

Analysis of United Community Services' Advocacy Surveys

Executive Summary

The following data come from forty-nine completed surveys about the advocacy activities of human services organizations, surmised to be primarily within the Johnson County, Kansas community. The organizations included in the survey work in a variety of areas within the human services field and their policy issues are similarly diverse, as demonstrated below. These organizations all have at least some interest in public policy surrounding their work, as demonstrated by their presence at the UCS Public Policy Forum in December 2011, where these surveys were collected. While this is obviously a relatively small sample that cannot yield definitive answers to questions related to human services organizations' public policy engagement, there are some insights here that can inform the efforts of United Community Services and similar organizations in their efforts to encourage this advocacy behavior. Specifically, the most relevant findings include:

- Human services organizations have a desire to engage in public policy advocacy, with significant majorities reporting a need to increase their engagement
- Lack of relevant information does not appear to be a significant constraint for public policy advocacy within human services organizations; most organizations rely on multiple sources and report that organizational resources are much greater limitations than available information
- Staff at human services agencies, as opposed to board or clients, bear most responsibility for public policy work, and, so, lack of adequate staff time is the greatest barrier to increased involvement
- Larger organizations, as judged by budget size, report spending more time on advocacy than smaller organizations
- Half of all human services organizations in this survey report that they intend to spend fewer than 5 hours per week on public policy work, in the aggregate for their organization, even during the 2012 legislative session itself
- Despite exhortations to the contrary, relatively few human services organizations are prioritizing tax and revenue policies on their slate of issue concerns
- Many human services organizations have formal advocacy agendas, approved by their governing Boards, but these agendas do not necessarily influence the organizations' level of advocacy engagement

Survey Results

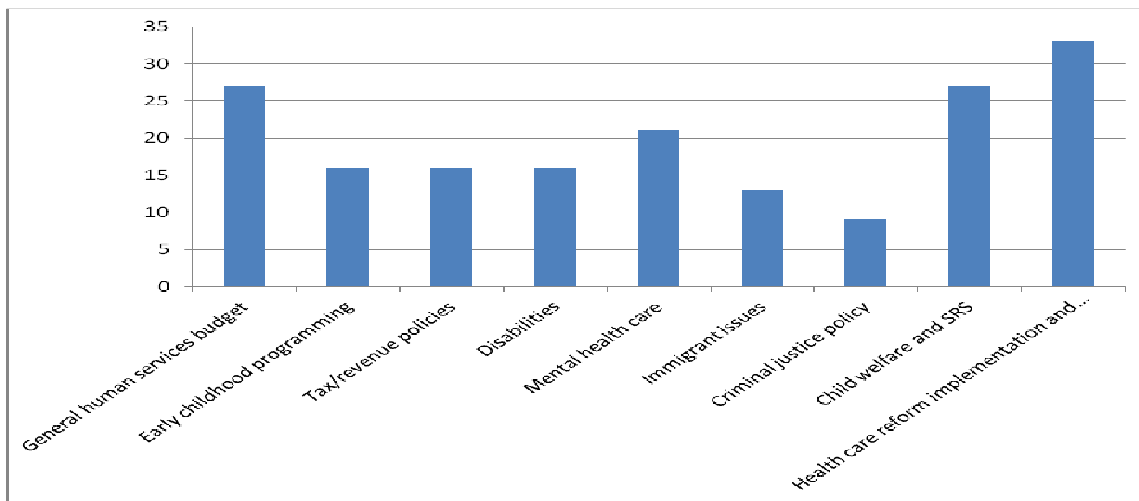
The following data come from forty-nine completed surveys about the advocacy activities of human services organizations, surmised to be primarily within the Johnson County, Kansas community. The organizations included in the survey work in a variety of areas within the human services field and their policy issues are similarly diverse, as demonstrated below. These organizations all have at least some interest in public policy surrounding their work, as demonstrated by their presence at the UCS Public Policy Forum in December 2011, where these surveys were collected. Accompanying each of the items

below is some analysis about the findings, as well as future questions to be addressed, as UCS works to enhance public policy advocacy for human services within the constituencies it represents.

