

**Accountability Mechanisms and
Mission-Based Activity:
A Nonprofit Agency Serving Immigrants and Refugees**

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Abstract

This paper assesses the relationship between accountability mechanisms and the mission-based services provided by nonprofit organizations serving refugees and immigrants in America. Currently, over 28.4 million immigrants, ten percent of the nation's total population, are estimated to be living in the United States. Many nonprofit organizations were founded specifically to serve these individuals. Nonprofits today are feeling intense accountability pressures, as they are being asked to justify the services they deliver and their operations. Therefore, to comply with funding and regulatory agencies, these organizations are integrating multiple methods and systems of evaluation. This paper examines accountability processes in a nonprofit agency serving immigrants and refugees. In particular, it identifies to whom the case study organization is accountable and the accountability mechanisms used in the case studied. This research further focuses on the time requirements of those mechanisms, the relationship between the mechanisms, and, finally, the impact of the accountability mechanisms on the mission-based activities of the organization.

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Section One: Introduction

Americans have long relied on nonprofit organizations for service provision. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville ([1830] 1988 cited in Light 2000, 89) observes that “Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations” to work toward the common good. Light (2000) follows that “America has always been a nation of voluntary associations.” These voluntary associations have become formalized in America through the establishment of organizations with legal nonprofit status. Currently, many of these nonprofit and public organizations are providing services to the 28.4 million immigrants and refugees in America.

Nonprofits have historically operated in what was referred to as ‘the sanctified sector,’ a sector that was above criticism, but times are changing. Some analysts argue that this ‘sanctified’ time never existed, and is only assessed as such in retrospect. In any case, at present, it is not sufficient to have a strong mission and nonprofit status, as nonprofit agencies must defend their activities. Nonprofit organizations must now incorporate multiple systems of accountability that address outcome measurement and transparency in financing and decision-making. Leaders of public and nonprofit agencies today face “a multitude of issues that continue to grow and plague” them (Koteen 1991, 3), accountability demands being one of these.

Nonprofit organizations can be accountable on multiple levels: upward, lateral, and downward. Upward accountability, accountability to funders, donors, and oversight agencies, focuses on ensuring that financial resources are used for the specified purpose and is usually ensured through the use of reporting, auditing, and monitoring activities. Upward accountability demands can have negative impacts on nonprofit agencies, including threats to other levels of accountability and to the mission of the organization. Lateral and downward accountability, to the nonprofit organization itself, its community partner organizations, and its clients/beneficiaries, generally employ less formalized methods, and it is thus less clear how agencies are judged in terms of accountability on these levels. While upward accountability usually is related to being held accountable, lateral and downward accountability is more a result

of felt responsibility. Najam (1996, 352) states that NGOs must recognize the complex layers of accountability demands so that they can “begin creating mechanisms and organizational structures that are equally accountable to their patrons, their clients, and to their own selves.” Thus, if lateral and downward levels of accountability are important to nonprofit agencies, they must integrate methods that allow for assessment and evaluation of accountability to lateral and downward stakeholders.

The literature suggests that upward accountability demands may be too intense for many nonprofit organizations to meet (Light 2000, Koteen 1991, Wagner 2000). Some suspect that these demands may even be detrimental to the organization’s ability to be downwardly and laterally accountable as well as inhibit the mission-based activities of the organization (Edwards and Hulme 1996b, Meyer 1999). The academic dialogue regarding nonprofit accountability has centered primarily on the demands of upward accountability. Yet, analysis of lateral and downward accountability concerns is equally important, and “may in fact be even more important since their mechanisms for NGO [non-governmental organization] accountability and learning are decidedly less well developed” (Najam 1996, 342). A “single definition or model of accountability can [not] suffice for a field as diverse as that of the nonprofit sector and thus is a fundamental “need to distinguish between elements of the sector” (Cnaan 1996, 221- 223).

This paper focuses on Bright Star¹, a nonprofit organization that provides resettlement assistance to refugees and aid and support to immigrants. The paper first provides an overview of the refugee resettlement process in the United States. Next, it provides a review of nonprofit, service delivery, and accountability literature. Finally, it documents the accountability mechanisms used by the Bright Star, the agency under study, and assesses the relationship between those mechanisms and the mission-based activity of the organization.

Five major questions guide this research. First, to whom is the organization assisting refugees and immigrants accountable? Second, what are the accountability mechanisms used by the organization assisting refugees and immigrants? Third, how much time does the nonprofit

¹ The name of the organization under study has been omitted for privacy reasons. Therefore the organization has been given the pseudonym *Bright Star* throughout the paper.

organization serving refugees and immigrants spend completing the requirements to satisfy upward, downward and lateral accountability measures? Fourth, how are accountability mechanisms used by the organization inter-related? Finally, do these accountability measures assist or inhibit the organization's ability to fulfill its mission?

Section Two: Review of the Literature

Nonprofit organizations, service delivery, and accountability

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND SERVICE PROVISION

Nonprofit organizations are defined as “self-governing, private, not-for-profit organizations that are geared to improving the quality of life of disadvantaged people” (Vakil 1997, 2060). Today’s citizenry has a paradoxical relationship with these organizations and government agencies regarding service provision. While the government is still seen as the most appropriate area to represent the public interest, beliefs that it is the best sector to help people are declining. Nonprofit organizations “are increasingly picking up where governmental action stops—or has yet to begin” (Najam 2000, 376). These organizations are fulfilling roles and providing services previously allocated to government agencies. As our societal call for small federal government increases, nonprofits will increasingly be asked to fill in the gaps (Boris and Steuerle 1999). Consequently, we have placed pressure on nonprofits to provide more public services, filling the void left by government retreats.

Smith and Lipsky (1993, 38) identify three types of nonprofit service agencies based on funding. First, there are the old-line, established agencies with endowments and, therefore, less reliance on government funding. Consequently, these agencies typically have established relationships with their funding sources regarding accountability requirements. Second, there are new agencies that have been formed in response to the availability of government funds. These agencies can be called Public Services Contractors, as they are nonprofit organizations that function according to market-based businesses serving the public needs. These organizations are considered to be “driven more by market considerations than by values” and are thus separated from other voluntary organizations that are “value-driven organizations” (Robinson 1997, 59). As a result, these agencies are more likely to change dramatically to meet funder accountability demands than organizations which are more value-based. The third type of nonprofit service agencies are new agencies that have formed in response to unmet community needs. These agencies operate on shoestring budgets and are heavily reliant on underpaid and volunteer staff. As a result, accountability demands can become more burdensome to these organizations than those with

more staff time and resources. Edwards and Hulme (1996, 963) claim that “governments are attracted to NGO provisions because NGOs can be discarded when necessary.” For any of these types of nonprofit service providers, their funding sources impact the accountability demands on that organization as well as the pressure for securing future funding, which can also impact accountability activities.

This connection to government funding is important when assessing nonprofit organizations and accountability. Najam (2000) developed a typology to assess the relationship between nonprofit organizations and the government, creating four categories: cooperative, confrontational, complementary, and co-optive. The relationship between the two, according to Najam, is based on the goals that each has (the ends) and the methods employed to reach those goals (the means). Thus, as governments and nonprofit organizations attempt to reach their goals, they interact in one of the four ways: “(1) seeking similar ends with similar means [cooperation], (2) seeking dissimilar ends with dissimilar means [confrontation], (3) seeking similar ends but preferring dissimilar means [complementarity], or (4) preferring similar means but for dissimilar ends [co-optation]” (Najam 2000, 383). Najam further identifies a fifth option, that government and nonprofit organizations simply do not engage each other at all. With cooperation, there is a risk that the agency will serve as a “mere implementer of government’s will” (Najam 2000, 384). The complementary relationship allows for a “partnership or contractual relationship in which government finances public services and nonprofits deliver them” (Najam 2000, 387). But whenever the two interact, there is a risk of co-optation. As Edwards and Hulme (1996, 967) question, “does the funding of NGOs to deliver social welfare services change the nature of the relationship with donors from one of partnership, to one of contracting?” or in Najam’s words from cooperation to co-optation? If so, what does this imply for the services provided to beneficiaries?

In the last twenty years, the nonprofit sector has been forced to adapt to changing funding, varying public confidence levels, and shifting needs in society (Wagner 2000). It is widely accepted that today the American public views nonprofit charities as better able to help people than the government (Wagner 2000). However, as previously noted, this relationship with nonprofits is paradoxical. While feeling that nonprofits are better able to serve local communities

than government agencies, the public simultaneously expects nonprofits to submit themselves to extensive accountability measures (Light 2000). Thus, as they are asked to provide more services, nonprofits are increasingly asked to justify their spending and management activities. The public is expressing concern that nonprofits, similar to government and market institutions, need to justify not only what services they deliver but also how they operate. Citizens are demonstrating that the focus on organizational mission is no longer sufficient and that organizations must demonstrate outcomes and efficiency. Nonprofits are caught in the middle of this predicament. Mission based value is waning and nonprofits must prove their economic value through demonstration of programmatic and fiscal accountability.

According to a recent Center for Public Service report sponsored by the Brookings Institution, the nonprofit sector is under increasing “pressure to improve its organizational performance as part of this new public service” (Light 2000, v).² Government, charitable foundations, and individual givers are ever more focused on efficiency and results, pressuring no-profits to prove that they are providing the services they claim to be providing, using the least possible resources. At the same time, clients, either individuals or communities, are becoming more insistent about efficiency and responsiveness. Nonprofits are asked to concurrently measure outcomes, make information transparent, and impose standards of excellence (Light 2000, 7).

Signs suggest that strong accountability activities will continue to be mandatory for nonprofits. Government funding for nonprofit service provision is on the rise and public opinion regarding nonprofits shows that positive feelings are increasing as well (Light 2000, 7). Popularity for the nonprofit sector may be due in part to a decrease in government popularity (Light 2000, 9). Nonprofits, though, do not function in the ‘sanctified sector’ (Wagner 2000) and must now contend with pressures to demonstrate organizational capacity and performance, as it is no longer sufficient to simply have nonprofit status and a service-oriented mission (Light 2000, 13). According to the Center for Public Service, these organizations must show improvement to maintain funding, either through demonstrating actual improvement in the area they are targeting or through learning and using the language of reform (Light 2000, 13). An overview of

² The Center for Public Service focuses on public work, done by government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private firms that are contracted to provide services.

accountability demands and mechanisms used for demonstrating accountability will further illuminate the increased pressure of nonprofits in America today.

NONPROFITS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In order to understand the complex situation of nonprofit accountability and mission-based activity, four questions must be addressed. These questions are (1) What is accountability?, (2) To whom are nonprofit agencies accountable?, (3) How is accountability measured?, and (4) What accountability mechanisms are used by nonprofit agencies?

What Is Accountability?

In discussing *accountability* for nonprofit organizations providing services, it is first important to define the term. Accountability is “generally interpreted as the means by which individuals and organizations report to a recognized authority...and are held responsible for their actions” (Edwards and Hulme 1996, 8). Definitions often frame accountability in terms of holding someone accountable: “Accountability...is defined as ‘the right to require an account’ and also ‘the right to impose sanctions if the account or the actions accounted for are inadequate’” (Leat 1988, cited by McDonald 1997, 53). Other definitions for accountability in relation to nonprofit organizations, however, expand the debate. For example, Ebrahim (2002, 3) identifies a broader perspective that focuses both on “being held responsible by others” and on “taking responsibility for oneself” which clarifies accountability as being “not only a reactive response to overseers, but also a proactive one linked to ensuring that the public trust is served.” This paper uses a broad definition of accountability: accountability refers to being answerable to stakeholders for the actions of the agency, whether by internal or external initiation. Special attention is devoted to accountability in relation to the mission of the organization.

To Whom Are Nonprofits Accountable?

After having defined accountability, the next question that must be asked is “to whom are nonprofit agencies accountable?” It is implied, when we discuss accountability, that there is “a constituency, or a group to whom a person or organization is accountable” (Bogart 1995, 158). Typically, the accountability debate has focused on the accountability of nonprofits to their funders. Edwards and Hulme (1996b) expand the accountability dialogue to include multiple layers of nonprofit accountability—“‘downward’ to their partners, beneficiaries, staff, and supporters, and ‘upward’ to their trustees, donors, and...governments.” However, in order to fully understand the accountability demands on nonprofit organizations, the debate can be

clarified further to classify organizational accountability upward to patrons, downward to clients, and laterally to themselves (Najam 1996) and the agencies with whom they work. Many practitioners and scholars have expressed concerns regarding the “difficulties [nonprofit organizations] face in prioritizing and reconciling these multiple accountabilities” (Edwards and Hulme 1996, 968), especially in cases where accountability is “skewed to the most powerful constituency”.

How Is Accountability Measured?

In terms of competing or conflicting accountabilities, it is essential to know how nonprofit organizations can demonstrate accountability to multiple levels (upward, lateral, and downward) of stakeholders. This question can best be addressed by separating the layers of accountability and assessing each of them. Upward accountability focuses on whether financial resources are being used for the purposes specified by the funding source, and it typically involves financial or statistical data. The types of information used to assess nonprofit organizational performance upwardly have many implications for nonprofit agencies, some of which may jeopardize mission-based activity. Lateral and downward accountability is less formalized and the guidelines by which nonprofit organizations are assessed on these levels are not as clear.

Upward Accountability

Upward accountability has been defined as the accountability a nonprofit organization has to its donors, funding sources, and government and typically relates to ensuring that money given was spent on that for which it was given (Najam 1996). During the last decade “government regulation and oversight of nonprofit service organizations have grown substantially,” (Smith and Lipsky 1993, 79) attempting to ensure nonprofit organization accountability to the public. These accountability requirements are part of a larger trend across the service provision sector, affecting both public agencies and private providers. This trend relates to the ongoing debate regarding administrative accountability, which refers to the arena of organizational responsibility wherein leaders and managers must answer to a higher authority and implement systems that can document programmatic and fiscal details. Political scientists Carl J. Friedrich (1901-1984) and Herman Finer (1898-1969) first outlined two distinct approaches to administrative accountability. Friedrich contends that internal measures would ensure responsibility of

administrators while Finer argues that administrative responsibility could be ensured only externally (Shafritz and Russell 2000). Friedrich's argument centers on the claim that internal measures of accountability are a natural part of organizational development and the results of such audits would be communicated to the public:

It would seem that the publicity is of the essence of a fully developed bureaucracy, and that consequently the demands of outsiders (the public) for publicity have merely accelerated a process which lay implicit (Friedrich 1932, 26).

Additionally, internal assessment is necessary due to the complexities of policies and standards. Finer (cited in Shafritz and Russell 2000), on the other hand, argued that external accountability measures were the only option to prevent corruption. Thus, there is an ongoing tension between external controls and internal measures of accountability.

Since the late 1960s, the federal government has broken with past practice and is initiating new regulatory efforts (Smith and Lipsky 1993), imposing external accountability methods on organizations that provide services. These external accountability mechanisms typically relate to upward accountability. Other funding sources have followed suit. These accountability requirements focus on two areas: fiscal and programmatic. Fiscally, a service organization "may have multiple funding sources, each with its own, non-compatible billing requirements" (Smith and Lipsky 1993, 80). In the programmatic arena, funding agencies often insist on specific record keeping such as performance-based indicators, in order to maintain funding. Both fiscal and programmatic demands have increased in recent years. These demands are due in part to beliefs that proper management and administration of human resource programs require empirical evidence that what presumably was paid for and deemed desirable was actually undertaken (Rossi and Freeman 1982).

