INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH – Interview Summaries conducted by Som Mathur

Article reviewed - "Broadening Participation in Community Problem Solving: A Multidisciplinary Model to Support Collaborative Practice and Research" by Roz D. Lasker Elisa S. Weiss

Interviews Summary

I conducted a total of 9 interviews of which consisted of members of the general public of varied age ranges including students, middle age people and the elderly. These included people of different backgrounds and ethnicity and proper consent was taken before conducting the interview. Interviews were mainly of people who had previous volunteer experience or people who were willing to start the process of volunteering. The interviews were conducted at venues chosen by interviewee to give them a sense of comfort and get the possible answers to the questions I had.

The problem at hand is to get more members of the general public further involved in volunteering with non profit to tackle social causes. After conducting interviews, I gathered several valuable insights.

To start off, each and every person had a very positive outset towards the notion of non profits functioning towards fighting for social change and the betterment of the community at large. However, while the outset might have been positive many felt that non profit organizations need to tie up with larger organizations like the sports teams or even the government to make an actual impact rather than the current state of a "fragmented effort" which is something I also mentioned in my literature review.

A common insight I gained from the volunteers/potential volunteers was that there seemed to be a communication gap between nonprofits and the general community. Many of the people I interviewed felt they only get to hear about non profits only by word of mouth or from university clubs in the case of students. When asked what more the non profits could do, an obvious answer was that technology is the best way to bridge that gap but it has to be used carefully. Some even felt when they search for organizations according to the cause they are interested in, and all they get back is list of "popular" clubs/organizations and think the search is biased towards "popularity" rather than focusing on the actual cause. A very interesting point brought up by one of the people interviewed expressed strong opinions on the fact that there needs to be separate platform only to show non profits according to the causes they want to contribute to.

When asked what some common solutions might be to actually tackle this communication gap, many felt that nonprofits need to be part of more community events to be better known to the general public. Some went on to suggest that even celebrity endorsement might go a long way.

Time management plays a crucial role in terms of how much time volunteers are willing to put in to tackle a social cause of their interest. A very trivial trend I noticed that as the age group increased there seemed to be more and more flexibility in schedule to take out time.

After going through all the interviews, it seemed people were only interested in volunteering for common social problems like homelessness and mainly educating the underprivileged. There was nothing in specific related to maybe something like rare diseases. In my view, something like this can be attributed to the fact that people may not be fully aware of the kind of social problems prevalent in our society.

Another common concern brought up in the interviews was regarding the legitimacy of non profit organizations. The concern was that sometimes people are not sure whether the non profit which claims to fight a particular social cause are actually fighting that particular cause or not. They felt some non profits might be recruiting volunteers for their own selfish motives and many people interviewed were also hesitant to make donations due this very concern of legitimacy.

In my opinion, legitimacy is a major concern and can hinder the entire process of recruiting volunteers. The overall sense I got from all the interviews was that the public need to be given assurance that their efforts won't go in vain. A very important point brought up was that if the non profits were to send more representatives to establish meetings in localities about various social problems, it would seem more personal and seem like that the nonprofits concerned may actually be working towards a certain goal of tackling these problems. However, the only con to this idea is that it may require an excess amount of manpower which most non profits might not have, given they depend on the availability of a few volunteers.

Adding on to the point of legitimacy from my literature review and also something I picked up from the interviews was that the people managing the non profit also matter as these are the people who influence how effective the non profit is going to be in long and short run. Almost everyone who I interviewed were of the

opinion that they would feel "more at ease" if there were experts from fields concerned with the social problem. A social problem, as rightly pointed out from my individual article review is interrelated with several fields.

To conclude, people are looking to contribute to the society in any way possible whether in the short term or long term. However, after conducting interviews it seems that this gap in communication between the non profits and the society at large needs to bridged and technology can play a major role if used in the right manner, for example, maybe creating a separate platform just for non profits which are sorted according to the user's interests and not just "popularity" or "trending" and adjusts according to a schedule established by the user. As far as the legitimacy is concerned, there will always be certain element of doubt when it comes to how much a non profit wants to do in terms of improving the society and there are methods of building a certain sense assurance but it all comes down to judgment of the particular volunteer.