As shown below, health care reform implementation and issues surrounding the move to Medicaid managed care in Kansas are the most prominent for these human services organizations, as they survey the 2012 Kansas Legislature. These were followed by issues related to child welfare and the work of Social and Rehabilitation Services (n=27) and general issues related to the human services budget, the latter of which obviously crosses many jurisdictional boundaries. Without more detailed information about the areas of work of these organizations, it is unclear the extent to which these legislative priorities reflect cross-sector work, for example, a mental health organization closely monitoring child welfare issues, because of a perceived alignment of interests. Also beyond the scope of this survey is an examination of the extent to which governmental actions drive organizations' priorities, and vice versa. For example, did the number of human services organizations prioritizing Medicaid reform increase with the Brownback Administration's announcement about a move to managed care?

Notably, despite content in the public policy forum about the importance of the revenue side of the budget debate, only one-third of respondents reported that they intend to pay close attention to tax and revenue policy decisions in 2012, a significantly smaller proportion than those interested in allocations decisions. As stressed by UCS and legislator participants, failure to attend adequately to revenue policy will inevitably result in absence from the decision-making around these issues, which will have lasting repercussions for the state's fiscal capacity with which to address human services needs.

Figure 1: Issues organizations intend to monitor in the 2012 Kansas Legislature

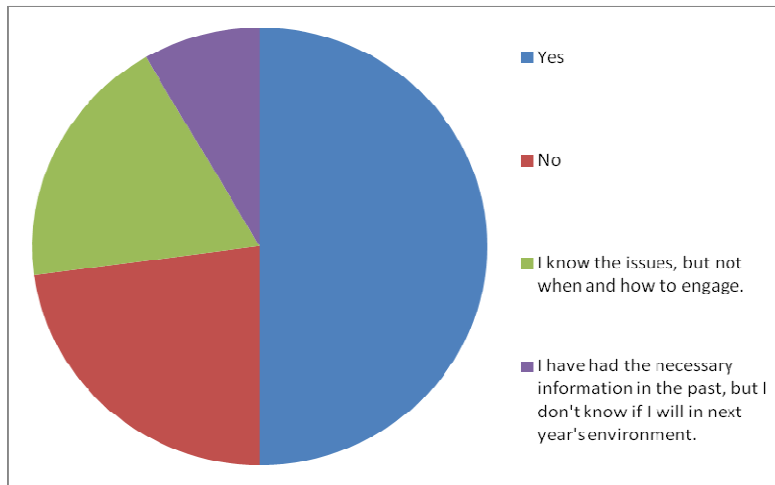


Exactly half of organizations responded that they have adequate information with which to engage in the legislative process, as shown below. This suggests that provision of information, alone, is unlikely to be the most effective strategy for increasing the public policy engagement of human services organizations in the area, a finding that is affirmed by organizations' responses to the question about what would most impact their advocacy capacity, to which only 12% responded that they would do more advocacy if they had better information. There is no statistically significant difference in the number of hours organizations expect to spend per week on advocacy during the 2012 legislative

session based on their perception of the adequacy of their information, although this can perhaps be partially explained by the additional effort that would be required to secure this necessary information.