In terms of upward accountability to donors and funders, organizations are responsible for "spending designated moneys for designated purposes" (Najam 1996, 342). Donors can require accountability from the NGO on the financial level by seeking accountability for the money spent and the policy level by seeking accountability for using the funds for the designated purpose (Najam 1996, 342). Unfortunately, as programmatic accountability is much more difficult to address, this accountability concern can often be translated into accounting rather

than accountability (Edwards and Hulme 1996), leaving NGO practitioners to count services and clients rather than demonstrate performance.

In addition, the effectiveness of such accountability requirements in assisting the organization in meeting its mission depends partially on the relationship between the donor and the agency. This can be better understood through the framework of principal-agent theory in which one's behavior in relation to accountability is also influenced by the "relationships between those holding the individuals into [sic] account for their actions (principals) and those trying to act responsibly (agents)" (Fry 1995, 186). This relationship and the ensuing interactions between principals and agents determine whether "accountability is experienced as a monitoring or enabling process" (Fry 1995, 186). Three factors influence whether accountability interactions are experienced as enabling or enforcing, and accordingly, how the agent will react to attempts to hold him/her accountable. If the agent views the principal's request as related to the "greater good" (Fry 1995), then s/he will likely view the accountability demands as more enabling than enforcing. Likewise, if the history demonstrates "fairness and dignity in the process," the agent will be more likely to view the process as enabling rather than enforcing mission-based activities. An NGO in Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya, experienced a shift in its relationship with funders, which affected its feelings about accountability and its mission-based activity: "What started off as a partnership based on dialogue [became] a subcontractorship based on commands and sanctions" (Perera 1997, 166). The organization was "treated as a subcontractor, not a partner" (Perera 1997, 163). As such, it was then entreated to fulfill a contract and demonstrate their performance, rather than focus on their mission. To prevent being forced to sacrifice mission for funding, "NGOs must recognize that when they work with donors, they enter into a power relationship in which they are the subordinate" (Perera 1997, 167) because the demand for donor money exceeds the supply and donors can thus decide which organizations to support.

The pressure for accountability, especially to satisfy funders, has many drawbacks for nonprofits. First, nonprofit organizations can become focused on "monitoring and reporting such information as the number of clients served, the quantity of services, programs, or activities provided, the number of volunteers or volunteer hours contributed, and the amount of donations received" (Vinson and Morley 2000, 1). This information is important but does not assist

nonprofit leaders in assessing progress towards organizational goals. As they are typically used to demonstrate responsible use of resources, upward accountability requirements are not designed for NGO learning. They are, instead, designed to serve as documentation to prove that the funds were spent on the designated purposes. As stated above, this type of documentation often focuses only on numerical representations, rather than a more complex picture of the agency's work. Thus, nonprofit practitioners must develop methods for using upward accountability mechanisms as learning tools for the organization. However, this can become difficult, as nonprofit practitioners may feel a need to protect their organization from donors, and display a "tendency in the NGO sector to highlight the success stories and downplay or 'camouflage' the failures" (Smillie 1995, cited by Vakil 1997, 2066). Furthermore, government funding sources can "eventually bring administrative and accountability demands which may be at odds with the agencies [sic] original visions" (1993, 40). There is a further risk that the nonprofit agency could distort their "mission for the sake of entity maintenance or even survival" (Lawry 1996, 179). This is a dilemma faced by many of the agencies that are now under contract to fulfill government-sponsored services. Unfortunately, many times NGOs are "responding not to the demands of the rural clientele they would be expected to serve but rather to the demands placed upon them by the donor agencies" (Meyer 1999, 67).

As previously stated, Najam's (2000) typology of the relationships between nonprofit organizations and the government has four categories: cooperative, confrontational, complementary, and co-optive. These relationships have fundamental impacts on nonprofit organizations, as they can change the way that the organization operates and can influence how the organization follows its mission. There is always a risk that the organization can be co-opted by the government. This is especially important in relation to accountability demands. As Edwards and Hulme (1996, 966) question "if NGOs are becoming more responsive to external concerns, are substituting for government... what is happening to the links—to their values and mission, and to their relationships with 'the poor,' supporters, and others?" Edwards and Hulme (1996b) also identify other concerns regarding accountability for nonprofits. When attempting to evaluate benefits and costs, nonprofits face barriers because "many of the things that add most to our quality of life are not readily quantifiable" (1996, 33). This focus on measuring, especially to satisfy funders, allows that "things that are not measurable get ignored" (Edwards and Hulme

1996, 33). In attempting to quantify results, organizations serving immigrants and refugees can allow upward accountability requirements to take precedence over downward accountability mechanisms to their clients or lateral mechanisms to themselves and others with whom they work.

Upward accountability, then, is necessary to retain funding as well as to ensure that nonprofit organizations are fulfilling their mission-based activities. However, these accountability requirements pose threats to organizations in terms of time and focus. As “government contracts eventually bring administrative demands which may be at odds with agencies’ original visions” (Smith and Lipsky 1993, 40), the challenge is to maintain an equilibrium between blind faith of practitioners in the service-provision field “to use their best professional judgment” and a watchdog situation that “inhibits their ability to function” (Shafritz and Russell 2000, 343).

Lateral and Downward Accountability

Although the accountability literature has long focused on upward accountability to funders and donors, dialogue on lateral and downward accountability has recently emerged. The NGO accountability discussion has been considered restrictive by some scholars, as it focused mainly on “accountability to NGO donors and on mechanistic project evaluations” (Najam 1996, 340). The dialogue centers on “externalities (controls, measures, and laws) to ensure that nonprofits are accountable” and therefore is based on the assumption that “controls actually produce results, and that the desire to do good work is externally motivated in all of us” (Fry 1995, 181). The dialogue must be expanded to include multiple layers of accountability as well as an assessment of the role of “felt responsibility” in being accountable (Fry 1995).

Lateral accountability is an extension of the upward-downward accountability debate. Najam (1996) expands upon the upward-downward accountability debate to include nonprofit agencies’ accountability to themselves and their partners. Nonprofit organizations are responsible to their mission and goals, their staff, and their partner agencies. As such, lateral accountability has two components, internal and external. Internally, lateral accountability refers to organizations’ accountability to themselves. Nonprofit institutions must demonstrate that their activities are mission-based. This is especially important in terms of seeking funding and funder demands on

the organization, as the mission of the organization must always be kept in mind. External lateral accountability also refers to nonprofit agencies' accountability to agencies in the community with whom they work. On this level, nonprofit organizations must demonstrate to community partners that they are fulfilling their mission-based activities.

Downward accountability, referring to accountability to clients, is similar to lateral accountability in that it is less formalized than accountability upward. Edwards and Hulme (1996b) coined the term downward accountability to refer to those who are served by nonprofit organizations. Najam (1996, 345), clearly identifies who downward accountability refers to as "individuals or groups to whom NGOs provide goods or services [who] may be considered NGO clients." Specifically, clients are those whom the services are designed to benefit. Downward accountability, then, refers to the responsibility of the nonprofit organization to "be accountable to the needs and aspirations" of those it intends to benefit (Najam 1996, 345). This is especially important, as those beneficiaries who are receiving the services of the nonprofit organization rarely have any connections with those donors or funders who finance the services (Balda 1994). Furthermore, diversity has a great impact on an organization's ability to be accountable to its clients and beneficiaries. According to Fry (1995, 192), "as the nonprofit sector serves more clientele and represents more diverse cultures and customs... the need to become engaged in conversation...increases." This communication is fundamental to organizations serving refugees and immigrants, as there is a fundamental lack of understanding among the funding institutions, organization providing services, and clients/beneficiaries of those services, and local community. Those providing funding and designing and implementing services may not have a clear understanding of the cultures and customs of clients. The clients/beneficiaries may not understand the organizations providing services either. Additionally, the local community may be unclear about the refugees being served and the organizations providing the services. For that reason, nonprofit organizations must work to integrate methods for assessing the desires of their clients as well as educating the public, if they are to be downwardly accountable.

Accountability has multiple components. First, there is the aspect of being held responsible for the results of something. This aspect of accountability is strongly connected to upward accountability with a formal, institutionalized structure where the agency can be held responsible

for its activities. While there may be some more formalized mechanisms for accountability downward and laterally, stakeholders on these levels are much less able to hold the agency accountable, as “NGOs cannot be formally accountable to their beneficiaries, however much they want to be” (Edwards and Hulme 196, 8). So, if nonprofit agencies want to implement strong mechanisms for accountability laterally and downward, they must move beyond the mechanisms through which they are judged externally to “felt responsibility” (Cummings and Anton 1990, cited by Fry 1995, 183). This feeling of responsibility, Fry notes, is the internal component while accountability is the external part of responsible behavior” (1995, 184). Accountability can become nurturing, when it allows individuals and organizations to feel a connection to their mission statement and job descriptions, because “through the act of making a promise, responsibility becomes felt” (Fry 1995, 189). A strong sense of felt responsibility to themselves, their partner organizations, and their clients, assists nonprofit agencies in implementing mechanisms that work to ensure accountability on these levels.

What Accountability Mechanisms Are Used?

Another question related to NGO accountability that emerges is what mechanisms should be used to ensure accountability to stakeholders. For the purposes of this paper a mechanism is defined as a process or technique for achieving a result. Accountability mechanisms, as such, are distinct activities or processes designed to ensure that an organization is serving its mission.

Currently, many of the identified accountability mechanisms focus on upward accountability. Reporting, auditing, and monitoring mechanisms are designed to address the financial and programmatic concerns of funders. For many organizations and funders, accountability has been “defined by the use of formal mechanisms to comply with explicit laws, regulations, and standards, such as 990s, annual reports, special reports to donors, internet disclosure” (Regional Forums on Ethics and Accountability 2002). Kearns (1996) has identified multiple accountability mechanisms with components that are upward and lateral. These include audits of financial and procedural compliance, self-study reports, site visits, contractual reports, internal audits, chain of command, formal communication channels, internal checks and balances, and performance evaluations. Ebrahim (2002) also identifies five mechanisms for accountability, allowing for a combination of methods for upward, downward, and lateral accountability: reports and

disclosure statements, performance assessments and evaluations, participation, self-regulation, and social audits. Nonprofit practitioners met in 2002 to discuss accountability in the nonprofit sector. The regional forum attendees focusing on *Accountability in the Sector* brainstormed mechanisms that can be used to demonstrate multiple levels of accountability, some that are currently being used and others that are potential options for the future (Regional Forums on Ethics and Accountability 2002). Activities toward accountability that they identified include: transparency; required accountability standards for umbrella organizations; the education of nonprofit practitioners, funders, and the public about accountability activities in the third sector; peer review processes; the creation of websites for nonprofits that provide information about their accountability activities; the use of self-assessment in performance evaluations; the development of national accountability standards for the third sector; and the evaluation of nonprofit organizations by local business bureaus.

The literature does not identify many mechanisms that relate to lateral or downward accountability. Most mechanisms focus on upward accountability and many nonprofits rely solely on these mechanisms to demonstrate organizational fulfillment of their mission. According to Fry (1995, 190), “nonprofits tend to rely on indirect indicators such as annual budget approvals as signs that they have responsibly and satisfactorily fulfilled their promises to clients or constituents.” Thus, it is important to identify mechanisms that center more on clients or beneficiaries, rather than simply relying on upward accountability activities to demonstrate fulfillment of organizational goals. As some nonprofit organizations are looking for mechanisms that would assist them in being accountable to all of their stakeholders, including the public and their clients, there is a need to identify mechanisms that relate to this type of accountability.

SUMMARY

As is the case for most service provision in America, nonprofit agencies are instrumental in providing services to immigrants and refugees. These agencies are asked to justify their spending and management activities. Typically, funder accountability demands focus on whether the funds provided were used on designated activities. Many argue that these upward accountability demands can place pressure on organizations that prevent downward and lateral levels of accountability. For organizations serving foreign-born individuals living in the United States,

one can argue that there is a greater need for downward accountability and that mechanisms to inform the agencies of client needs is fundamental to the ability of the organization to fulfill its mission of assisting immigrants and refugees.

Section Three: Refugee Resettlement and Immigration in the United States

Before looking at the actual mechanisms used by agencies serving immigrants and refugees, it is important to understand the role of local agencies in the refugee resettlement process and the potential impacts of public opinion on funding opportunities and accountability demands on these agencies.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Refugees, given their political status from the State Department, are a subcategory of immigrants. Three federal agencies, The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), The Department of State (DOS), and The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), play a role in refugee resettlement in the United States. Additionally, private organizations are central to the U. S. refugee resettlement program, as the program is “designed to function as a public-private partnership, with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) playing a key role. NGOs participate in every step of the process, working in partnership with the Federal and State agencies as well as with each other to provide effective and coordinated services to refugees” (Overview of the U. S. Resettlement Process 2002). Refugees receive resettlement benefits from a combination of sources including the Federal Government, some additional State funds, and private NGO support. According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, “the private nonprofit NGOs that place refugees in communities raise considerable funding privately, and recruit volunteers, contributing generously to the cost of resettlement” (Overview of the U. S. Resettlement Process 2002).

There are ten voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) that utilize both private and government funding to coordinate refugee resettlement in the United States. Over 450 local affiliated resettlement offices work through out the country, assisting refugees as they resettle in the United States, helping them to adjust to their new homes, surroundings, and cities. The primary goal is to help refugees become self-sufficient. Many activities are undertaken to achieve this goal, as agency staff members assist with “enrolling children in school, seeking medical attention, applying for

work, receiving language training, obtaining housing and basic necessities, etc.” (Overview of the U. S. Resettlement Process 2002). Of these ten national VOLAGs, nine are religiously affiliated. These national voluntary agencies are Church World Service (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Immigration and Refugee Services (IRSA), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), United States Catholic Conference (USCC), World Relief Corporation (WR), and the State of Iowa, Bureau of Refugee Services (National Voluntary Agencies 2002).

The refugee resettlement program in the United States follows guidelines of a worldwide processing priority system that was designed to manage and process applications in an orderly fashion (Overview of the U. S. Resettlement Process 2002). The resettlement process begins at a refugee camp when refugees interview with the U.S. State Department and an INS representative. A VOLAG representative is also present at these interviews. When a refugee is approved for admission to the United States, they complete a biographical data form, which is then sent to New York where the voluntary agencies meet and review the biographical data sheets. Each voluntary agency determines which individuals or families it can resettle. Then, the heads of each VOLAG contact the state and local sites to ensure refugee placement. If possible, refugees are placed near family or friends to assist with the transition (Personal Communication with Director January 31, 2001³).

Once approved and placement is assured, refugees may still wait a considerable period of time at a processing site. However, once they arrive in the United States, they are greeted by a representative of the Reception and Placement Program of the Department of State, usually a local refugee resettlement agency employee, at the airport. Then, they are taken to their apartment, where essential services (housing, clothing, food, and referrals to medical and social services) are provided for the first thirty days. After the initial thirty days, refugees, through the local nonprofit agency, are linked with longer term ongoing benefits. These benefits include transitional cash assistance, health benefits, and access to many social services. During the initial

³ Throughout the paper the location of interviews with staff members in the case study organization is excluded for privacy reasons.

period, the “primary focus is employment services such as skills training, job development, orientation to the workplace and job counseling” as these services lead to “early economic self-sufficiency for the family, but adds greatly to the integrity of families who seek to establish themselves in a new country and provide for their own needs”⁴. Other services are provided to assist the adjustment of the family to life in the United States, including family strengthening, youth and elderly services, adjustment counseling and mental health services.