Raw Data-

Interview 1:

1.   What is your opinion on volunteering and nonprofit organizations to tackle social causes?
I think that volunteer opportunities and non-profit organizations are wonderful incubators for social change. I really admire their abilities to involve individuals of all demographic groups (i.e.: young children, the elderly, individuals with special needs) in the journey to solve a social issue.

2.   As a member of the community, what are the challenges you face in terms of connecting/ looking up organizations that you want to contribute to?
I find that locating a volunteer opportunity that is directly related to my interests is a bit difficult. Often, when I search for a volunteer opportunity, the most popular results are displayed. This is an issue, because I am looking for opportunities that correspond with my personal interests. I am not simply looking to join the "most popular" or "most recently searched" initiative.

3.   What kind of volunteering/social causes are you interested in contributing to?
-Helping individuals with special needs

-Using arts (i.e. music, visual art, culinary arts, dramatic arts) to help individuals in marginalized communities
-Working alongside an expert in my field of preference (i.e.: volunteering alongside an expert painter)
-Urban community uplift/revitalization opportunities
-Helping individuals who are homeless.
-Helping elderly individuals (especially with issues such as Alzheimer's and Dementia)

4.	What are your concerns on the legitimacy of non profit organizations?
-	I worry that some non-profit organizations may not have a record of safe workspaces for volunteers.
-	I also worry that some "non-profit" organizations may not actually be operating as non-profit groups. Instead, they may recruit volunteers to carry out processes that do not work to benefit the community/cause of interest.
-	I also feel that sometimes the people managing these non profits might not want to as involved but only do it as a status symbol and build a name for themselves.

5.	What is your primary source of receiving advertisements/ communication from non profits?
Email

6.	What do you think nonprofits can do better connect with the public?
	They can
-	Participate in more community events to establish their legitimacy
-	Advertise their causes more broadly in a variety of places.
-	Immerse themselves in social media/electronic forms of communication
-	Send delegates/representatives to established meeting areas (safe meeting spaces) to recruit volunteers.

7.	In your opinion how do you feel about technology playing a role in bridging a gap between the public and non profits?
I think that technology has the ability to enable non-profits to reach a broader demographic. However, it may be more difficult for non-profit groups who use social media to really get their messages across to social media users, because there are many, many other non profit groups that are competing for the same demographics. In addition, I feel that the internet is quite biased in displaying results. Thus, it may be easier for some non profits to simply "fall through the cracks". For example, sites like Facebook have a lot of visual "noise" (i.e.:

distracting content) that could easily distract users from seeing certain advertisements. It would be nice to have some sort of platform that is devoted to only showing non-profit/volunteering opportunities.

8.   What are your long term or even short term plans to contribute to the society in any way?
Short term:
-         Help individuals who are homeless to acquire basic necessities of life.
-         Use music to raise money for various causes
-         Use visual art to raise money for various causes
-         Make the lives of others happier via intangible gifts
Long term:
-         Help to stop the cycles that lead individuals to be homeless
-         Advocate for better homeless interventions
-         Advocate for youth participation in volunteerism
-         Start campaigns to activate self-esteem

Interview 2-

1.   What is your opinion on volunteering and nonprofit organizations to tackle social causes?
         I think it's really effective. Someone has to take the initiative. And Non-Profit organizations, often have the support of other for-profit organizations and the government to help achieve their objectives.

2.   As a member of the community, what are the challenges you face in terms of connecting/ looking up organizations that you want to contribute to?

         Obviously, time is a major challenge. I'm also, aware that more underprivileged regions of the GTA are farther away from Downtown. And often we're not fully aware of the difference in work culture and circumstances, until we start volunteering. So accessibility is a serious issue.

3.   What kind of volunteering/social causes are you interested in contributing to?
         I'm currently very interested in youth initiatives. Simply because, there are so many kids out there who have the potential to fulfil their ambitions, but don't have the resources. It's important to help them understand the

importance of education or even self-education in enabling them to realize their goals.