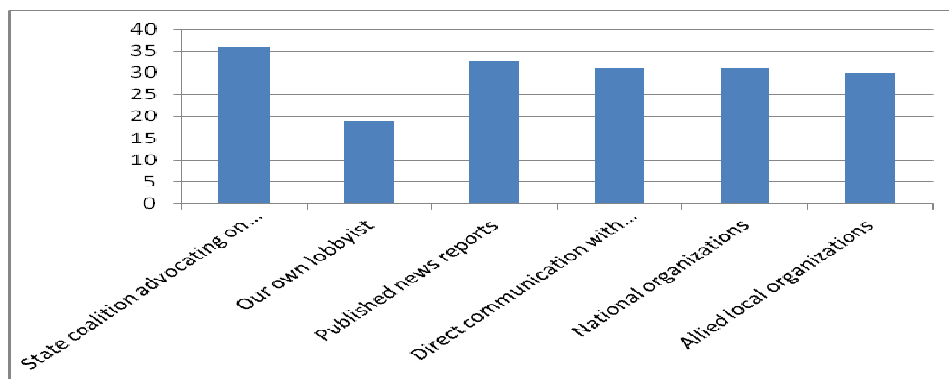
There is some evidence that information about the policy change process, more than content-specific information, would likely be more helpful in catalyzing organizations' advocacy, since at least some respondents expressed a particular need for information about when and how to engage in the legislative process. Given the accumulated issue expertise of these organizations, from their base of services, it makes sense that this process knowledge is what they view as more lacking.

Figure 2: Organizations' perceptions of whether this information is adequate for their advocacy



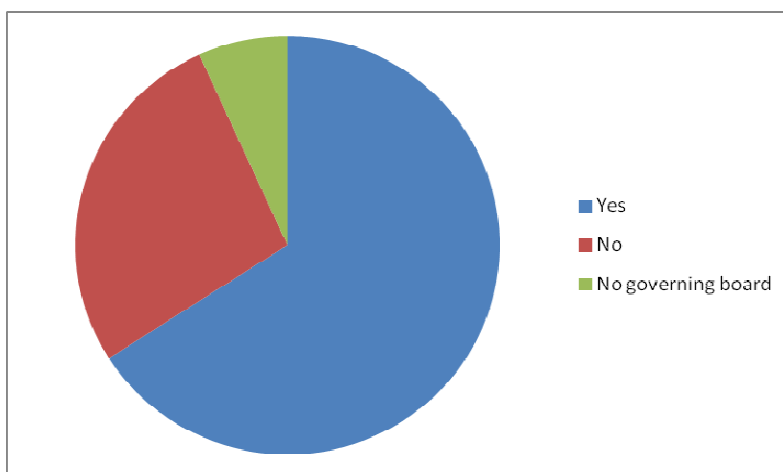
As shown below, respondent organizations utilize many different information sources. Even the least common source of information, the organization's own lobbyist, is utilized by 39% of respondents. Almost ¾ of respondents connect to a state coalition that advocates on their same issues, while many have coalitions in the local area to which they can turn for information, and more than half depend on national organizations. Obviously, the vast majority of respondents utilize multiple information sources as they approach public policy engagement, itself a tactic that demonstrates considerable sophistication and advocacy capacity.

Figure 3: Sources of useful information about these priorities



United Community Services began the public policy forum with an overview of its public policy principles, and encouraged attendee organizations to also develop principles to guide the development of an advocacy agenda. Somewhat surprisingly, a significant majority (66%) of respondent organizations reported that their governing boards have approved an advocacy agenda under which their public policy engagement operates. This is obviously significant, given the internal process through which organizations must move in order to have their governing boards affirm the importance of advocacy as part of the organizations' mission, as well as the potential for more focused and intense public policy engagement as a result of this public signal of advocacy intentions. However, the responses of these organizations do not lend tremendous evidence to the idea that advocacy agendas necessarily influence organizations' public policy work to a noticeable degree. For example, there was no statistically significant difference in the number of hours per week that organizations expect to spend on advocacy for those with an approved advocacy agenda and those without one.