According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the success of refugee resettlement services results from two components of refugee services programs: first, the use of case managers to track the individual progress of refugees and to refer refugees to the appropriate services when needed, and second, the fact that ORR regulations now require that services are provided by bilingual and bi-cultural providers. According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, “this has had a great impact on easing the integration of refugees into American society (U. S. Resettlement Program: An Overview 2002).

⁴ The information in this paragraph is from Overview of the U. S. Resettlement Process (2002).

PUBLIC OPINION REGARDING IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

Public opinion is important to local agencies that work with the ten national VOLAGs to resettle refugees throughout America, as it can impact the amount of funding allocated for and accountability demands on refugee resettlement programs. According to the Census Bureau, more than 1.2 million legal and illegal immigrants, defined as foreign-born individuals, settle in the United States each year (Camarota 2001, 1). Since 1970, the foreign-born population living in the United States has tripled from 9.6 million to 28.4 million people (Camarota 2001, 1). Articles and opinion editorial pieces in newspapers throughout the United States daily debate the effects of immigration and the presence of immigrants on the country. Headlines such as “Massive Immigration Will Destroy America” are countered by “Who are the true ‘invaders’ of America?” (Auster 1994, Bennett 2000). There are many books written about the impacts of immigration on the U.S. economy and pundits debate whether immigrants provide more in revenue than they cost in social service benefits (Vernes 1996, Kposowa 1998). A brief Internet search revealed six national anti-immigration organizations such as Project USA, Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), and Negative Population Growth working against immigration to the United States (“Opponents of Immigration” website 2001). These organizations focus on issues such as overpopulation, health threats, the education of U.S. schoolchildren, employment and labor, national security, and environmental protection. In addition, they propose that immigration has extreme and definite negative impacts on our country. In contrast, in the same search, there were over ten national nonprofits working to assist and aid immigrants and refugees resettling in America, including the International Rescue Commission, National Immigration Forum, and the Immigrant Support Network (“Advocacy, Support, Amnesty, Human Rights” website 2001).

Nationally, Americans are divided about the impacts of immigration on America. A 2000 Gallup poll that attempted to determine public opinion regarding immigration found that most American citizens believe that immigration levels should be held constant or decreased (Jones 2000). However, the majority of those polled stated that, overall, immigrants become productive citizens who are employed in jobs that other Americans do not want. In the poll, 48 percent of respondents stated that they believe that immigrants contribute positively to society, while 40

percent consider immigrants a drain on the national economy, costing taxpayers through their use of government services. This poll shows that 38 percent of respondents thought that too many immigrants are being permitted into this country (Jones 2000). In 1992, a Roper poll revealed that 54 percent of Americans felt this way (de la Garza 1993, 1). Thus, the recent poll suggests that Americans more favorably accept immigrants today than they did eight years ago. The context of this debate is important in relation to services provided to immigrants.

Fix and Zimmerman (1995, 2) claim that “public support for reducing benefits to immigrants, is, at least in part, premised on the assumption that welfare use by immigrants is widespread, growing rapidly, and includes those who are here illegally.” They refute these assertions regarding immigrant use of welfare benefits. In their article “When should immigrants receive public benefits?” they provide details on what benefits immigrants are eligible to receive and how many actually use these benefits. They identify refugees and elderly immigrants as the top immigrant users of welfare benefits and then discuss welfare use rates for the rest of the immigrant-non-refugee population. Of this population, only five percent, the same as for U.S. born Americans of working age, take advantage of welfare assistance programs, despite the fact that a larger proportion of immigrants live in poverty (Fix and Zimmerman 1995, 2). Whether services are provided by government agencies or through nonprofit organizations, the national public opinion regarding immigrants as contributors or ‘invaders’ is important to the context in which services are provided.

Section Four: Methodology

To study the accountability mechanisms used by Bright Star, I employed qualitative research methods. Qualitative research frequently “employs an inductive research strategy... [which] builds on abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories” (Merriam 1998, 7). I used an interpretive approach that allowed me to explore the accountability mechanisms used by the case under study and then to generate a hypothesis about the relationship between accountability mechanisms and the mission-based activity of nonprofit organizations serving refugees and immigrants in America.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall goal of the research was to determine the relationship between accountability mechanisms and the mission-based activity of the case under study, a refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agency. To further specify the areas under consideration, the following research questions were identified.

1. To whom is the organization assisting refugees and immigrants accountable?
2. What are the accountability mechanisms used by the organization assisting refugees and immigrants?
3. How much time does the nonprofit organization serving refugees and immigrants spend completing paperwork requirements to satisfy accountability measures (upward, lateral and downward)?
4. What is the relationship between upward and other accountability requirements/activities? Does the current amount of time spent on upward accountability inhibit the organization’s ability to utilize downward and lateral accountability mechanisms?
5. Do the current accountability measures assist or inhibit the organization’s ability to fulfill its mission?

CASE STUDY SELECTION

I used a case study approach, as case studies can “help us to understand processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object” (Sanders 1981, 44 as cited in Merriam 1998, 33). The case I selected, Bright Star, is a local agency that is contracted by one of the nine religiously affiliated organizations working

with the U. S. Department of State to resettle refugees. It has fourteen full-time staff members and resettles over 200 refugees per year.

I selected the case for three main reasons. First, through previous work, I had gained access to the agency and developed a rapport with the Director of Bright Star. Second, the case seemed representative of refugee resettlement organizations in America in terms of funding and accountability activities. Third, through previous research, I observed that the agency gave great importance to what I thought of as downward accountability. However, the Director once stated that she did not think that the agency was able to engage in downward accountability activities due to the heavy upward accountability demands placed on them. Thus, I thought that the agency would provide useful insights into the relationships between different levels of accountability.

I gained access to the organization under study through previous research projects with the agency in 2001. Through the relationships I developed while working on those projects, I contacted the Director of the organization and presented my research ideas and asked if she would be interested in allowing me to study the agency.

In terms of funding and accountability requirements, the agency is fairly representative of refugee resettlement and immigrant assistance agencies in America, as it receives federal funding through the U.S. Department of State as well as a balance of Voluntary Agency and grant/Foundation funding. As this is a single case study design, it is not a representative sample, but provides useful insights into the accountability requirements and mechanisms used by such organizations. As refugee resettlement is the activity of the organization with the most stringent upward accountability requirements, my case study analysis focused primarily on the refugee resettlement component. This element of the organization can shed light on the relationships between upward, lateral, and downward accountability within refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agencies.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

I conducted an initial series of interviews with the Director of the refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agency to gather factual information about the organization. In these

initial interviews, conducted from January 2001 to March 2002, I gathered information about specific programs at the agency, the funding streams for programs, and accountability requirements for the organization. I collected information on all of the upward accountability paperwork requirements for the organization, including the type of accountability (fiscal or programmatic), the type of report (numerical/statistical, budgetary, or narrative), the timeline for the report, and the individuals responsible for each report. I also gathered information about other accountability activities that the organization engages in and the staff members who undertake these activities.

In February and March 2002, I visited the organization multiple times, observing the interactions between the staff members and between staff members and clients/beneficiaries. I observed a weekly staff meeting as well to gain a greater understanding of the role of these meetings in meeting the organization's mission-based activities.

Then, in early March, I interviewed another nine of the fourteen personnel in the organization. The three staff members whom I did not interview were caseworkers. As I interviewed three of the six caseworkers, I felt that the caseworker perspective was represented. The interviews were conducted at the local agency office and lasted between forty-five minutes and one and a half hours each. The time required for each interview depended on the position of the staff members. I spent a longer time interviewing those staff members who work with multiple components of agency accountability activities. I used a semi-structured interview format, where I developed a set of questions related to key topics to discuss with each interviewee, but was able to prompt for further information during the interview (Berg 2001, Merriam 1992). By interviewing over two thirds of the staff members at the agency, I was able to confirm the data gathered through the interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a clearer understanding of each accountability mechanism used by the agency, gather information about the time requirements for each accountability activity and discuss the impacts of the requirement on the organization (see Appendix A for the full list of interview questions used). These interviews provide important information regarding accountability activities, the types of mechanisms used to ensure accountability to multiple types and layers of stakeholders, the amount of time practitioners spend on accountability documentation paperwork requirements and other

accountability requirements, and the impact of those accountability activities on the organization's mission-based activity. The interview instrument contained open-ended questions that allowed the interviewee to share his or her views on the accountability requirements for his or her organization.

I used an implied consent method, where I described the nature of my research and asked each of the interviewees if they were willing to participate in the project. If they agreed to continue, I asked if I could record the interview to assist me in analyzing the data gathered in the interview. I also informed the interviewees that I would work to ensure that no information gathered through the interviews harm the organization or the individuals participating, by using confidentiality techniques, such as using a pseudonym for the organization and referring to the staff members by job titles used in most refugee resettlement agencies (Berg 2001). Later in the study, I gained written consent from the participants, using an informed consent form.

Finally, in early March, I conducted a follow-up interview with the Director of the refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agency to evaluate the impact of accountability activities on the organization from her perspective. This interview was conducted in the agency's office and lasted approximately one and one half hours. Similar to those interviews conducted with the rest of the staff, I used a semi-structured interview format, where I developed a set of questions related to key topics to discuss with the Director, but was able to prompt for further information during the interview (Berg 2001, Merriam 1992). See Appendix B for the list of questions used in this interview.

In addition to interviews, I reviewed documents from the agency, including staff position descriptions, performance appraisal instruments for staff evaluations, fundraising letters, annual goals and objectives for the organization, the annual budget, the annual reporting schedule, monthly and quarterly reports, training materials, needs assessments and results, and tutor exit interview instruments.

The data gathered from the interviews and document analysis were organized using two techniques. First, I created a "matrix of categories" of accountability levels identified in the

accountability literature and then placed the evidence I gathered into those categories (Yin 1989, 187). I also created “data displays,” such as tables and figures, which helped me in “examining the data” (Yin 1989, 187). Once the data were organized, they were analyzed in relation to the theoretical information related to accountability and nonprofit service delivery, in order to better understand the accountability mechanisms used by the agency.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Tests for validity and reliability have been designed to ensure the quality of a research design. Four of these tests evaluate the level of construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin 1989, Berg 2001). Three of these relate to this study which is exploratory in nature, while the internal validity test, a test for causal relationship, does not. Construct validity focuses on whether or not the study uses the appropriate measures for the research questions. External validity refers to whether or not the study is generalizable to other cases. However, in general case studies, “like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (Yin 1989, 21). Reliability refers to whether or not the results of the study can be replicated.

Validity

Possible sources of bias to the construct validity of the case are researcher bias and the bias of staff workers at the agency under study. The largest risk to the study was researcher bias, which occurs “if an investigator seeks only to use a case study to substantiate a preconceived position” (Yin 1989, 65). As noted above, my previous research projects with Bright Star provided access to the agency staff and allowed me to build a rapport with the staff members more quickly. However, through the previous research projects I had developed a positive opinion of the organization and the Director. Thus, there was a risk that I would be less critical of the organization in terms of their accountability activities, and would seek from the beginning only to focus on accountability activities that show the agency in a favorable light.

In order to protect against these biases, I used multiple triangulation strategies. As “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” in qualitative research (Merriam 1998, 7), it is necessary to ensure validity through triangulation strategies.

Triangulation can refer to using “varieties of data, investigators, theories, [or] methods” (Denzin 1978, 295 cited in Berg 2001, 5). In order to minimize bias, I used multiple data collection methods and contacted multiple key informants in the organization. I used three methods to gather information regarding funding sources, semi-structured in-person interviews, review of organizational documents, and observation. The semi-structured in-person interviews asked key questions in multiple formats to verify the information received. Additionally, I interviewed multiple practitioners in the agency, including caseworkers and the director. Moreover, the qualitative interviews allowed me to focus on the emic perspective of upward accountability requirements and their impacts, from the views of the interviewees, whereas a more quantitative approach might limit the analysis to an etic interpretation (Merriam 1998), thus minimizing the impact of my own biases in analyzing the data. According to Yin (1989, 65) “one test of possible [researcher] bias is the degree to which a case study investigator is open to contrary findings” (Yin 1989, 65). By designing the questions in such a way that allowed the views of the staff members to describe accountability mechanisms and placing the evidence in a matrix of accountability mechanism, I was able to be open to the evidence rather than use the evidence to prove a preconceived idea. Furthermore, by reviewing Bright Star documents, I was able to verify the information provided by staff members regarding their activities. By using multiple collection methods and interviewing multiple people (Denzin 1978, Yin 1989) in the organization, triangulation “offer[s] perspectives other than [my] own” (Borman, LeCompte, and Goetz 1986 cited in Berg 2001). This triangulation leads to multiple measures of the same phenomenon, thereby reducing potential problems with construct validity in qualitative research (Yin 1989).

External validity refers to the extent to which the case study is generalizable to other cases. This component was addressed in the *Case Study Selection* section above. As the study focuses on only one case, the data gathered in this study are not generalizable to other cases. However, as stated above, the particular elements of the organization under study make it somewhat representative of the population. Therefore, it can provide useful insights into the mechanisms used by refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agencies.

Another strategy that can improve the overall quality of the report is to have participants review the draft report and provide comments. According to Yin (1989, 145), the corrections “made through this process will enhance the accuracy of the case study, hence increasing the construct validity of the study. The likelihood of falsely reporting an event should be reduced” (Yin 1989, 145). Drafts of this case study report were reviewed twice by the Director of Bright Star. Corrections based on conversations with the Director after her reviews clarified the accuracy of the paper. There was a risk that the Director would not catch all misinterpretations or that the Director could reinterpret staff members’ comments, which could impact the final conclusions of the final paper. Thus, this process would have been further enhanced by having others in the agency review the paper, thereby allowing other perspectives. However, given the time constraints both of my timeline and of the other staff members’ job responsibilities, I relied on the Director for this stage of reviewing.

Reliability

Tests for reliability refer to whether or not the findings and conclusions would be the same if another researcher conducted the same case study again. Three techniques were used to improve reliability in qualitative research. The first is that the researcher should “explain the assumptions and theory behind the study, his or her position vis-à-vis the group being studied, the basis for selecting informants and a description of them, and the social context from which data were collected” (Merriam 1998, 207). Second, the investigator should use triangulation strategies, identified earlier, which improve the reliability as well as the validity of the study (Merriam 1998). Finally, it is important to document the steps taken during the research process, how the data were collected, and how the categories for analysis were determined (Merriam 1998). However, it is important to note that even though each of these strategies was used to improve the reliability of the study, another researcher might not yield the same results if s/he repeated the study. According to Merriam (1998, 205), “reliability is problematic in the social sciences...since there are many interpretations of what is happening, there is no benchmark by which to take repeated measures and establish reliability in the traditional sense.” The goal in qualitative research is to utilize techniques to ensure that the data is as reliable as possible. To that end, I have attempted to meet each of the necessary requirements for reliability: explanation

of the theories used, case selection, and collection of data; triangulation strategies (identified above); and documentation of the steps undertaken during the research process.

Section Five: Introduction of Case Study

This study focuses on the case of Bright Star, a local refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agency. It is located in a state with over 500,000 immigrants, placing it among the top ten regarding the number of immigrants living in the state, (Camarota 2001). The agency is a nonprofit organization with IRS 501(c) (3) status that resettles refugees and assists immigrants in the surrounding area and has been serving its region for 26 years (Interview with Director March 1, 2001). This local agency is connected to an umbrella VOLAG resettles over one fourth of the refugees that come to the United States.

