

# **Nonprofit Reporting in Action:** Practitioners and Researchers Assess the Challenges of Linking Accountability to Organizational Learning

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*Principal Investigator:*  
Alnoor Ebrahim, Associate Professor, Virginia Tech<sup>1</sup>

*Practitioner-Graduate Researcher Teams:*  
Calvary Women's Services: Kris Thompson (Exec. Director), Patrick Halpern (Virginia Tech)  
Georgetown Ministry Center : Gunther Stern (Exec. Director), Jennie Geisner (Virginia Tech)  
Miriam's Kitchen: Scott Schenkelberg (Exec. Director), Catherine Crum (Social Services  
Director), Kathryn Webb Farley (Virginia Tech)

Please direct enquiries to:  
Alnoor Ebrahim, Associate Professor  
Visiting Faculty Fellow, Center for Democracy and the Third Sector  
Georgetown University  
3240 Prospect Street, NW, Lower Level  
Washington, DC 20007  
Tel: (202)687-0512 or (703) 549-1431 Fax: (202) 687-0597  
E-mail: [ase23@georgetown.edu](mailto:ase23@georgetown.edu) or [aebrahim@vt.edu](mailto:aebrahim@vt.edu)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing concern in the nonprofit sector that pressures for accountability are at odds with efforts to improve mission achievement and long-term social outcomes. Much of the public debate concerning nonprofit accountability has centered primarily on three sets of issues: financial “transparency,” the legal responsibilities of boards, and the demonstration of “results” that impact communities. For example, much media coverage of the United Way of Greater Washington in 2002 focused on questions of transparency surrounding expenditures by former executives of the organization as well as on the more general practice of withholding contributions to service “overhead” or administration costs (Salmon & Whoriskey, 2002; Whoriskey & Salmon, 2002). Similarly, the Washington Post’s front-page stories on The Nature Conservancy’s land deals with trustees and other insiders, as well as loans to its own officials, raised questions both about transparency and results, particularly on the board (Stephens & Ottaway, 2003). These are all central issues examined by the Independent Sector Panel on the Nonprofit Sector.<sup>2</sup>

As necessary as greater transparency and results may be, however, the current accountability climate arguably also has a dark side: that too great an emphasis on oversight and measurement can lead to a chilling of innovation and creativity in the sector, a hesitation to examine failures even when they might lead to better outcomes, and a focus on short-term measurable results at the expense of longer-term social change (Cnaan, 1996; Ebrahim, 2005; Edwards, 2002; Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001: 214; Riddell, 1999: 225-6).

How do nonprofit organizations deal with these tensions between transparency, results, and external reporting on the one side, and innovation, critical reflection, and internal learning on the other? A primary research objective of this project is to identify key barriers facing nonprofits in linking external accountability to internal organizational learning. We focus specifically on the use of reporting and evaluation. In cases where evaluations and reports are used to provide information to donors about the use of funds and progress-to-date, they may be seen as mechanisms of “upward” accountability. In instances where evaluation results and other forms of reporting are designed systematically to feed back into organizational decision making, they may be seen as mechanisms of organizational learning. The two uses are not mutually exclusive, but they encapsulate the central challenge of managing multiple and competing accountability demands — balancing upward reporting to funders, downward responsiveness to clients and beneficiaries, and internal responsibility to organizational mission and values.

Previous research has found that evaluation and reporting are sometimes conducted for “symbolic” purposes in order to satisfy the demands of funders, and do not actually feedback into organizational decision making. For example, Behn (2001: 10, 202), has suggested that a dominant emphasis on accountability rules and performance auditing can hinder or even thwart organizational performance and reflection. Research on 36 nonprofits conducted by the Independent Sector and the Urban Institute found that only about half of these organizations actually use the data they collect for learning to improve programs (Morley, Vinson, & Hatry, 2001). Similarly, The James Irvine Foundation’s efforts to assist nonprofit agencies in California

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the panel and its report, visit <http://independentsector.org/panel/main.htm>

to improve data systems concluded that “establishing these systems alone was not good enough. In the end, the project’s success had less to do with whether measurement systems were developed and more to do with . . . [creating] a culture that valued the process of self-evaluation” (Hernández & Visser, 2001: 2).

This paper presents the initial findings of a project that looks at how social service nonprofits use evaluations and reporting for purposes of internal learning as well as for external accountability. Our broad goal is to identify features of evaluation and reporting that are useful for internal learning and reflection, but without being unduly onerous to nonprofit staff. The empirical content of the article features the work of three well-regarded organizations in Washington, DC that work with homeless populations: Calvary Women’s Services, Georgetown Ministry Center, and Miriam’s Kitchen.

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND PROPOSITIONS

The primary research objective of this project is *to identify key barriers facing nonprofits in linking accountability to organizational learning*. The link between accountability and organizational learning is implicit: organizations that improve performance by learning from experience and mistakes also demonstrate accountability to their missions as well as to their clients and patrons. Organizations can be seen as learning “by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior” (Levitt & March, 1988: 320) or, in broader terms, by “improving actions through better knowledge and understanding” (Fiol & Lyles, 1985: 803). Accountability mechanisms, such as evaluations, can thus be said to contribute to learning only when they lead to behavioral change. Simply identifying shortfalls in performance is insufficient for ensuring actual change.

The research focuses more specifically on the use of evaluation and reporting for learning and accountability purposes. What challenges do organizations face in linking evaluation and reporting to processes of organizational learning? How can evaluation, reporting, and learning be integrated more effectively with accountability?

Based on previous work by the PI, we began with a list of seven propositions that suggest how an integration between accountability and learning might occur.<sup>3</sup> Under conditions of high upward accountability, organizational learning is more likely if:

1. staff perceive evaluation as central to their own work, rather than as a task only for managers and outside experts. (Denton, 1998; Edwards, 2002, pp. 334, 339; Riddell, 1999)
2. error is embraced as opportunity and the threat of sanction is minimized. (Chambers, 1994; Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001: 214; Smillie & Hailey, 2001: 76)

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<sup>3</sup> These propositions refer to conditions of “high upward accountability,” i.e., conditions where the demands of external funders are strong, and where reporting to funders is a central component of organizational reporting more generally. These propositions may be quite different for organizations that are membership based and which, as a result, are less dependent on external resources. For a more detailed look at these propositions and their supporting literature, see Ebrahim (2005).