Figure 4: Human services organizations with advocacy agendas approved by their governing boards



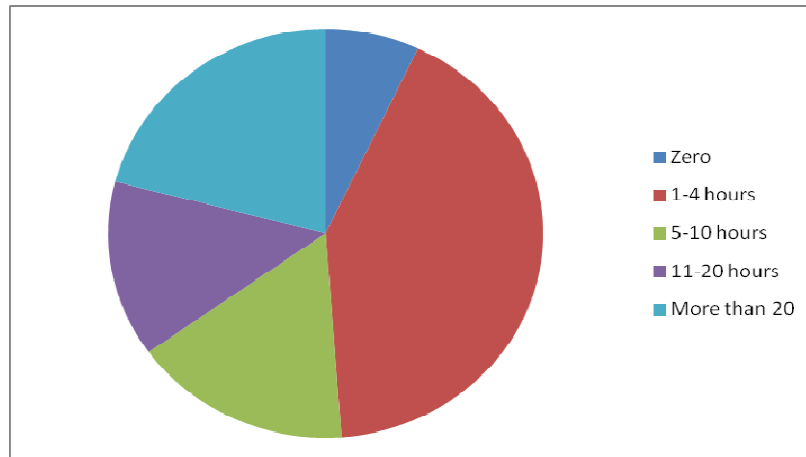
As detailed below, organizations responded that they intend fairly active engagement on a variety of advocacy fronts, with some clear patterns developing. For example, there are only a few activities on which staff are not expected to take the lead and, interestingly, these relate to direct contacts to state legislators (Board members and volunteers are reported to be more active in calling/visiting and writing/emailing these elected officials). There were no activities in which clients are reported to be the most active and, indeed, in virtually all areas clients are significantly less active (at least as reported by these organizations) than the other stakeholders. Despite the obvious importance of regulatory and agency advocacy for the policy issues facing these organizations and those they serve, respondents report less engagement in these areas of policymaking than in legislative activity. There is also some reason to believe, at least anecdotally, that some over-reporting could be reflected here, at least in terms of comparing these self-reported activities and the impressions of elected officials, most of whom perceive a greater need for engagement by human services organizations. However, to the extent to which these reports signal public policy intentions for the 2012 legislative session, there is reason for optimism, since activity at these levels would certainly have an impact on the policymaking process.

Table 1: Organizations' Advocacy Activities

Advocacy Activity	Board/volunteers	Staff	Clients
Calling/visiting state legislator	61%	59%	24%
Writing/emailing state legislator	74%	69%	22%
Submitting written legislative testimony	27%	53%	18%
Testifying in a legislative committee	29%	51%	20%
Attending a legislative hearing	39%	58%	16%
Attending a legislator's community forum	47%	70%	22%
Inviting a legislator to visit your organization	41%	53%	12%
Commenting on proposed regulations	25%	47%	6%
Contacting a state agency about policy concerns	22%	51%	20%
Writing a letter to the editor, issuing a press release, or contacting media	33%	54%	20%
Attending an organized "lobby day"	39%	57%	33%