4.   What are your concerns on the legitimacy of non profit organizations?

This is why simply donating is not sufficient for community service. Volunteering and actively participating within the organization helps justify its legitimacy. There need to be certain people in management who need to be well versed with the problem at hand to give some sort of assurance to the people willing to volunteer.

5.   What is your primary source of receiving advertisements/ communication from non profits?

Through the center for community partnerships at U of T. And my mom is heavily involved in social work, so I help her out too, whenever I go back home.

6.   What do you think nonprofits can do better connect with the public?
Perhaps reach out to the public through more mainstream events that'll also help raise funds. I know this one organization is doing an event with the Toronto Raptors, to create awareness about their goals and initiatives.

7.   In your opinion how do you feel about technology playing a role in bridging a gap between the public and non profits?
It plays a huge role. Appropriate Facebook targeting and a smooth website can work wonders for fundraising or donations.

8.   What are your long term or even short term plans to contribute to the society in any way?
Currently leading a Scholarship Campaign for a youth organization. I'll be working on it over Reading Week this semester.

Interview 3-

1.   What is your opinion on volunteering and nonprofit organizations to tackle social causes?

They are ineffective in my opinion – such issues need to be tackled on a wider scale by government.

2.   As a member of the community, what are the challenges you face in terms of connecting/ looking up organizations that you want to contribute to?

Awareness levels regarding these organizations is very limited. If time permitted, I would not mind spending a couple of hours per week for a good cause!

3.   What kind of volunteering/social causes are you interested in contributing to?
Feeding the needy.

4.   What are your concerns on the legitimacy of non profit organizations?

I'm always concerned that such organizations may not be legitimate or may not make an impact because they are dependent on the availability of a few.

5.   What is your primary source of receiving advertisements/ communication from non profits?
I go by word of mouth – especially from friends.

6.   What do you think nonprofits can do better connect with the public?
Partner with government and promote the cause/organization more widely through social media and press ads. Celebrity endorsement would also help! Large corporations need to partner with more non-profits and encourage their employees to participate/contribute regularly.

7.   In your opinion how do you feel about technology playing a role in bridging a gap between the public and non profits?
Social and digital media can definitely help bridge the gap but need to be leveraged more effectively!

8.   What are your long term or even short term plans to contribute to the society in any way?
I currently spend 2 days a year serving food at an old-age home. Would like to do that more often!! In the long term – I would like to teach unprivileged kids in India/SouthEast Asia.

Interview 4-

1.   What is your opinion on volunteering and nonprofit organizations to tackle social causes?
       I believe non profit organizations tackling social causes (that many of us deem unimportant or say don't have time deal with) is a great cause and they need to be applauded for their efforts. Campaigns that raise awareness for several issues and help collect donations are one of the things that work right and should continue to be supported.

2.   As a member of the community, what are the challenges you face in terms of connecting/ looking up organizations that you want to contribute to?
        Many times it is 'time' that is used as an excuse to not contribute to social causes. However, there are ways that many organizations have used that make it simpler to contribute to social causes. There are United Way campaigns within the office that allow people to contribute by a simple click of a button.

3.   What kind of volunteering/social causes are you interested in contributing to?
        First and foremost, anything related to children – whether it is SickKids or any other organization related to children leading better lives.
4.   What are your concerns on the legitimacy of non profit organizations?

        There is always a concern for legitimacy of an organization – so, I would do my research before contributing to any organization.

5.   What is your primary source of receiving advertisements/ communication from non profits?
       Flyers, email

6.   What do you think non profits can do better connect with the public?
      Raise more awareness via campaigns. Continue to send out information in terms of flyers, email; and also use technology. Facebook and Twitter are such massive social media platforms that one story can reach thousands of people within a few minutes. People have to beware of false stories in this case, which is always a challenge. It is best to speak with someone within the organization before contributing/donating as you don't want the funds to reach the wrong hands.

