

**Lessons learned at Bienvenidos: How theory is reflected in the daily operations of
non-profit organizations**

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I. Introduction

One time during a Public Organization Dynamics class, a professor asked his students, “Have you heard when people say, ‘I’m wearing this hat, let me use this other different hat instead to address this other problem’? Well, I believe I never take off ‘my hats,’ but I use them all at all times.” This paper seeks to reflect that uninhibited yet sounding claim. I describe my findings as a Board Member for *Bienvenidos*, and I do so from my public administration graduate student, my public relations practitioner, and my own Latina identity perspective. However, I will emphasize the theory learned through all these semesters in the MPA program. Because I also believe we cannot divide ourselves into different “hats,” I write this paper wearing all of them.

II. Description of Bienvenidos

Bienvenidos at Gallatin Valley (Bienvenidos), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that seeks to provide Spanish-speaking immigrant families with a better north and resources, is the organization I got paired with through the MSU Boardroom Bobcat program. Their mission is “Bienvenidos illuminates pathways to self-empowerment and belonging for the Spanish-speaking community by building bridges to resources, relationships, and advocates.” This is reflected in their Board of Directors members, people from different educational and career backgrounds committed to providing these families with a new and brighter future.

III. Population they serve

“We envision a Montana where neighbors welcome each other with open arms, where everyone feels at home, and we celebrate the richness of everyone’s story, fostering a community where all can thrive together regardless of their background.” (Bienvenidos, n.d., para. 2).

Bienvenidos programs’ beneficiaries are Spanish-speaking immigrant families. According to their website, their volunteers (including Board members) support 46 and 90 children in total. As the organization has grown, it has more capacity to serve these families. For instance, the Resource Coordinator meets with 10 families per week to direct them to other community resources depending on their specific needs (para. 6).

In an interview with Explore Big Sky, Bievenidos President shared that the organization “serves a growing demographic as more and more immigrants arrive in Gallatin Valley, coming from countries like Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico and looking for work and a different way of life.” Furthermore, the city's growth has led to a high demand for “new workers, especially in the construction and hospitality industries.” (Genau, 2024, para. 11).

IV. Community needs

Bienvenidos started back in 2019 when one of the founders noticed a need for a winter clothing drive in a public school in Bozeman. Thus, 12 Spanish-speaking families benefited from this initiative which later led to the formation of the Family Mentor Program.

Bienvenidos Board has mostly engaged in a qualitative approach to measuring the community needs by combining a set of observations and earning input from informal interviews with community members through snowball sampling (Bryman, 2021).

- **Advisory Board Committee:** In an effort to better understand if the activities performed by the organization's members have an impact on the community and if resources (time, materials, funds) should be redistributed or redirected, the Advisory Board Committee was created in October 2024.

In the first meeting, the following issues were highlighted for the participants:

- a. Housing. Not only the availability in the market but also the over-dependency some families have with the employer. Usually, the employer offers a place to live and transportation, but when that relationship ends, the employee and their family are left without anything.
- b. Lack of a wider network of information where Latinos/as/x can learn better about other types of support they can access. Especially due to the lack of bilingual staff or representatives.
- c. Lack of support for individuals without a family. Some organizations focus their services on people with a family, but single people without children have a harder time finding out who can help them.
- d. Childcare support
- e. Affordable or free English classes
- f. Education: Encourage Latinx high schoolers to pursue higher education and help people with a profession to revalidate their studies once they are here.

This specific community's needs fall into the Comparative Needs group since the objective is to shed light on this group's living and educational conditions.

"Comparative measures are sometimes used to give high priority to people or

communities that are relatively less well off or deemed to be at higher risk than others” (Pawlak & Vinter, 2004, p. 94). Even though these families still represent a minority in the overall community, the Bozeman school district has reported that there are 530 children from immigrant families enrolled this year. This represents 130 more children compared to last year’s number.

V. Strategic Plan and Programming

For some authors, like Bryson (2010), strategic planning serves as a navigation tool to keep the organization moving. “The smart ones [leaders] will emphasize strategic thinking, acting, and learning—and see strategic planning as a practice meant to help [...] them “navigate between the twin dangers and enemies: mindless action and the actionless mind” (Scharmer 2009, as cited in Bryson, 2010, p. 260). For others, it is viewed as a systematized process to obtain the organization’s goals. “Strategic planning attempts to systematize the processes that enable an organization to attain its goals and objectives” (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2010, p. 151). Crittenden and Crittenden (2010) also point out five general steps for this process “(1) goal/objective setting, (2) situation analysis, (3) alternative consideration and selection, (4) implementation, and (5) evaluation” (p. 151).

