Stoking the Fire to Make Change

Supporting Policy Advocacy by Community-based Organizations and the Communities They Serve in Winnipeg

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Introduction

ACROSS CANADA, MARGINALIZED community members and their allies continue to engage in advocacy efforts to improve their quality of life and their communities. They have protested their landlords to effect repairs or prevent evictions.[1] They have lobbied local and provincial governments in attempts to advance policy changes such as increased social program funding, better employment laws, or the creation of new affordable housing.[2] The forms these efforts take and the strategies and tactics they use are varied. In many cases they are supported by non-profit community-based organizations (CBOs) and service providers.[3]

CBOs are non-profit organizations that provide services or deliver programs to people locally.[4] They may be funded by governments but are not government institutions.[5] Many, but not all, have charitable status and are bound by regulations governing charities.[6] Because of their proximity to the communities they serve and the networks and relationships developed through this work, CBOs are uniquely positioned to engage in policy advocacy on behalf of the communities they serve—but how can they also support communities to advocate on their own behalf?

This study examines how CBOs in Winnipeg support community and grassroots policy advocacy to address the needs of their participants.[7] Results from a survey and interviews with staff working at CBOs show that Winnipeg's non-profit sector takes policy advocacy seriously. CBOs engage in policy advocacy on issues that matter to community members and employ a variety of methods to engage their participants in the identification of

priorities for policy change and in the implementation of advocacy efforts. External factors, such as a hostile government or lack of public support, were generally not seen as limiting factors. Rather, internal CBO issues such as lack of staff time and resources were more likely to decrease policy advocacy activity. Respondents also identified significant barriers to the involvement in policy advocacy of those directly affected by poverty and marginalization.

The study identifies several promising practices that may improve a CBO's policy advocacy practice and increase community involvement in and control of policy advocacy. These practices address some of the barriers to policy advocacy engagement faced by individuals and the organizations themselves. It finds that CBOs with clear policies and internal processes for engagement are more likely to have significant involvement by community members in policy advocacy. Additionally, professional development and capacity building for both CBO staff and community members aid in addressing barriers to engagement.

What is Advocacy?

POLICY ADVOCACY CAN take many forms, from formal lobbying of politicians to developing research projects with the aim of identifying policy problems and potential solutions, making a shared definition important.[8] Some definitions of advocacy focus on the goals of the activity — the 'cause' being promoted — while others emphasize the types of activity (civic participation or building social capital, for instance), while still others centre the targets of such advocacy — governments or institutions — in their definitions.[9] In her study of non-profit organizations in Saskatchewan, DeSantis developed a definition of 'social policy advocacy' that summarized the non-profit literature on the subject, proposing that such advocacy "consists of those intentional efforts of [non-profit organizations] to change existing or proposed government policies on behalf of or with groups of marginalized people."[10] We have adapted this definition and expanded it to capture a wider array of potential policies and actors. Our study used the following definition of policy advocacy in the survey and interview questions.

> Policy Advocacy: intentional efforts to change existing or proposed institutional policies or actions on behalf of, and/or with, a group of people affected by the issue. Institutions may include government, employers, landlords, agencies, or the media.

This definition is intentionally broad, to include a wide diversity of tactics and targets, while recognizing that CBOs may advocate for, as well as with, the communities they serve.

While most CBOs focus on providing programs and services to their respective communities, a small but significant number of community-based organizations engage in policy advocacy. The strategies used by community-based organizations vary, and include meeting with government officials, speaking to the media, lobbying, authoring and sharing research that provides evidence for policy changes, organizing demonstrations, building coalitions, engaging in electoral debates, advancing legal challenges, and many others.[11] Some organizations view policy advocacy as a logical extension of their service-delivery function, as a means to ensure the needs of their communities are addressed; others view policy advocacy in terms of democratic decision-making, hoping to assist communities affected by policies to have some input, through the CBO, in the shaping of those policies; while still others view policy advocacy as a necessary step to improving the socio-economic system.[12] Likewise, how CBOs engage participants and community members in policy advocacy varies widely.

Sherry Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Participation* outlines eight rungs or levels of citizen power in political decision making. While originally developed as a critique of strategies for "citizen participation" in government programs in the United States, the ladder offers potential for critical assessment of many types of community engagement.[13] The lowest rungs of the ladder represent types of non-participation in decision-making. In the middle rungs, communities are 'tokenized' when they are consulted about their needs by institutions or organizations that then shape policy change without addressing their input. Three rungs of 'citizen control' — the ability for those affected by an issue to identify the issue, the preferred solution, and how to implement it — lie at the top of the ladder. While more recent typologies of participation and empowerment exist,[14] there are some common themes: that participation can be manipulative; it can be functional or 'instrumental' for both institutions and impacted communities; it can be interactive or collaborative or involve communities taking their own initiative; and, it can be empowering and transformative.[15] Arnstein's ladder is a helpful way to think about the work of policy advocacy by CBOs that serve Winnipeg's marginalized communities.

However, because Arnstein's ladder and similar typologies focus on the relationship between governments or institutions and organizations such as CBOs and community members, they cannot capture fully independent community activities including, for example, tenants organizing their own building associations, low-wage workers holding impromptu walkouts to protest mistreatment, or Indigenous or Black communities rallying in

FIGURE 1 Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation
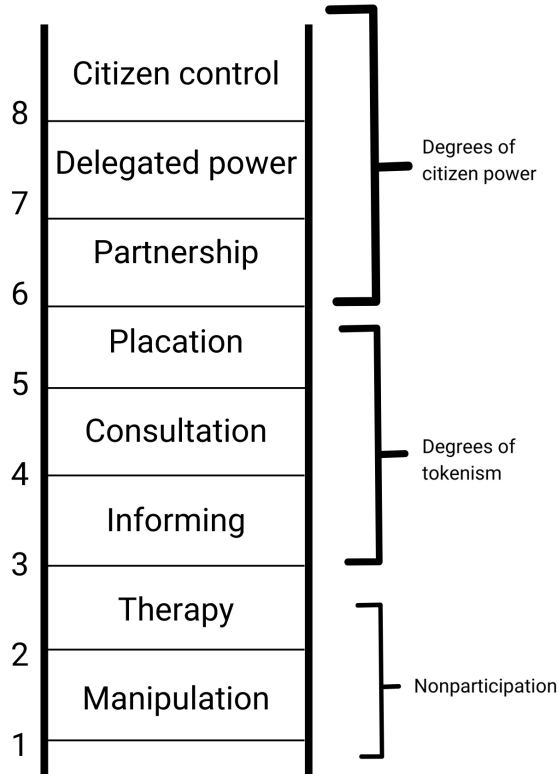
response to police misconduct. By definition, fully-independent, 'citizen-controlled' community advocacy efforts exist apart from community-based organizations, even if CBOs may support these efforts.[16]

CBOs have specific 'constituents' in addition to the communities they serve, including government, funders, and other CBOs to which they are accountable.[17] Although CBOs are, in many ways, well-placed to advocate with and on behalf of the communities they serve, past research has questioned the extent to which they are capable of moving beyond the "non-profit industrial complex."[18] Scholars and activists in the United States have described the non-profit industrial complex as an element in the "policing and incarceration of marginalized, racially pathologized communities, as well as the state's *ongoing absorption* of organized dissent through the non-profit structure."[19] When CBOs become reliant on external funding to provide services that should be provided by the state, they risk forgetting that "the purpose of the work is to gain liberation, not to guarantee the organization's longevity."[20] In addition, CBOs must follow rules and regulations (which community

activists are not bound by) and may not want to risk funding, charitable status, or relationships with policymakers.[21]