OVERVIEW OF THE AGENCY

Refugee resettlement is the primary function of Bright Star. The mission statement of the organization states that it “resettles refugees and assists immigrants empowering them to build new lives in a welcoming community” (Interview with Director March 1, 2001). Bright Star provides wide-ranging resettlement services: orientation to U.S. laws, customs, and institutions; intensive case management including resource development, transportation, interpretation, and advocacy; early employment placement assistance; English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction; school liaison services; and prevention services for refugee youth and families. Health care is a critical part of resettlement, as caseworkers spend 60-70 percent of their time focusing on health appointments (Personal Communication with Director January 31, 2001). In addition to resettlement services, the organization provides low-cost services to immigrants including counseling assistance with status adjustment, petitioning for relatives, applying for asylum and other immigration issues.

Bright Star’s long-range goals (1995-2000) and annual (1999-2000) objectives were determined on a regional level by the regional coordinating office of the agency, which oversees the three offices serving the area. The Strategic Plan defines actions in three main areas. Each content area lists specific activities that will be undertaken and the individuals who are responsible for each area which, according to Bryson (1995), is an effective strategy for organizing and maintaining strategic plans and activities. The three content areas of the goals and objectives are to resettle

2000 refugees in the state, providing them an opportunity to build a new life and the people of the community an opportunity to meet and know individuals from the third world; to assist the refugees in becoming self-sufficient; and to sustain and increase the community support for refugees and immigrants to ensure support after the initial resources for resettlement are depleted (Interview with Director March 1, 2001).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

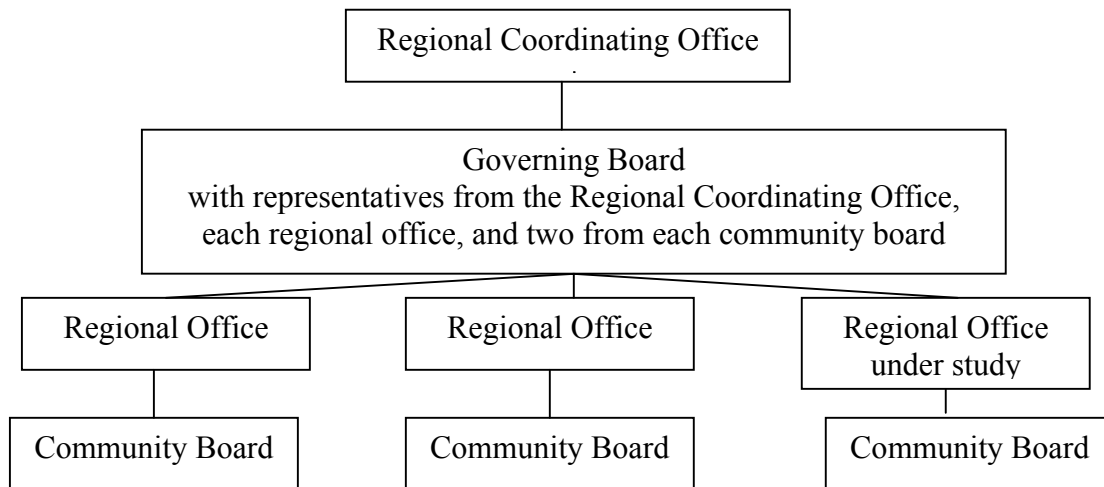
Bright Star has fourteen full-time staff members: a director, a volunteer coordinator, an education coordinator, an employment specialist, an immigration counselor/interpreter services manager, a secretary, a school liaison, a resettlement coordinator, and six full-time caseworkers. Two of the caseworkers have additional responsibilities beyond their case loads, coordinating donations and securing housing. The staff meets weekly to discuss each of the current cases as well as external issues that may impact the organization (Interview with Director March 1, 2001).

To assist with guidance of the organization, Bright Star has a Community Board of twelve members. The Community Board members, as stated by the Director, support the functions of the organization and attend national meetings with funders to lobby for the agency. All Community Board members serve on at least one of three committees: public affairs, resource development, and advocacy. These committees allow Board members to assess key needs of the organization and develop the appropriate public relationship plans to meet those needs; pursue appropriate legislation to strengthen the goals of the agency; and to develop and participate in fund-raising initiatives (Personal Communication with Director March 5, 2002). Though not involved on a daily basis, the Community Board members provide support to the daily functions of the office, publicize the positive functions of the organization, represent the organization at events, and participate in strategic decision-making processes. Thus, the Community Board provides a connection between Bright Star and the community (Tyler Scott 2000).

Bright Star has a statewide regional coordinating office that oversees three regional offices, one of which is the refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agency under study (Figure 1). Each of the regional offices has a Director and a Community Board that report to the Governing

Board at an annual meeting. Each office submits quarterly and monthly reports to the regional coordinating office, some of which are compiled into region-wide reports.

Figure 1. Overview of the Regional Agency Structure⁵



ORGANIZATIONAL FUNDING

Nonprofit organizations are dependent upon resources to fulfill their missions and, therefore, they must pay considerable attention to the demands of their funding sources as well as initiate creative income-producing components to support their mission-based activities. Brinckerhoff (2000) states that while a nonprofit organization must be led by its mission, without money, there is no mission. Nonprofit leaders, then, must be able to guide their organization efficiently and effectively while ensuring fulfillment of and adherence to the mission. The Director of Bright Star successfully manages the organizational budget⁶, develops organizational plans, and guides the organization while keeping the main focus on the mission. Bright Star receives its primary funding from the Department of State and the umbrella voluntary agency to assist with refugee resettlement. Grants and foundation funding, individual donations and volunteer time supplement this funding. Additionally, the agency connects refugees to sources of social services and

⁵ Connections to the U.S. Department of State, the national Voluntary Agency (VOLAG) and State government offices are not illustrated in this figure.

⁶ The organization’s budget is administered on a regional level, covering three offices. The overall budget for these three offices is almost \$2 million, which is tracked using a fund accounting technique (Stephenson 2001) with line items relating to different categories, such as salary, rent, travel, supplies, utilities, postage, telephone, and equipment.

national assistance such as fuel assistance, Medicaid (for eight months), WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) funding, subsidized housing, and cash assistance (Personal Communication with Director January 31, 2001).

Bright Star has two fee-for-service components, immigration counseling and interpreter services. According to Brinckerhoff (2000), it is often necessary to have revenue centers within a nonprofit to help finance other parts of the organization. Cross-subsidization, using funds from one area to cover a deficit in another programmatic area or to contribute to the capital reserve, is a strategy that the organization employs. The agency provides immigration counseling, assistance with immigration papers, interpreter services, and translating services to immigrants on a sliding fee scale basis (Personal Communication with Director January 31, 2001). Bright Star also operates Interpreter and Cross Cultural Training programs on a fee for service basis. These components bring in approximately \$15,000 per year in profit, which is put into what the Director referred to as an emergency fund, which provides flexible funding when a refugee has an immediate need.

Figure 2 illustrates the funding chain for Bright Star. The Department of State, Voluntary Agency, and the regional parent Coordinating Office of the Agency all contribute financially to the activities of the organization. Accordingly, each agency requires accountability documentation (which are outlined and analyzed below in the *Results and Discussion* section).

Figure 2. Federal Funding Chain for the Agency

Federal Funding Path to the Local Agency

U. S. Department of State ► National Voluntary Agency ► Regional Coordinating Office of the Agency ► Local Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Assistance Agency (Bright Star)

While Voluntary Agency, Regional Coordinating Office, and U. S. Department of State funding provide a basis for services, Bright Star relies heavily on donations and volunteers to fulfill mission-based activities. Donations of money, household items including pots, pans, linens,

appliances, food, clothing, beds, couches, computers, and even cars supplement official funding. Volunteers, too, enhance the organizational ability to provide services. They tutor refugees in English and academic subjects, sponsor refugees, provide transportation for refugees, assist with housing arrangements, mentor refugees, work in the office, and act as interpreters.⁷ Boris and Steuerle (1999, 87) suggest that volunteerism has peaked and then leveled off since 1987. This leveling raises questions about the sustainability of organizations that depend heavily on volunteers. While trend data can be misleading or incomplete, it is important for nonprofit leaders to keep abreast of trends that may impact their organizations. The organization under study does not seem to be affected by the leveling of volunteer hours, as it continues to utilize volunteers as peer tutors (adults, teens, and children), ESL tutors, mentors, and friends to refugees.

As stated previously, Americans are divided about the impacts of immigration on the country. To recap, while believing that immigration levels should be held constant or decreased, individuals also felt that in time immigrants become productive U. S. citizens with jobs that are undesirable to most Americans. Respondents to surveys, however, were almost evenly divided regarding whether or not immigrants ultimately improve or worsen American society. These results, in contrast to a survey conducted eight years earlier, suggest that Americans feel increasingly positive about immigrants in America. The context of this debate is important in relationship to services provided to refugees and immigrants. The Director noted that recently Congress cut the budget in a way that worked against immigrants, but the President vetoed it. She noted that because immigrants lack voting power, it is difficult to have an impact on national policy decisions (Interview with Director March 1, 2002). Therefore, as Director, she must be aware of national swings in opinion in order to predict and prepare for possible policy changes that might affect the Bright Star's funding.

⁷ All information gathered in an Interview with Director March 1, 2002.

Section Six: Results and Discussion

This section discusses four of the major questions that guide the research. To whom is the organization assisting refugees and immigrants accountable? What are the accountability mechanisms used by the organization assisting refugees and immigrants? How much time does the nonprofit organization serving refugees and immigrants spend completing accountability activities? How do the current accountability measures impact the organization’s ability to fulfill its mission? The responses to these questions enable hypotheses to be developed about the relationship between accountability mechanisms and mission-based activities in nonprofit organizations serving refugees and immigrants.

TO WHOM IS THE AGENCY ACCOUNTABLE

The director and staff of Bright Star see themselves as accountable: 1) upwardly to individual donors, funders, and their umbrella Voluntary Agency (VOLAG); 2) laterally to one another and themselves, as the staff, volunteers, Community Board members, and the community agencies with whom they work; and 3) downwardly to their clients/beneficiaries and the local community (See Table 1.).

Table 1. To Whom Is Bright Star Accountable?

Level of Accountability	Stakeholders of the Agency
<i>Upward</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •their donors •their funders •their Voluntary Agency
<i>Lateral</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •each other and themselves (staff) •the organization’s mission •their volunteers (including the Community Board members) •the community agencies with whom they work
<i>Downward</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •their clients/beneficiaries •the local community

When asked who has a stake in the organization, the Director responded that Bright Star is accountable to its funders, the agency’s umbrella Voluntary Agency, the staff of the agency, the

volunteers, the community agencies with whom the organization works, the community at large, and the agency's clients, who are primarily refugees (Interview March 1, 2002). It is difficult, however, for Bright Star to reconcile all of these accountabilities, as there is such a broad range of expectations from the multiple stakeholder groups. These accountability pressures from different stakeholder groups can be clustered into the designations previously identified: upward, lateral, and downward. Each of these categories is discussed below.

The upward accountability pressures stem from Bright Star's umbrella Voluntary Agency and funders. The Voluntary Agency has "systems set up to monitor us, including audits, reports, and monitoring visits," according to the Director of the organization (Interview March 1, 2002). Through the regional office of the agency, reports are submitted to the VOLAG and funders. One staff member states that she "is responsible for ensuring that all responsibilities are being met" in terms of the contract with the U. S. Department of State.

The stakeholders that can place lateral accountability pressure on Bright Star are the staff, volunteers, and the community agencies with whom the organization works. The staff, according to the Director, "have a major stake in the organization" and the agency is accountable to them (Interview March 1, 2002). The staff members spoke freely about their accountability to one another. According to caseworkers at Bright Star, "we are all so interrelated; whatever we do can impact all [staff]. We are accountable to the other caseworkers and staff" (Interview March 1, 2002). The staff members expressed their desire to support one another and their confidence in the director. One caseworker stated "I don't let clients complain to me about other caseworkers. I tell clients, if you have a problem with me or another caseworker..., go to [the Director... and she] will support the caseworker one hundred percent. She has never dis-authorized me with a client. She is always behind me" (Interview March 1, 2002).

Volunteers can also place pressure on Bright Star. Their expectations of the organization are highly shaped by the refugees with whom they work. According to the Director of Bright Star, after their initial training⁸, volunteers have limited contact with the agency and thus "evaluate [the agency] based on what the refugees tell them, which is based on the refugees' expectations"

⁸ Volunteer training is discussed in greater detail in the section *Accountability Mechanisms Used By the Agency*.

(Interview March 1, 2002). Thus, it is important to implement mechanisms that maintain communication with the volunteers, to assure open dialogue. According to the Education Coordinator, it is also essential to value volunteers' time: "I really bend over backwards to ensure that their time is being used well, to ensure that students [refugees] are accountable to the tutors, such as ensuring that the students are at home during the scheduled tutoring times" (Interview March 1, 2002). Finally, the Director suggests that the agencies in the community with whom we work "have the best chance to view how we do our work day in and day out...they are the best judges of how trustworthy we are" (Interview March 1, 2002).

Stakeholders for whom downward accountability is important are the clients/beneficiaries, who are mostly refugees, and the community at large. As for the refugees, according to the Director, "it is difficult to say" what their expectations of Bright Star are, as they gather information about what to expect from the agency through their friends and family who have already arrived in the United States and from overseas orientations before leaving for the United States (Interview March 1, 2002). These refugees, "have a broad range of expectations" ranging from thinking they will receive a car and spending money without having to work to having few expectations of the agency (Interview March 1, 2002). According to the caseworkers at Bright Star, the agency is accountable to its clients, ensuring that we "help them [refugees] function in our society, try to help them integrate" (Interview March 1, 2002). The Director states that the community at large evaluates the organization "through how the media portrays us and the services we provide" (Interview March 1, 2002). Thus, the organization always has needed to focus on public relations.

After identifying the groups to which the agency is accountable, it is important to assess how these accountability pressures are reconciled within Bright Star by first identifying specific activities undertaken to achieve accountability to different stakeholder populations (i.e. mechanisms of accountability).

ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS USED BY THE AGENCY

As identified above, a mechanism is defined as a process or technique for achieving a result. Thus, an accountability mechanism is a distinct activity or process designed to ensure that the organization is serving its mission. These mechanisms can be a formal component of the institutional structure, such as reports, or an informal element of the structure, such as open dialogue among staff.

Some accountability mechanisms used by Bright Star serve multiple layers of accountability. The education of the staff on laws and regulations that relate to immigration, schools, employment, housing, and other components of refugees' lives promote accountability on multiple levels, including upwardly to the Voluntary Agency, laterally to the community agencies with whom Bright Star works and to each other as the staff, and downwardly to the clients/beneficiaries. Likewise, the staff meetings provide an opportunity for the Director to ensure that the staff is being accountable to multiple stakeholders, including one another, agencies with whom they work, and the clients/beneficiaries. The maintenance of the case notes in client files allows accountability to funders and among the staff regarding activities with different families. Ongoing contact with schools and attendance at school board meetings helps maintain accountability with the schools with whom the agency works. These activities also ensure accountability to clients, by ensuring the school system is meeting client needs. Finally, providing cultural training for community agencies provides opportunities for the organization to prepare these agencies to address the needs of Bright Star's clients, thus demonstrating accountability to client needs. Additionally, these trainings are a mechanism for accountability to community agencies with which Bright Star works, allowing these community agencies access to Bright Star staff and providing an opportunity for dialogue around meeting the needs of the refugee and immigrant population in the region.

