

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENT:  
Constructive Partnerships/Creative Tensions**

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As we the people have agreed to address specific responsibilities and functions relating to our organized neighborliness, there have evolved public/private partnerships or public/private competition in most areas of public endeavor.

Given the current mix and trend in public services, the equation has to include the commercial sector and, in the face of growing competition among all three sectors, the question really becomes, "Who Should Do the Public Business and How Will it be Paid For?"

We are used to parallel services by public, voluntary and commercial institutions that run hospitals, business colleges and homes for the aged, but all three sectors have become even more competitive and their roles are becoming even more blurred by the very number and spread of similar services and the common denominator of government funding within them. Whether the field is recreation, cancer research, community theater, alcoholism, preservation, family counselling, job training, urban planning or cemeteries, all three sectors are involved and the government is providing at least some of the funds through formula grants, categorical grants, block grants, project grants, contracts,

loans, loan guarantees, credit insurance, interest subsidies, vouchers, purchase agreements, price supports, surplus land grants and many other forms of federal assistance.

Even where it has become obvious that certain activities are the clear responsibility of government, rather than establish governmental facilities or programs, the government has very often chosen to fulfill its responsibility through voluntary institutions and, more recently, through business corporations. A relatively recent example relates to health research, now a multi-billion dollar federal enterprise carried forward largely through the universities with a growing role for private businesses. Today, in about all areas of public responsibility, this partnership exists, including hospitals, schools and colleges, family counseling, maternal and child health, job training for the unemployed, homes for the aged, protection for endangered species, international education, and on and on.

These partnership arrangements are now seriously challenged by the growing competition among the partners, limited funds and a concern that the patchwork nature of the system leaves it uncoordinated, unmanageable and unaccountable.

As with most matters, the dilemma is not altogether new and we can learn something from history.

In Massachusetts in the mid-1850s, there was enormous confusion, competition and contentiousness among the three sectors as to which should be assigned the running of human service institutions. It will sound familiar that the business advocates felt they could perform many of these functions better and cheaper and that government officials questioned the legitimacy of nonprofit organizations to perform government services. These two ganged up on what they thought was the weaker voluntary sector and officially challenged the principle of tax exemption for other than church organizations. The matter was settled in 1873 with the principle beautifully articulated by Charles W. Eliot: "The reason for treating these institutions in an exceptional manner is that...they contribute to the welfare of the State. Their function is largely a public function; their work is done, primarily indeed, for individuals, but ultimately for the public good...."

Another helpful historical perspective is contributed by Lester Salamon of The Urban Institute, who reminds us of "a classic study of American charities completed by Amos Warner in 1894 which reported that the 200 New York agencies serving orphan children and the friendless were receiving two-thirds of their income from government sources by the 1880s, and that half of the expenditures made by New York City for care of the poor went to private charitable organizations."

Salamon goes on, "Despite the rhetoric of separation, it is actually cooperation and interdependence that seem to have characterized the relationship between government and the nonprofit sector throughout most of our country's history."

There is and always will be debate about what government's essential responsibilities are but, over the years, there has developed a consensus that democratic government has responsibility to deal with our most basic public interdependence — defense, sewage disposal, clean water, communicable disease, public education, social security and many other manifestations of our abject interdependence.

Voluntary organizations, unlike government, are not usually established to deal with "the general welfare". They tend to deal with Lutheran aged, the school in my neighborhood, autistic children or modern art. They represent alternatives, options, experimentation, supplementation and leadership, and they can be a vehicle through which the government fulfills many of its public functions, but it is essential to our clear grasp of relative roles that for basic governmental responsibility, it is our representative democratic government to which we turn.

This doesn't mean that government must run every service and program, but that's a secondary consideration. We won't clearly sort out the primary issue unless we start with an understanding of ultimate responsibility. Whatever delivery mechanisms we may want to establish for these governmental services, they are, nevertheless, a governmental responsibility. We can say we want the churches to play a larger role in delivering essential social services or that we want voluntary organizations to carry a larger share of services for the elderly, but we can no longer allow our delivery preferences to obscure that these are government responsibilities. Though the activity can be delegated, the responsibility cannot.