Worth (2017) includes the previously mentioned steps but adds “prepare for planning,” “clarify mission, vision, values” and “write and communicate the plan.” Therefore, Bienvenidos has engaged in a new branding strategy, having its website already refreshed and showing a renewed commitment to the Spanish-speaking families’

community. Although the 2025 Strategic Plan has not been published yet, internally shared documents emphasize sustainable self-support that leads to empowerment and healthier programs to fully satisfy community needs.

Program	Internal Initiatives
Partner Family Program (Mentor Program) Pairs immigrant families with dedicated mentors who help them navigate and acclimate to their new home.	a. Legal Immigration Support Initiative b. Emergency Family Support
Community Engagement Program Spaces and events to foster community connection, belonging, and mutual support among families, volunteers, and community members.	a. Youth and Children Engagement b. Family and Community Gatherings c. Advisory Committee
El Centro de Bienvenidos Guidance and connections to resources for those not in urgent need but still requiring assistance in navigating available social services.	a. Bilingual Social Resource Navigation Program
Advocacy Program Raising awareness, fostering equitable access, and amplifying the voices of immigrant communities through coordinated advocacy efforts.	a. Migrant Community Coordination Group (MCC) b. Policy and Legislative Advocacy

[Source: Bienvenidos' Master Folder, 2024]

Even though Bienvenidos has Umbrella programs, its internal activities are the more direct services offered to families. “Service programs are almost continuously being modified, cut back, or started up in response to changing conditions and opportunities”; therefore, the services are ever-evolving and depend on the current context. (Pawlak & Vinter, 2004, p. 6).

VI. Organizational capacity

Bienvenidos is run mostly by volunteers. Its working board has 11 members, and other types of volunteers include mentors, and translators/interpreters, among others (Bienvenidos, para. 2). The only paid employees are 3 staff members, including the Executive Director, *El Centro* Resource Coordinator, and an Administrative Assistant (by contract). All three staff members were hired this year since it was not feasible in previous years due to a lack of funding.

- **Expected roles for Board members**

According to the latest meeting held on December 9, these are the updated expectations for Board members:

Responsibility	Description
Attendance	Attend monthly board meetings (2nd Mondays, 4:30–6:30 pm.), officer meetings (if applicable), and board-sponsored events.
Mission Alignment	Review and support the organization’s mission, vision, values, and methods with provided materials.

Three-Month Check-In	Complete a check-in with the Board President or Vice President to ensure role clarity and support.
Snack Contribution	Bring snacks to one board meeting annually to promote a collegial environment.
Volunteer Engagement	Attend at least two volunteer orientations per year to connect with the community and programs.
Conflict of Interest Form	Sign the form to maintain transparency and accountability in decision-making.
Committee Participation	Actively serve on a committee or contribute to a board-initiated project using personal expertise.

Employee commitment is addressed by Slatten et al. (2021) and they define it as “what causes an individual to carry out an activity which leads to completing a desired end goal or reaching a target,” but also what involves “psychological aspects that cause them to form an attachment to their employer or organization” (p. 52). Although board members are not employees, they represent the organization when connecting with interested parties through networking, fundraising, and similar types of events.

In that regard, Board members are motivated by the organizational mission – or they would not volunteer their time and efforts to fulfill their roles in the first place. However, they should also portray a high organizational identity, and being accountable for those expected

responsibilities is a way to do so. A better sense of connection and engagement will be achieved by earning a higher organizational identity.

Organizational identity can also be found in Parkes-Pershing and Austin's (2014) notion of "Cohesiveness." It's a group's faculty to keep together in a mutually beneficial environment and "the degree to which members are attracted or linked to one another." The authors also referred to it as the group's objectives resonating with the individuals' personal goals (p. 141).

VII. Leadership and relationships

Research shows that the role of the manager or leader at a non-profit organization includes "being reflective and proactive in their own motivation," "being aware that what motivates them is not necessarily what will motivate others," and "making the work satisfying and meaningful," among others (Denhardt et al., 2016, as cited in Worth, 2017, p.254). Thus, this section explores the role of the President and the Executive Director.

a. President:

The President serves as the Chief Executive Officer of a corporation. The President, under the control and guidance of the Board of Directors, is responsible for supervising and managing the organization's affairs and the activities of other officers. Key responsibilities include:

- **Supervisory Role:** Act as the direct supervisor of the Executive Director (ED), ensuring alignment between the Board's vision and the ED's execution of day-to-day operations.
- **Meeting Leadership:** Preside over all Board of Directors meetings and Executive Committee meetings, leading discussions and ensuring smooth meeting operations.