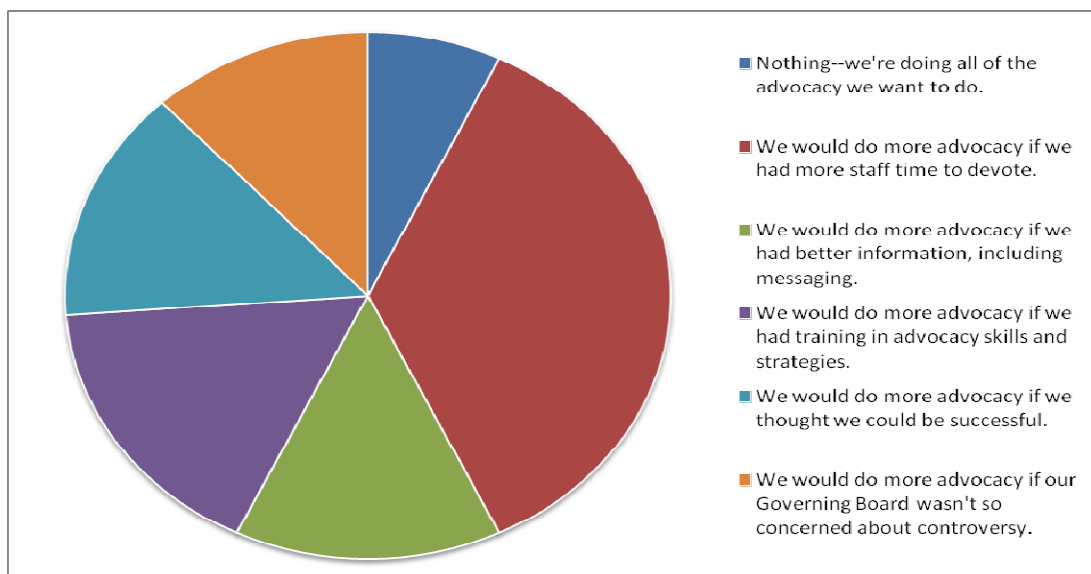
As shown below, despite plans to engage in a wide variety of advocacy activities, with participation from an inclusive set of organizational stakeholders—Board members, volunteers, staff, and constituencies—organizations acknowledge that they spend relatively little time each week, even during the height of the legislative session, on advocacy. Indeed, almost half of respondents report that they will spend less than four hours each week on advocacy, as an organization, although it is certainly possible that these respondents are unaware of the totality of public policy engagement happening throughout their organizations during a given legislative session, especially as it involves Board members, volunteers, and clients. In the future, it would be helpful to analyze the amount of time that organizations intend to spend on public policy by the type of organization, not just in terms of organizational structure (as shown below in Figure 9), but based on whether they consider advocacy to be central to their mission, or whether they are more focused on the provision of direct services. Certainly, the survey results reveal the presence of both types of organizations within the data; some respondents reported, for example, that they do not have any clients. To pursue the question in greater detail, UCS or others could ask how much time organizations intend to devote to specific advocacy activities, in order to gain additional insights into the way that human services organizations in the area approach their engagement in public policy.

Figure 5: Hours organizations expect to spend per week on advocacy during 2012 session



United Community Services, in its role as a convener and catalyst within the human services sector, seeks to find ways to stimulate public policy engagement of human services organizations, on behalf of the interests of these same constituencies. Of note, only three respondents indicated that they are currently “doing all of the advocacy (we) want to do.” The vast majority of respondents, then, report an interest in engaging more in the public policy process than they are currently, with the single greater barrier the lack of adequate staff time/resources. This speaks to potential areas for intervention, including resource development targeted to advocacy capacity, assistance to engage Board members, volunteers, and clients more in public policy, and greater collaboration so that organizations can combine efforts in the public policy arena.

Figure 6: Interventions that would increase organizations’ human services advocacy



While one must be careful not to conflate overall organizational capacity with advocacy capacity—there are certainly many examples of large and strong human services organizations reluctant to risk that size and strength in order to take a stand on policy issues—there is evidence within these results for a

connection between organizational size and advocacy engagement. Specifically, there is a statistically significant correlation between organizations' budget size and the number of hours per week that they anticipate spending on advocacy during the 2012 legislative session ($r=.526$). There is not, however, a statistically significant correlation between the percentage of organizations' budgets that are composed of government funds and the number of hours per week that they anticipate spending on advocacy during the 2012 legislative session, indicating that, here, it is the availability of staff resources, more than a particular connection to governmental decisions (or, even, constraints related to funding sources) that drives public policy participation. A larger sample size would facilitate greater analysis of the connections between these issues of organizational composition and structure and their influence on advocacy.