Until 2019, in Canada, charities were restricted from engaging in "political activities" amounting to more than 10 percent of their annual expenditures and faced the possibility of the loss of their charitable status for flouting this rule.[22] Today, Canadian charities are allowed to engage in "public policy dialogue and development activities" that advance the goals of their charity, using up to 100 percent of their resources; however, they are barred from "directly or indirectly support[ing] or oppos[ing] a political party or candidate for public office."[23] Before and after these rule changes, Canadian CBOs and charities have engaged in policy advocacy on behalf of, and with, marginalized communities. In her study in southern Ontario, Hardina found that a third of social workers supported clients or community members to "obtain resources or a role in government decision-making;" over 80 percent were involved in policy advocacy or social action.[24] CBOs in the newcomer sector in Ontario, B.C., and Saskatchewan have partnered with academic researchers and engaged in coalition-based advocacy to "amplify their voice" in an inherently political policy process.[25] Some Canadian CBOs have engaged in insider advocacy, working closely with governments, or making use of the mass media to influence policy.[26] Others have actively supported community members challenging government policies through rallies, public mobilizations, or in the courts.[27] The involvement of community members in CBO policy advocacy in Canada has been mediated by several factors, including basic material barriers such as lack of time, money, or resources, and psychological barriers such as a lack of knowledge or trust, or fear of negative outcomes for the community members.[28] Despite these challenges, and the infrequent success of policy advocacy, the literature examining Canadian CBOs shows that CBOs continue to engage in policy advocacy. Our research hopes to contribute to these efforts.

Research Methods

THIS STUDY AIMS to answer the following research questions:

- How do CBOs engage in policy advocacy?

- How can CBOs increase their policy advocacy?

- How can CBOs best help their communities to engage in policy advocacy?

To do so, we used surveys and interviews with staff at Winnipeg CBOs. The surveys were distributed first, in fall 2021, to gather a high-level picture of CBOs' policy advocacy, including factors that shape CBOs' advocacy and how CBOs engage their participants in advocacy. Then, in winter 2021–22, we conducted interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in community-engaged policy advocacy in practice. The research was approved by the University of Manitoba's Human Research Ethics Board.

Survey questions were based on prior studies of Canadian CBO policy advocacy (see Appendix A for survey questions).[29] The survey was offered through Qualtrics. We distributed a link to the survey widely, through local listservs and social media sites relating to poverty and community development in Winnipeg. Respondents had to be over 18 and employed at a CBO in the previous three years. Twenty-five fully completed surveys were collected from a total of 44 responses. The survey results were analysed using Excel to identify basic trends. Of the 25 full responses received, more than half were

from staff working in large organizations of 15 or more employees. Eighty percent of respondents worked for charities (three worked for non-profit organizations and two respondents did not know their organization's status). Almost all (23) were full-time staff in various roles: front-line workers (9), managers or program coordinators (8), and executive directors (6).

Following the survey, between November 2021 and April 2022 we held semi-structured interviews[30] with staff working in Winnipeg-based CBOs. We sent invitations to 15 purposively sampled organizations representing the diversity of Winnipeg CBOs. Eleven staff from ten organizations participated in 40–60 minute interviews conducted over Zoom (see Appendix B for interview questions). Interviewees included people who had worked in CBOs from three to more than ten years in a range of roles, including frontline workers, managers, and one executive director. The organizations included neighbourhood-based renewal corporations, local branches of larger issue-based organizations; one self-identified as an Indigenous organization. The interview data was coded[31] to identify key themes about how CBO staff perceive policy advocacy and their organization's role in advocacy.

Limitations

Given the relatively small number of survey and interview respondents, the picture painted by their responses, while illuminating, should not be regarded as representative of all CBOs in Winnipeg. The research focused on the CBOs themselves, and did not engage community members to hear their perceptions of advocacy by CBOs; they may well have a different perspective from the staff. As well, respondents who chose to participate in the study may be more interested in advocacy and perhaps more likely to engage in policy advocacy within their organization, regardless of an existing organizational policy or mandate. These limitations could be addressed in future research.

Winnipeg Community-Based Organizations and Policy Advocacy

THE SURVEY RESULTS show that Winnipeg CBOs are engaging in a broad spectrum of policy advocacy activities to address the needs of their participants and the communities they serve. All of the survey respondents reported that their organization had been involved in some form of policy advocacy in the past three years, including by raising awareness with government, joining advocacy coalitions, and developing and participating in research (see *Figure 2*). However, the survey data also suggests that advocacy is more likely to take place through official channels or accepted institutional processes than to involve confrontation with governments or institutions.

The interviews also showed that policy advocacy work by staff had a similar focus on the use of institutional channels to advance their policy goals. Staff from seven organizations said their organization advanced their policy goals through direct engagement with institutions and government. This is consistent with other studies showing community-based service organizations engage in policy advocacy through "'insider' channels" to successfully advance changes at the level of policy implementation, informed by their day-to-day work in the community.[32] As one interviewee said, instead of "being out on the street with a sign…[CBOs are] actually sitting at tables with people who are decision makers." Several interviewees described new

FIGURE 2 Focus of Advocacy Activities During the Last Three Years
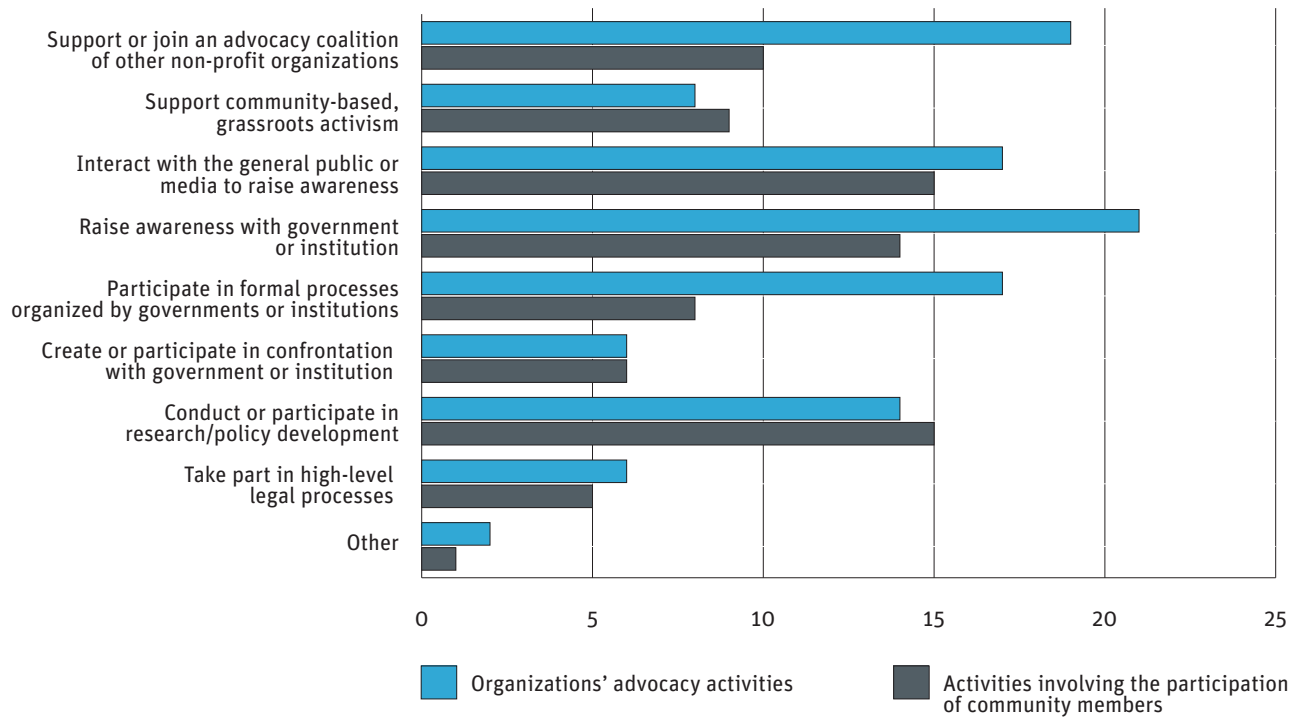
Note: The survey was conducted in Fall 2021, so this period covers 2018–2021.

policy initiatives, programs, or system 'operational fixes' which resulted from these relationships.

