

Preparing students to lead in government-nonprofit collaboration: Lessons from the field

Prepared for 2009 Teaching Public Administration Conference

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Purpose and focus of this research

To better understand the implications of the rise in “third-party government” for the MPA curriculum; to develop recommendations for preparing our students to lead government-nonprofit collaborations

. . . focusing on government-nonprofit social services contracting

Our questions

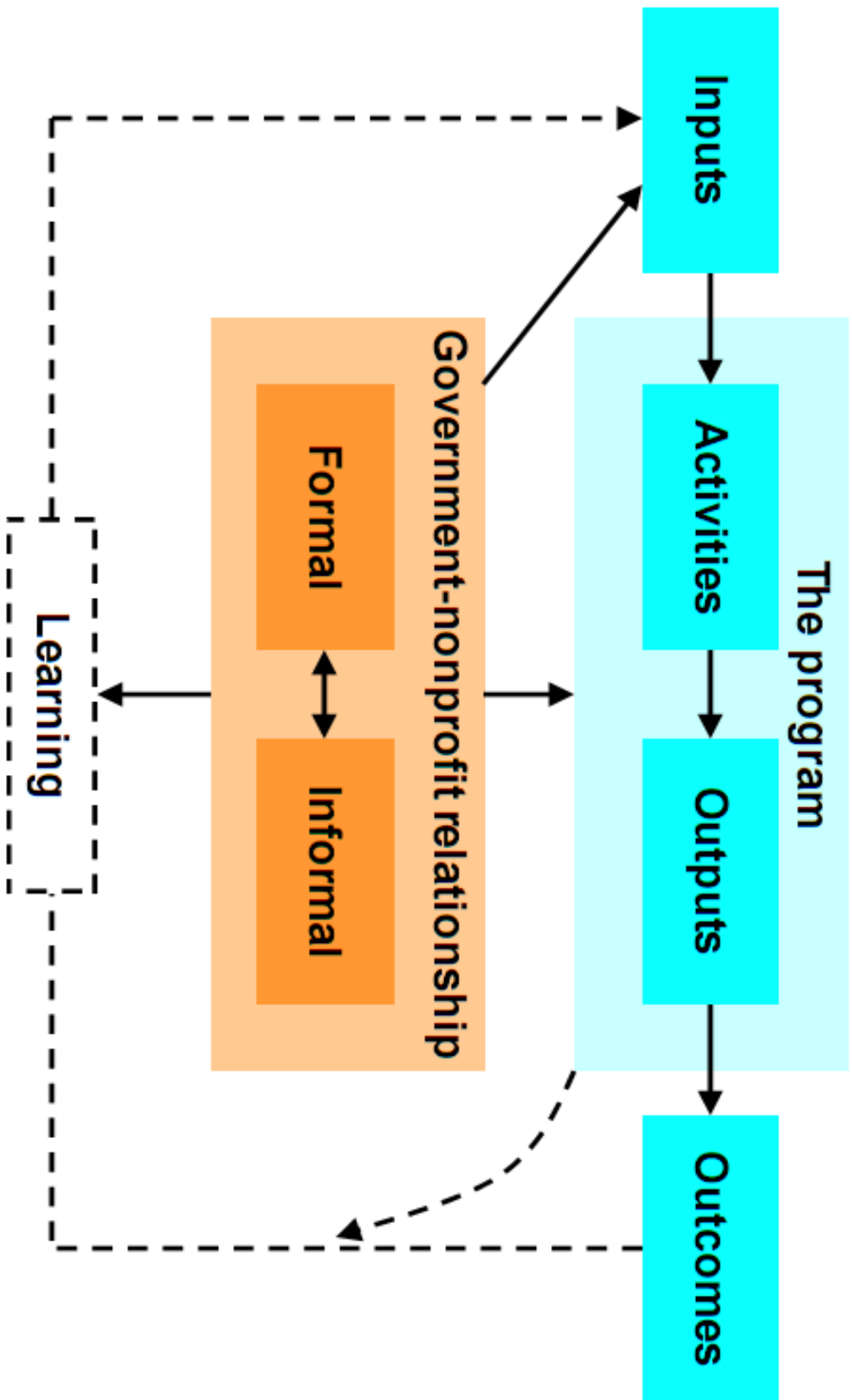
- What characteristics of the contracting relationship affect program outcomes?
- What have practitioners learned about leading successful government-nonprofit contracting relationships?
- How can these lessons help us strengthen the MPA curriculum?

What we’re doing

- In-depth, open-ended interviews with government and nonprofit administrators heavily involved in the social services “contracting regime” of one city, supplemented by interviews from other regions
- Interviews “get at” our research questions directly and indirectly
- Basic qualitative data analysis of transcripts—open coding, axial coding, selective coding
- Grounded theory approach—ongoing iteration between data analysis and model building

What we're learning

- Program outcomes are strongly influenced by formal *and* informal aspects of the government-nonprofit relationship.
- Organization and systemic learning are facilitated by, hindered by, and filtered through the formal and informal aspects of the government-nonprofit relationship.
- The formal and informal aspects of the government-nonprofit relationship are interdependent and malleable.
- Practitioners stress the need to understand the formal structures and processes of organizations in the “other” sector.
- Practitioners on both “sides” espouse negative stereotypical views of the “other side” while viewing positive experiences as “exceptions to the rule.”
- Practitioners strongly endorse experiential learning integrated throughout the curriculum.
- Practitioners are pessimistic about the value of classroom-based education for preparing students to lead in government-nonprofit collaboration.



What can we teach our students?

Suggested learning objectives: Students will . . .

- ... be familiar with the basic formal structures and processes of government, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations.
- ... understand the particular strengths of for-profit, nonprofit, and government organizational forms and their implications for structuring collaborations.
- ... appreciate the importance of informal relationships, characterized by trust and open communication, to achieving the goals of collaborations.
- ... be able to design formal collaborative structures that support the emergence of facilitative informal relationships.
- ... be able to identify effects of formal and informal relationships on organizational and systemic learning.

Examples of learning activities

Comparative study of governance and structure across sectors				✓	✓
Case studies, class discussions that raise awareness, surface assumptions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Study philosophy and features of strengths-based collaboration				✓	
Read and critique actual contracts, memorandums of understanding, RFPs, etc.	✓	✓			✓
Study interdependence of formal relationship and informal relationship		✓	✓		
Experimental cross-sector learning throughout the curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