It is of course necessary to address financial responsibility. Here, too, though the issue is enormously complicated, the underlying principle is simple. But because it's so tough to swallow, we prefer to start almost anywhere else. Over the years, I have traveled a long way around trying to avoid the basic conclusion that if it is government's responsibility, then government financing is the underpinning of the effort. I'm a great believer in contributions, fees for service, vouchers and other means by which the values of the marketplace are applied to making services available and keeping them effective, responsive and economical, but whatever funding patterns are appropriate and possible, making certain that governmental services are in fact funded, is ultimately government's responsibility.

The city or county may have an ambulance service of its own, contract with a profit or nonprofit organization to provide ambulance service or

allow competition among all three, but it has the ultimate responsibility to be certain that the service is available, accessible and affordable to all.

Obviously, how government fulfills these obligations and the other functions of voluntary institutions are terribly important, and you would expect the President of **INDEPENDENT SECTOR** to talk about them; but, for purposes of this particular assignment, it is vital not to exaggerate what voluntary organizations can do, or what government should not do.

Having placed so bluntly before you the limitations of voluntary organizations to be responsible for the general welfare, let me also deal with the limitations of big government to carry out the staggering responsibilities I place so squarely on it.

The primary limitations relate to the size and diversity of our nation. We want services and systems that are manageable, coordinated and accountable, and this leads us constantly towards centralization which, in this country, gets things totally out of scale. Even at the state level, Columbus or Sacramento are just too far from the people to be able to deliver most public services. I recall the experiment in California where, for purposes of coordination and management, responsibility for most human services was centralized in one mammoth state government department. The system was designed to be certain that people did not fall through the cracks between health, welfare, housing, rehabilitation and the other human services. The problem was that the cracks became chasms. The department was so large and was so far removed from Eureka or San Diego that it was grossly expensive and totally inefficient. Because of its size and distance, it was completely insensitive to the people it was designed to serve, and it was even inaccessible to their elected representatives.

Another practical problem was that they could not attract talented people, such as health department directors from other states, who did not want to be three or four layers down in this omnibus department.

In the past fifty years, we have expanded enormously what is considered governmental responsibility. As the size and scope of these responsibilities have grown, we have turned more and more to the federal government for financing and other leadership. The national character of many of these problems, the limitations of the tax base of state and local government and the limitations of funds voluntarily contributed have all caused us to look to Washington.

Even though we may be emotionally and intellectually committed to dispersion of authority, that conviction is challenged by realities and by our own conflicting desires.

We don't want one federal monolithic system, for example, for health care or social services, but we do stridently insist that systems must exist that are coordinated, comprehensive and accountable.

We don't want more federal government except in the areas which we view as priority. If our priority is the criminal justice system, or cancer control, or clean air, or the rights of minorities or women, or learning disabilities, we can be exceedingly articulate and forceful in making the case that the federal government, as the representative of all the people, has a moral responsibility to deal with that priority. And the listing is not limited to human suffering — witness the recent clamor about federal cuts in the National Endowment for the Arts.

Our solution has been to point up federal responsibility and to evolve a decentralized delivery system involving partnerships among the levels of government and between government and the other two sectors.

This pattern of financing and delivering public services has now reached a point of such complexity that many people consider it unresponsive, ineffective, incapable of accountability and utterly beyond management.

We have tended to deal with the dilemma of decentralization vis-a-vis coordination of service by building complex systems involving a mix of governmental levels and non-governmental institutions and then damn the system because it is not accountable or manageable.

And faced with repeated breakdowns of these complex systems, Congress, which talks so much about community control, tightens the reign of its control and, as a result, the federal government overlays stifling control mechanisms to try to be sure that everyone is playing the role that the federal government believes is appropriate to them. The result is a profusion of pluralism fighting against centralization of funding, centralization of planning and centralization of authority.

Into this muddle have come extremists who say:

1. Voluntary organizations did it before and should do it again, or
2. If you want it done right, turn it over to those with bottom-line discipline, the business sector, or
3. If it's government's business, government should do it.

Many public administrators, legislators and others are now insisting that we must go to a much more clearly delineated governmental system that is not confused by contractual arrangements and other delegations of governmental responsibility.