3. organizational capacities are built to anticipate and respond to environmental instability. (Levinthal & March, 1993; March, 1991; March & Olsen, 1988)
4. internal reporting structures maintain strong feedback loops between field staff, managers, and directors. (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Denton, 1998: 92, 196)
5. job descriptions and performance appraisals reward staff for analysis and innovation, supported by resources of time and training. (Garvin, 1993; Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001)
6. information systems are simple and flexible, rather than elaborate or rigorous, and where the distance between information originators and users is minimized. (Ebrahim, 2002; Edwards, 2002: 343)
7. internal accountability to mission, rather than upward accountability to donors, guides information and reporting systems. (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999)

We did not explicitly discuss these propositions during meetings with nonprofit managers and executive directors during this research, due to a concern that the propositions would structure the discussion too heavily and could lead us to overlook other central insights. This indirect probing yielded specific insights on propositions 1, 2, and 4, while also lending support to propositions 6 and 7. The discussions also highlighted a series of unanticipated but highly relevant issues: tensions between output and outcome measurement, sectoral fragmentation, and a need for ecosystem learning. We explore these key issues further in this paper and in the conclusion.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The case materials presented here are part of a larger project that is organized into three phases:

- 1) an initial phase of 3 in-depth exploratory case studies for developing hypotheses on the links between accountability and organizational learning;
- 2) a survey phase involving the administration of questionnaires to the principals of approximately 195 nonprofit organizations engaged in activities with homeless populations in the greater Washington DC area; and,
- 3) a third phase of more detailed follow-up cases with approximately 20 of these organizations.

This paper presents the findings of phase I. The survey in phase II is presently under development, and will be administered in early 2006. The final phase of follow-up case studies is anticipated to occur in spring and fall of 2006.

The cases in phase I were self-selected on the basis of “readiness” rather than through random selection. It was crucial at this exploratory stage that participating organizations be keenly interested in questions of evaluation, reporting, and organizational learning, and that they be willing to openly and frankly share their experiences and insights within the group. It was also necessary that the executive directors be willing and able to devote time to meet with graduate students and to attend two workshops during the course of the semester.

An email invitation concerning the project was sent out through the courtesy of two umbrella organizations in the Washington DC area: The Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington, and the Center For Nonprofit Advancement (formerly the Washington Council of Agencies), and was followed by an introductory meeting convened by the Nonprofit Roundtable. Case

identification proceeded slowly, but eventually yielded three participating organizations, and an additional thirteen potentially interested organizations. We began work with the three initial cases, with the prospect of adding cases if resources of time and funding permitted.

Three graduate researchers were teamed up with the executive directors of the three participating nonprofits, under the supervision of the principal investigator. Between December 2004 and May 2005, each graduate student was responsible for completing the following tasks with her/his organization:

- a) preparing a “mapping” or inventory of current reporting and evaluation practices (i.e., what data are collected, for whom, and how they are reported);
- b) examining efficiencies in data collection and reporting (i.e., identifying redundancies or overlaps in data collection and report generation within the organization);
- c) conducting interviews with key program staff in order to better understand: i) what information is the most useful to the organization and why (i.e., identifying and prioritizing meaningful indicators); and, ii) the organization’s main concerns, challenges, and future vision with respect to its reporting and evaluation (i.e., its hopes for an integrated learning and accountability system).

The case study research employed a collaborative process — involving the PI, nonprofit managers, and students — to ensure its usefulness. This approach is deeply influenced by concepts from “action research,” in which research is viewed as being closely integrated with learning and social change. Action research is driven by the question “How do I improve my practice?” (Whitehead, 1989) and uses participatory methodologies (Roakes & Norris-Tirrell, 2000: 101). Research plays a particularly important role in providing “a disciplined framework for helping people makes sense of their own learning” (McNiff, 2000: 227) and brings together traditional positivist approaches to management with more experiential and constructivist perspectives. This approach is also captured in the work of Donald Schön (1983; 1987) on the “reflective practitioner” in which he explores how practitioners such as architects and planners rely on sophisticated forms of “reflection-in-action” in order to improvise and improve upon their work. In Schön’s work with Argyris (1978; 1996), action research was seen as a way of generating practical theory. In this sense, action research is closely related to ideas of the “learning organization” developed by Senge (1990), and by the writings of Paulo Freire (1970; 1973) and others on “participatory action research” (e.g., Fals-Borda, 1988; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Rahnema, 1997) that have influenced the practice of many nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations throughout the developing world.

The process required a fair investment of time on the part of the graduate researchers (approximately 10 hours per week each) over the course of five months. It was thus decided to limit phase I to the three in-depth cases, rather than to burden the researchers with additional but less detailed cases. The process was further supported by two half-day workshops during the data collection period that brought together all participants in order to discuss preliminary findings and to enable peer-to-peer discussions. Both workshops were held at the Aspen Institute’s premises in Washington, DC. The remainder of this paper focuses on the findings of phase I.

#### **IV. THE CASES: NONPROFITS WORKING WITH HOMELESS POPULATIONS**

This research centers on organizations working with homeless populations in the greater Washington, DC area (including Northern Virginia and Maryland). The three organizations that participated in phase I of this project are all located in the District of Columbia. According to the 2001 census, approximately one-fifth of the population of the District was estimated to be living in poverty, and about 18,500 people experienced homelessness at some point during the year 2004.<sup>4</sup>

Indicators and outcomes associated with efforts to address homelessness vary considerably. The activity most popularly associated with reducing homelessness is housing, which itself ranges from emergency overnight shelter, to transitional housing in which residents receive other supportive services, and finally to permanent housing. But housing measures provide, at best, a very partial view of the landscape of the needs of homeless populations, given that there are many homeless subgroups which are not ready or sufficiently functional for the commitments and requirements associated with housing. Moreover, there has been limited empirical comparison of how traditional transitional housing programs compare to non-transitional alternatives in helping people exit from homelessness (Barrow & Zimmer, 1998: 14).

A wide range of performance and outcome measures for housing and non-housing services have been noted in the literature. For example, a summary of core performance indicators developed for the Department of Health and Human Services distinguished among five general categories of measures: process (numbers of individuals enrolled in or receiving services), housing status (numbers of individuals temporarily or permanently housed, or whose housing condition has improved), earning/employment status (numbers of individuals with earnings, jobs, or improved earnings), health status (numbers of individuals with improvements in physical health, mental health, and reduction in substance abuse), and youth-only measures (numbers of runaway youth reunited with families, attending schools, completing high school) (DHHS ??).

But reporting systems and outcome measures are not simply managerial or technical tools. Arguably, they “represent the desired ends of powerful groups who seek to define. . . what they believe to be right within a particular field of human services” (Moxley & Manela, 2001: 576-7). To the extent that organizational reporting and measurement reflects expectations of funders or other external actors, they may be seen as mechanisms of external accountability. But to examine how they might better enable organizational learning, one must look at the specific contexts and needs of nonprofit service providers. Thus, even the broader measures noted above may be insufficiently flexible for nonprofits to adapt them to their specific contexts — in terms of the kinds of clients they serve, the preferences of those clients, and their own internal organizational decision cultures.

The three organizations that participated in phase I of the research have each struggled with the challenges of designing meaningful reporting and evaluation procedures. Collectively, they demonstrate not only dilemmas, but context-specific approaches to better evaluation, learning,

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<sup>4</sup> The District’s 2001 population was 571,822, with 115,508 people living in poverty (TCP 2005)

and accountability. We begin with an overview of their activities, and then follow with a discussion of their reporting practices.