- Oversight: Perform all duties required by law, the Articles of Incorporation, the Bylaws, and any additional duties assigned by the Board.
- Representation: Attend organizational events as needed, acting as a public representative for the organization.
- Communication: Maintain regular dialogue with the Executive Director to ensure transparent communication between the Board and the organization's leadership.

b. Executive Director (ED):

It's responsible for overseeing the strategic direction, program development, fundraising, and day-to-day operations of the organization. Reports directly to the Board of Directors, supervises administrative staff, and collaborates with stakeholders to secure funding and further the organization's mission. A summary of their roles:

Administrative Duties (20%)

- Work with standing committees and provide activity reports at monthly board meetings.
- Familiarize with employee and contractor roles, supervising task completion.
- Perform HR functions and ensure compliance with reporting, background checks, and other requirements.

Fundraising Duties (20%)

- Identify, write, and secure grants, and cultivate donor and sponsor relationships.
- Develop and execute fundraising campaigns and events.
- Collaborate with the Treasurer on reporting for grant funders.
- Manage donor correspondence and gift receipting compliance.

Operations Duties (60%)

Volunteer Program Coordination

- Support non-mentor volunteers and oversee the partner-mentor program.
- Facilitate meetings, monthly gatherings, and onboarding processes for volunteers.
- Ensure compliance with safety policies and coordinate program evaluation.

Migrant Community Coordination Program Coordination

- Act as the primary contact with stakeholders and facilitate meetings.

Community Outreach Coordination

- Develop volunteer recruitment strategies and manage newsletters, social media, and website updates.
- Collaborate on events with engagement committees.

There is a certain level of overlap between both positions and their corresponding functions. Some of them are not surprising, for instance, both are responsible for promoting an adequate level of communication among all the members of the organization and both are responsible for creating meeting agendas, and leading key meetings. However, there are other areas of oversight that conflict with each other if not performing within the boundaries of each position:

1. Representation and Stakeholder Engagement

- **President:** Represents the organization at events and acts as the public face of the Board.
- **ED:** Serves as the primary contact with stakeholders, coordinates community outreach, and represents the organization to secure funding and partnerships.

Overlap: Both represent the organization in various capacities, with the President focusing on Board-related visibility and the ED handling operational and stakeholder relationships.

2. Meetings and Facilitation

- **President:** Presides Board and Executive Committee meetings, leading discussions and decision-making.

- **ED:** Facilitates meetings for program committees, volunteer gatherings, and stakeholder coordination.

Overlap: Both are responsible for leading and facilitating meetings to ensure smooth operations and decision-making, though the scope differs (Board vs. program operations).

3. Compliance and Oversight

- **President:** Ensures the organization adheres to legal requirements and Board directives.
- **ED:** Ensures compliance with HR, safety, and risk management policies.

Overlap: Both ensure compliance, with the President focusing on overarching legal and governance issues and the ED on operational policies.

Despite the fact that the Executive Director has openly expressed that she considers the President as a mentor (during a Boardroom Bobcat program meeting and in other places), there is a need for a better understanding of these two positions' roles. As a result, I hope to see a more *Folletian* co-creative type of interactions during Board meetings as co-creating solutions and creating new processes are fundamental in any organization. If we consider Follet's concept of knowledge as co-producing and ethics as co-determined, a more process-oriented view where governance is shared and jointly developed becomes a priority (Stout and Staton, 2011, p. 276).

I am confident that the more experience and time the Executive Director earns at Bienvenidos, the more secure her decisions will be and the more trust the Board members devote to her.

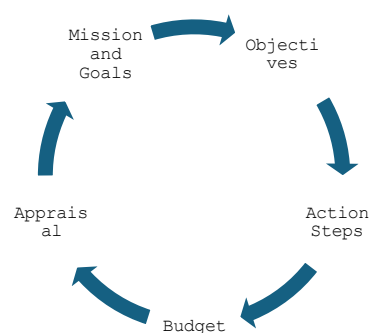
VIII. Fundraising and development

As part of the development and fundraising plan of actions presented by the Executive Director, Bienvenidos hosted its first big fund-raising event called “Stories Beyond Borders.” The date was chosen based on the nationwide “Giving Tuesday” campaign. The idea of this event was to share impactful stories from families Bienvenidos serves, but also volunteers’ stories with them. The stories were reviewed before shared because we wanted to avoid adopting a “hero” or “savior” perspective. It would’ve not been aligned with the organizational mission’s empowerment element.

The tickets were \$75 each and according to the last budget review, we earned more than \$6,000 at that first event. Nonetheless, the overall amount for this year’s revenue breakdown is:

- Website donations: \$9,300
- Giving Tuesday + Stories Beyond Borders event: \$6,111
- Grant contributions: \$68,000

Not only that, but a single donor has offered and committed to fund a full-time position for three years. As a result, Bienvenidos is actively searching for a Developer Coordinator for its fundraising efforts among other responsibilities. Not surprisingly, having a fully dedicated staff to increase the



organization's budget is a big step for Bienvenidos. There will be 4 staff members and the idea of a physical space for the organization would be more of a reality than a dream.