As we try to sort this all out, it's essential to keep in mind the kind of people with whom I worked for so many years, the discharged mental hospital patients, now newly discovered as among the tragic homeless. They are dumped by state hospital systems into unprepared community systems. They have the total range of needs: health, mental health, food, employment, housing, and on and on, but these confused souls are usually dropped into a community system without anyone being responsible for helping them through the maze of federal, state and local programs and government voluntary and proprietary services. It helps to think of these tortured human beings when sorting out responsibility and effective delivery systems.

It starts with governmental responsibility.

We need to make a distinction between government's responsibility, the mechanisms for delivering government services and how we keep services accountable and responsive.

A fundamental decision will relate to whether we go for a streamlined, easily identifiable, top-down governmental structure or continue to try to do our government's business through the more complex mix of governmental levels, voluntary institutions and proprietary organizations.

There are attractions to a more clearly delineated governmental system, but people of all political and philosophical persuasion have concluded that trying to do so much of this country's business from Washington, or Harrisburg, or Albany, just doesn't work.

On the other hand, one can be carried away with the rhetoric of pluralism, dispersion of authority and decentralization, and overlook the clear evidences of breakdown in such essential factors as coordination and accountability.

After years of struggling with the dilemma in some very tangible settings, I have come to favor a system that starts with governmental responsibility, but provides for many different ways by which that responsibility can be fulfilled.

I recall a conversation with one of the most senior and able people in the field of human services. Margaret Hickey, (Public Affairs Editor of the Ladies Home Journal and Chairman of President Truman's Commission on Women) now well into her seventies, still has a remarkably fresh way of looking at things and this, combined with her sheer depth and breadth of experience, makes her a sage counselor. We were talking about how to organize human services, and she drew on her years of seeing the pendulum swing back and forth between centralization and de-centralization and on her years of seeing various bright ideas being pasted by the federal government on unwitting states and communities; and she concluded that in

this continent-wide nation, comprising such total diversity, that we just can't expect any one model to be right or that the federal government will ever achieve the level of omniscience to figure out what's best for citizens of Roaring Fork, Los Angeles and Bangor. She concluded that the best we can do is to stipulate the basic services which should be provided and the basic attributes which should be present and then let local people do it their way. I realize that sounds rather simplistic, but I sure have learned to lean in that direction rather than the opposite.

I get discouraged that we repeatedly assume that there is any one solution to solving the complexity of human need. For what it's worth, my experience is that there is no simple approach, but that there is a formula which, if followed, will give maximum opportunity for helping people:

1. Availability of service
2. Accessibility of service
3. Affordability
4. Coordination
5. Consumer influence on the services designed to serve them.

The matters of availability, accessibility and affordability come smack against the realities of resources, but I think the American people want and will pay for good services. I believe that much of the taxpayer revolt involves a rebellion against having to pay for poor, insensitive and over-priced services.

As people are finding out that the cutbacks mean grandmother does not get housekeeping services, or neighbors don't get enough food, or crippled kids don't get special education services, or working women don't have day care, the reaction is "My God, we didn't mean that!" Local and state governments, usually far more strapped than the federal government, are digging deeper to keep or restore such services, but are organizing them in ways to be more effective, sensitive and economical.

As a society, we can afford and I believe will be willing to pay for good public services but the lesson must be utterly clear that the public will not tolerate systems that are not effective or fair, including services that are run for the convenience of the providers and not the consumers.

I don't suggest that the sky is the limit on spending but I believe that we want, need and will pay for effective government service. I also believe that as the responsibility for planning, organizing and evaluating those services is more broadly shared, and in the face of cost lessons being learned, we will be better prepared to make some excruciatingly difficult decisions that involve saying no, even in the face of awful human consequences. We will decide not to keep the dying alive at any cost and will decide that we have to set realistic limits on

the price the government will pay for dialysis or heart surgery or psychoanalysis. The leaders coming up through the ranks are "street smart" — they can tolerate and encourage the democratic cacophony, but after listening to the strains of joy and pain, they will be able to say no — sometimes even to you and me.

The most serious missing elements in my formula are not money or talent or will, but the elements of consumer influence and administrative coordination for such a de-centralized pluralistic system.

If, after years as a community organizer, I had to emphasize any one factor that is most likely to provide responsive, sensitive, effective service, it would be the element of consumer influence including and, indeed, emphasizing consumer involvement in articulating needs, planning services, operating programs and evaluating results. The more I work with communities, the more faith I develop in the common sense of people and their capacity to respond to responsibility with fairness and practicality.