### Calvary Women's Services, Inc.

Calvary Women's Services, Inc (Calvary) has been providing shelter and supportive services to homeless women within the District of Columbia since 1983. It first began operations out of a church basement, and has been at its current offices, in a transitional neighborhood undergoing severe gentrification, for the past 11 years. The organization's mission is to provide "a safe, caring place for tonight; support, hope and change for tomorrow" (Calvary Women's Services, 2005b). Operating on an annual budget of approximately \$850,000 and 18 staff (Calvary Women's Services, 2005a: 6), the organization offers three housing programs:

- Temporary 25-bed housing program (Calvary Women's Shelter)
- Transitional 10-bed housing program for chronically homeless women (Pathways)
- Permanent housing program for 8 women who are in recovery from substance abuse and may also experience chronic health issues including HIV/AIDS (Sister Circle)

The organization also provides a variety of in-house services, such as life skills classes, case management, psychiatric and substance abuse treatment services, and job preparedness services. Off-site services include mental health, substance abuse and medical care services, legal services, job training, GED classes, and various life skill development classes.

Calvary's executive director identified a number of key areas that it hoped to improve with respect to reporting and learning systems through this research project: a) streamlining of Calvary's reporting processes through better database integration<sup>5</sup> and through identifying redundancies in the overall reporting process; and, b) developing outcome indicators, beyond those already in use, in an attempt to measure long-term programmatic success and to manage the expectations of donors.<sup>6</sup>

### Georgetown Ministry Center

Georgetown Ministry Center (GMC) provides services to the homeless in two of Washington, D.C.'s most affluent neighborhoods: Georgetown and Foggy Bottom. Beginning as a modest clergy-university partnership in 1987, GMC's mission is to help each homeless person in the area get off the street and into a safe, sustainable living situation. GMC is a small organization, with an annual budget of approximately \$300,000 and 7 to 14 staff depending on the season (two full-time and two part-time staff, supplemented with three AmeriCorp Vista workers, periodic assistance from a development support person and a consulting psychiatrist, plus seven

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<sup>5</sup> Calvary and the other organizations each expressed an interest in better database management software that could handle all of their reporting and evaluation needs. As this is not an area where the research team has experience, it was not explored. However, integration across computerized reporting systems remains a major challenge.

<sup>6</sup> Each participating organization also requested assistance with highly specific tasks. In the case of Calvary, there was interest in developing a more formalized data collection process to evaluate its employment program. Where possible, Virginia Tech provided such support. However, since the aim of this paper is to highlight broader insights related to learning and accountability, we do not detail these more case-specific interventions here.

additional workers during the busy winter months). GMC offers the following services (Georgetown Ministry Center, 2005):

- Drop-in center and day outreach. This is GMC's primary activity, and includes a range of services such as counseling, information and referral services, psychiatry services, distribution of supplies, and laundry and shower facilities.
- 10-bed congregation-based winter shelter. Operating from November to March, this shelter rotates among a group of churches, and offers residents dinner and breakfast.
- Night outreach program that involves four to five people going out into the neighborhood every night during the hypothermia season for approximately three hours to check on homeless people, and to distribute emergency foil blankets and other donated supplies.

In an initial self-assessment, staff identified two key areas in which they hoped to improve GMC's reporting and learning systems. First, the nature of GMC's client base hinders the organization from tracking progress and ultimately documenting successes. While GMC sees 600 people annually, the majority of clients come in looking to fulfill short-term needs and never return. As a result, the organization only works long-term with approximately eight to ten percent of people who come in (and staff have no way of knowing at the onset who those ten percent will be). Therefore, GMC has been unable to do reasonable "before and after" assessments of its services to clients. In other words, they know why people come in, but they do not know how the organization's programs affect them.

Second, GMC is interested in getting its board of directors more involved in its day-to-day operations. GMC reports quarterly to its board; traditionally, the reports have consisted of financial data and program statistics. In response to board member requests, the organization has begun incorporating anecdotal recounts into the reports. GMC is hoping the stories will encourage board members, and member congregations, to become more vested in the organization and its mission.

### Miriam's Kitchen

The mission of Miriam's Kitchen is "To provide individualized services that address the causes and consequences of homelessness in an atmosphere of dignity and respect both directly and through facilitating connections in the Washington, DC community" (Miriam's Kitchen, 2005).<sup>7</sup> Established in 1983, Miriam's Kitchen offers a variety of services with minimal barriers to entry (e.g., no commitment and little personal information, if any, are required to participate), which results in many clients being served who do not receive services elsewhere in the city, including a high number of mentally ill clients. With a budget of approximately \$609,000 per year and 12 staff, and with extensive support from about 1,500 volunteers annually, Miriam's main activities include:

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<sup>7</sup> The mission statement quoted here is expanded somewhat from that provided on the organization's website, as based on personal communication with the executive director, November 7, 2005.

- Breakfast Program every weekday morning, including holidays. In 2004, an average of 178 meals were served per day. Volunteers, many of whom were repeat volunteers, provided more than 12,000 hours of time in 2004.
- After-Breakfast Program, which includes therapeutic groups involving painting, poetry, creative writing, literary discussion groups, psychiatric support groups, and yoga.
- Case Management Program that provides a myriad of services including: helping guests to obtain identification, providing transportation tokens to legal and medical appointments, obtaining public benefits, and helping secure permanent or transitional housing, mailing address, and voice mailbox. This program which grew by 22.5 percent in 2004 to serve 1,046 unique clients.
- Arnold's Place Transitional Housing Program provides four men with a stable living environment for up to 24 months while they work with case managers to find permanent housing and employment.

Miriam's primary interests in this research project were twofold. First, managers were concerned that their existing client needs assessment efforts were overly complex and relied too heavily on the responses of clients. While it is clearly important to gauge client perceptions of any program or service, this is complicated in programs serving the homeless because many clients are mentally ill and not fully functional. Thus, widely espoused forms of client-based evaluation (and "customer satisfaction" surveys) are poorly suited to this context, and provide limited useful information for improving programs.

Second, and more strategically, Miriam's Kitchen was keen to engage in a critical dialogue on the adequacy of its current evaluation efforts and, particularly, its reporting to funders and to its board. In particular, staff wanted to know whether there might be better ways of tracking program outcomes rather than simply outputs, and in a manner that would be operationally feasible.

## **V. FINDINGS: REPORTING PRACTICES**

The findings cover three themes: a) an inventory of key reporting practices and tools used by the participating organizations, including a discussion on redundancies in data collection and common challenges; b) a discussion on indicators used for reporting purposes; and c) a look at tensions between output and outcome measures within the cases. The first of these themes is addressed in this section, with the remaining two discussed subsequently.