While relationships with government have yielded some gains, interviewees acknowledged that these 'tables,' which include policy professionals and government representatives, were generally not welcoming to community members living in poverty. Organizations try to bring community perspectives to these tables through pre-consultation with their participants. One interviewee described this "stakeholder and lived experience" input as a form of holding the organization accountable to the community it serves as it seeks to represent their interests to government.

In addition to building relationships directly with government, CBOs joined or supported advocacy coalitions. Half of the interviewees' organizations were also involved in advocacy coalitions such as Make Poverty History Manitoba or the Right to Housing Coalition,[33] which push for systemic policy changes. Coalitions were seen as helpful because organizations could have a 'louder voice' together and could take positions that they might not be able to take alone. One interviewee said that coalitions provided their CBO with

an 'arm's length' way "to support advocacy without having to be the voice for advocacy," in ways that wouldn't jeopardize the CBO's partnerships with institutions that might be the target of those advocacy campaigns. However, not all of the interviewees praised coalitions. One interviewee from a large CBO noted that some local coalition-led advocacy efforts lacked the voices and leadership of people directly affected by marginalization; they felt that the voices and leadership of people directly experiencing poverty in the city, particularly those of the Indigenous community, were not prioritized.

Factors Shaping CBO Policy Advocacy

Survey respondents were asked to assess how specific internal factors affected their organization's involvement in advocacy and to assess the effect each factor had on the CBO's advocacy (see *Figure 3*). The factors that decreased advocacy the most were lack of staff time, insufficient resources, and the need for service delivery to take priority. Despite the recent change to CRA laws and regulations for registered charities which now allow for policy advocacy by CBOs, funding rules discouraging advocacy were also perceived by the respondents as a significant factor in decreased advocacy involvement by CBOs.

In interviews, CBO staff noted that their own involvement in policy advocacy often occurred in spare moments after completion of core responsibilities. As several interviewees described it, advocacy is something they do off the side of their desks. The organizations' obligations to meet the service delivery requirements of their funding first and foremost was frequently mentioned by interviewees. As many noted, since the beginning of the pandemic, needs in the community have become more pronounced and staff spend much of their time "putting out fires" (as one interviewee put it) and focussing on the urgent needs of their clients, which reduces time available for advocacy. The priority of service delivery, combined with a lack of staff time and insufficient resources, make it difficult for organizations to engage in advocacy work.

Survey respondents were more likely to report that having an unsupportive executive director or board would have no effect on policy advocacy rather than decrease it. Among interviewees, on the other hand, almost half felt that there was a hesitancy in their organizations to "rock the boat" and endanger relationships with their funders. Rather than casting a 'chill' over advocacy and pushing CBOs to stop policy advocacy altogether,[34] this pressure may account for the strategies CBOs choose to employ (e.g. direct

FIGURE 3 Internal Issues Affecting Organizational Involvement in Advocacy
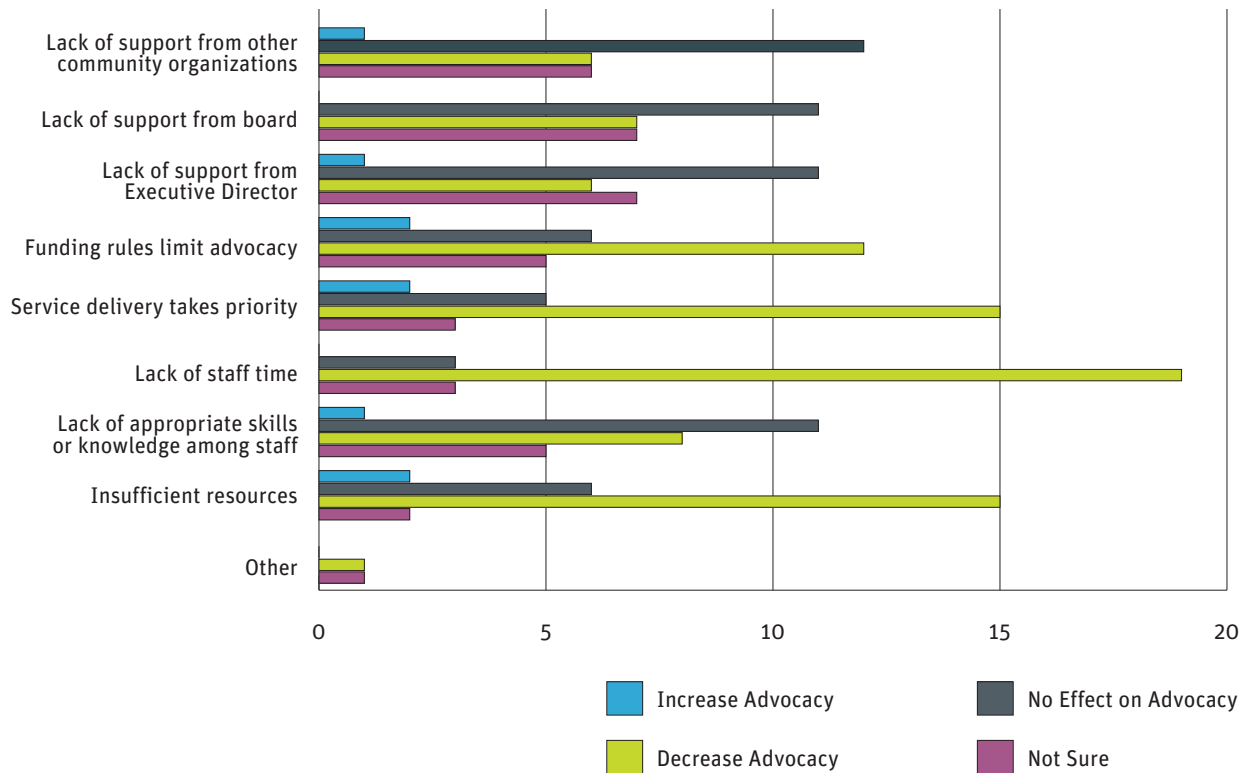
engagement with government) and those they forego (e.g. confrontational activities). However, most of the interviewees were not in management roles directly involved with maintaining relationships or negotiating with funders, so it is hard to draw definitive conclusions about the likelihood of negative repercussions vis-à-vis funders arising from advocacy and whether this motivated CBO leadership choices.

On the other hand, several interview respondents were supported by their respective organizations to include some hours of advocacy, outreach, or coalition work as part of their responsibilities. As one CBO program manager remarked, the increased size of the organization made advocacy more possible:

> Ten or twelve years ago, everyone was working to meet the day-to-day needs of the participants, that was the primary focus. It wasn't, 'let's sit down and brainstorm ways to approach the government because this policy sucks.' We've been able to do a lot more of that as we've grown.

Six of the organizations allowed staff time to take part in community-based advocacy events such as vigils or rallies, but most interviewees characterized this as dependent on individual staff initiative rather than organizational mandate. In only one case was the majority of the staff person's work hours specifically devoted to advocacy and organizing directly with community members; the role was funded through a grant program which allowed specifically for this kind of activity. Several interviewees were supported to take formal training in advocacy if they desired but in just one case was advocacy training part of the employee orientation.