While multiple layers of accountability addressed by each mechanism add complexity to the study, the mechanisms can be placed into a matrix that attempts to clarify the main purpose of the activity used by the organization under study (Table 2.). As defined earlier, accountability refers to being answerable to stakeholders for the actions of the agency. Thus, the mechanisms

outlined in Table 2 are activities designed to ensure that Bright Star is answerable to its stakeholders in terms of their mission-based activities. The accountability mechanisms are classified as internal and external. Internal accountability mechanisms are those activities that involve being answerable to individuals within or served by the agency while external accountability activities involve answering to individuals and organizations outside the agency. The actual mechanisms are discussed in greater detail below.

Table 2. Accountability mechanisms used by the agency under study

	<i>Upward accountability</i>	<i>Lateral accountability</i>	<i>Downward accountability</i>
Internal Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● reports to the umbrella Voluntary Agency ● audits ● case notes in client files ● caseworker time and mileage form ● monitoring visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● staff meetings ● informal open communication among staff ● staff performance self-evaluations ● case notes in client files ● Director support of staff ● volunteer exit interviews ● volunteer tutor training ● monthly peer and volunteer tutor report forms ● phone conversations and messages with peer and volunteer tutors ● alignment of fee-for-service component to agency mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● voicemail in clients' native languages ● needs assessments ● documents and pamphlets/brochures in native languages ● access to caseworkers and the director of agency ● client evaluation of English needs and current ESL program ● weekly caseworker and staff visits to clients home ● avoidance of upward regulations ● agreement in the client's native language outlining services
External Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● reports to funders ● donor thank you letters ● transparency in fund-raising letters to potential donors ● audits ● monitoring visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● cultural training for other agencies ● access to ESL resources ● focus groups to prepare agencies for large arrivals ● attending school board meetings ● regular contact with schools ● participation in community associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● cultural training for other agencies ● focus groups with experts to prepare for new arrivals ● transparency with news media ● regular contact with schools

Upward Accountability Mechanisms

Upward accountability mechanisms refer to the activities undertaken by Bright Star to maintain accountability to the individual donors, funders, and the larger Voluntary Agency that provide funding for the organization. Upward accountability to donors and funders is achieved through external accountability mechanisms, including transparency in fundraising letters and thank you letters to donors (a form of “felt responsibility”) and more institutionalized and formal means of reporting, monitoring, and auditing. Internal upward accountability mechanisms to demonstrate mission-based activity to the umbrella Voluntary Agency include case notes in client files as well as auditing, monitoring and reporting.

Accountability to individual donors is very important to the Director of Bright Star. She expressed a strong commitment to transparency in terms of how money and resources from individual donors are used. The organization’s fundraising letters, written by the Community Board committee on fund-raising, attempt to clearly articulate how a donation will be used, and for what number of refugees. The Director provides the necessary information to the committee members and then they draft the letter. A recent letter first tells specific stories about refugees and then notes that “they are among nearly 175 refugees who will be resettled” by the agency this year (Agency Fundraising Letter 2001). These refugees need “homes, jobs, and to learn English” which will require more than the “up to \$400 per person for newcomers” provided by the U. S. Department of State. The organization needs to “provide at least two to three months’ rent, utilities, and other needs while they [the refugees] get on their feet”, and therefore the office “needs more support from the community” (Agency Fundraising Letter 2001). Thus, Bright Star clearly identifies the funding they have and why they need more assistance. After assistance has been given, the Director of Bright Star makes a commitment to personally thank each donor. She or other staff members write personal thank you letters to each donor and, as much as possible, identify exactly what the donation provided. For example, a refugee family recently received a car and the agency wrote a thank you letter and sent the donor a photograph of the recipient family with the car (Personal Communication with Volunteer Coordinator February 22, 2002). The Director notes that she responds to a lot of questions from donors and attempts to be accessible to them; however, despite these activities, she feels that Bright Star could improve its accountability in this area (Interview February 8, 2002). These activities are not required, but are

seen as important to the agency and are therefore as a result of felt responsibility rather than being held accountable.

Accountability to funders is achieved through multiple reports as well as audits and monitoring visits. The refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agency completes over ten reports to funders, some monthly and other per quarter. The five most significant reports, in terms of funding percentage and accountability paperwork requirements, are outlined in Table 3.⁹

⁹ The names of some of the reports have been changed for privacy reasons.

**Table 3. Major Funding Sources
Upward Accountability Reports Overview**

Purpose of Funds	Source of Funds	Report	Type of Report	Monthly/ Quarterly	Activities to Complete Report	Purpose of the Report
Provide initial resettlement assistance	Federal, State	Voluntary Agency	Programmatic: Narrative and statistics	Monthly and Quarterly	Talk with all caseworkers, gather documentation on each case/family	Overview of the services provided
Provide alternative to public assistance	Federal	Matching Grant	Fiscal	Monthly	Home visits to count items and review of tutor reports	Document the amount of items and services donated
Strengthen families, focusing on English education and the school-parent-child tie	Federal	Support for Families	Programmatic: Narrative and Numerical	Quarterly	Review personnel notes and charts Director compiles organization-wide report, assembles statistics and narratives from multiple components of agency Review information on each client regarding education services provided	Overview of the services provided to support refugee families
Assist with refugee adjustment to life in the United States	Federal	Mental Health	Programmatic	Quarterly	Staff Meetings and informal discussions with staff to gather information	Overview of services provided
Provide statewide services to refugees through contracts with Voluntary Agencies	Federal, administered through the State	State Report	Programmatic: Numerical with narrative components	Quarterly	Review all case files, enter all services provided to each case/family, use numerical report to inform a narrative	Track the services statewide, Policing contracts for federal funding

Bright Star completes a quarterly fiscal and programmatic report to the *Voluntary Agency*, which acts as a conduit for federal, state and grant funding. The funds made available through the Voluntary Agency are given to provide initial assistance in the resettlement process “to get an apartment, buy food, until we can apply for food stamps, until they [the refugees] can get a job, etc. It is a starter fund, a safety net” (Interview with Resettlement Coordinator February 22, 2002). The report tracks all in-kind donations to all families served by Bright Star and, according to the Director, is “very tedious” (Interview February 8, 2002). Completion of this report requires conversations with all of the caseworkers and evaluation of all documents regarding ease case/family.

The *Matching Grant* is a federal funding source that matches funds for all donations, non-government grants, and in-kind donations to assist families to resettle and become self-sufficient. The goal of the Matching Grant is to assist refugees in becoming self sufficient within four months and is designed as an alternative to public assistance programs. The report is fiscally focused and is completed monthly. According to the Director, “this is a tedious report, as it is the accumulation of all knowledge about a client or family” (Interview February 8, 2002). This report includes information about the time and activities of caseworkers, time and mileage of tutors, donations of items and food, and employment searches. It requires detailed paperwork and intense accounting. The Volunteer Coordinator completes four different forms per month and, when closing cases/families out of the system, must visit their homes and count items, such as towels, spoons, and chairs, and, sometimes she “has to dig through cabinets and drawers to determine the number of *extra* items like towels, blankets”. (Interview February 22, 2002). The form that requires a site visit is “very detailed, and takes forever to count each item and assess its value. I can only count that which is [deemed] extra, what is beyond what they *need*...for example, the number of chairs, you can count chairs in excess of the number of people in the home. There are also stipulations on the timing of the gift, after thirty days from arrival date” (Interview with Volunteer Coordinator February 22, 2002). This report, which literally requires counting the number of spoons donated to families, demonstrates that Bright Star has accounted for every item and volunteer hour that was given to a client.

Support to Families is designed to provide assistance to refugee families, focusing on English training and the school-parent-child tie. The report is a programmatic report, with narrative and numerical components and a match component that is fiscal. This is a federal funding source and report. According to the staff member responsible for contact with the schools, the school component of this report includes “the statistics of the children in school, in after school programs, after school care, that type of thing” while the narrative is “compiling the meat of what has taken place in the quarter” to provide a description of particular challenges or successes (Interview with School Liaison March 1, 2002). The Education Coordinator states that this report also requires information on the number of clients enrolled in homebound English classes or worksite classes, their English proficiency level, the ethnic backgrounds of clients, and information on new class developments (Interview March 1, 2002). Completion of this report requires activities by multiple staff members. First, program specific staff members review their notes, charts and files regarding services provided and prepare statistical and narrative data for the Director. Then, the Director compiles the information into an organization-wide report, assembling the statistics and narratives from multiple components of Bright Star.

The *Mental Health Grant* is designed to assist refugees to adjust psychologically to life in the United States. Adapting to life in the United States is difficult for many refugees and “there are problems that come up as they adjust. This funding source gives me the time to help them normalize their feelings...that many refugees experience similar things. Also, it lets them know they have support” (Interview with Resettlement Coordinator February 22, 2002). Mental Health is a programmatic report completed quarterly that notes what services were provided in narrative and statistical format. It also focuses on who Bright Star has collaborated with in this area. The staff member who completes this report provides most mental health services to clients. Thus, in order to complete this report, the staff member relies on her own experiences as well as information gained in staff meetings and informal discussions with staff to gather a listing of activities related to the mental health of agency clients (Interview February 22, 2002).

State funding is given to provide statewide services to refugees through contractual agreements with Voluntary Agencies and is reported through the *State Report*. The funding is originally from the federal level and is channeled to the agencies such as Bright Star through State sources.

According to the Director, these funding sources are grants to assist in resettling refugees, with a component for regions impacted by the number of refugees resettled there (Interview March 1, 2002). The State Report is programmatic with multiple components, narrative and numerical/statistical, completed quarterly. The report is designed to “track the number of nationalities and services provided, etc. to refugees for a given period of time” (Interview with Secretary February 22, 2002). In order to complete this report, the secretary reviews all of the case files and enters all of the services provided to each case/family into a database. Then, the numerical data is used to inform the narrative component of the report.

In addition to the monthly and quarterly reports, detailed above, accountability is also achieved through audits and monitoring visits. According to the Director of Bright Star, the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB), provides fiscal and programmatic guidelines for auditing of government programs (Interview March 1, 2002). Thus, Bright Star’s umbrella Voluntary Agency pays a private firm to audit the agency at a regional level (Interview March 1, 2002). In the annual review, the auditors go through all of the reports that were submitted to the regional coordinating office to ensure that each of the local agencies is doing the reporting they should be doing. The review focuses on whether the necessary programs are being offered and that funding is being used appropriately (Personal Communication with Director March 28, 2002). Bright Star receives monitoring visits from multiple funding and oversight agencies. The umbrella Voluntary Agency comes for monitoring visits on alternate years, visiting the refugee families, talking with staff members, and checking case files. These visits focus primarily on the living conditions of the refugees, ensuring that they have necessary items for living and that their living conditions are safe and comfortable (Personal Communication with Director March 28, 2002).

Representatives from the State also conduct monitoring visits every other year. They audit the case files and visit the families to ensure that the refugees are being provided the services they should be receiving, such as employment assistance (Personal Communication with Director March 28, 2002). Bright Star has not received a monitoring visit from the U. S. Department of State. However, the regional coordinating office is monitored by the U. S. Department of State every four years. The monitoring visit focuses on the living conditions of the families, and they “check the case files, a lot of their time is spent with the families, ensuring that their living

situation is safe, codes are being followed, they are getting furniture they are supposed to get” (Personal Communication with Director March 28, 2002).

Case notes in client files are also an important source of information for upward accountability. Bright Star accesses these files in writing reports for the Voluntary Agency as well as for other funding sources. The caseworkers identify the components of the case notes in client files: they “list by date what you did, the details, so that others can refer to it...the [binder per case] has sections with documentation on employment, vouchers with what the organization has spent on the client, ESL information, health information” (Interview March 1, 2002). Additionally, the caseworker time and mileage form must be completed monthly and sent to the regional coordinating office to be used in ensuring upward accountability. All statewide data and reports are compiled at the regional coordinating office.

Overall, upward accountability mechanisms at Bright Star are formal and institutionalized. Upward accountability mechanisms are designed to hold the agency accountable for providing the services to refugees that the money was given to support. Lateral and downward accountability mechanisms, addressed in the following two sections are less formal and institutionalized, and are therefore more reliant on the felt responsibility of the staff.

Lateral Accountability Mechanisms

Multiple mechanisms are used by Bright Star in its attempts toward lateral accountability internally to the staff, mission of the organization, and volunteers, and externally to the community agencies with whom they work (see Table 2). The staff members openly discuss the ways in which they stay accountable to one another, through staff meetings and constant informal dialogue. Staff evaluations are also used to ensure accountability to each other and the mission of the organization. Another piece of accountability to the mission of the agency is the alignment of the fee-for-service component of the agency to the mission. Mechanisms used by staff to maintain accountability to volunteers include training sessions, exit interviews, monthly reports and phone conversations. The main tool used to maintain accountability with community agencies are cultural training and regular contact with the agencies in the community with whom the refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agency works. As defined earlier,

accountability refers to being answerable to stakeholders for the actions of the agency. Thus, the above mechanisms are activities designed to ensure that the staff is answerable to one another, volunteers, and community agencies with whom they work in terms of their mission-based activities.

Bright Star has weekly staff meetings which “allow us to discuss the things that each of us does” and how that will impact the other staff members in their jobs (Interview with Staff Member March 1, 2002). For example, to set up tutoring, the Education Coordinator needs to be informed of work schedules; caseworkers need to know about clients’ work schedules in order to set up medical appointments. During the staff meeting I observed each of the staff members spoke about the activities they had engaged in during the last week and highlighted any important upcoming events. Then, the staff spent over an hour discussing each of the families, beginning with the most recent arrival. During this time, they informed each other of what was happening with each family, in relation to donations, needs, doctor appointments, tutor activities, medical situation, among other things. They discussed all of the contact that each staff member had with that family during the last week. Then, as a group, they determined what steps should be taken and by whom for each case/family. This information was then entered into a log where each week’s decisions are recorded. Staff members also used this time to inform each other of services that might address concerns regarding different families/cases (Personal Observation February 20, 2002). The staff meetings, then, provide an arena for discussions that become the foundation for decision-making regarding agency activities. This link between the staff meetings and actions taken by staff members demonstrates that these meetings provide one venue where the staff members are answerable to each other for their actions, and thus accountable.

Moreover, the staff members are highly accessible to one another. They have frequent informal gatherings to work together on different cases/families. These impromptu informal discussions allow staff members the opportunities to rely on one another for job description related interaction, overall support to one another, and each others’ areas of expertise. According to the Resettlement Coordinator, “I’ll be working with a woman refugee and I will have lunchtime conversations that will help me know what to do or get assistance” (Interview March 1, 2002). Furthermore, one staff member notes “I stay in the conference room; it is a focal point for the

office. People eat lunch there. The dynamics provide an environment for communication, for give and take all day” (Interview February 22, 2002). In addition, the staff members maintain contact through frequent notes in each other’s mailboxes. The case notes in client files also allow staff to access information on what is happening with the clients/beneficiaries, when other forms of communication are not available.

The staff evaluations used by the umbrella Voluntary Agency focus on accomplishments, identified deficiencies in performance, and recommendations for growth for the following year. The evaluations include self evaluation, peer evaluation, and supervisor evaluation components. These foci allow staff to evaluate themselves and each other regarding commitment to the agency’s mission. While these instruments are used, this is one area where accountability to staff could be better implemented at Bright Star. As one staff member noted “I would like to see more review of what we do. I would like to see more opportunities to review what we are doing. I like the process of discussing what I do. It is helpful” (Interview March 1, 2002).