All three of the case organizations distinguished between internal and external reporting. Internal reporting, refers to data collection and report generation for staff, management, or boards, but also generally serves as a basis for external reporting to funders or regulators. We provide below a listing of general reporting practices, followed by a summary of key issues and concerns about these reporting practices.

### Internal Reporting

The general kinds of internal reporting tools used include:<sup>8</sup>

- *Spreadsheets and Databases.* As a means of organizing and displaying summary data, spreadsheets tend to serve as a central data collection and reporting tool in all three organizations. For example, in Calvary, the spreadsheet contains most of the relevant information on individual clients and includes: basic demographic information such as where they came from and income; basic historical and psychosocial information; dates of entry into and exit from a program; services and benefits received and/or receiving; current employment status; and any relevant special circumstances. At GMC, where the process is significantly less formalized, a Filemaker database program is nonetheless used to manage client files. The organization's executive director and program coordinator each visit the winter shelter twice per week for casual "chitchats" with residents in order to build rapport and to encourage them to come into the office for more services. Depending on the extent of the encounter, information gathered is logged into the resident's Filemaker record. Similarly, data collected on a street outreach log are entered twice weekly into Filemaker by a volunteer.
- *Dashboards.* The use of tools to measure an organization's goals against its targets (as set out in a strategic plan, for example) is subject to varying degrees of formalization. Miriam's Kitchen generates a dashboard spreadsheet for each of its four programs on a monthly basis for review by its board. It also supplements the spreadsheets with a "dashboard document" that includes qualitative, narrative, and anecdotal information. Calvary's program staff and board use a "strategic plan dashboard" to summarize information related to each organizational goal and objective, including who is responsible for the fulfillment of an objective or goal; the status or movement toward a specific goal; and the deadline for attainment.
- *Intake and Exit Forms.* Such forms vary considerably, but are used most consistently by case managers who collect data on new clients on intake forms, and on clients leaving a program on exit forms. In some cases, intake and exit data are collected or aggregated by program staff and directors (e.g., in Calvary), and in other cases by the executive director who interviews shelter applicants (e.g., in GMC). The content of such forms differs significantly, but all seek to capture basic client information such as name, services desired, and reasons for leaving. It is noteworthy that intake and exit forms are ill-suited to capturing data on clients who are neither resident in a shelter nor formally assigned to a case manager (e.g., individuals that come in for a meal or shower, and thus interact briefly with staff, but do not seek longer-term services).

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<sup>8</sup> No single organization engages in all of the kinds of reporting listed here, and many engage in less formalized processes not listed here. Our purpose is only to provide a general sense of the types of data generated and reporting tools used.

Miriam's is thus beginning to record any "substantive actions" it has with such clients, which includes client's name, date of action, and time spent assisting or speaking with the client. Such data are typically logged into a database. Nonetheless, in both Miriam's and GMC, most information on such clients is informally acquired and held through informal conversation.

- *Case management reports.* Case managers in each of the organizations prepare periodic summaries, both to enable them to keep track of client progress, and to generate an overall picture of activity for review by managers. For example, each case manager in Calvary is responsible for the generation of *monthly client summary notes* and a *monthly caseload report*. The summary notes are narrative in nature, and make use of case file notes, general observations, and a monthly meeting with the client in order to summarize progress. At Calvary's Shelter, a *monthly caseload report* is generated by each case manager. This reports short-term outcome information on each case manager's caseload, such as the number of clients who moved into transitional or permanent housing, the number of clients who accessed a variety of services, and the total number of clients served.
- *Monthly program reports.* These reports aggregate the experiences of specific programs, over the course of a month, and are typically prepared by program directors who draw on staff reports (such as the caseload reports written by case management staff). The purpose is to provide program directors, the executive director, and sometimes the board with a monthly picture of each program. Such reports also serve as the foundation for feeding into aggregate spreadsheets and for external reporting.
- *Annual program statistics and reports.* Monthly program data serve as a basis for generating annual statistics and reports which include, for example, data on the number of clients served; their living situation at entry and exit; basic demographic information; employment status; general needs; and, programmatic outcomes. These then serve to inform a variety of external reporting needs and also help the organization to look at changes in programmatic outputs and outcomes from year-to-year.
- *Surveys and Needs Assessments.* Boards, management, and funders periodically seek information on a specific program or client base. In 2003, Miriam's conducted two such surveys: a "milk survey" for a corporate supporter, which gathered client perspectives on food quality, reasons for accessing services, and preferences regarding fresh and powdered milk. While the survey was completed only once, it generated information on client perceptions that has been useful in communication with funders and other supporters. In 2003, the organization also completed a needs assessment survey of clients, which contained approximately 90-100 questions and was administered by case management staff. The data have been used to identify how the organization can serve clients better, to market Miriam's work to funders, and to feed into strategic decision making at the board level.

## External Reporting

External reporting to funders tends to draw on the above internal reports, and most commonly includes:

- *Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) or ServicePoint.* HMIS is a national client information and reporting system mandated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for all federally funded public and nonprofit organizations working with homeless populations. It aims to serve as both a homeless persons tracking system and an online reporting system. A quasi-governmental organization known as The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP) is responsible for administering District of Columbia and federal HUD grant contracts in Washington, DC, and uses a management information system called ServicePoint.<sup>9</sup> An online interface allows nonprofits to submit a range of data on clients, which is then passed on to TCP and eventually to HUD. The data include, for example: persons served and the reason for departure; basic demographic information; services accessed; length of stay; and outcomes related to income and employment. For organizations providing shelter, ServicePoint requires the submission of weekly bed lists (although this was not required at the time of research, due to system changes in ServicePoint). ServicePoint data are typically entered by the directors of each program, and in some cases by the executive director. The data entered are drawn from a range of internal reports, such as intake and exit forms, and monthly program reports. Both Calvary and GMC receive TCP funding and must thus use ServicePoint. GMC uses its own client forms, which are then used for data entry onto ServicePoint. Miriam's Kitchen is not required to use ServicePoint but has been doing so nonetheless since it provides a centralized system for recording and aggregating data. However, Miriam's is switching to a privately designed client database in 2006.
- *Scope of Work and Quarterly Measurable Objectives.* This report is also required by TCP, and is submitted by both the shelter and transitional housing programs at Calvary. The scope of work report is submitted at the beginning of the fiscal year and outlines each program's objectives (for each quarter and annually) in terms of services delivered and expected outcomes. This report is completed by the executive director. This is followed by a quarterly measurable objectives of the organization's progress and fulfillment of those objectives set in the scope of work.<sup>10</sup>
- *Year-End and Annual Progress Reports.* A year-end report is submitted to TCP that assesses the organization's actual outcomes/objectives against those that were predicted in the scope of work. In addition, some programs must submit an annual progress report to HUD. Annual financial and narrative reports are also submitted to foundations and other funding organizations; reporting requirements can vary significantly.