For many people and services, the market theory and approach will be the most direct way to achieve consumer influence. This deserves far more positive attention than time permits, but because it has received a good deal of deserved coverage elsewhere, let me comment on some of its limitations, at least in terms of what purchasing power can't do.

In certain-size communities and for many major programs, it may never be practical to give people a choice of hospital, school, museum or senior center. The Minnesota Citizens League says that one way to overcome practical limitations on day-to-day competition is to give elected and appointed officials more options as to whether they contract with for-profit or not-for-profit groups to handle ambulance services or garbage removal, or whether the town or city will perform those services itself. Contracts would be subject to periodic renewal and appointed and elected officials would be free to switch from one approach to another. I would go a step further and provide regular voter referenda on the responsiveness and effectiveness of singular, major central services and when approval falls below certain levels, the service would be given a year or two warning before facing voter response again. Another means of gaining consumer and citizen involvement, but one we've never gotten very good at, involves citizen boards and advisory committees for schools, health services, urban transportation, corrections and all the way up to military research planning. We in public administration and the other fields of public service are not just not very good at working with such groups, we are pretty terrible. We even tend to equate success with masterful manipulation and certainly don't train or even condition our people for the realities and opportunities of an active citizenry.

Elected officials are, of course, one of the best ways to keep government responsive to the people. But, even here, we need more



attention to such basics as voter registration, voter turn-out, regional governance and the training of elected officials in all sorts of their responsibilities, including the balance between prodding the system and supporting and interpreting it.

Whatever the devices for encouraging rather than discouraging or neglecting citizen participation, the goal should be to give people maximum influence over the programs designed to serve them.

The second neglected element in making decentralized systems work, the effective administration of such pluralistic arrangements, will also require commitment to individuals, particularly those who are most vulnerable and with multiple needs. Without being entirely sure of my ground, let me go out on a limb and suggest that the group that moves into this disparate system and fits the pieces together for the consumer will eventually become the de facto manager of the system and, therefore, among the most significant of our public servants. For example, there is a desperate need for more manager/coordinators within state and county human service departments and there is a like need for client/managers for people with multiple needs.

One of the very best programs I ever saw involved volunteers who were called "community friends" who were carefully trained in the complexities of state/local human care systems and who were assigned to persons discharged from the state mental hospitals or just entering community mental health systems. It was the responsibility of each "community friend" to stay with that individual until he or she was connected with and attended by all necessary services. The program was under the direction of a social worker who knew the pain of these human beings, knew the system, respected the capacity of volunteers and knew how to use both people and experience as leverage to improve the system.

That role is in the best tradition of social workers who were to be oriented to individuals and families, not limited to health or psychology, knowledgeable about the systems and involved with all its parts, including schools, courts, job agencies, food banks, alcoholism treatment centers, hospitals, self-help groups and on and on. If they could just expand on that orientation and experience and match it with the need for making even broader systems work for people, then the even more golden days of social work could still be ahead.

There is a practical limitation for professions and professionals to be oriented to the whole person and there has been a natural tendency for professions and professionals to become focused on professional credentials, licensing and professional practice that do not usually include primacy of the roles and influence of consumers. The system of the future will depend absolutely on maximum citizen participation. Social work is the profession that pioneered community organization, but along with the other professions, it let a commendable concern for

professional standards freeze out the non-professional and, along with the doctors, psychologists and lawyers, social work hasn't embraced the role of the citizen and consumer in shaping human services.

Whether the expanded service of representing the consumer in the dispersed system is provided by a new order of case work, a reconstituted family agency, a new volunteer corps, a sub-specialty of public administration or a combination of them isn't obvious. But what is crystal clear is that if we are committed to a de-centralized system of government services, someone has to be responsible for the consumers who are not in a position to exercise their options and who, in a humane, democratic society, have a right to be served, advocated and empowered.

There is one other important relationship between nonprofit organizations and government in the provision of services. Understandably, we here tend to focus on the direct delivery of services and not speak much of the role of voluntary organizations in creating, shaping and changing government services. There is certainly about as much confusion and competition as most of us can handle in just trying to build and blend the dispersed delivery mechanisms, without getting into the advocacy role of not-for-profit organizations. However, if we really want to understand and shape the even broader context of how government services are decided and provided, we have to develop an even higher tolerance for the pain euphemistically sugar-coated as "creative tension".