[Source: Drucker et al., 2008, p. 71]

IX. Social climate and expected outcomes

Stone (2012) said that much of our political world is socially constructed, drawing on emotional and value-driven images/symbols vs “objective reality” and that problems are social constructions made intersubjectively. Thus, what might represent a problem worth solving for a specific group of people doesn't necessarily apply to others. Some sentiments go beyond indifference and cross the opposition line. Take as an example the quotes below.

“The only way an illegal immigrant from South America ends up in Montana is if a ‘nonprofit’ connected with the Biden administration moves them there,” said Zinke, who identified the family as hailing from Venezuela. (Daily Inter Lake, 2024, para. 13).

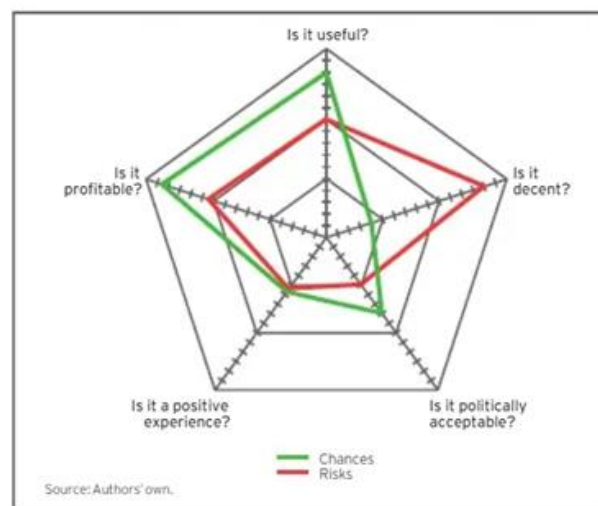
“I’ve [Governor Gianforte] repeatedly pressed Joe Biden to tell governors when he ships illegal immigrants to our states, who they are, and where they’re going. Shamefully, he hasn’t done any of it.” (Daily Inter Lake, 2024, para. 20).

These types of sentiments from public figures and community members have been around in the city for a while, and, as anticipated, Bienvenidos' Board members and volunteers are aware. Nevertheless, Bienvenidos' team remains committed to providing help to those who come to the U.S. in search of a job, or with an already secured one, because a good number of them are hired to build houses that are attractive to wealthy community members.

As stated in an article published by Montana Free Press (2024), “Southwestern Montana is in the middle of a massive multi-year economic explosion, propelled by a surge of wealthy people, a multibillion-dollar tech industry, and, especially, a luxury real-estate market that continues to soar to new heights” (para. 6). To better portray the above-mentioned points, I have made a Public Value Scorecard.

- **Meynhardt's Public Value Scorecard**

Public values are an ever-changing aspect of our society. They are always created or destroyed. Besides, due to human nature, those are intangibles and public opinion related. Thus, Bienvenidos’ mission and goals can be interpreted as:



[Source: Meynhard et al. The Public Value Scorecard: What makes an organization valuable to society? Performance, Volume 6, Issue 1, Feb 2014]

- Is it useful? It is useful for Spanish-speaking families and all those who believe in the organization’s mission statement.

- Is it decent? Yes, since it seeks to do good in that population. Bienvenidos believes that by providing resources towards self-sufficiency, the overall community can benefit from joint work.
- Is it profitable? The profit is merely reputational, but we could also consider the profits from the Spanish-speaking population's contributions to the city.
- Is it a positive experience? It is for all interested parties, including donors who align with the mission and core values, as well as the people the organization strives to serve.
- Is it politically acceptable? Here is where the conflict resides. This already conflicting situation will be reinforced after the new administration (Donald Trump's) starts in January.

Drucker et al. (2008) recommend non-profit organizations' leaders think of a better strategy for continuing and boosting their operations. As mentioned by the authors, need or tradition won't be sufficient to justify continuity (p. 54). However, that is why a well-thought-out and robust strategic plan for the next years is fundamental.

X. Conclusions

Bienvenidos has proven to be an organization with a strong commitment to serving a population that might be a target for very acute and negative comments due to the mixed perceptions in our society. Board members and other volunteers are being trained in multiple advocacy skills. Take for example the Basic Immigration Law Training Course to be offered in January 2025. Therefore, the organization is aware of the challenges of the next four years and is actively looking for ways to mitigate any negative impact through education and engagement campaigns.

I am sure that this experience will keep broadening my views about the non-profit sector, but also about politics, networking, and crisis management. I am thankful to see firsthand all the efforts Bienvenidos' leadership is putting into reflecting its mission.

XI. References

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