Interviewees were asked if their CBO had a formal or informal policy about advocacy activities. These are similar to internal policies which define scope of work, set out responsibilities and expectations for staff and leadership, and set out processes to inform decision-making, or manage conflict. Two interviewees noted their organizations did not have an internal advocacy policy of any kind, while five said their organizations had an 'informal' advocacy policy.[35] Just four interviewees noted that their CBOs had explicit policies that informed their policy advocacy. These policies take several forms. Some are embedded in the mission of the organization or meant to guide large aspects of the organization's work, such as one organization's development of a long-term plan to decolonize their work, which moved the organization to align themselves with Indigenous-identified needs and Indigenous-led community movements in their policy advocacy work. Other policies were developed in response to issues directly or indirectly affecting their clients (such as mental health and addictions) and often were expressed in terms of values or positions that the organization held on the issue. One used a specific strategic framework model to guide their advocacy activities, which uses a theory of change to allow their organization to see how specific activities might align with or act against their longer-term plans. CBOs with some formalization of policy advocacy tended to be larger, formally linked to larger organizations or institutions, or well-established, though not all such organizations had internal policies.

Survey respondents were also asked to assess how specific external issues impacted their organization's involvement in advocacy and to rank the effect they had, from no effect, to decreasing or increasing their advocacy (see *Figure 4*). Interestingly, many of the factors listed, from hostile or receptive governments or public, to community interest, were identified as having no effect on advocacy by a large number of respondents. The factors that the largest number of respondents felt would increase CBO advocacy were
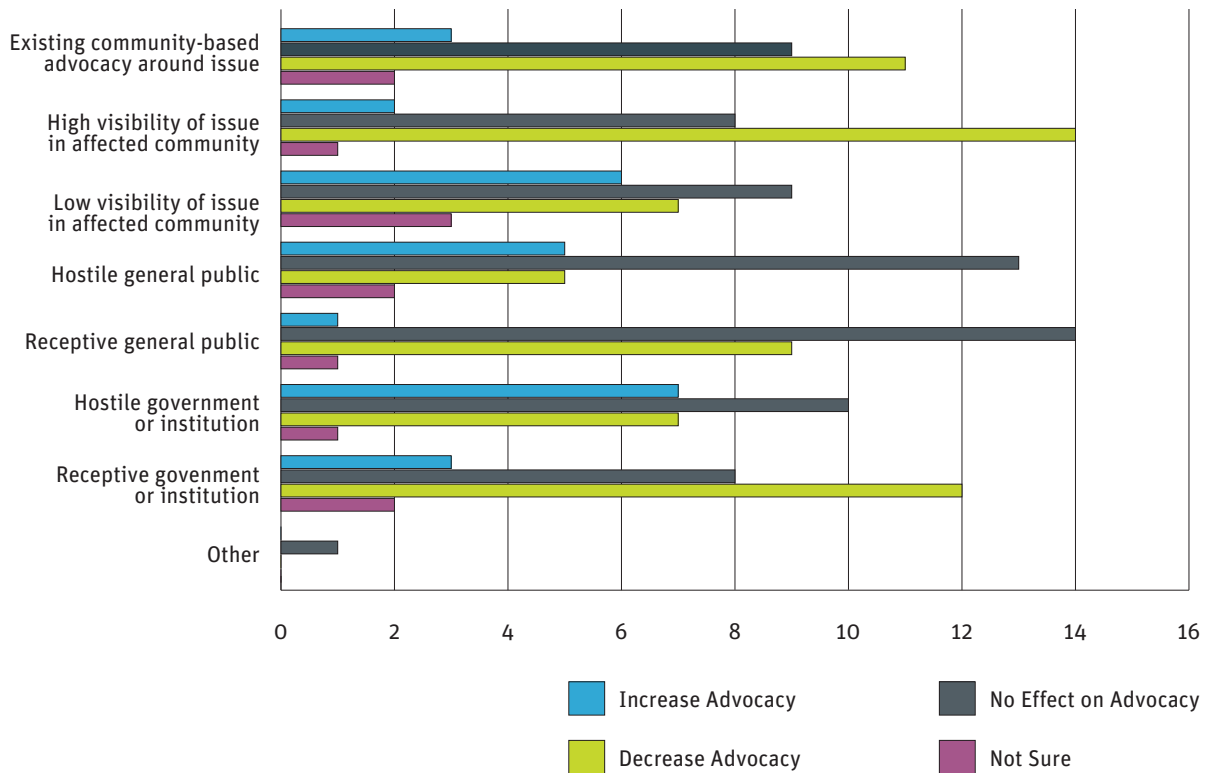
high visibility of an issue in the community or existing community-based advocacy, as well as a receptive government or institution.

The importance of policy advocacy aligning with the community's perspective on an issue was echoed by the interviewees, who also emphasized the need for policy advocacy to reflect the will and needs of the community. Several interviewees placed a very high value on following the lead of the community they serve, as either (or both) a way to build trust and as a way to ensure that policy advocacy addresses the harms as they are defined by community members. "I think it's often about when we do advocacy, why, and for who," said a staff person working in a large organization. "We have to often think about what permission we have to do that. You know, who we are speaking for or, on whose behalf, and what gives us that legitimacy to do that. And really, again, to be really careful about those processes." As this quote illustrates, CBO staff have considered, to varying degrees, the perspective of those directly affected by an issue and how these perspectives should inform the policy advocacy of their organizations. Interviewees acknowledged that an approach to policy advocacy which centres relationships with community

is not simple or easy. As one CBO manager said, it's "a journey of courage and humility, [to] bravely forge ahead when you're constantly falling on your face, [but then you] pick up and look at the fallout and repair things and try to move forward in a better way."

Several CBO staff placed priority on representation of people with lived experience of poverty and marginalization. Many interviewees noted that the staff or boards of their organization did not reflect the demographics of the community they served, though at least one organization had made gains in hiring people with lived experience of poverty. Over half of the interviewees noted that this kind of representation within the organization and on the board should be prioritized and, in particular, that Indigenous staff be hired. Interviewees argued that staff who had similar experiences or came from similar communities as participants would be more approachable and may be trusted more easily by those who routinely face discrimination or misunderstanding by social services and other institutions.

Some interviewees also suggested that, in order to represent the community's interests in policy advocacy, the organization must be more representative of the community. Several interviewees discussed the importance of developing relationships with Indigenous Elders to support the needs of their participants and how doing so would improve engagement in advocacy and other activities, linking connection with culture and community to the empowerment of Indigenous individuals in poverty. As one interviewee said, "the importance of ceremony and bringing people together and welcoming them is also key for some of these types of engagements. Having involvement and guidance of Elders, especially if there are Elders with lived experience is really important."

Community representation is also essential in building trust and momentum towards advocacy. A CBO frontline staff member expressed a desire for community leadership from those directly affected by poverty, saying:

> I think a sort of galvanizing force in the community would be really helpful. You know, a figure or figures that have credibility. ...You must be credible, you have to be authentic, because people smell bullshit a mile away and they want somebody to be honest, right? They want to know they are being led in the right direction.

To this end, the next section examines the extent to which participants and community members are engaged in policy advocacy by CBOs.

Involving the Community in Policy Advocacy

All but one of the survey respondents' organizations involved participants or community members in policy advocacy activities. Interestingly, community members were much less likely to be part of formal institutional processes (just eight respondents) and advocacy coalitions (10 respondents) even though these are two of the more commonly used policy advocacy methods (see *Figure 1*, above). As noted earlier, interviewees suggested that formal advocacy processes, which involve in-person interactions with government representatives or policy professionals, were seen as less welcoming to marginalized community members.