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<sup>9</sup> HUD requires that cities and regions develop a coordinated plan for addressing homelessness, which it calls a Continuum of Care. TCP coordinates the Continuum of Care for the Washington DC area. This includes the management of an information system (i.e., ServicePoint). For more information, see [www.community-partnership.org](http://www.community-partnership.org) and [www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/coc/index.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/coc/index.cfm).

<sup>10</sup> At the time of research, ServicePoint was not operational with respect to collecting data on measurable objectives.

- *Program Evaluations.* Periodic program evaluations are sometimes required by funders. Miriam's submits evaluations of its breakfast and case management programs to the United Way as part of its grant reporting.
- *Public Newsletters.* As a part of public reporting, especially to volunteers and individual donors, some nonprofits generate newsletters to inform supporters of key events and accomplishments, as well as other news. Miriam's sends out an electronic newsletter on a bi-weekly basis, as well as a quarterly newsletter by regular mail.

### Reporting Efficiencies and Redundancies

Given the above inventory of reporting practices, Virginia Tech graduate researchers worked with nonprofit managers to identify inefficiencies or redundancies in their reporting. Overall, there were surprisingly few redundancies to be found, and it became quite clear that nonprofit staff were attentive to minimizing unnecessary paperwork given the pressures of their daily schedules. Nonetheless, even in this relatively sophisticated group of actors, a handful of reporting efficiency challenges stood out, and which managers candidly shared.

The first concerns duplication across various internal and external reports. Some duplications were of a technical nature (i.e., incompatibilities between spreadsheet software and monthly reporting formats, thus leading to the same data being collected and entered more than once) whereas others had to do with personnel training (i.e., insufficient familiarity with MS Excel or ServicePoint or Filemaker, etc.). While these may not be serious problems, they emerged frequently as a source of frustration, and were exacerbated in instances of personnel turnover.

In addition, all three organizations expressed concern with maintaining two parallel information systems: one for internal purposes using customized spreadsheets, and ServicePoint for external purposes. Even Miriam's Kitchen, which had invested considerable energy in trying to align ServicePoint with its own case management system, found that ServicePoint lacked sufficient flexibility or the capacity to manipulate data entry fields. While all three organizations appear to have reconciled themselves to these shortfalls, they nonetheless cause notable redundancies in reporting.

More significantly, we found that, with the exception of the executive directors, very few staff had a comprehensive overview of the entire data collection and reporting process within their organization. Conversations in Calvary suggested that it may be beneficial for users to understand the entire process so that everyone knows what information is needed and why it is required. Doing so may also lead to more informed conversations among staff about how data collection and analysis can aid mission achievement.

Fourth, when it came to more specific data collection and reporting — such as needs assessments and surveys — we found an inclination towards overemphasizing the number of indicators. For example, a client needs assessment carried out by Miriam's Kitchen in 2003 involved 90-100 questions per client. As Miriam's management candidly reflected, the survey was unsuitable for a population with a high incidence of mental illness, as it ended up self-selecting those clients who were sufficiently functional to be interviewed. While Miriam's is in the process of

redesigning and simplifying the assessment, this experience points to a potentially more pervasive perceptual problem about research: that larger numbers of indicators and complex data collection protocols are frequently associated with scientific rigor, even where simpler and less onerous systems may be more effective and less draining on staff resources.

This is not to say, however, that data collection is generally overdone. In one case, GMC, reporting and information systems are much less formalized than in the other cases. Given its small size, this informality has served the organization well. But as its executive director noted, the organization is facing an increasing demand for its services and is thus under some pressure to better formalize its information systems. This has been complicated by loss of institutional memory through recent staff turnover and a general perception that reporting is largely required for external purposes of accountability rather than for internal organizational learning.

Despite the challenges discussed above, it is noteworthy that the three organizations discussed here have relatively sophisticated reporting procedures already in place. Even more importantly, their executive directors are actively seeking ways to improve their own learning systems and are confident enough in their own strengths to share some of their weaknesses. As such they may be said to constitute a “tough test” for accountability and learning systems in the sector because if such challenges are apparent among them, then it is conceivable that these challenges are even more pronounced in the sector more broadly. In other words, there is reason to believe that the core dilemmas about accountability and learning — parallel information systems, duplication in reporting, overemphasis of quantitative information and indicators at the expense of simpler systems — are pervasive. This remains, however, an empirical question that will be tested in the second phase of this research project through a survey to 195 organizations working with homeless populations in the greater Washington, DC area.

### Common Reporting Challenges

Beyond the reporting efficiency issues above, reporting practices in the three participating organizations face a series of other common challenges.

First, all rely heavily on spreadsheets and databases to track and report on clients. While spreadsheets provide a means of organizing client data, nonprofit managers often expressed concern that such reporting is biased towards quantifiable data, and overlooks qualitative achievements and challenges in the lives of clients. Such information is not readily communicated through spreadsheets and databases, but frequently occupies attention during staff meetings, case management sessions, and sometimes even board discussions. The risk of such attention to data easily displayed on spreadsheets, is that it necessarily restricts the time and attention devoted to other tasks or information sources thereby conveying the impression that this regularly collected information is important (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978: 74-75). In other words, information collected by an organization can become important to decision making simply because it is available. In cases where this information is dominated by the requirements of donors, it may “reorient accountability upward [i.e. to funders], away from the grassroots, supporters and staff” (Edwards & Hulme, 1996: 968).

Second, the nature of the client base makes it a very difficult population to track accurately. This problem is especially acute at Miriam’s Kitchen and GMC where most clients come in to satisfy an immediate need (e.g., breakfast or a shower) and where fewer than ten percent seek long-term services. This is less of a problem at Calvary, where the services are primarily shelter- and housing-based. In addition, because many clients face mental illness or substance abuse problems, data acquired through client surveys and self-reporting are unreliable.

Third, all three organizations expressed significant concerns about ServicePoint in terms of system quality and usability, intrusiveness with respect to personal client information, and use of the system by public agencies and contractors. At face value, there are many potential benefits to a centralized reporting system: it can alleviate the need for nonprofits to manage their own databases; it can streamline report generation; it can provide comparable data across service providers and regions; it can provide an aggregate analysis on problems of homelessness across the country and over time. In practice, however, a number of problems have arisen. Nonprofits need to manage their own information systems anyways, so ServicePoint is sometimes seen as adding a further layer of database entry and management. Perhaps more importantly, nonprofits and their clients do not necessarily see the value of the data that they are required to enter, and in some cases find that it is counterproductive. For example, the system requires sharing of personal data on homeless individuals, such as their social security numbers. Requests for such data are seen as intrusive for many individuals, but can be further perceived as threatening to homeless individuals, especially those with mental illness. This can have the effect of chilling client relations with nonprofit staff at a time when they are trying to build trusting and confidential relationships with individuals. Clients that have been in abusive relationships, for example, may reasonably be distrustful. Another concern raised by nonprofit managers is that ServicePoint does not accurately aggregate data — that is, when one “runs the numbers” in the system, different statistical results are generated each time. And finally, while the data are exported to TCP and eventually to HUD, the participating nonprofits do not know how, or if, the data have been used by funders to shape policy. It is thus not clear whether this extensive reporting system has yielded results at the funder level in terms of organizational learning.