Commitment to organizational mission is important not just in the service provision component of the agency, but also in the fee-for-service section. Without a connection to the mission of the agency, there is a risk that the agency could be pulled away from its original mission. In this case, the fee-for service components (which include immigration counseling and interpreter services) were strategically designed to support the mission of Bright Star, because “no matter what other funding or profit sources we seek, they need to stay with our mission to help immigrants or refugees or to help the community understand them better” (Personal Communication with Director April 1, 2002). According to the Interpreter Services Coordinator, “this component ties to the larger [organizational] mission of empowerment, helping refugees and immigrants, and to equal justice” (Interview February 25, 2002).

Accountability to the staff is fundamental to the Director of Bright Star. The Director explains her “personal philosophy... that [her] staff are the first priority and the second priority is the people they serve.” She always “back[s] them up and trust[s] them. Then, they can do their job with total focus without worry.” She says that she tries “to be as open to the staff as [she] can be.” In 25 years working in social services, she has “never had a door on [her] office. The best

communication is a result of open access.” Thus, she tries to locate her workspace “by a doorway where people come in and out so they can stop by and chat” (Interview March 1, 2001). The Director has developed a principle of supporting her staff in a way that she identifies as different from profit focused management. She states “you get a different breed of people in this type of work, people who love their work, who are committed to the work, but maybe people whose needs are greater than others...they feel a real need to give, but you have to adjust your management style for that. Management with people like that needs a sensitivity and freedom to be able to talk to you [the manager] about all kinds of things in their lives” (Interview March 1, 2002). The Director is employing mechanisms that allow the staff to discuss their experiences in relation to each other, their clients/beneficiaries, and the agencies with whom they work. As demonstrated later in the *Impacts* section, this access and support positively impacts the staff members’ abilities to fulfill their mission-based activities.

Accountability to volunteers is also paramount to Bright Star. The staff considers volunteers essential to the mission of the organization and therefore view accountability to them as essential. The Education Coordinator states “self-sufficiency is our goal for refugees. English acquisition is a key component of self-sufficiency. We are so dependent on volunteers to do English training. It is very important to support them. I spend a lot of time affirming volunteers, showing my appreciation” (Interview March 1, 2002). The mechanisms used to stay accountable to volunteers’ needs are training sessions, phone conversations, tutor report forms, volunteer appreciation luncheons, and exit interviews. As accountability refers to being answerable to stakeholders for the actions of the agency, these measures provide opportunities for volunteers and staff to dialogue about the activities of Bright Star. Changes in agency procedures often result from these accountability mechanisms, thus demonstrating accountability to the volunteers.

The training sessions are important because they prepare the tutors to enter into homebound language tutoring experiences. These training sessions are evaluated by the participants and information used from the evaluations informs future trainings. Volunteers also have exit interviews and submit monthly progress reports. The exit interviews provide an opportunity for volunteers who are leaving to address and reflect upon their reasons for leaving, the most and

least satisfying experiences they had while a tutor, the training sessions, and placement with tutees (Agency Exit Interview Instrument 2002). According to the Director, these discussions and reports provide opportunities for volunteers to present concerns and overall evaluations of the tutoring process (Interview March 1, 2001). To encourage dialogue with current tutors, the Education Coordinator states that she makes “it clear during the training session, invite[s] them to be in contact, to call any time” (Interview March 1, 2002). She further tells them “You should be having a good time doing this. If you are not, contact me so that we can make adjustments” (Interview March 1, 2002). The Volunteer Coordinator also attends the training, not necessarily to assist as much as to ensure accountability to volunteer tutors. The Volunteer Tutors have the majority of their contact with the organization through the Education Coordinator. However, by ensuring that she meets the volunteers, the Volunteer Coordinator can talk with them if the Education Coordinator is not available. She notes that if “they know someone else at the organization, [it] makes them more comfortable” (Interview February 22, 2002). She also organizes a volunteer appreciation luncheon every two months to recognize those who gave gone above and beyond, who have done extra work. Volunteer appreciation is deeply felt at the organization, highlighted here by the Education Coordinator who states that interactions with tutors to stay accountable to them “is [her] favorite and what [she views] as the most important part of [her] job” (Interview March 1, 2002).

Bright Star employs lateral accountability mechanisms to stay accountable to the community agencies with whom it works, including employers, housing providers, Social Services, Head Start, Social Security, and area schools. The agency employs these mechanisms to attempt to maintain open lines of communication, thus being answerable to the community agencies with whom it works about Bright Star’s activities. While it is impossible to ensure that the mechanisms used are effective without interviewing representatives from the community agencies, it is possible to assess how the staff at Bright Star views the mechanisms and how the mechanisms impact the agency’s mission-based activities.

Relationships with employers are important to Bright Star. The Employment Coordinator states, “I value my relationship with employers. I have been a personnel manager. Integrity is important, if I tell them something, they know it is the truth” (Interview February 22, 2002).

Furthermore, it is important to the Employment Coordinator that he is accessible to employers. He states that he takes “an active role in the community. I asked the Director to pay the membership to a Human Resources Management Association, which allows me to actively participate in the [employer] community and to establish integrity. It allows me to keep close to employers, establishing and maintaining relationships” (February 22, 2002). He also notes that he exchanges “business cards, Christmas cards with employers [and makes] periodic visits to sites.” He maintains constant phone and email contact with employers, which the Director of the agency says is a “critical link as they know they can call him” (Personal Communication April 1, 2002). These activities maintain open communication with employers, which creates an atmosphere for Bright Star staff to be answerable to employers for the actions of the agency (i.e. to be accountable).

Bright Star utilizes other mechanisms to maintain accountability with community agencies as well. It provides cultural orientation training for the staffs of community organizations. These activities are designed to serve multiple purposes: ensuring that the agencies know the Bright Star staff and therefore trust the caseworkers, educating the workers in these agencies about important issues related to immigrants and refugees, and ensuring quality care for their clients. The School Liaison attends school board meetings and maintains close ties with the schools. She believes that this serves dual purposes: keeping the schools informed of what they can expect in terms of new arrivals as well as guaranteeing quality services for the clients (Interview March 1, 2002). Another way in which Bright Star demonstrates accountability to the community and community agencies with whom they work is through resource sharing. The Education Coordinator notes “I maintain an English language resource list that is available to anyone who calls, [and that is part of] community outreach” (Interview March 1, 2002). Each of these activities provides opportunities for Bright Star to inform community agencies of what they do and allows the community agencies access to the staff of Bright Star, which can improve answerability regarding the activities it undertakes.

Downward Accountability Mechanisms

According to the Director, the staff of Bright Star uses many strategies to invite clients and beneficiaries to give evaluations and share their concerns (Interview March 1, 2001). The

internal mechanisms include open access to the director of the agency, willingness to bypass the upward accountability structure, caseworker interactions with clients, translation of documents into the native languages of clients, needs assessments surveys, and focus groups. Many of these client-focused activities have brought about changes in the organization. In addition to their clients, Bright Star focuses on accountability to the public, the local community at large, demonstrated mostly through interactions with the local media. Externally, the accountability mechanisms used by Bright Star are cultural training for community agencies (addressed previously), focus groups with experts to prepare for refugee arrival, and transparency with the news media.

According to the Director, there is a lot of feedback from beneficiaries in informal ways, which ranges from accolades to complaints and statements of need (Interview February 8, 2002). The informal mechanisms include open access to staff and the director of Bright Star. All staff, volunteers and beneficiaries have open access to the director to discuss concerns and make complaints. If a situation cannot be resolved at that level, the individual can move into formal mechanisms and contact the State, Regional, and National levels of the umbrella Voluntary Agency. Additionally, the Director states that all staff members now have voicemail in the native language of their clients (Interview February 8, 2002). Thus, clients can leave messages after hours and on the weekend to contact their caseworker.

Moreover, the staff demonstrated a commitment to their clients in ways that sometimes jeopardized the upward accountability structure. Compliance with upward accountability mechanisms in Bright Star held high priority among the staff, as many note that their reports are fundamental to the functions of the organization to maintain continued financial support. However, in certain circumstances, staff members have bypassed or changed upward accountability mechanisms to engage in activities that are not a part of the approved activities of the organization. They did so believing that accountability to their clients had a higher precedence. The case workers, therefore, maintained positions of *don't tell* in circumstances where they knew that something was against protocol, but believed it was important to improving the life of the refugee: "I just don't communicate if I want to help with things like ...because then there is no accountability because they just don't know if I don't tell" (Interview

March 1, 2002). Another caseworker noted that if something needed to be done for a client that did not fit within the caseworker job description “I use my own time, if I want to help more or fill in where another staff member left off. On my own time, I can do what I want” (Interview March 1, 2002). Another example of this bypassing of upward accountability requirements is estimating information for reports. The Resettlement Coordinator stated that for reports “I have learned to fudge things and shorten things because I would rather be out in the field. I am a generalist. Other people are much more detail oriented” (Interview February 22, 2002).

The caseworkers are central to downward accountability, as they are the link between the clients and the agency, through their weekly visits and contact with clients. The caseworkers provide an initial orientation to the refugees’ new apartment, assist them with necessary paperwork, and take them to medical appointments. The caseworkers see themselves as “the seed, the trouble-shooter/problem solver. [They] channel everything out...to the staff, ...who specialize in other areas” (Interview March 1, 2002). According to the caseworkers, “we push for what clients need” (Interview March 1, 2002). Client visitation and contact is very important in Bright Star and is promoted by the Director. In fact, according to one caseworker, the Director “is more uptight when we are in the office. She wants us visiting the clients” (Interview March 1, 2002).

Formal downward accountability mechanisms include translation of all of the documents and brochures used in Bright Star into the native languages of the clients/beneficiaries. These documents include pamphlets on services as well as the agreement form that outlines what the client can expect from the agency and what the client must do in terms of working with the agency to meet resettlement needs (Personal Communication with Director April 1, 2002). The staff explain to the client/beneficiary that s/he can then use that document to hold the agency accountable for the services it is supposed to provide (Personal Communication with Director April 1, 2002).. In addition, immigrants and refugees are asked to complete needs assessment surveys regarding programs. Recently, Bright Star administered a mental health survey asking if refugees would be interested in mental health programs and, if so, what type. The responses led to a grant focused on Mental Health, allowing Bright Star to provide counseling to clients to assist them in adjusting to life in the United States. In addition to needs assessments, the Director points out that all refugees have multiple meetings with their caseworker during their first three

months. During this time, they address information on an orientation checklist. This process includes time to talk, ask questions, and give feedback (Interview March 1, 2001). These initial meetings allow the clients to inform Bright Star (through the caseworkers) of their needs, as well as ask questions about the services available to them. Additionally, the Education Coordinator notes that the agency has just implemented a new program “of asking refugees how they feel about their English program, allowing them to evaluate the program...to understand how we can better meet their language needs” (Interview March 1, 2002). She hopes to use this survey to improve the English language tutoring program, by focusing more directly on the needs identified by clients.

Bright Star hosts focus groups of previous arrivals to prepare for the arrival of new populations. According to the Director of the agency, these discussions center on how needs were met and what the organization could have done differently to welcome the refugee to the region (Interview February 8, 2002). Bright Star also holds focus groups with community experts and agencies to prepare for new arrivals. For example, when a group of refugees from Sudan, called the Lost Boys, were coming to the region, Bright Star hosted a meeting with health-care agencies and nutrition experts from a local university that would be working with the new arrivals to ensure that everyone was properly prepared to meet the needs of the newcomers (Interview February 8, 2002).

Bright Star staff sees accountability to the community at large as fundamental to meeting the agency’s mission of resettling refugees in a ‘welcoming community.’ Therefore, the agency accesses the local media and is transparent about activities, to increase public awareness of the Bright Star programs. This process can allow the public to hold Bright Star accountable for its activities, making the agency answerable about its activities. Many newspaper stories are series, where Bright Star first notes what they will do to resettle incoming refugees with follow-up articles assessing what the agency did and whether the refugees are being resettled successfully (Interview with Director March 1, 2002). It is unclear to what extent this activity ensures accountability, as newspaper stories typically reflect positively on Bright Star. A further analysis might provide insights into how the agency would interact with the news media if reports were critical of the agency.

TIME REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY ACTIVITIES

Bright Star staff members had difficulty assessing the time commitments of many of their accountability activities. Especially when focusing on lateral and downward accountability activities, many saw the accountability activities as fundamentally connected to their jobs. Where possible, I present information regarding the time requirements necessary for upward, lateral, and downward accountability activities.

Upward Accountability Mechanisms

According to the Director, upward accountability requirements put a lot of pressure on organization staff: the staff members must complete paperwork to comply with requirements from the U. S. Department of State, State, Voluntary Agency, and funders (Interview March 1, 2001). She notes that staff members spend a great portion of their time completing accountability documentation requirements which focus almost entirely on refugee resettlement activities.

Some staff members could not identify the amount of time required to complete requirements. Thus, the time spent on specific upward accountability requirements is outlined below only for those cases where it was identified or estimated. The “statistics [of the Support to Families report are kept] up on a day to day basis,” while the narrative is completed at the very end. The narrative takes a long time, according to the School Liaison, probably over two hours because the staff member “hates it” as it asks that three months of experiences be condensed into a couple of paragraphs (Interview March 1, 2002). The Education Coordinator notes that for the Support to Families report, “any time is too much” but overall it may take approximately three hours to write the report, while the numeric portion is ongoing (Interview March 1, 2002). While the actual time commitment for these reports does not seem overly burdensome, the staff feel that the report is not useful to them and therefore any time spent doing it would be better spent engaging in other agency activities. To compile the above-noted components into the final Support to Families organizational report, the Director spends approximately three hours per quarter (Interview March 1, 2002). According to the Resettlement Coordinator, the Voluntary Agency and Mental Health reports are estimated to take approximately a couple of hours per quarter each (Interview February 22, 2002).

According to the Secretary of Bright Star who has worked there for twenty years, the State Report is now much less time consuming than in the past, as the numerical portion of the “report can now be done electronically, so that makes a real difference. You are able to access it and get reports at any time. Before, the report was compiled by hand and was handwritten” (Interview February 22, 2002). It now requires approximately 30 hours per quarter. Before computerization, it took approximately 80 staff hours to complete each quarter. The Director spends three hours per quarter to compile and write narratives (Interview March 1, 2002). The Education Coordinator states that she spends approximately thirty-five percent of her time keeping up with the files, that it takes “hours and hours” (Interview March 1, 2002).

The Match Report is quite cumbersome, requiring detailed accounting, home visits, and reviews of forms. This report requires counting items in each client home, including small items such as spoons and towels. These items are then given a value, according to their perceived quality, using a chart provided by the funding source. According to the Volunteer Coordinator, it takes between two and a half and seven hours per case/family to complete the required paperwork each month, so that the total amount of time depends on the number of cases each month (Interview February 22, 2002). This report, identified as one of the most tedious reports, is seen by the staff member who completes it as important to Bright Star: “It keeps us organized, keeps us up-to-date on what donations our families are getting, services, tutor time. Not all families are [a part of this program], but it is nice to have a representative show of our families. We don’t do this for other families” (Interview February 22, 2002). Furthermore, she stated that this grant provides the funding for staff salaries, so it is valuable in that way as well.

The feelings of the staff toward the upward accountability activities, then, are directly related to how useful the staff perceives the report to be. Actual time commitments are less important than whether the staff member can directly identify how the report is connected to the mission-based activities of Bright Star. This concept is further explored in the following *Impact* section.