The high number of CBOs that involved community members in policy advocacy identified in the survey responses is encouraging. However, the type of level of involvement of community members was often limited (see *Figure 5*).

The CBO staff described their organization engaging in similar policy advocacy activities which involved those directly impacted by poverty. Four of the interviewees described how their CBO created or facilitated committees of community participants at varying levels of engagement. These committees ranged from ad hoc groups that provided feedback on

FIGURE 5 How Community Members Participated in the Advocacy Activities
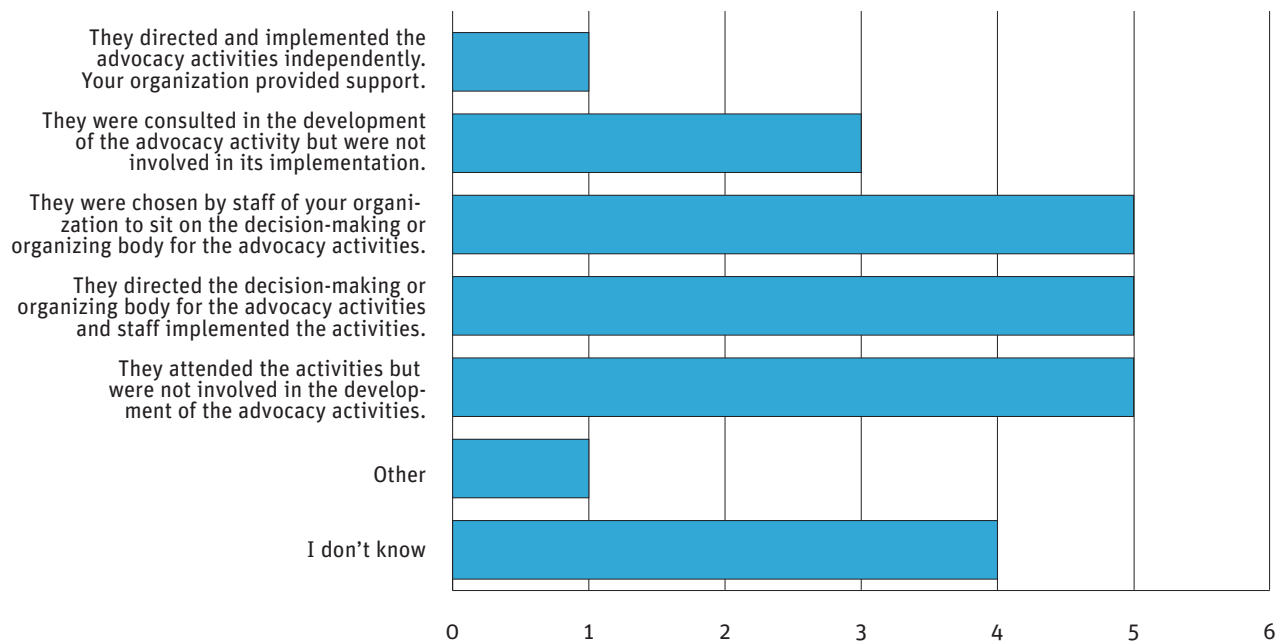
organizational initiatives, or who were asked for input into advocacy priorities or messaging, to committees that became relatively autonomous and directed their own advocacy campaigns without formal CBO involvement, but with occasional CBO support. However, the capacity of participants to engage in these activities varies substantially.

### Factors Shaping Community Involvement in Policy Advocacy

When asked about issues that affect the capacity of community members to participate in advocacy, survey respondents identified daily survival issues, lack of practical support, and psychological barriers as the main impediments to community member involvement in advocacy activities (see *Figure 6*). Consistent with the survey results, interviewees identified several barriers to community member involvement in policy advocacy, including daily survival needs. In response, CBOs attempt to mitigate some of the material barriers to involvement in advocacy. One interviewee noted:

> You might get a couple of people that will show up if there's no reward provided because they're doing well in their life at that time and they have kind of the fire burning in them to make change, but...the vast majority would be a hell of a lot more likely to attend and participate if there is some sort of incentive.

These incentives include one organization's set 'lived experience expert' fee offered to individuals when they were invited to events or meetings, while other organizations offer food at events or provide bus tickets.

CBOs staff also noted psychological barriers to policy advocacy involvement, including a hesitancy among participants to 'stick their neck out,' and real or perceived vulnerability related to their social position. Some of this hesitancy may stem from negative experiences with activism or policy advocacy, either their own or that of others, such as family members or members of their community here in Manitoba or elsewhere. For example, one interviewee suggested that newcomers may be wary of participating in advocacy work: "There could be a real personal hesitancy around doing [advocacy], especially if those individuals have not yet become Canadian citizens, and [they] might fear for their chance of getting citizenship [if they are seen as troublemakers]." Others noted that the lack of immediate results in participants' daily experience may contribute to low participation in advocacy efforts, since large-scale policy changes such as completely new social programs may require years-long campaigns.

FIGURE 6 Perceived Issues Affecting Community Member Involvement in Advocacy
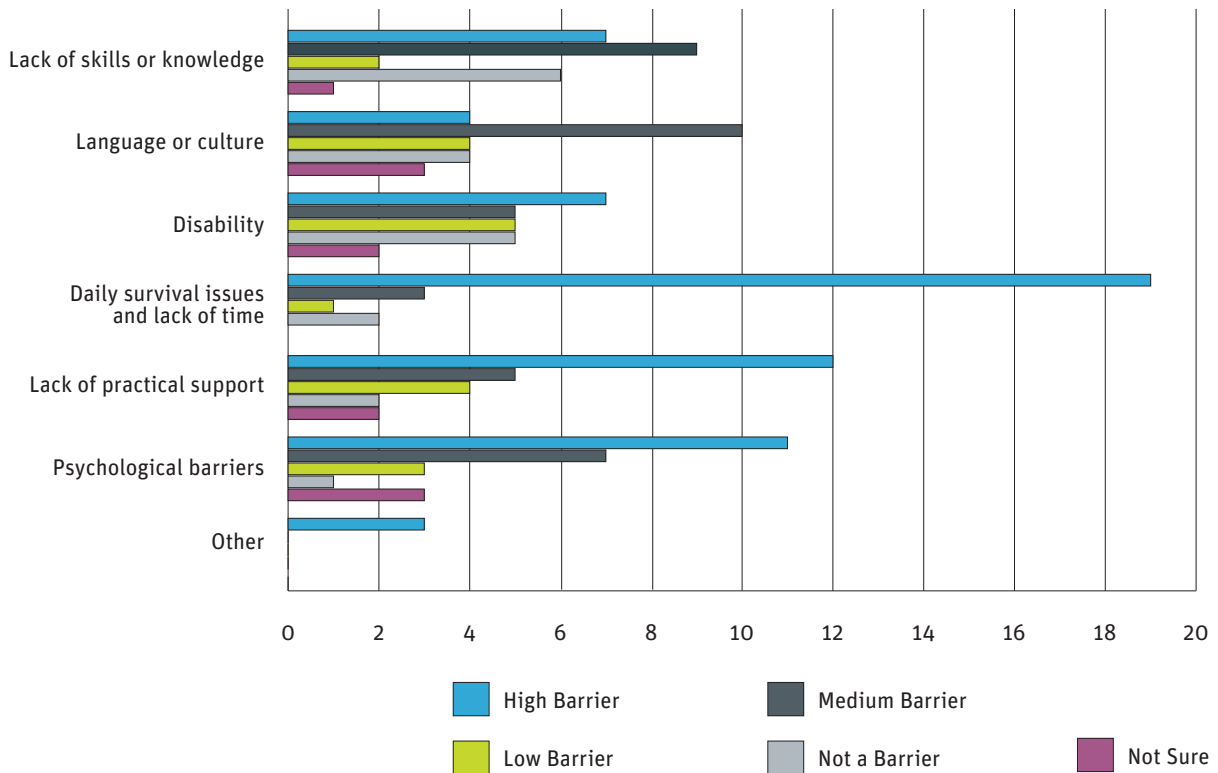
On the other hand, some CBO staff found ways to link policy advocacy with participants' daily concerns, where results might be realized in shorter time frames. One CBO documented and tracked policy 'fails' through their direct client service work — specific small-scale problems their clients routinely faced. This enabled the CBO to identify trends that were then prioritized for policy advocacy efforts by the organization. A frontline CBO staff member saw people's daily struggles as a potential entry point for collective advocacy efforts directed at larger policies. "These systems-level issues can sometimes be not very accessible," said the interviewee. "There's a need to loop in advocacy efforts with the possibilities of dealing with people's struggles as they come up." This is an opportunity to engage participants in advocacy on their own behalf, by connecting high-level policy to everyday lived experiences.