Finally, while reporting to boards of directors in all three organizations has tended to emphasize quantitative results (e.g., using the spreadsheets and dashboards), board members are increasingly asking for qualitative and anecdotal information. There is a structural tension apparent here: on one side board members want the “numbers” because they need them to be able to market the organization to potential donors, but at the same time, they want “stories” about success that are less sanitized and are better able to communicate social change. For nonprofit managers, this leads to a central reporting challenge: How can this be done in a way that is systematic and meaningful, so as to help the organization improve its work rather than simply resorting to picking the best stories about clients?

In sum, the participating nonprofits face a series of substantial reporting challenges that are likely to extend into the broader social services sector: a heavy reliance on easily measurable data amenable to display on spreadsheets at the expense of attention to other kinds of information; a client population that is very difficult to track accurately; a government-mandated client information system that appears to fall short on usability, privacy, and quality; and a tension in the dual reporting needs of boards.

## VI. FINDINGS: INDICATORS, OUTPUTS, AND OUTCOMES

We turn now to a discussion on how the three case organizations deal with the challenges of creating meaningful indicators. What information is the most useful to the organizations and why? How does each organization identify and prioritize its indicators? How does it deal with the growing pressures to measure long-term outcomes, rather than short-term outputs? These preliminary findings are based on interviews with the executive directors and some of their staff, as well as on discussions in two workshops held during phase I of the research.

Despite the array of reports generated by each organization, we found that conversations about indicators tended to converge on a relatively small number of metrics in each organization (see Table 1 below). Calvary provided a list of five indicators that it has been using for both its temporary shelter and its transitional housing program. The five indicators for Miriam's Kitchen were identified by the graduate researcher as being fairly central to the organization's reporting. And the six indicators for GMC are based on the graduate researcher's assessment of metrics linked to the organization's mission, but which are not currently a part of the organization's formal system. These indicators were identified early on in the research project, but then served as a basis for broader discussion. As such, they are intended for illustration purposes and should not be viewed as definitive metrics for each organization.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

A comparison of these indicators leads to a number of more general observations about the creation and current status of reporting systems:

- It is possible to focus on a small number of indicators for assessing an organization's progress. Larger numbers of indicators are not necessarily better or more rigorous.
- Even among this small collection of indicators, there is a tendency to focus on quantifiable metrics (i.e., numbers of . . .). On the contrary, discussions among the researchers and practitioners during workshops focused less on numbers and more on developing qualitative assessments of work. This appears to be part of a tension between external reporting and internal learning.
- Most of the indicators are measures of outputs rather than outcomes, with the exception of those items marked with an asterisk (\* as shown for indicators 1 and 3 for Calvary, indicator 4 for Miriam's, and indicator 1 for GMC). This does not mean that the organizations do not wish to measure outcomes, but rather that the task of measuring outcomes is difficult, especially for organizations whose strengths lie in the provision of immediate and interim services (such as meals, showers, and case management).
- There are few "process" indicators, with the exception of GMC's last two measures, which center on improved participation by its board and congregations. These are the only two indicators that focus on building internal processes and accountability rather than on external reporting.

Our discussion on indicators further probed the difficulties in measuring outcomes and yielded the following insights:

- Outcome measurement on nonprofits serving homeless populations has tended to emphasize two primary metrics: movement of homeless individuals into permanent housing and stable employment. Funders and the public want to know how many people have been “moved off the streets.” But these measures undervalue the work of organizations that are not primarily engaged in the provision of permanent housing and employment, but which nonetheless provide other crucial services (such as Miriam’s Kitchen and GMC).
- There is a need for output and outcome measures that distinguish among categories of homeless clients. Among populations with a high incidence of mental illness and substance abuse, there are varying degrees of functionality. As such, what constitutes progress in one category of clients may be very different for those in another category.
- The client population is exceedingly difficult to track. The high degree of mental illness and the high mobility of clients makes it very problematic to carefully measure improvement in a client population over time. Self-reporting by clients, through interviews or needs assessment surveys, tends to be unreliable.
- Key outcomes extend beyond organizational boundaries. Long-term outcomes such as movement of clients into stable health, employment, and housing are beyond the services that a single organization can reasonably provide to most of its clients. It appears more feasible for each organization measure its own outputs well, rather than try to measure outcomes that are beyond its control.
- The sector is highly fragmented, but long-term outcome measurement and achievement requires integrated efforts with other organizations. The homeless services sector is fragmented in terms of services (we don’t have an overview of what services others offer or how they might be better coordinated), data collection (we don’t know what data others have on the same clients), and clientele (we don’t know what services clients demand the most and where they see the greatest gaps). Addressing this fragmentation is necessary for achieving long-term outcomes, but it is beyond the capacity of any single organization. This is a task, perhaps, for a network of organizations in collaboration with public agencies.

Despite these challenges, the participating nonprofits demonstrated a seriousness about developing new ways of measuring their outputs and outcomes. Table 2 displays a new “Client Matrix” developed by senior staff at Miriam’s Kitchen in conversation with a graduate researcher. The table is significant in at least two respects. First, it distinguishes among three categories of clients based on level of functionality — non-engageable, semi-engageable, and significantly engageable — and identifies recognizable characteristics for each category. Non-engageable clients, for example, tend to be unapproachable, they sit at the back wall in Miriam’s breakfast room, and can be paranoid. This is both the most vulnerable group of Miriam’s clients as well as the least approachable. Thus, for Miriam’s staff, getting an individual in this category to actually engage in a conversation with staff over a cup of coffee would be a significant outcome. This is very different from an outcome with a significantly engageable client who readily speaks with Miriam’s staff and already accesses a range of services.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Similarly, at Georgetown Ministry Center, only a tenth of clients actually come back for services, and even fewer are ready to enter the winter shelter. As a result, GMC has also begun to

differentiate among client categories. But rather than distinguishing among client engageability, GMC staff have chosen to assess clients based on five categories: living situation, income, health, mental health, and substance abuse (see Table 3).

[Insert Table 3 about here]

It should be noted, however, that the challenges of collected data on different client categories and their respective outputs and outcomes can be unfeasible, and even overwhelming, for small organizations. Thus, while Miriam's currently measures many of the outputs and some of the outcomes identified in Table 2, senior staff have indicated that is most likely impossible to measure many of the outcomes on current staff resources. Senior staff recognize the value of such measurement, but also know that the processes to obtain such information would be too onerous and could jeopardize their capacity to provide services to clients due to time constraints.