Downward and Lateral Accountability Mechanisms

Many of the staff members could not separate these categories of accountability from the activities they engage in to do their jobs. They have a strong sense of felt responsibility to each

other, the agencies with whom they work, the community, and their clients. Thus, for many, it was difficult to identify what they do as accountability activities and assess the time requirements accordingly. However, the School Contact Staff Member stated that she spends 40 hours per month on home visits relating to schools. The time spent per month in accountability activities to schools, though, is too difficult to assess. The School Contact Staff Member stated that “some weeks I may be there constantly and other weeks less... or it may be on the phone” (Interview March 1, 2002). The caseworkers stated that their entire jobs are related to accountability (Interview March 1, 2002). Likewise, the Volunteer Coordinator states that “to stay in touch with tutors, it takes a great percentage of my time, maybe fifty percent” (Interview March 1, 2002). For many of the staff, lateral and downward accountability activities are indistinguishable from activities designed to meet the agency’s mission and the time required for these is evaluated in light of the importance placed on the activities to meet their mission.

IMPACTS OF THE MECHANISMS USED ON MISSION-BASED ACTIVITY

Many of the accountability mechanisms used by Bright Star assist the staff in conducting their mission-based activities. First, these positive impacts from accountability mechanisms will be presented. However, it is clear from the discussion of accountability mechanisms used by the agency under study that two main tensions regarding the relationships between the levels of accountability arise. These tensions must be assessed in terms of the impact on mission-based activities. The conflicts are between upward and downward accountability and between upward and lateral accountability. Organizations must reconcile these conflicts between levels of accountability as best they can in order to work towards meeting multiple levels of accountability and engaging in mission-based activities. This assessment will focus on the impacts of each level of accountability on meeting the mission of the agency and will then focus on the tension present in meeting the multiple levels of accountability.

Positive Impacts of Accountability Mechanisms

Upward, lateral, and downward accountability activities all have positive impacts on the organization. Upward accountability requirements help Bright Star staff keep track of activities undertaken by the agency and services provided to clients. As identified earlier, lateral and downward accountability activities are seen by staff as fundamental to the mission-based activity of the organization. Lateral accountability mechanisms are useful in ensuring communication among the staff and with volunteers which assists staff members in serving their clients. Downward accountability mechanisms that allow for communication with clients are seen as key to meeting the mission of the organization.

Reporting mechanisms, though sometimes cumbersome, are seen as necessary for nonprofit organizations and are sometimes useful to agency staff in ensuring that activities are aligned with the mission of Bright Star. The Director identifies the ways in which the reports are useful to her guidance of Bright Star: “If I see disparities in numbers from quarter to quarter, it helps to identify what is happening. Also, I use reports to write grants. It helps to identify needs, to pressure for support to provide services. It helps us to give what our clients need” (Interview March 1, 2001). A current grant focused on providing mental health services to clients was sought as a result of reading the narratives of reports and realizing that Bright Star needed

“support and resources to address a need” (Interview March 1, 2001). Additionally, as many reports are compiled at the regional coordinating office, the final reports contain sections for each of the local offices. The Director states, “it is helpful to see the compilation of reports from other sites. It is helpful to think in new ways, to be creative. The staff often brainstorms” based on reading these reports (Interview March 1, 2001). Accordingly, the reports are used as a tool for organizational learning, and thus impact mission-based activities and accountability laterally and downwardly.

Other upward accountability documentation requirements are also seen as useful by Bright Star staff. For example, the Matching Grant report, identified as one of the most tedious reports, is seen by the staff member who completes it as important to Bright Star: “It keeps us organized, keeps us up-to-date on what donations our families are getting, services, tutor time. Not all families are [a part of this program], but it is nice to have a representative show of our families. We don’t do this for other families” (Interview February 22, 2002). The State Report is seen as useful on multiple fronts. According to the agency’s secretary who completes the numerical portion of the State Report, this component is centralized at Bright Star, where “in other offices each staff member enters for their programmatic responsibility” area; it is “good for it to be centralized so that at least one person in the office know what is going on with the clients, as an overview” (Interview February 22, 2002). The Education Coordinator also notes that “there is a direct relationship between this report [and our activities]. It is a valid report of what is going on. It reflects who is being served, how” (Interview March 1, 2002). Upward accountability mechanisms, then, are most useful to the organization when they accurately demonstrate what the organization is doing and do not overlap with other accountability requirements.

Lateral and downward accountability activities are often viewed by the staff as indistinguishable from working toward the mission of Bright Star. Activities which provide opportunities for feedback from lateral and downward stakeholders, then, serve two functions. First, they are important to ensure that Bright Star is answerable to its stakeholders for its actions, and thus accountable. Second, these activities help the staff meet their mission-based goals.

Lateral accountability is often useful to Bright Star. Staff meetings, for example, are seen as fundamental to maintaining mission-based activity in the organization. As one staff member states “we need to know what we are all doing” (Interview March 1, 2002). Staff meetings are key to this communication. These gatherings provide the opportunity not only to discuss the activities with each case/family, they also allow the staff “to discuss our apprehensions, fears and concerns, to let those be known” (Interview Resettlement Coordinator March 1, 2002). Another staff member states “the staff meetings are essential. We have to have them... to talk about the families all together or talk about issues within the organization together. We share news about what we are doing, get support from one another. It is also a time to laugh, to let off steam. We work with some intense stuff” (Interview Education Coordinator March 1, 2002). According to the caseworkers, clients often “play us off of each other” (Interview March 1, 2002). They will ask one staff member to do something and if the staff member says no, the client will ask another staff member to do it. Therefore, staff meetings and informal dialogue is fundamental to staff relationships, as “it is ideal if the caseworker asked the other ‘what is the deal with this’ before acting on a client request (Interview March 1, 2002). Open communication allows the staff to work well together. According to the Director, Bright Star staff members talk through their disagreements, and, afterward, they have greater respect for one another (Interview March 1, 2001). The organization staff members respect each other more when they discuss differences and concerns. Thus, as an organization, they are building civic capacity and social capital. The Director of the refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agency notes that all but two of the staff have been with Bright Star for over five years and some members have worked there for ten, thirteen, and seventeen years. She states that among the staff, “there is a great rapport and cohesiveness” (Interview March 1, 2001). This cohesiveness ensures that the staff is answerable to each other for their actions, in relation to each other and to their clients and beneficiaries. In other words, staff meetings and informal dialogue ensure that the staff is laterally accountable, while helping them meet their mission-based goals.

Accountability to tutors also has a positive impact on Bright Star’s mission-based activities. The Education Coordinator gave an example of a change made because of the responses in a volunteer exit interview: “One volunteer said that they would like more contact from the office, from me because they felt alone and isolated doing their work. From that, I have made an effort

to stay more in touch with volunteers” (Interview March 1, 2002). Staff contact with volunteers has a positive impact on the organization’s missions, beyond that of ensuring accountability to the tutors themselves and improving the tutoring program. The Education Coordinator states “the tutors are often in contact with the families more than others in the organization [after the initial resettlement period] as they go twice a week... They bring information to us about health, [suspected] spousal or child abuse...they might be aware of things that we would not be tuned in to. So, it is really helpful to stay in touch with them” (Interview March 1, 2002). Accountability to tutors, then, not only serves a lateral accountability function to the volunteers, but also helps inform the staff of potential needs of their clients, thus working toward downward accountability.

The downward accountability mechanisms employed by Bright Star were seen by staff as necessary to do the organization’s mission-based activities. The two key elements of staying accountable to clients, according to the staff, are: access to information and assessments of needs and programs. Having voicemail and pamphlets in the native languages of the clients/beneficiaries is seen as important because it gives clients access to information and assistance, fundamental to the agency’s goal of self-sufficiency for the refugees. Likewise, the weekly home visits and open access to staff for clients was seen as directly related to the success of the organization’s mission. Needs assessments and evaluations were seen as fundamental to the organization because they allow the organization to develop the programs that the refugees identify as important. So, downward accountability mechanisms positively impact the organization’s mission-based activity, and are frequently seen as indistinguishable from it.

At times, different levels of accountability are in conflict with one another, placing tensions on agency staff to determine which level of accountability is more important. These tensions are paramount between upward accountability and the other two levels, lateral and downward.

Tensions Between Upward and Lateral Accountability

The tension between upward accountability requirements and lateral accountability manifests itself in multiple ways. First, there is a risk that the organization’s mission could be co-opted by funder demands. Second, the requirements by funders could monopolize time that could

otherwise be spent in ways more useful to the organization. Third, reporting requirements can jeopardize mission-based activities by divulging too much information to funders.

Nonprofit organizations must always be aware of the risk of co-optation by funders. Using Najam's model regarding the relationship between governments and agencies, Bright Star and the government are complementary, where they are "seeking similar ends with dissimilar means" (2000, 383). Bright Star is a public service contractor technically, as the agency is paid per refugee resettled. However, the relationship moves beyond Bright Star serving as a "mere implementer of government's will" which would be cooperation (Najam 2000, 384), as the staff and community board work diligently to improve the lives of new arrivals, even lobbying the government for support and policy changes. Furthermore, Bright Star does not focus solely on the business aspect of the relationship, as it is guided by its mission. Thus, the relationship falls more under the complementary model, as "a partnership or contractual relationship in which government finances public services and nonprofits deliver them" (Najam 2000, 387). But, the question arises, is Bright Star at risk of being co-opted by the government? Upward accountability requirements can influence how the organization follows its mission. Edwards and Hulme (1996b, 966) question "if NGOs are becoming more responsive to external concerns, are substituting for government... what is happening to the links—to their values and mission, and to their relationships with "the poor," supporters, and others?" Presently, felt responsibility ensures that Bright Star is maintaining lateral and downward links. The Director of Bright Star notes that accountability in recent years has shifted from needs assessment to goal attainment to the current focus on outcomes (Personal Communication April 1, 2002). For nonprofit agencies providing social services it is difficult to provide outcome-based reports, as measuring outcomes on social services is challenging and many times takes years to appear (Personal Communication April 1, 2002). The Director is aware that the organization needs to protect itself from funders whose reporting requirements change with the trends. While Bright Star is aware of these pressures, it must still fight to ensure that mission-based activity is not put at risk by accountability requirements.

In the context of supporting the personnel, the Director, as the manager of the organization, must also meet the needs of what she called "grant paper-pushing" (Interview March 1, 2001). The

pressure for accountability, especially to satisfy funders, has many drawbacks for nonprofits. It fails to account for things that cannot be measured; these immeasurable aspects are ignored, “just as those that fall ‘outside’ the system under consideration get excluded” (Edwards and Hulme 1996b, 33). Additionally, “government contracts eventually bring administrative demands which may be at odds with agencies’ original visions” (Smith and Lipsky 1993, 40). The challenge, then, is to maintain equilibrium between blind faith of practitioners in the service-provision field “to use their best professional judgment” and a watchdog situation that “inhibits their ability to function” (Shafritz and Russell 2000, 343). In situations that place upward and lateral accountability at odds with one another, the Director states that she tries to “make it as simple as possible for the staff” (Interview March 1, 2001).

The Director highlighted one example of this type of managerial activity revolving around federal and state directives that call for time sheets to record with whom and when caseworkers are with clients (Interview February 8, 2002). The auditors hired by the regional coordinating office informed the regional directors that organizational case workers needed to complete time sheets. The Director, along with the other two agency directors in the state, was able to negotiate with the auditor as “it would be impossible to note the time spent with individual families, as a caseworker could be dealing with multiple cases at once and that caseworkers would end up spending all of their time writing in time sheets” (Interview March 1, 2002). They were able to arrange with the auditor to accept the travel sheets with a time component added, which required adding only one column on existing mileage sheets. This is an example of resolution of the tension between upward and lateral accountability mechanisms that allowed Bright Star to meet both levels simultaneously. However, in order to meet both of these levels, the Director of Bright Star had to stand up for its mission of serving clients against upward accountability demands.

Another potential risk to nonprofit organizations is that activities necessary to fulfill funder requirements can minimize the time available for other activities or can force those in the agency to focus on areas less related to the organizational mission. Many reports generated for funders don’t necessarily help Bright Star further its mission. In terms of the impact of specific reports, when asked about the purpose of the Support to Families report, the School Liaison who prepares a component of the report responded “that I couldn’t tell you because other than compile what I

do monthly, I don't do anything with "the funding source or report" (Interview March 1, 2002). Another staff member noted that she did not know much about the purpose of the funding sources: "they just hand me a report and I complete it" (Interview February 22, 2002). The report is not really helpful, according to the School Contact Staff Member who completes one segment of it: "I am aware of what I am doing as I am doing it. The paper report does not really relate. You know, putting it all together at the end, it is just summarizing" (Interview March 1, 2002). Another staff member, the Education Coordinator, who works on this report notes "this does not add anything, except that it sustains our program, as it gives money for our staff...It is not that useful. It inhibits us. I don't see much value in it. It is a numbers game. I know we need to do it for funders," but beyond that it is not a useful tool for the organization (Interview March 1, 2002). The only way that it is helpful is that all three of the regional offices' reports are compiled and combined, and therefore Bright Star staff members are able to see what the other offices are doing. It seems, then, that this report takes time away from other important mission-based activities without providing much useful information for the organization.

Nonprofit agencies are typically dependent on federal, state, and foundation funding to support their mission-based activities. Funder requirements to divulge information regarding activities and finances can harm nonprofit agencies. The Resettlement Coordinator noted that "all of these reports serve two major purposes. First, they demonstrate that we are doing our job, fulfilling our part of the contract. Second, they show how this money is helping us resettle refugees, do our mission" (Interview February 22, 2002). However, this can negatively impact Bright Star because "there is never enough money, but we do all this good work, and these reports show all of the good work we are doing. But, we shoot ourselves in the foot, they see that we can do all this work with this little money" (Interview February 22, 2002). By demonstrating that they can work with less funding, Bright Star is allowing funders to rely on their services without providing appropriate funding. However, all of the reports "do help" according to the Resettlement Coordinator, "because we see what we have been doing and it helps identify what we could do more of" (Interview February 22, 2002).

The Director of Bright Star acknowledges that "the reporting requirements serve a purpose" but she believes "that the people who write the requirements don't have a clue what the organization

does. They need to look beyond [counting] spoons to [valuing] the intangibles (are we advocates?). There is no way to account for so many things that we do” (Interview March 1, 2001). The funders focus more on accounting than accountability. Furthermore, upward accountability requirements need to be evaluated so as to provide the information funders need, while also assisting Bright Star in its mission-based activities as much as possible. For example, according to the Director of Bright Star, “just having six or seven federal grants, all requiring different reports... [with] different requirements. The reporting requirements are duplicative. It is a joke...If the federal government could consolidate and say this is what we expect, you could get it down to two reports, [but] it is a turf thing in Washington” (Interview March 1, 2002).

Tensions Between Upward and Downward Accountability

In assessing the relationship between upward and downward accountability activities, theorists have posited that funder requirements can prevent downward accountability activities due to time constraints (Edwards and Hulme 1996b, Meyer 1999). For Bright Star, the Director perceives that the upward accountability time requirements often preclude major downward accountability initiatives with volunteers or immigrants and refugees (Interview March 1, 2001). While this appears true for some reports, it is also clear that felt responsibility toward clients sometimes created a different tension between the two levels of accountability. Staff members noted that they often shirked upward accountability requirements in order to better meet downward ones. They avoid informing the Director of activities that are not approved by funder or parent organizations when they feel that a client needs those activities. Additionally, rather than focus on the details of reporting, some staff members estimate information for reports, so as to get into the field with clients more quickly. These data suggest that felt responsibility impacts the interactions between these two levels of accountability and can determine which receives higher priority.

