

## **Applicant Information**

### **Statement of Interest.**

This project on virtual advocacy around welfare policy represents a continuation of my interest in policy applications of social science research that has characterized my research from the beginning of my career. This project is focused on the significant changes in welfare policy that impacted women, children and families during the Clinton administration and citizen responses that have continued to interact with changing policy to the present time. In this project, I am analyzing email messages that I began receiving (and am still receiving) from a number of advocacy groups since before the proposed welfare policy changes were finally adopted. I am in the process of coding these messages and beginning to do a qualitative analysis of the strategies used by these advocacy groups, their successes and barriers, and the ways their uses of virtual communication have changed over time. I also consider the extent to which the types of messages developed varies with the extent to which the group is composed of “experts” or those from the poverty community, and how this is related to successfully influencing policy.

### **Experience.**

I received my doctorate in sociology from Indiana University in Bloomington in 1976 and have had an active research program ever since. I began with an interest in women’s labor force behaviors, with a strong focus on the policy implications of my research. At my first job at Ohio State University, I had a joint appointment at the Center for Human Resource Research and have quite a few publications with various staff members at the Center that focus on the policy implications of our research there, all of it on women’s labor force behaviors among the older and younger women’s cohorts that were being collected by the Center at that time. I had used both cohorts of data for my dissertation before joining the staff at the Center. I continued those interests when I moved to University of Wisconsin-Parkside, where I began doing most of my research on community issues with community partners. One of the largest of these projects was a 3-year longitudinal study of workers at a Chrysler plant there in Kenosha after the plant had shut down. The student members of the research team and myself collected data from a sample of displaced workers at three points in time after the plant shut down and then did conference presentations and published papers on these data. However, these data were mostly used by the county, city, and local union to address the needs of the workers. While at UW-Parkside, my interests expanded to include environmental issues, the subject of one of my sabbaticals, which again combined applied work with collaborative research with community partners, but I have remained concerned about gender issues to a large extent. I was Outreach Administrator for the University of Wisconsin System Women’s Studies Consortium for eight years, during which time I coordinated a collaborative research project on welfare reform in Wisconsin. Teams of Women’s Studies faculty and women living in poverty in nine cities with UW campuses did a 4 year longitudinal, qualitative study of women who were being impacted by the W-2 welfare change initiated by Governor Tommy Thompson. Again, we presented the results at academic conferences and published articles in academic journals and books, but we also made our findings available to the advocacy community. Several advocacy groups noted early in this process that our research seemed to be the only data available that told the story of welfare reform from the recipients’ perspectives. This participatory research project entailed more than the research, but also strategizing about ways to impact policy with the insights we had acquired from our research.

## **Project Design**

### **Introduction**

This project will provide insight into how welfare policy advocacy groups are using the internet to network, organize, and pressure various target groups for the outcomes they desire, using nearly 20 years of email messages largely but not exclusively from approximately 15 welfare policy advocacy groups. A priority this summer will be to scan messages that came in the 1990's and early 2000's and exist in hard copy only, and enter them into an electronic data base. The scanning will be done over the summer of 2014, and data analysis will continue over the summer and throughout the academic year. As we are scanning and entering the paper copies into the data set, I will be refining and adding categories for analysis. I will begin by focusing in particular on advocacy work around health care reform and tax and regulatory policy. Papers will be submitted for presentation beginning fall of 2015, and results shared with the advocacy groups involved. The findings will contribute to our understanding about how virtual communication is impacting the development of public policy, for the benefit of several potential audiences, in particular those using a participatory research approach.

