

ARNOVA Community and Grassroots Associations Section Report on 11/15/2000 Section Meeting Prior to ARNOVA Conference

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Strong intellectual interest in the Section was expressed by participants because it was felt the Section represented the "dark matter" and the "invisible stepchildren" of the voluntary nonprofit sector---self-help groups, grassroots associations, community organizations, and smaller staffed nonprofits as contrasted with big, easily seen, paid-staff nonprofits and nonprofit academic research centers that seem to dominate attention in ARNOVA.

Some participants expressed interest in usable knowledge and bridging the scholarship-practice gap with dialogue, research translation, and participative action-research (user- or client-relevant research). It was suggested that one should not do research "to" small organizations but rather "with" them. One participant pointed out that there are many existing academic-practitioner venues, especially in the community development and economic development fields.

Some participants were pleased to have the new Section as a social community within ARNOVA providing the potential for some interpersonal intimacy in what has become a large and somewhat impersonal academic organization. The Pre-Conference Section Meeting, with its tradition of self-introductions of oneself and one's research work, is now a regular way of getting to know others in this field which can be followed up afterwards.

Several research issues were mentioned: What is the effect of receiving substantial funding on a volunteer group? What is the process of going from a volunteer to a small paid staff group, as some self-help groups in the UK are doing as they get lottery money? Should self-help groups be seen as a low cost approach to public problem solving? Why do people join or leave associations? Why are people becoming more interested in event volunteering rather than being members of associations? How are rural associations and nonprofits different from more urban ones? How can we move toward a more cooperative and collaborative approach to research on associations? Is there little research on associations or is there a lot and it is just hard to find?

There was a general feeling that the Pre-Conference Section Meeting was a good thing, but that it should be supplemented by one or more panel discussion sessions organized by the Section on relevant topics and possibly some paper sessions as well, although these occur naturally at present. We might ask for our own "track" and presentation room at the next conference. (At this conference many papers of interest to our Section seemed to be given in room Pelican 1.) It was suggested that the Section might edit a supplemental issue of NVSQ on community and grassroots associations, and the Section Executive Committee is following up on this suggestion. Other publication suggestions were made for an annual review volume, for a handbook, and for articles in the JAI annual review volume on community.

In the Nordic nations, most nonprofits are associations not paid-staff nonprofits, because of the welfare state there, so the Community and Grassroots Associations Section is likely to be

attractive to many voluntary action researchers there. As a result, one Nordic researcher present suggested that we find a way to reach out to the Nordic Network of Third Sector Researchers.

The Section Meeting was led by 2000-2002 elected Co-Chairs (tie-vote) Thomasina Borkman and Carl Milofsky. Other elected Members of the Executive Committee of the Section are Ram Cnaan, Siegrun Freyss, John Messer, Susan Ostrander, Per Selle, and Richard Sundeen. David Horton Smith continues to serve on the EC in his role as Past Chair now. The EC held a dinner meeting the evening after the Section Meeting.