Supporting policy advocacy to address smaller institutional decisions — a rent increase by a landlord, for example — was seen by some as a specific skill set that wasn't common inside their organization. A frontline

caseworker described having to work with a tenant organizer from outside their organization who had those skills:

> I kind of work with [the tenant organizer] in those situations as well, like if we know a building is being evicted illegitimately for renovations. We'll talk about it, [the organizer] will go in with letters, they'll create a group and get them going... and then I would go in and support... talk about maybe we need to start finding housing and how are we doing to do that, and I would talk to the landlord.

In this way, CBOs can work together to support the needs of their participants, sharing advocacy skills. This is also a way to counter fear or hesitancy, by focusing on the importance of relationships, previous experience, and building trust: "People, they want to see with their own eyes. They want to hear with their own ears that something has worked for someone they know."

By definition, fully independent, 'citizen-controlled' community advocacy efforts exist apart from community-based organizations' responsibilities and relationships of accountability, including to their funders.[36] Most CBO interviewees said their organizations supported citizen-controlled policy advocacy, including through gestures of solidarity like endorsing campaigns or attending rallies organized by grassroots groups or social movements. A few interviewees described providing grassroots movements with resources such as meeting space or photocopying. In one notable case, a large part of one interviewee's role was to actively support independent advocacy efforts begun and led by the community (this role was funded specifically for this purpose). The support of grassroots efforts may be one way that CBO staff navigate the tension between their organization's broad vision or mission, and the activities they are allowed to carry out.

Analysis and Conclusions

THERE ARE MANY ways to advance policy advocacy goals aimed at improving the lives of particular groups in the community, and as our study shows, CBOs in Winnipeg take part in many of them.

Winnipeg CBOs engage directly with government, sometimes in policy processes created by government and other times at their own initiative. This is consistent with other studies showing community-based service organizations advanced their policy goals through direct engagement with institutions and government.[37] This has been effective in addressing some policy issues, particularly pertaining to existing policies or programs. Scholars have identified that this type of insider advocacy strategy is dependent on a government willing to listen to CBOs.[38] From our results, it is apparent that CBOs have found such a willing listener, at least in regards to some policy issues. Winnipeg CBOs also engage in advocacy that is directed at the public or specific communities, rather than taking place through closed conversations directly with government. CBOs advance this kind of public-facing policy advocacy in coalitions with other organizations, such as raising awareness, using the media, or rallying publicly. Working in coalitions can be a way for CBOs to take 'risky' positions on issues without jeopardizing relationships with government and funders.[39] Scholars have found that working with academics and researchers — as the Manitoba Research Alliance has been doing for over 20 years — can also assist CBOs to advance systemic policy advocacy.[40]

The policy advocacy strategies described by interviewees were often informal, reactive, and dependent on staff initiative and time: most of the interviewees described their advocacy work as secondary to their day-to-day responsibilities. While most organizations had no official policy on advocacy, or only an informal policy, four had formal policies which primarily focused on a specific issue or goal. Just one CBO had a developed theory of change to guide advocacy and engagement; the organization adopted a pre-existing model of community-based collaborative change, drawing upon resources created by its practitioners to assist them in implementing within their organization. Unsurprisingly, CBOs with more substantial advocacy efforts tended to be those where funding and staff time/job duties were dedicated to advocacy and engagement by CBO leadership. Where clear internal operational policies and/or position statements on issues were developed, staff said they felt supported in their advocacy efforts, including involving participants in campaigns or events.

Given these findings, Winnipeg CBO policy advocacy can be improved firstly at the administrative or leadership level. Research on CBOs highlights the importance of administrative policies and practices that support empower-ment goals including in relation to advocacy. Organizations whose mission is, explicitly or implicitly, supportive of advocacy are more likely to engage in and maintain policy advocacy.[41] Organizations lacking a formal policy can be caught off-guard without well-considered guidelines or procedures in high-tension moments.[42] To address this concern, CBOs that seek to increase their policy advocacy and its effectiveness should prioritize policy advocacy through the adoption of mission statements, formal policies, and internal structures.

CBOs are also more likely to engage in policy advocacy if they are able to direct resources to these activities. Larger budgets and staff complements have been positively correlated with increased policy advocacy by CBOs.[43] This may include the creation of staff positions dedicated to policy advocacy; research and experience in Winnipeg shows that formalizing this role and providing training in advocacy can increase a CBOs effectiveness at identifying policy issues facing their participants and acting to address them.[44] To improve their policy advocacy, Winnipeg CBOs should dedicate organizational resources and staff, trained in policy advocacy, to this type of work.

While many CBOs want to support community members in advocacy work, there are several barriers that limit both the CBO and the participant's ability to engage in advocacy. Most importantly, respondents noted that the demands of daily survival make it challenging for participants to engage in

advocacy work. Despite these barriers, several organizations have found ways to support community participation in policy advocacy. They use strategies such as providing financial or in-kind supports (such as snacks or bus tickets) to encourage participation. They also held consultations with community members before staff meet with government representatives so that community perspectives informed their advocacy and helped to connect participants' everyday experiences to systemic policy issues. This approach can help to address the perceived distance between long-term social change campaigns and community members' daily lives and struggles. In one case, hiring staff to directly support grassroots organizing led by community members highlights another useful strategy identified by researchers. A staff member can provide the kind of stable support, encouragement, and skills development that can help grassroots efforts thrive over the long haul. These strategies are consistent with 'best practices' identified by researchers for supporting community organizing.[45]

In addition to involving community members in CBO-led advocacy, some interviewees wished their CBO was more reflective of the demographics of the community they serve. There is a link between CBO demographics and advocacy. Scholars have identified how CBOs whose staff and leadership do not reflect the community may unintentionally or intentionally stymie the structural policy change called for by the community.[46] Where CBO staff and volunteers were of the same racial background as their participants, they were more likely to engage in policy advocacy activities.[47] Other research finds that including marginalized community members on the boards of CBOs decreases alienation, strengthens CBO connections to marginalized communities, and increases feelings of empowerment within the organization.[48]

Winnipeg CBOs also supported independent, grassroots advocacy that was initiated or led by community members outside of the CBO. Scholars have identified that community groups and CBOs, who are seemingly natural allies, can sometimes come into conflict. This can occur because the community groups prioritize different goals on similar issues,[49] chose different tactics,[50] or because CBOs are accountable to funders or other constituents, in addition to the community groups.[51] One research report, co-authored by a community organizer, suggests developing clear 'solidarity' policies to structure a relationship between grassroots groups and the CBO.[52]

Another difference that may arise between community-based advocacy, including several of the examples of grassroots movements identified in this study such as Idle No More and Black Lives Matter, and CBO-involved policy advocacy can be characterized in terms of desired result. Mosley et al.

note that advocacy goals can be divided between *policy change* (influencing public policy) and *social change* (shaping public opinion, cultural meanings or societal norms).[53] Differing orientations between policy change and social change, including the substantial overlap that may exist between the two categories, and the implications of such for CBO advocacy goals, strategies, or activities were not considered in our research, but may be of interest in further studies.

