housing facility, and worked to secure low-cost housing for visiting volunteers  
- Developed community service projects for an average of 50 local and visiting volunteers per day

**CONSULTING WORK**

_Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory_  
*EnCorps Consultant, March 2008 - October 2008*  
- Contributed best practices and procedures for addition to EnCorps, federally-sponsored AmeriCorps Member Development resource center  
- Reviewed and edited resources submitted from nation-wide AmeriCorps*State programs  
- Developed new training modules and resources for national AmeriCorps distribution