### **Background information**

I have been interested in the issue of poverty, in particular women and poverty, since my early graduate school days in Sociology at Indiana University when I was a research assistant for my advisor, [REDACTED], for his work on the Gary Income Maintenance Experiment during the Nixon administration. While my own interests were focused on women and work early in my career, I would periodically work on issues of poverty, and then came to this issue full force when I became Outreach Administrator for the University of Wisconsin System Women's Studies Consortium in 1992. In that role, I coordinated several state-wide projects – a Wisconsin Native American Cultures project that included a statewide conference and a curriculum development project, a Women and the Environment project that included a Wingspread conference with women from the former Soviet Union followed by an environmental conference in Moscow many of us from Wisconsin attended, and a 6 year Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative that included a statewide conference (with an edited volume from the conference) and a longitudinal qualitative interview project with women who were being impacted by the W-2 welfare reform then being implemented by Governor Tommy Thompson. We developed a collaborative research model that involved the women being impacted in the design of our study and the interpretation of the results. As coordinator of that project (which was funded by the Mott Foundation and the Center for Community Change), I began receiving email messages from a variety of advocacy groups, and I soon realized that this would become a rich source of data on strategies of various kinds and began printing and keeping the messages. Since coming to University of Southern Indiana in 2007, I have not published anything from the interview data or these follow-up data, but I have done several workshops using the interview data and have been doing preliminary analyses of the email messages.

### **Review of literature**

The thinking that spawned the welfare reform that was the focus of our work was summarized by Mead (1993; 1986) in his efforts to change perceptions about those receiving public assistance. In this time period (and still today), there was great debate between those who believed the poor

suffered from personal failings and those who believed the cause of their poverty was structural barriers that prevented individuals from acquiring adequate resources for themselves and their families. The political rhetoric that exhorted the poor to “get out of the wagon and pull with the rest of us” won the day and became the basis for the reform proposals that provided only temporary assistance, as opposed to a “lifetime of aid.” As the reform proposal moved forward in Wisconsin, there seemed to be few opportunities for those who would be impacted to voice their opinions and shape the policy in any way. However, recent evidence suggests that, both here and abroad, policy changes that consider these voices and incorporate their views are likely to be more successful in moving individuals to truly sustainable economic situations than policies drafted without this input (Gibson, 2012; Miller, 2011). Similar findings emerge from various participatory research models with foci that range from empowerment evaluation to the practitioner-as-researcher (see for example, Bensimon, et al, 2004). Our own research suggests the efficacy of giving voice to one’s experience and feeling it will be listened to for a women’s journey out of poverty (Schleiter, Statham and Reinders, 2005; Schleiter, Rhoades, and Statham, 2004). The lack of input into the conversations of policy makers seems to be very important. In the literature on social movements, there is evidence that advocacy can impact public policy and vice versa (Johnson and Frickel, 2011), but this research looks more often at issues favored by middle class advocates and tends to focus on attempts to influence corporations rather than government policy (King, 2011). It is not clear how the work of advocates, those who often claim to speak for the poor, functions in this realm. How do they structure their messages? How do they speak about those they represent? Do they appear to include them in their conversations? What other strategies do they use, with what results? How are messages framed in general? How effective are they? Are they able to impact policy development effectively? These are the research questions that are guiding this project.

Exhortations to lend one’s expertise to such efforts in such a manner are found in traditional sociological circles (Trevino, 2012; Buroway, 2005), as well as in gender or women’s studies programs (Naples and Boyjean, 2002; Harding, 1991). And the social movements literature suggests that qualitative approaches, such as the approach employed here, can provide useful insights into the relationship between advocacy and policy directions (Barberena, Jimenez and Young, 2014; Bair and Palpacuer, 2012)

### **Specific Goals and Objectives**

The goal of the project overall is to create and analyze a data set that will shed light on how welfare policy advocacy groups are using their email organizing networks to structure messages, develop strategies and in general advance their causes, with what success. To do this, I must convert a large number of email messages into electronic format, then enter them into the Nvivo software program designed for qualitative analysis.