Section Seven: Conclusions

The accountability literature suggests that upward accountability demands may be too intense for nonprofit organizations to meet, inhibiting downward and lateral accountability and mission-based activities (Light 2000, Edwards and Hulme 1996b, Meyer 1999). Rather than seeking to test that claim, this research seeks to explore to whom nonprofit agencies serving immigrants and refugees are accountable, what mechanisms are used to work towards accountability, and the impact of these mechanisms on mission-based activity. The data gathered in this research points to four main conclusions. First, upward and downward accountability can be better achieved with strong lateral accountability mechanisms in place. Second, upward accountability is dependent on the agency being held accountable, while downward and lateral accountability is dependent on the felt responsibility of agency staff. Third, lateral and downward accountability activities are often seen by agency staff not only as accountability mechanisms, but as actions that are fundamental to the mission-based activity of the agency. Finally, to the extent that upward accountability mechanisms are perceived as useful to the organization, agency staff will pay increased attention to the mechanisms. These four conclusions are expanded upon below.

Conclusion One: Upward and downward accountability can be better achieved with strong lateral accountability mechanisms in place.

In Bright Star, lateral accountability supports upward and downward accountability. Activities designed to facilitate lateral accountability, such as staff meetings and community training, have the added benefit of improving other levels of accountability. For example, staff meetings ensure accountability among staff and to Bright Star's mission (i.e. laterally), and they also ensure accountability downward, as staff members can hold each other accountable for activities requested by clients/beneficiaries. These staff meetings also provide a venue for the Director to ensure that funder requirements are being met. Likewise, training for community agencies has external lateral implications for those agencies. However, it also improves awareness of immigrant and refugee concerns and issues, which can increase care for the clients/beneficiaries of the agency under study (accountability downward).

Conclusion Two: Upward accountability is more attributable to being “held accountable” while downward and lateral accountability is more dependent on “felt responsibility.”

There are formalized mechanisms for holding nonprofits upwardly accountable. These mechanisms do not exist or are less institutionalized for downward and lateral accountability. Thus, the literature suggests that downward and lateral accountability can be deterred because of the intense time requirements for upward accountability. However, felt responsibility of staff members guides them in actively engaging in lateral and downward accountability activities that are not formally required. For example, obtaining jobs for refugees would be sufficient for upward accountability requirements. However, guided by the Director, the Bright Star staff members feel a responsibility to go beyond this to ensure that the jobs refugees secure include benefit packages. Felt responsibility mediates tensions between upward and downward accountability, enabling staff to focus on activities more closely related to the agency’s mission. This is demonstrated through staff members’ commitment to their clients’ needs, even when the necessary activities to meet those needs are in conflict with the regulations of the agency. Thus, felt responsibility ensures that the agency is maintaining lateral and downward links.

Conclusion Three: Lateral and downward accountability activities are often seen not as accountability mechanisms but as activities that are fundamental to mission-based activity.

Activities which provide opportunities for feedback from lateral and downward stakeholders, serve two functions. First, they are important to ensure that Bright Star is answerable to its stakeholders for its actions, and thus accountable. Second, these activities help the staff meet their mission-based goals. Bright Star staff members often see lateral and downward accountability activities as simply doing their jobs. Downward accountability to clients through multiple mechanisms, including needs assessments and evaluations, are seen by the staff as fundamental to serving the refugees. Rather than thinking of their activities as accountability mechanisms, the staff sees these actions as important to know that they are doing their job well. Additionally, the staff actively seeks new ways to gather information from stakeholders, such as creating a new ESL tutoring evaluation system. This occurs because they believe it will assist them in meeting the mission of the organization not because it is required or viewed as necessary for accountability.

Conclusion Four: To the extent that upward accountability mechanisms are perceived as internally useful to the nonprofit organization, there will be an increase in attention to these mechanisms.

First, it is important to note that accountability documentation requirements do not always impede the functions and mission-based activities of nonprofit agencies. In fact, in some cases, they even enhance them. Upward accountability requirements help Bright Star staff keep track of activities undertaken by the agency and services provided to clients. Additionally, some of the reports are useful to the agency in determining areas of client need that they are not currently addressing. These reports, then, are the ones that receive the most attention from Bright Star staff. Agency staff are more enthusiastic about reports that they feel provide useful information to them about their work. Similarly, the time required for upward accountability mechanisms is sometimes seen as too intensive, not because of the actual time requirements, but because of the perceived usefulness of the activity to the nonprofit organization.

The overall question posed for this research is “what is the relationship between accountability activities and the mission-based activities of the organization?” From my research, it seems that lateral and downward mechanisms are directly tied to the mission-based activities of Bright Star and are often viewed by the staff as necessary activities for doing their jobs. The upward accountability activities, on the other hand, are sometimes seen as useful in assessing mission-based work, but are also seen as external demands that prevent further expansion or completion of mission-based activities. Thus, downward and lateral accountability relate more to felt responsibility, while upward accountability is more about being held externally accountable. As this research is exploratory in nature, using only one case study, it is not a representative sample. The case was chosen in part because it was fairly representative of other refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agencies in terms of its umbrella Voluntary Agency, funding and accountability requirements. However, in the end, Bright Star may be unique in its focus on felt responsibility laterally and downwardly and may not be representative of how refugee resettlement and immigration assistance agencies approach accountability. Thus, each of the conclusions reached above are propositions that merit further study with a larger sample size. Further study could test the accuracy of the propositions regarding the impacts of and relationships between upward, lateral, and downward accountability mechanisms generated here.

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¹⁰ As identified earlier, the agency under study has been given a pseudonym for privacy reasons.

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¹¹ City location given pseudonym to protect privacy.

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Appendix A: List of Questions for Interviews with Staff

1. Please describe your position at Bright Star?

Questions Related to Stakeholders

2. Please describe your relationship with volunteers¹²? How do you interact with them?
3. What activities do you engage in with volunteers that keep you accountable to them or display your accountability to them? Please describe the accountability activity engaged in. How do you stay in touch with volunteers to ensure that you are responding to their needs?
4. The Director gave me a copy of the exit interview instrument. Can you tell me about any situations where changes or improvements have been made at the suggestion of a volunteer?
5. What opportunities are there for current volunteers who are not exiting to make suggestions, brainstorm, etc.?

Questions Related to Activities and Time

6. Please describe the activities required to complete this accountability activity on a daily, weekly, monthly, and/or annual basis.
7. How much time per week/month/quarter does this activity require?
8. Does the activity (contacts with tutors) provide opportunities to further your mission-based functions? Please describe how.
9. Please describe the relationship between the activity (your interactions with tutors) and the services your organization provides.
10. Do these activities pose any threats to your organization's functions? Please describe how.
11. Do you use information garnered from the activity in assisting organizational activities? Please describe how you use this information.

Questions Related to Funders

12. Please describe the purpose of the funding source that you write the report for.¹³
13. Please describe what you perceive to be the purpose of the documentation you are required to submit.
14. Please describe the type of report required by the funding source (narrative, numerical, etc. and budgetary/fiscal or programmatic).
15. Please describe the activities required to complete accountability requirements on a daily, weekly, monthly, and/or annual basis.
16. How much time per week/month/quarter does this activity require?
17. Please describe the relationship between the paper compliance requirement and the services your organization provides.
18. Does the required report provide opportunities to further your mission-based functions? Please describe how.

¹² Questions 2-11 were asked to appropriate staff members regarding all stakeholders.

¹³ Questions 12-21 were asked to appropriate staff members regarding each upward accountability reporting requirement.

Questions Related to Reports

19. Do these requirements pose threats to your organization's functions? Please describe how.
20. Do you use information garnered during the process or from the final report in assisting organizational activities. Please describe how you use this information.
21. Do funders, regulatory agencies ask for information on a regular basis...are requests predetermined or predictable?
22. In what ways do you interact with other agency staff members? What are the ways in which agency staff members stay in touch with one another? Hold each other accountable for the activities they are supposed to perform?¹⁴
23. What questions have I failed to ask you that you think would tell me more about the agency/that I should know about?

¹⁴ The questions in 22 and 23 were asked of all staff members.

Appendix B: List of Questions for Interview with Director

1. Please describe your position at Bright Star?
2. Who are your primary clients or beneficiaries? Can you describe what their expectations of you are? How do they judge you in terms of accountability?
3. Beyond clients and beneficiaries, who else has a stake in your organization? How do they judge you in terms of accountability?
4. Do funder accountability requirements impact decisions regarding grant writing or seeking certain types of funds?
5. What external events or trends could affect how accountability is defined and perceived by your stakeholders?
6. What external events and trends pose the most significant threats to your organization's accountability?
7. What are legal, regulatory, or bureaucratic standards to which your organization is held accountable? Who enforces these standards?
8. Do the legal and regulatory standards provide opportunities to further your mission-based functions? Please describe how.
9. Do these legal and regulatory standards pose threats to your organization's functions?
10. How well has your organization performed in meeting explicit and implicit accountability standards?
11. Does your organization have sufficient resources to meet accountability documentation requirements?
12. How do the upward accountability requirements relate to your accountability to your organizational mission?
13. Do you use information garnered during the process or from the final reports in assisting organizational activities. Please describe how you use this information.
14. You stated that the caseworkers all complete a travel/mileage form which includes time spent at each site. This is submitted each month. You and the directors of the other two regional agencies negotiated this combined function to assist caseworkers in streamlining their paperwork. Who gets this form? Which funding source did you negotiate with to streamline? How easy was it to win this victory?
24. Please describe the purpose of the funding source that you write the report for.¹⁵
25. Please describe what you perceive to be the purpose of the documentation you are required to submit.
26. Please describe the type of report required by the funding source (narrative, numerical, etc. and budgetary/fiscal or programmatic).
27. Please describe the activities required to complete accountability requirements on a daily, weekly, monthly, and/or annual basis.
28. How much time per week/month/quarter does this activity require?
29. Please describe the relationship between the paper compliance requirement and the services your organization provides.
30. Does the required report provide opportunities to further your mission-based functions? Please describe how.

¹⁵ Questions 24-33 were asked in relation to each of the reports that the Director writes or compiles.

31. Do these requirements pose threats to your organization's functions? Please describe how.
32. Do you use information garnered during the process or from the final report in assisting organizational activities. Please describe how you use this information.
33. Do funders, regulatory agencies ask for information on a regular basis...are requests predetermined or predictable?
34. What is your relationship with the regional level governing board?
35. Can you tell me more about the Community Board? Have they given 'advise' to the agency? If so, what is your responsibility to follow that advice?
36. Do you have a listing of the tasks of the Community Board? When was it established? Why was it established? Is there a mandate for the Board?
37. In what ways do you interact with other agency staff members? What are the ways in which staff members stay in touch with one another? Hold each other accountable for the activities they are supposed to perform?
38. What questions have I failed to ask you that you think would tell me more about the agency/that I should know about?

Appendix C: Vita

Rachel Atkin Christensen

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email: rachrist@vt.edu

EDUCATION

Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, **Masters of Public and International Affairs, May, 2002** GPA 3.91/4.0
Graduate Assistant, Research and Coordination of an Institutional Committee on Health 2000-02
Intern, Conflict Resolution Center, Roanoke, Virginia *Fall, 2001*
Chair, Graduate Urban Affairs and Planning Association 2000-2001
Student Representative, Faculty Search Committee in Urban Affairs and Planning *Spring, 2001*

Mediation Certification, Supreme Court of Virginia, anticipated *Fall, 2002*
Basic Medication Training and Virginia Judicial System Training, *Fall, 2001*

Guilford College, Greensboro, NC, **Bachelor of Science with honors, May, 1996** GPA 3.51/4.0
Major: Political Science Concentration: Women's Studies
Teacher's Assistant: "Freedom and Slavery" and "Quakerism"
Study abroad: London, England *Fall 1994*

Athens High School, Athens, WV, **Diploma with honors awarded June, 1992** Salutatorian GPA 3.98/4.0

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Faculty Leader & Visiting Assistant Professor, Guilford College Study Abroad, Mexico 1999

- Developed and taught the Community Development Course and a 25 hour orientation course
- Directed the program, utilizing and supervising the student leadership team; organizing extra-curricular activities including group day and weekend excursions, meals, meetings; serving as a counselor to the 18 students; and designing and facilitating group development sessions
- Coordinated the relationships with our partners in Guadalajara, Intercolonias, a grass-roots community organizing association, and Centro de Estudios para Extranjeros, the language school students attended
- Managed all institutional questions and details; including residential life, curriculum and registration, financial aid and tuition matters, academic affairs, and student life; serving as the primary liaison between students and the home campus

Internship Coordinator, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC 1997-1999

- Worked with students and faculty members to design positive and dynamic experiential learning placements by advertising possibilities, discussing options, sharing resources, planning strategies, distributing student Internship packets, reviewing resumes, and visiting internship sites
- Developed, coordinated, and facilitated Internship Enrichment Events, designed to assist student interns in gaining the fullest experience from their internships. Foci included resume development, women in the workplace, racism in the workplace, power in the workplace, and development of future career goals.
- Performed administrative tasks including office organization, file maintenance, initial assessment and planning for a computerized file system, compilation of semester and year-end reports, and development of certain departmental publications
- Contributed to the development of a merged department (Career Development, Internships, and Service Learning) and designed a training and support manual for the Internship Coordinator position to help ensure continuity

Professor of English, Universidad Peruana Los Andes, Huancayo, Peru *February-August 1997*

- Taught intensive beginning, intermediate, and advanced English as a Foreign Language courses and developed and taught new courses focusing on conversation, phonetics, and grammar
- Translated documents from Spanish to English for the University
- Developed a training manual for future English professors from the United States

GROUP FACILITATION, TRAINING AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Secretary, Guilford College Community Senate, Greensboro, NC *1995-1996*

- Developed and maintained systems for increasing dialogue and discussion on campus among students, faculty, and staff
- Created a resource manual for the position of Senate Secretary to enhance continuity of officer activities and knowledge

Intern, Pathways Family Shelter Tutoring Program, Greensboro, NC *1995*

Internships and Service Learning Staff Advisor

1997-1999

- As an intern, served as one of the first liaisons, acting as an educational advocate for the children living at Pathways by facilitating communication between parents, teachers, and tutors to better meet the needs of the children
- As staff advisor to the student leadership team, worked to identify and nurture skills and leadership in student participants and to increase dialogue about our work in the predominantly African American site

Workshop Leader, N. C. Students Teach and Reach Program, Greensboro, NC *1993-1996*

- Organized, planned, and facilitated discussions on prejudice and discrimination among middle & high school students
- Assisted in the training of facilitators and contributed to the training manual

Clerk, Project Community, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC *1993-1995*

- Organized and coordinated the reform and re-chartering of the organization which works to promote and facilitate a higher involvement in community service by hosting and advertising community service events
- Developed a manual for future Clerks to assist in the organization and facilitation of service projects

HONORS AND AWARDS

Virginia Citizens Planning Association Award to Graduate Student for Service to the Urban Affairs and Planning Program 2001

Virginia Citizens Planning Association Fellowship Outstanding First Year Graduate Student 2001

Presidential Scholar and Host, Guilford College 1992-96

Dana Scholar, Guilford College 1995-96

Dean's List, Guilford College 1994-96

Student Marshal, Guilford College 1994-96

Who's Who Among American College and University Students 1995

Bonner Scholar, Guilford College 1992-96

Representative, National Bonner Student Coalition 1994-95

SPECIAL SKILLS

Grant proposal research and writing
Training/Resource Manual development
Collaboration, group discussion, facilitation
Organizational analysis

Knowledge of PC/Macintosh systems and the Internet
Knowledge of experiential learning
Conversational Spanish
Mediation and Negotiation