Finally, Calvary also set out initially to develop a new client assessment tool, but later decided to abandon this effort on two grounds. First, given the organization's focus on housing (shelter, transitional, and permanent), its client population is not as differentiated as in the other cases. Equally important, however, was the executive director's observation that such a tool would both increase the data collection burden on staff and, more importantly, would be unlikely to yield much information on the group of clients from which there was the most to be learned: those that leave the program unsuccessfully. As such, it made more sense for Calvary to focus on getting better client feedback on its programs, and it has thus begun to develop a simple tool to provide an ongoing evaluation of its employment program. This was a decision based on critical reflection about what kind of assessment tool would be valuable for learning purposes, rather than what would generate more data for external reporting purposes.

In short, the experiences of all three organizations suggest that enhancements in the quality of measurement and reporting — in assessing clients, outputs and outcomes — come at real costs in terms of organizational attention and resources, and attempts to improve both accountability and learning can impose burdens on actual services.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

We now return to the primary question posed in the opening of this report: How do nonprofit organizations deal with these tensions between transparency, results, and external reporting on the one side, and innovation, critical reflection, and internal learning on the other? We respond to this question, for the specific context of the three cases discussed here, in the following ways: we identify key barriers facing nonprofits in linking external accountability to internal organizational learning; we revisit some of the research propositions originally posed; and, we draw potential implications for the sector more broadly.

In linking external accountability to internal learning, a number of barriers stand out:

- *Parallel information systems.* All three organizations expressed concern with maintaining two parallel information systems: one for internal purposes using customized spreadsheets, and ServicePoint for external purposes. While this dual system enables organizations to buffer their

core activities from unwanted external interference, it also leads to a burden on resources of time, staff, and money in a context where organizations are frequently short-staffed and under-resourced. The effects of such a separation are especially pronounced in instances where organizational leaders seek to scale up their activities (due to increased demand) and thus wish to better formalize their information systems in a way that is useful for going to scale rather than simply useful for external reporting.

- *Limited staff overview of information systems.* With the exception of the executive directors, few staff had a comprehensive overview of the entire data collection and reporting process within their organization. There is some evidence that it may be beneficial for users to understand the entire process so that everyone knows what information is needed and why it is required. Doing so may also lead to more informed conversations among staff about how data collection and analysis can aid mission achievement.
- *Overemphasis on the number of indicators and a bias towards quantitative data.* There appears to be a general misperception that large numbers of indicators and complex data collection protocols lead to scientific rigor, even where simpler and less onerous systems may be more effective and less draining on staff resources. This was especially apparent in needs assessments and surveys. This points not only to a perceptual problem within nonprofit organizations about what constitutes quality and effectiveness in research, but more importantly to the pressures they face in demonstrating accountability to their external donors and regulators. This barrier to learning is closely related to a heavy reliance on spreadsheets and databases to track and report on clients. While spreadsheets provide a means of organizing client data, nonprofit managers often expressed concern that such reporting is biased towards quantifiable data, and overlooks qualitative achievements and challenges in the lives of clients.
- *Poor quality and usability of centralized reporting systems.* The ServicePoint system, as it currently stands, does not appear to improve the abilities of nonprofits to track and serve their clients. All three organizations expressed significant concerns about the centralized system in terms of system quality and usability, intrusiveness with respect to personal client information, and actual use of the system by public agencies and contractors.
- *Insufficient sectoral integration for outcome measurement.* As crucial as it may be to measure long-term outcomes rather than simply short-term outputs, our findings indicate that it is presently very difficult, if not impossible, to measure outcomes for the client populations of the participating organizations. This is more pronounced in the cases of Miriam's Kitchen and Georgetown Ministry Center than it is in Calvary Women's Services. The reasons for this are many: a) a client population that is exceedingly difficult to track due to the high degree of mental illness and mobility; b) Key outcomes extend beyond organizational boundaries; and, c) Long-term outcome measurement and achievement requires integrated efforts with other organizations, but the homeless services sector is presently too highly fragmented in terms of services, data collection, and clientele. Addressing this fragmentation is necessary for achieving long-term outcomes, but it is beyond the capacity of any single organization. Given these constraints, the growing emphasis on outcome measurement appears to place unreasonable, and possibly misplaced, burdens on nonprofits.

Because these findings are based on conversations with three organizations, they should be taken as preliminary and subject to broader investigation. They are useful for the larger research project as they shed light on a number of the research propositions outlined earlier in this paper. Table 4 below lists the original propositions as well as modifications resulting from these cases. The modified propositions will be used in developing a survey to 195 organizations in the second phase of this project.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

While this paper has focused on identifying key barriers to integrating accountability with learning, the purpose of such action research is ultimately constructive— to identify opportunities for better learning and accountability. At this early stage of the project, a number of such opportunities are apparent but not definitive. Some of the tentative operational implications for nonprofit managers are obvious: focus on limited numbers of meaningful indicators (both quantitative and qualitative), work with staff and users to build a common understanding of which data they collect are important, clarify how output and outcome measures link to organizational mission, differentiate these measures across client types, and be realistic about what data are feasible to collect and assess.

But there are also sector-wide barriers which offer significant opportunities. The barriers of parallel information systems, government-mandated reporting systems, and insufficient sectoral integration, all have implications for the roles of boards as well as for funders and regulators. First, there is a central role to be played by boards of directors in supporting innovative approaches to accountability and learning. In all three of the organizations examined here, reporting to boards of directors has tended to emphasize quantitative results, even though they are increasingly asking for qualitative and anecdotal information. But in doing so, boards end up perpetuating the production of parallel information systems, and thereby further taxing the information capacities of their own organizations. If there is to be better integration across external and internal systems, then it would seem that some of that challenge lies with boards, and extent to which they are willing to risk the promotion of more innovative reporting that is centered on learning.

Moreover, there are crucial opportunities for funders and regulators, particularly public agencies such as HUD. Funders are uniquely situated to promote organizational learning for two basic reasons: they interact with many nonprofits and thus have direct access to sector-wide data, and they build the reporting systems and contracts that serve as a basis for reporting across the sector. Relatedly, the challenges of outcome measurement in this sector (i.e., a client population that is hard to track, limitations posed by organizational boundaries, and sectoral fragmentation) can only be overcome through efforts to integrate efforts across multiple organizations.

This observation is not new. Indeed, efforts to better coordinate services to homeless populations have long been a part of federal policy, and have been the basis for the establishment of the Continuum of Care approach which provides incentives to localities and states to develop plans for coordinating homeless services and long-term plans (Hambrick & Rog, 2000: 360). There is also evidence that service system integration can lead to better outcomes (Rosenheck et al., 1998: 1610). But fragmentation in the sector remains a major problem, suggesting that public

agencies still have a significant role to play in promoting and enabling sectoral integration. But it is worth asking whether this can be accomplished through current relationships of accountability in which management information systems such as ServicePoint become burdens on service providers rather than enabling better coordination and client tracking. Is there an opportunity for exploring relations of mutual accountability, in which HUD's role in supporting and integrating nonprofit reporting might be equally subject to assessment and scrutiny by the nonprofits it supports?