7.   In your opinion how do you feel about technology playing a role in bridging a gap between the public and non profits?
    Similar answer to question above

8.   What are your long term or even short term plans to contribute to the society in any way?
    We have our annual budget of contributing to society via donations, food drives and clothing donations.

Interview 5-

    1.What is your opinion on volunteering and non profit organizations to tackle social causes?

I think it's a great initiative and it's a great way to make the world a better place by tackling social issues.

2.   As a member of the community, what are the challenges you face in terms of connecting/ looking up organizations that you want to contribute to?

    i.   Limited time on hand
    ii.   Limited transparency from organizations about their goals, initiatives
    iii.   Lack of digital footprint for ease of access

3.   What kind of volunteering/social causes are you interested in contributing to?

    i.   Uplifting the society by raising employment levels and standard of living
    ii.   Uplifting the girl child
    iii.   Eradicating poverty and hunger
    iv.   Shelter homes for the homeless
4.   What are your concerns on the legitimacy of non profit organizations?

    We don't know whether the money that is donated to non-profit organizations is actually used for the society or whether its pocketed by the owners. In addition, the longevity of the non-profit organizations and making sure that they aren't fraud.

Effective management can probably improve on longevity problem and also attract more volunteers.

5.   What is your primary source of receiving advertisements/ communication from non profits?

Email/ Connections

6.   What do you think nonprofits can do better connect with the public?

Go out to more public events. Show where all and how they are actually working to make a change and be transparent in showing achievements.

7.   In your opinion how do you feel about technology playing a role in bridging a gap between the public and non profits?

In this digital age, I think its integral to use technology to bridge this gap. Nonprofits should try to have a digital footprint by establishing themselves on social media platforms to gain maximum attractions.

8.   What are your long term or even short term plans to contribute to the society in any way?

I would really like to donate part of my income to social causes and help those in need whenever it is in my capacity to do so.

Interview 6-

1.   What is your opinion on volunteering and nonprofit organizations to tackle social causes?
These organizations are essential to tackle social issues as the Govt cannot be expected to efficiently take care of them. They are best served at the grassroot level of society. It also gives citizens a chance to contribute their skills and time to serve others without an expectation of monetary return.

2.   As a member of the community, what are the challenges you face in terms of connecting/ looking up organizations that you want to contribute to?

Too much or too little information is available. Sometimes one is not sure of its validity.

3.   What kind of volunteering/social causes are you interested in contributing to?
Serving the homeless in my community; education of underprivileged children in third world countries; improving living and health conditions of families in underdeveloped nations.

4.   What are your concerns on the legitimacy of non profit organizations?
If these organizations are doing what they claim to be doing, whether the funds are directed to those in need or are they lost in administrative expenses.

5.   What is your primary source of receiving advertisements/ communication from non profits?
Internet, TV, Direct mail

6.   What do you think nonprofits can do better connect with the public?
Advertise on TV if funds permit, create an awareness for their cause in high schools and colleges, participate in public events

7.   In your opinion how do you feel about technology playing a role in bridging a gap between the public and non profits?
Technology is important to create and establish awareness since it allows people and nonprofits to connect through social media, apps

8.   What are your long term or even short term plans to contribute to the society in any way?
Serve the homeless in my community by providing food and other essentials, provide funds to organization in India to educate children in remote rural areas, support hospitals that provide free treatment for children with cancer.

Interview 7-

1.   What is your opinion on volunteering and nonprofit organizations to tackle social causes?

Volunteering and Non-profit organizations are essential in tackling social causes if run efficiently and without corruption. Nonprofits primary

objective is to improve social being, however this is extremely difficult with the lack of funds available and therefore their overall impact in tacking causes is not that effective. Volunteering by individuals is extremely useful as they are giving up time in order to improve certain aspects of society. Although, it is important to note why the volunteering is being conducted, some volunteers such as business are only interested in personal gain such as working on a one off basis to improve their own public image. Certain volunteer activities have shown to do more harm than gain in improving the social cause for e.g. a group of volunteers were tasked to build a house for certain individuals, however the group was only available for a week and after the week finished they left the house half-way through construction which is not only a waste of resources but also creates new problems. Therefore, although volunteering and non profits are essential, they have to be run efficiently to have an impact on society.