Recommendations

Building on this study's findings and a review of the existing literature, we have developed several recommendations for CBOs that are interested in advancing their advocacy work, and particularly those interested in supporting participants and community members to engage in advocacy. These can be articulated in two key areas: first, through CBOs' own internal policies and processes; and second, through building CBO capacity to support staff and participant advocacy.

CBO Policies and Processes

CBOs should:

1. Consult with participants and community members to develop organizational policy positions on areas of concern (such as decolonization, housing, etc.), which can then guide staff decision-making and action.

2. Introduce organization-wide policies on advocacy that commit the organization and staff to supporting community-based advocacy and responding to community needs and priorities.

3. Ensure that policy advocacy and community engagement is an organizational responsibility so that no single staff person carries this responsibility alone.

4. Integrate casework or direct services and policy advocacy (i.e. use casework to identify advocacy priorities, identify opportunities for collective responses and connecting participants to grassroots campaigns relevant to their issues, etc.).

5. Develop peer support and mentorship programs or policies to support policy advocacy and engagement by staff and community members (perhaps through a CBO network rather than led by a single CBO).

6. Cooperate and coordinate with other community-based organizations and coalitions that do policy advocacy, and particularly those that engage participants in advocacy, to share skills, knowledge, and best practices.

7. Commit resources to policy advocacy by the organization and to supporting independent community-based advocacy (e.g. meeting rooms, photocopying, honorariums/food/transit fares, social capital, etc.).

Professional Development & Capacity-Building

CBOs should:

1. Seek funding for, hire, and train staff dedicated to community development, organizing, and policy advocacy.

2. Provide mandatory training to staff in policy, advocacy and organizing, and other priority community concerns (e.g. intergenerational trauma, colonization, etc.).

3. Recruit, hire, and train people with lived experience of poverty or housing insecurity or who otherwise reflect the community being served.

4. Recruit board members with lived experience of poverty or housing insecurity or who otherwise reflect the community being served.

5. Develop relationships with Elders to create Indigenous support groups for community members.

Staff at Winnipeg community-based organizations are committed to the communities they serve. They work to address people's daily needs while also advancing policy changes that would improve their community's lives. As the survey results show, CBOs are using diverse methods to effect policy change, despite finite resources and sometimes competing responsibilities. All the staff interviewed felt that their organization (and CBOs generally) could do more (or do better) to affect the systemic and policy-based causes of the difficulties their clients and communities faced. We hope this study sparks discussion among CBO staff and leadership to strengthen their existing

commitments to policy advocacy and ensure that the communities they serve are leading that change, to do this work in a way that lifts up participants and community members.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

[THE FIRST PAGE of the survey questionnaire is the informed consent form, which includes project information. Survey participants will not be able to proceed with completing the survey unless informed consent is provided. Participants are encouraged to elaborate on their answers if desired in the comment boxes provided.]

This research project asks questions about community organizations in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

1. In the last 3 years, have you been employed in a community organization based in Winnipeg?
    a. Yes, I am currently employed in a community organization.
    b. Yes, I was employed in the last 3 years but am not currently employed in a community organization.
    c. No, I have not been employed in a community organization. [if participant chose no they would be sent directly to #19)

2. Please describe the total number of employees (including both part-time and full-time) of the community organization. Please do not include volunteers in your answer:
    a. 1–4 staff.
    b. 5–9 staff.
    c. 10–14 staff.
    d. 15 or more staff.
    e. I have never been employed by a community organization. (if participant chose F they would be sent directly to #19).

3. What is (or was) your role in the community organization?
    a. Front-line staff – Full-time.

    b. Front-line staff – part-time.

    c. Manager/supervisor/program coordinator, etc.

    d. Executive Director.

    e. Other: (please explain)

4. Is your community organization a registered charity?
    a. Yes

    b. No

    c. Don't know.

5. How many years of total employment have you had with the community organization? Enter the approximate number of years (including off-season, time on lay-off, etc.):

6. Which issue is the *primary* focus of your community organization's services and activities (choose the most precise option available):
    a. Income supports

    b. Residential Tenancy

    c. Homelessness

    d. Employment

    e. Violence

    f. Criminal Justice

    g. Immigration

    h. Child Welfare

    i. Health

    j. Other: (please describe)

7. What groups does your organization serve or work with (choose as many as apply):
    a. Women

    b. Indigenous people

    c. People with disabilities

    d. Newcomers (immigrants and/or refugees)

    e. Racialized community members

f. 2SLGBTQA+ community members

g. Youth

h. Parents/families

i. Other: (please describe)

For the purposes of this study, we define advocacy as *intentional efforts to change existing or proposed institutional policies or actions on behalf of and/or with a group of people affected by the issue.* The institutions may include the government (city, province, federal), employers, landlords, or the media. In other words, advocacy is about attempting to create change which benefits a group, rather than one individual.

8. Using this definition, please describe the general focus of the advocacy activities your organization is or has been involved in during the last 3 years (check all that apply).

   a. Support or join an advocacy coalition of other non-profit organizations (eg. Make Poverty History Manitoba, etc.)

   b. Support community-based, grassroots activism (e.g. Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, etc.)

   c. Interact with the general public or media to raise awareness (e.g. Press releases, interviews, community meetings, rallies in public places, etc.)

   d. Raise awareness with government or institution (e.g. Meet with city councillors, phone calls to landlord, etc.)

   e. Participate in formal government or institutional processes/meeting organized by governments or institutions (e.g. Submissions to Committee meetings of City Council, etc.)

   f. Create or participate in confrontation with government or institution (e.g. Rally outside MLA office, rent strike, etc.)

   g. Conduct or participate in research/policy development

   h. Take part in high-level legal processes (eg. Court challenge to policy, complaint to ombudsman, etc.)

   i. Other: (please explain)

   j. None of the above [if participant answers j they are moved to #13]

   k. I don't know.

9. Of the advocacy activities your organization is or has been involved in, please identify which involved the participation of one or more community members directly affected by the issue (check all that apply):

a. Support or join an advocacy coalition of other non-profit organizations (e.g. Make Poverty History Manitoba)

b. Support community-based, grassroots activism (e.g. Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, etc.)

c. Interact with the general public or media to raise awareness (eg. Press releases, interviews, community meetings, rallies in public places, etc.)

d. Raise awareness with government or institution (eg. Meet with city councillors, phone calls to landlord, etc.)

e. Participate in formal government or institutional processes/ meeting organized by governments or institutions (e.g. Deputing at Committee meetings of City Council, etc.)

f. Create confrontation with government or institution (e.g. Rally outside MLA office, rent strike, etc.)

g. Conduct or participate in research/policy development

h. Take part in high-level legal processes (e.g. Court challenge to policy, complaint to ombudsman, etc.)

i. Other: (please explain)

j. None of the above [if participant answers j, they are moved to #13]

k. I don't know.

10. Thinking of the community members who participated in the advocacy activities, how would you characterize their involvement? If more than one community member was involved, use the community member(s) who were most involved. Please choose the best answer.

a. They attended the activities but were not involved in the development of the advocacy activities.

b. They were consulted in the development of the advocacy activity but were not involved in its implementation.

c. They were chosen by staff of your organization to sit on the decision-making or organizing body for the advocacy activities.

d. They directed the decision-making or organizing body for the advocacy activities and staff implemented the activities.

e. They directed and implemented the advocacy activities independently. Your organization provided support.

f. Other. Please explain:

g. I don't know

11. If your organization has supported community members who have independently directed and implemented their own advocacy activities please describe this support:

a. [comment box]

b. Not applicable.