These broader opportunities for sector-wide accountability and learning might be framed as challenges of "ecosystem" learning in which outcome achievement depends on the integrated activities of multiple actors such as clients, service-providers, policy advocates, regulators and funders. Within such a framing, it is noteworthy that all of the organizations discussed here work on the "demand side" of the homelessness problem in service delivery — those that seek to assist individuals that are already homeless. There is, of course, also a "supply side" to the issue, which concerns the basic causes of poverty and homelessness (e.g., wages, employment, health insurance and services, housing prices, etc.) and involve policy advocacy and social justice. Such organizations are equally crucial players in this highly fragmented sector.

*Table 1: Indicators for the Case Organizations*

	<b>Calvary Women’s Services</b>	<b>Miriam’s Kitchen</b>	<b>Georgetown Ministry Center</b>
1.	Number of clients who moved into more permanent housing*	Number of breakfasts served	Number of individuals that transition from the streets to stable housing*
2.	Number of clients who received mental health services	Number of cases managed	Number of first-time GMC clients that <i>return</i> for services on a consistent basis
3.	Number of women who began employment, job training, or other employment services*	Number of “substantive” contacts made by Case Management staff	Number of clients that move from one service into the greater fold (e.g. a psychiatry client that comes into the Center for assistance in getting an ID)
4.	Number of women who applied for or began receiving government benefits	Number of Arnold’s House (transitional housing) tenants moved into permanent housing and employment*	Number of “success stories” generated
5.	Number of women who began participating in substance abuse services	Number of After-Breakfast Program participants	Amount of increased Board participation
6.			Better participation by shelter congregations

Table 2: Client Categories and their Outputs/Outcomes, Miriam's Kitchen

<b>Client Category</b>	<b>Characteristics displayed by client</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Output Indicators</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Outcome Indicators</b>
<i>Non-engageable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unapproachable</li> <li>• Unwilling to change</li> <li>• Sit on back wall</li> <li>• Do not talk</li> <li>• Paranoid</li> <li>• Get food and leave</li> <li>• Not willing to accept shelter</li> <li>• Most vulnerable group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring basic needs are cared for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # breakfasts served</li> <li>• # given clothing</li> <li>• # getting toiletries</li> <li>• # getting Id cards</li> <li>• # getting glasses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving towards some engagement with staff</li> <li>• Inter-agency contact to engage other agencies in clients care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of increased active staff contacts with this group this year as opposed to last</li> <li>• # moving off of back wall</li> <li>• # of clients referred to other agencies this year as opposed to last</li> </ul>
<i>Semi-engageable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some constantly delusional</li> <li>• Some episodically engageable</li> <li>• Able to develop relationship over time</li> <li>• Some guided by substance abuse</li> <li>• Some are consumers only looking for what they can get from service</li> <li>• Rarely will accept shelter, but some will</li> <li>• When accept shelter, it is short term and they are not ready to access services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring basic needs are met</li> <li>• Engaging with staff</li> <li>• Interagency contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # participating in After Breakfast Programs</li> <li>• # receiving during breakfast services</li> <li>• # of referrals to other agencies</li> <li>• # referred to substance abuse program</li> <li>• # getting toiletries</li> <li>• # given clothing</li> <li>• # assisted with finding work</li> <li>• # assisted with finding housing</li> <li>• # assisted with getting ID cards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing venue for clients to express themselves</li> <li>• Movement towards higher functioning state</li> <li>• More active engagement with staff</li> <li>• Increased access of services available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of days in shelter in past month</li> <li>• # of days employed in past month</li> <li>• # of sober/clean days in past month</li> <li>• # of clients that feel they are receiving better health care</li> <li>• # receiving legal services</li> <li>• # receiving ongoing psychiatric care</li> <li>• # of recurring participants in ABP program</li> <li>• # of clients given referrals that are actively working with agencies</li> <li>• Self report of satisfaction with client services</li> <li>• Self report of perceived quality of life</li> </ul>
<i>Significantly engageable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ready for housing</li> <li>• Will access services</li> <li>• Some are clean and sober</li> <li>• Typically at MK because they need a specific thing (housing, job, psychiatric care, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping meet key constraint to permanent housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # being case managed</li> <li>• # of substance abuse treatment program referrals</li> <li>• # of referrals for housing</li> <li>• # helped with seeking employment</li> <li>• # helped with resumes</li> <li>• # of psychiatric referrals</li> <li>• # helped with obtaining public benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent Housing and Permanent Shelter</li> <li>• Clean and Sober</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # in permanent/transitional housing in past six months</li> <li>• Possession of housing subsidy</li> <li>• # of days employed in past six months</li> <li>• # of sober/clean days in past month</li> <li>• # actively engaged in psychiatric care</li> <li>• Self report of satisfaction with client services</li> <li>• Self report of perceived quality of life</li> </ul>

Table 3: Client Categories, Georgetown Ministry Center

Living situation	Income	Health	Mental Health	Substance Use
Street bound	None/panhandle	Multiple Serious Problems	Obvious impaired thinking	Significant abuse
Shelter and street	odd jobs	At least one serious issue	Noticeable odd behavior	Noticeable Abuse
Shelter stable	work	Some health concerns	Observable over time	Concerns of Abuse
Temporary unstable	disability Income	Fair	Fair	Occasional use
Permanent Stable	Other sustaining source	Good	Good	None
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Table 4: Research Propositions

Original Propositions	Modified Propositions
Under conditions of high upward accountability, organizational learning is more likely if . . .	
1. staff perceive evaluation as central to their own work, rather than as a task only for managers and outside experts	1. staff perceive <i>reporting and</i> evaluation as central to their own work, <i>and have an overview of what information is needed and why.</i>
2. error is embraced as opportunity and the threat of sanction is minimized	2. error is embraced as opportunity and the threat of sanction is minimized <i>through board and funder support for innovation in reporting and information systems.</i>
3. organizational capacities are built to anticipate and respond to environmental instability	3. (no change)
4. internal reporting structures maintain strong feedback loops between field staff, managers, and directors	4. internal reporting structures maintain strong feedback loops <i>and are complemented by externally mandated systems (rather than running parallel to them).</i>
5. job descriptions and performance appraisals reward staff for analysis and innovation, supported by resources of time and training	5. (no change)
6. information systems are simple and flexible, rather than elaborate or rigorous, and where the distance between information originators and users is minimized	6. (no change)
7. internal accountability to mission, rather than upward accountability to donors, guides information and reporting systems	7. (no change)
	8. <i>output and outcome measures differentiate among client categories and are feasible to collect (given sector fragmentation).</i>

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