Advocacy is easily tolerated by alert public officials who start the groundswell in the first place or who, at least, encourage enthusiastic supporters. If you ever worked with (or perhaps it's more accurately stated as worked for!) such outreachers as Jim Shannon, Bob Felix, Burt Brown or Jim Webb, you'll have known some of the absolute masters at marshalling organized citizen demand for more of what they just happen to want. Presidents might say to keep a lid on mental health expenditures, but baby-faced Bob Felix would innocently say he couldn't help it if all those people from Alabama and Rhode Island were telling Senator Hill and Representative Forgarty that mental health appropriations should be doubled.

There isn't a school superintendent worth his or her salt who doesn't plead for and encourage independent citizen advocates for better schools.

It is always fascinating to see the reaction of even the masters when their supporters (cum co-conspirators) are disloyal to the point of having an independent view or traitorous enough to become critics. Even their hurt in such situations is nothing in comparison to the pain and bewilderment of officials when self-appointed critics spring up on their own.

If public administrators are uneasy and ill-prepared for the confused service delivery partnerships with voluntary organizations, this is

nothing compared to their unease, antipathy and total lack of preparation for the independent advocacy of nonprofit organizations. Public administrators, like others in public life, will point with obvious pride to the influence of such crusaders as Jane Addams and Dorothea Dix who broke the encrusted barriers of public indifference to excruciating human need, but we tend to view as annoying, troublesome, rabble-rousing and maybe even dangerous, those who today force us to include hospice coverage in Medicaid, insist that state government cannot wash its hands of the schizophrenic who is discharged from the state mental hospital or who insist that in this day and age the availability, accessibility and affordability of day care must be addressed by the federal government.

We say that we are all for pluralism and active citizenship in the abstract, but we are not very sophisticated in dealing with them day-to-day in our own work. There was an apt observation in the chapter "The Role of Philanthropy in a Changing Society", from the Peterson Commission Report of the '60s: "There are some who may agree 'in principle' with the worth of private philanthropy but, when a crunch is on, they view philanthropy as Lord Melbourne, Prime Minister of England in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, viewed religion. 'I have', said he, 'as much respect for religion as the next person. But things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to interfere with England's interest.'"

There are many roles that voluntary organizations play, including providing services and acting as vehicles through which the government fulfills some of its public responsibilities, but the largest contribution is the independence they provide for innovation, advocacy, criticism and where necessary, reform.

In the pursuit of government's roles to operate and improve services, develop the new services of the future, keep services responsive to the people and protect the freedoms through which citizens express their influence, we must develop public administrators who are conditioned to and comfortable with the pluralism that governs how this country decides and conducts public business.

David Mathews helps pull it all together when he says that the best way to understand how this country really operates is to think of it as "Coalition America".

Our democracy — our liberty — our freedom — still depend on informed citizen participation and we will presage the decline of our civilization if we think the issues utterly beyond citizen comprehension. We can be discouraged with the complexity of today's issues and concerned that people won't make the right decisions for themselves, their families and their communities, but there is wisdom and comfort still in Thomas Jefferson's advice, "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society, but the people themselves; and if we think them not

enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."

Chester Newland, Donald Stone, Harlan Cleveland, Guthrie Birkhead, George Frederickson, Frederick Mosher and others have provided recent reminders that the origins of the field of public administration were tied closely to the involvement of public-spirited citizens in achieving good government. This is supported in recent re-readings of some basic texts, including Luther Gulick's reminiscences about the National Institute and the National Bureau.

I suggest that public administration, like other disciplines and professions, has gotten altogether too far away from the citizen and that active citizenship is at the heart of providing good services, protecting rights and fulfilling so many other responsibilities of democratic government.

I commend the Academy for this effort to better understand how public services can be best provided and I commend the National Association of Schools of Public Administration for their similar interests, and I respectfully suggest that both expand attention to the encouragement of active citizenship and attention to the development of public administrators who have a clear grasp of how the public business is done and have a capacity for what my professor and dean, Paul Appleby, said was our task — "...to make a mesh of things".