When we began this project in the 1990s, I began receiving email messages from national groups that I started saving, then in hard copy and I arranged to retain my UW-Parkside email account so I could continue to receive messages from approximately 15 organizations on a regular basis, along with other messages from other organizations that come from time to time. Some of these connections were made through national networks connected with funding we received from several foundations interested in welfare reform and its implications for the individuals involved. These sources still send more than 100 such messages each week, and I save all of them that are

substantive. I review what comes each week, and have constructed coding categories that I am using for filing and preliminary analysis with the messages as they now exist on my personal drive here at USI, but have not produced any formal reports, much less papers, to this point.

I have developed preliminary coding categories: Briefings/Meetings Conferences, Children, Economic Development, Education, Food/Hunger, Funding, General Poverty, Grassroots Organizations, Housing, Immigration, Labor Issues, Medical/Health Care, Nonprofits, Race, Social Security, TANF/W-2/New System, Taxes and Regulatory Policy, Transportation, Unemployment Insurance, and Violence. I am using these categories for filing of incoming messages and have begun some preliminary analysis that suggests they will provide conceptual cohesion as they stand. These categories map to some extent onto the analysis categories that we used in our analysis of the longitudinal depth interview study of those being impacted by W-2 in Wisconsin. Major categories used in that analysis included the impact of background (which included a good deal of traumatic episodes), health issues, education, job or work experiences, how children are doing, coping and support systems and dealing with the system. It is likely that the issues being addressed in the email messages of advocates are connected to the experiences of those being impacted by the policies, something that will be explored in a later stage of analysis. In that study, and in this one, sub-categories that represent finer theoretical clarity emerge as one moves through the analysis. The Nvivo analysis program will assist in developing great theoretical connections and clarity.

I have a large number (more than a file cabinet full) of hard copies that were received earlier in the process and now need to be scanned and then coded and saved electronically to allow me to begin data analysis in earnest. I would like to hire a student to help me scan the material and possibly, if interested, write some reports and papers with me. I have had much experience with large and small qualitative (and quantitative) research projects, and am able to convert such data into products of interest to both academic and more public audiences

#### **Significance of problem or impact of goal**

The impact of the findings from the larger project will be greater clarity about methods and outcomes for virtual advocacy work -- the trends in message framing, coalitions, trends in strategies for countering policy efforts, and the extent to which those living in poverty are included in these conversations. In addition to general knowledge, the findings will be useful to the advocacy community in helping them assess their own efforts. Results will be shared and processed with those groups for that purpose.

#### **Research methods and timeline**

A qualitative approach will be used to analyze the content of the email messages. Outcomes for the summer work are the creation of the data set, with all paper copies scanned and all messages (current electronic as well as the paper copies) entered into the software program, and preliminary summaries written on various subsets of the data, which will set the stage for the more thorough data analysis to follow during the academic year and following summer. A student will be hired to scan the paper messages and help with short report summaries during the summer of 2014. A full analysis will be done academic year 2014-2015 and summer of 2015 on the categories of medical/health care and tax and regulatory policy, as a beginning focus. Papers for conference presentation will be submitted throughout that time period, with some final papers

being submitted for publication beginning fall of 2015 . If the student working on this is interested, they will be offered the opportunity to co-author the papers that result.

The analysis strategy begins with review of all messages in a certain category, notes taken on patterns and connections, then reports that are produced first on various theoretical patterns, then moving to a larger picture of the connection among specific patterns. The patterns and connections are then reorganized and integrated, and eventually developed into papers that will be submitted to conferences and for publication. Shorter pieces will also be written that will be sent to the organizations involved. Another outcome is producing information that is useful for the advocacy groups, helping them understand how to become more effective. The names of the organizations will be kept confidential throughout the project and in the papers that result.

#### **Evaluation of expected outcomes and means of dissemination**

Success can be determined by the existence of the full electronic data set and preliminary reports by the end of summer 2014, conference papers/proposals accepted, and papers ready for submission for publication during the fall of 2015. Feedback from advocacy groups will also be solicited about the extent to which presentation of the findings proved to be useful to them.

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