Figure 7: Organizations' budget size

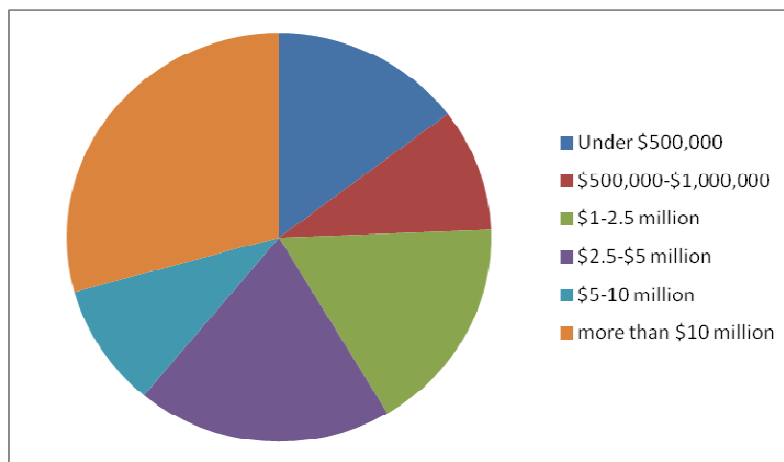
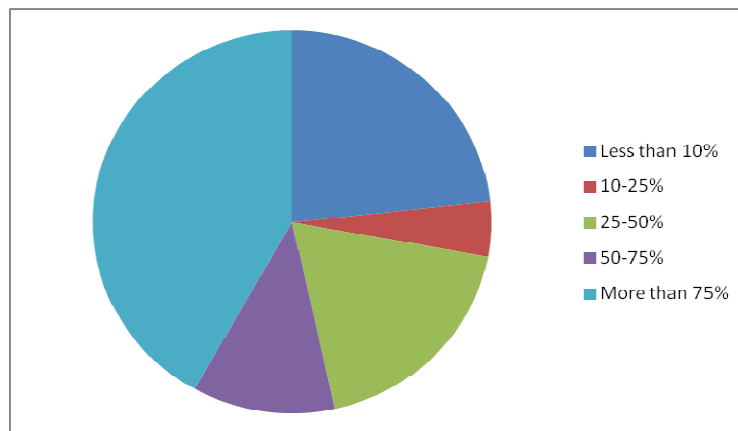
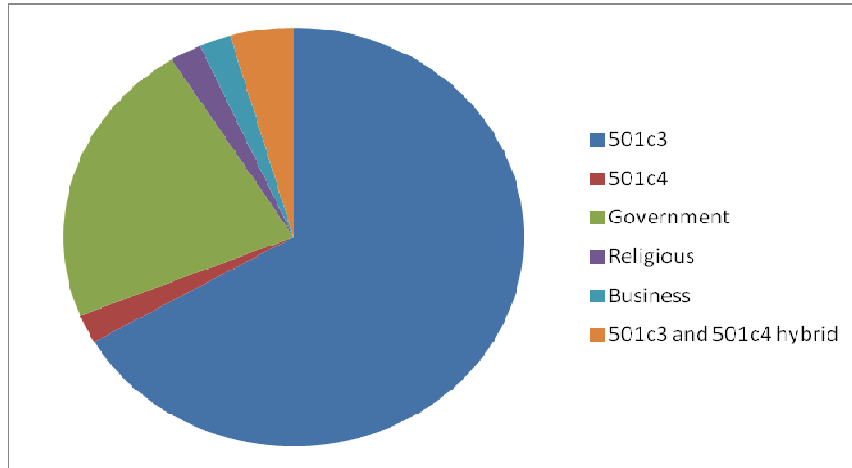


Figure 8: Percentage of budget composed of government funds



Because 501(c)3 organizations are the significant majority of organizational types for this relatively small sample size, it is not possible to conduct a definitive analysis of the impact of organizational type on advocacy activities. Comparing these results to those attained with a sample that includes more 501(c)4 or other types of organizations would, perhaps, provide some insights into the impact of organizational structure on advocacy behavior.

Figure 9: Organizational type



Conclusion

The high attendance at UCS’ 2011 public policy forum indicates strong interest in the public policy decisions that affect the human services industry. United Community Services will continue to be a resource for organizations navigating the policy environment and will seek to serve as a catalyst for efforts to collectively address common concerns and to build an infrastructure for a strong quality of life. In the 2012 Kansas legislative session and beyond, UCS will look to the organizations within its networks for guidance about the ways in which it can most successfully support the public policy advocacy that human services sector—and those who depend on it—needs to thrive.