12. Thinking of your employment over the past 3 years, in a typical month, how much of *your* work time do you spend on advocacy activities:

a. None.

b. Less than 2 hours.

c. 2 – 4 hrs.

d. 4 – 8 hrs.

e. 9 – 16 hrs.

f. 17 hrs or more.

g. Unsure/Don't know

13. Please assess how the following issues may impact community member involvement in advocacy activities. Please answer even if your organization does not currently engage in advocacy activities. (For each, choose High Barrier, Medium Barrier, Low Barrier, Not a Barrier, Not sure)

a. Psychological barriers (e.g. Stigma, feeling afraid of reprisal from policy-maker, etc.)

b. Lack of practical support (e.g. No transportation, etc.)

c. Daily survival issues and lack of time

d. Disability

e. Language and/or culture (e.g. Lack of interpreters, activities not culturally appropriate, etc.)

f. Lack of skills or knowledge

g. Other: (please explain)

14. Please assess how the following issues impact your organization's involvement in advocacy: (For each, choose Increase advocacy, No effect on advocacy, Decrease advocacy, Not sure)

a. Insufficient resources

b. Lack of appropriate skills/knowledge among staff

c. Lack of staff time

d. Service delivery takes priority

e. Funding rules limit advocacy

f. Lack of support/direction from Executive Director

g. Lack of support from Board

h. Lack of other supportive community organizations

i. Other (please describe)

15. Please assess how the following issues impact your organization's involvement in advocacy: (For each, choose Increase advocacy, No effect on advocacy, Decrease advocacy, Not sure)

a. Receptive government or institution (e.g. landlord, employer, etc.)

b. Hostile government or institution (e.g. landlord, employer, etc.)

c. Receptive general public

d. Hostile general public

e. Low visibility of issue in affected community

f. High visibility of issue in affected community

g. Existing community-based advocacy around issue

h. Other: (please describe)

16. In the last 3 years, have you been involved in advocacy activities outside of work (as a volunteer or member of a community group, for example):

a. Yes. (Please describe)

b. No

17. If you have made any comments, do you give permission for your comments to be referenced in the research project publication as coming from a staff member of an organization that provides services or advocacy for people in housing need. The name of your organization will not be used.

a. Yes.

b. No. [if they answer NO they will forwarded to question #20].

18. I give permission for my comments to be referenced back to:
    a. my job type (e.g.. executive director, housing director, case worker, etc.)

    b. a more generic term (e.g. staff person, etc.)

19. I would like to receive a summary of the results from this project (expected to be available in November 2021). If yes, please provide your email address or mailing address below. IMPORTANT NOTE: If you provide contact information here, your responses will no longer be anonymous to the researchers (but will remain confidential). If you want your survey responses to remain anonymous but still want to receive a summary of the results, DO NOT enter your contact information here. Instead, please email dirksy@myumanitoba.ca or sarah.cooper@umanitoba.ca
    a. Yes [enter email in comment box]

    b. No.

20. Are you willing to participate in a confidential one-on-one interview with the researchers to discuss how community organizations support their members or participants to engage in advocacy to address housing needs?
    a. Yes

    b. No

    If yes, please enter your contact information and preferred interview method below.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you provide contact information here to do a follow up interview, your responses will no longer be anonymous to the researchers (but will remain confidential). If you want your survey responses to remain anonymous but still want to do a follow-up interview, DO NOT enter your contact information here. Instead, please email dirksy@myumanitoba.ca or sarah.cooper@umanitoba.ca to request an interview.
    Name:
    Email address:
    Phone number:

21. This research project is collecting information from current or past staff employed at community organizations in Winnipeg, Manitoba. As you indicated that you have not been employed at a community organization in Winnipeg we have ended your survey. Thank you for your time.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Can I have your permission to record this interview?

2. Can you confirm the name of the organization with which you are employed or represent?

3. What is your position with this organization?

4. How many years have you been employed with the organization?

5. Can you briefly describe your role and responsibilities with the organization?

The next several questions deal with policy advocacy undertaken by your organization. For the purposes of this study, we define advocacy as *intentional efforts to change existing or proposed institutional policies on behalf of and/or with a group of people affected by the issue.* The institutions may include the government (city, province, federal), employers, landlords, or the media. In particular we are interested in advocacy relating to housing and housing need.

Internal Factors in Organization-led Advocacy Activities

6. Please describe any policy advocacy activities undertaken by your organization.

7. Does your organization have a formal or informal policy about advocacy activities? Please describe.

8. Does your organization provide training or support to staff to engage in advocacy? Please describe.

9. Research has identified several factors that impact the extent and ways in which non-profit community organizations are involved in policy advocacy. These include, but are not limited to available financial resources, the skill sets of staff and volunteers, time, service delivery pressures, and the existence of other community partners. Are there internal factors which support your organization's policy advocacy? Please describe.

10. Are there internal factors which decrease or prevent involvement in advocacy by staff or the organization as whole? Please describe.

Community Member Involvement in Advocacy Activities

11. What are the specific strategies you and your organization use to involve marginalized community members in the policy advocacy of your organization, if any, and why do you use them?

12. Thinking of you and your organization's policy advocacy, what factors may have prevented or decreased community member participation in the activities?

13. Thinking of you and your organization's policy advocacy, what factors may have supported or increased community member participation in the activities?

The next several questions deal with advocacy or community organizing outside of your organization, led by community members. Some examples would include grassroots social movements such as Idle No More or Black Lives Matter, community-based activist organizations such as Communities Not Cuts or small tenant associations, or specific events such as vigils or protests.

Supporting Community-led Advocacy

14. Does your organization support independent, community-based activism, policy advocacy, or organizing? Please describe.

15. What factors would positively affect your organization's decision to support a community-based advocacy initiative or event?

16. What factors would negatively affect your organization's decision to support a community-based advocacy initiative or event?

Concluding Questions

17. Thinking of your organization, is there anything you would change to better involve community members in advocacy?

18. Thinking of factors outside your organization, is there anything you would change to better involve community members in advocacy?

19. Do you have anything you would like to add to your responses?

20. Are there any organizations that you would recommend we approach for an interview on advocacy and community engagement?

Endnotes

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2 Cynthia J Cranford and Deena Ladd, "Community Unionism: Organising for Fair Employment in Canada," *Just Labour* 3, no. Fall (2003): 46–59, https://doi.org/10.25071/1705-1436.167; Yutaka Dirks, "Community Campaigns for the Right to Housing : Lessons from the R2H Coalition of Ontario," *Journal of Law and Social Policy* 24 (2015): 135–42.

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7 CBO staff who were interviewed often referred to those people who used their services or took part in their programs as 'participants' and we have followed their example. When we are discussing people who are among the demographic groups served by CBOs but who are not current clients or program participants, we use the term 'community members.'

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16 August and Webber, *Demanding the Right to the City and the Right to Housing (R2C/R2H): Best Practices for Supporting Community Organizing*.

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18 INCITE!, ed., *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

19 Dylan Rodríguez, "The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. INCITE! (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 23.

20 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "'In the Shadow of the Shadow State' in INCITE! (Ed.), (Originally Published by South End Press, Cambridge, 2007; Republished by Duke University Press, Durham," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. INCITE! (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 51.

21 August and Webber, *Demanding the Right to the City and the Right to Housing (R2C/R2H): Best Practices for Supporting Community Organizing*.

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