2.   As a member of the community, what are the challenges you face in terms of connecting/ looking up organizations that you want to contribute to?

The challenges include being able to connect with worthwhile organizations as most organizations do not have easy forms of communication channels. Time management is essential in being able to volunteer, as a student with a busy schedule it is not simple to volunteer without being able to plan properly how many hours of productive work will actually be contributed by volunteering rather than menial part time work.

3.   What kind of volunteering/social causes are you interested in contributing to? Personally I am interested in teaching young children and/or adults life skills or certain attributes that can help them in the future

4.   What are your concerns on the legitimacy of non profit organizations?

Concerns include where certain donations go and whether they have been accounted for.

5.   What is your primary source of receiving advertisements/ communication from non profits?

Emails

6.   What do you think nonprofits can do better connect with the public?
        Better online presence

7.   In your opinion how do you feel about technology playing a role in bridging a gap between the public and non profits?

        Technology will play a crucial role in bridging the gap, but it has its pros and cons. Although technology will help the public donate and be more aware, again the issue of the accounting of the donations is essential. Also individuals instead of spending their time which is way more valuable than any monetary benefit may choose the easy way out and donate through online payment portals.

8.   What are your long term or even short term plans to contribute to the society in any way?

        My short terms goals are to volunteer at local events and try to physically improve physical and human capital for the lower strata of society. For the long term, I would to like to create awareness and possible solutions to the issue of lack of education and link to poverty and debt trap.

Interview 8-

1.   What is your opinion on volunteering and nonprofit organizations to tackle social causes?
        They are very effective in bringing up issues but need more government support to solve issues at many levels.

2.   As a member of the community, what are the challenges you face in terms of connecting/ looking up organizations that you want to contribute to?

        Poor visibility of organizations hence awareness levels are low.

3.   What kind of volunteering/social causes are you interested in contributing to?
        I would like to contribute time to women's organizations , cancer patients and feeding the poor.
4.   What are your concerns on the legitimacy of non profit organizations?

Am definitely concerned about legitimacy of organizations as many have turned out to be invalid or run by corrupt management. Management play a crucial role. Background checks are critical!

5.   What is your primary source of receiving advertisements/ communication from non profits?
I get information through friends on social media and word of mouth

6.   What do you think nonprofits can do better connect with the public?
They should leverage public figures to endorse them and get more government backing. Large business houses need to contribute more and help with publicity.

7.   In your opinion how do you feel about technology playing a role in bridging a gap between the public and non profits?
Technology and digital media is already playing a big role but needs to be leveraged more to reach a larger number of people.

8.   What are your long term or even short term plans to contribute to the society in any way?
Have helped teach poor kids in the past but would like to be more involved with old age homes and cancer patients going forward.

Interview 9-

1.   What is your opinion on volunteering and nonprofit organizations to tackle social causes?
In my opinion they tackle social issues very well with compassion for all classes of people, not only affluent.

2.   As a member of the community, what are the challenges you face in terms of connecting/ looking up organizations that you want to contribute to?
I never faced any challenges as I was one of the founder members of a non-profit school for underprivileged kids

3.   What kind of volunteering/social causes are you interested in contributing to?
   Teaching underprivileged children as I have done in the past.
4.   What are your concerns on the legitimacy of non profit organizations?

I'm always concerned about the legitimacy of the organization and background checks need to be done.

5.   What is your primary source of receiving advertisements/ communication from non profits? Word of mouth and Press

6.   What do you think nonprofits can do better connect with the public?
Involve the government and advertising on social media e.g. Twitter etc..

7.   In your opinion how do you feel about technology playing a role in bridging a gap between the public and non profits?
Technology definitely helps

8.   What are your long term or even short term plans to contribute to the society in any way?
I would still like to continue teaching underprivileged children.