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for Nonprofit Organizations

**Civic Associations That Work:
The Contributions of Leadership to Organizational Effectiveness¹**

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ABSTRACT

Why are some civic associations more effective at advancing their public agendas, engaging members, and developing leaders? We introduce a multi-dimensional framework for analyzing the comparative effectiveness of member-based civic associations in terms of public influence, member engagement, and leader development. Theoretical expectations in organization studies, sociology, political science, and industrial relations hold that organizations benefiting from either a favorable environment or abundant resources will be most effective. Using systematic data on the Sierra Club's 400 local organizations, we assess these factors alongside an alternative approach focusing on the role of leaders, how they work together, and the activities they carry out to build capacity and conduct programs. While we find modest support for the importance of an organization's available resources and external environment, we find strong evidence for each of our three outcomes supporting our claim that effectiveness in civic associations depends to a large degree on internal organizational practices.

For much of our history, civic associations have served as “schools of democracy” (Tocqueville 1835) for the millions of Americans to whom they taught leadership skills, democratic governance, and public engagement. In being accountable to their membership, governed by elected leaders, and committed to public advocacy, civic associations teach the practice of democracy itself by engaging citizens in working together on common goals. In fact, many have argued that the recent trend replacing such associations with professional advocates and professional service providers has eroded valuable civic infrastructure (Putnam 2000; Skocpol 2003). But not all civic associations are in decline. Some continue to thrive as they develop leaders, engage their members and influence public life—and afford scholars the opportunity to learn why they work when they do. Yet, despite the importance of civic associations in American democracy, surprisingly little research addresses the question of why some are more effective than others.

For the last three decades, organization scholars have examined effectiveness but focused on private, public, and nonprofit organizations that produce goods or provide services. The purposes and characteristics of civic associations differ from these in fundamental ways making it difficult to apply standard conceptions of effectiveness used in these studies. Scholars who study civic associations have rarely developed multi-dimensional conceptions of effectiveness, have paid minimal attention to participation and leadership as outcomes, and have not engaged the broader organizational research on effectiveness. Instead scholars frame the debate in terms of success, influence, impacts, or consequences and focus primarily on policy impacts (Amenta and Young 1999; Andrews 1997; Gamson 1990; Giugni 1998). In this paper, we join these parallel bodies of research by organization scholars on effectiveness and by political scientists and sociologists on civic associations.

Overall, we can distinguish competing explanations for the effectiveness of civic associations between those that focus on external factors (such as characteristics of the political environment or the availability of resources) and those that focus on internal organizational factors (such as the practices, strategies, and efforts of leaders). We argue that while political context and the availability of financial and human resources matter, their effect is far more modest than proponents claim and is largely mediated by organizational and leadership factors. In an organization with a democratically elected and volunteer leadership, the values and experiences of the leaders, the way they organize themselves, and the programs they undertake critically determine how effective—or not—the organization will be.

In this paper, we examine the sources of differential effectiveness of local groups in a major national environmental organization. To do so, we introduce the contours of our broader project, as well as our multi-dimensional framework for assessing effectiveness—which includes leader development, member engagement, and public influence. Our study - National Purpose, Local Action (NPLA) – allows us to assess competing explanations for organizational effectiveness with comprehensive data from the Sierra Club’s 62 state or regional chapters and 343 local groups. We examine variation in leader development, member engagement and public influence and assess the extent to which available resources, favorable civic and political context, and organizational practices shape the effectiveness attained by local civic associations.

The Question of Organizational Effectiveness

Although evaluating the effectiveness of civic associations ought to be of critical interest to scholars and practitioners, few studies have focused on this question in a sustained and comprehensive way. Most studies of organizational effectiveness examine service-providing or

goods-producing organizations. Scholars have, nevertheless, generated important tools we can use, even though the models developed in these studies are not directly applicable to civic associations,. Thus, we begin by bringing together the work of organization scholars with that of social movement and interest group scholars to develop a multi-dimensional framework appropriate for studying civic associations.

Over the past three decades, conceptions of effectiveness by organization scholars have moved from simple “goal attainment models” to more complex multi-dimensional frameworks. Effectiveness became a focus of intense interest to organization scholars during the 1970s (Kanter and Brinkerhoff 1981; Pennings 1976; Webb 1974). Initially, scholars argued that effectiveness could be evaluated in terms of goals, but debated whose goals were relevant and how best to measure them (Campbell 1977; Etzioni 1960; Georgopoulos and Tannenbaum 1957; Perrow 1961; Price 1968). Critics pointed to several problems with goal attainment models. Some organizations set easily achievable goals while others pursue more ambitious objectives, and some organizations pursue goals that are irrelevant to their constituencies while others serve their constituencies well (Herman and Renz 1999). Moreover, goal attainment was a poor measure of effectiveness because organizations could accomplish goals even if they were not very “effective” organizations (Campbell 1977). These scholars argued that the study of effectiveness should examine organizational *capacities*, such as resources, staffing, and structure (Mahoney and Frost 1974; Yuchtman and Seashore 1967). Often, however, the connection between capacities and outcomes is quite murky because some organizations produce outcomes with minimal capacity while others are unsuccessful at parlaying capacities into broader effectiveness (Cameron 1986b). Thus, studying capacity raises a different set of problems. Others argued organizational effectiveness is best understood as the degree to which the

organization satisfies its constituencies (Bluedorn 1980; Connolly, Conlon, and Deutsch 1980; Hirsch 1975; Katz and Kahn 1978). But since one organization often has multiple constituencies that could be at odds with one another, the question remained of which constituency counted. Important questions about just what effectiveness is thus remained unresolved.

Beginning in the 1980s, scholars began to question the utility of seeking a single universal measure of effectiveness—arguing that effectiveness was more of an expression of value than an objective phenomenon and that organizations could perform well on one dimension while struggling in others (Cameron 1986b; Goodman, Atkin, and Schoorman 1983). Because most organizations have a wide diversity of goals, capacities, and constituencies, scholars argued that more complex, multi-dimensional, measures of effectiveness were required (Cameron 1986a; Cameron 1986b; Doty, Glick, and Huber 1993; Herman and Renz 1999; Lewin and Minton 1986; Sowa, Selden, and Sandfort 2004). Along these same lines, scholars have increasingly recognized that effectiveness has different meanings for different types of organizations – operating in different environments and with different purposes (Cameron 1986, Herman and Renz 2004). Given that most research has been conducted on organizations that provide services or produce goods, the task facing scholars of civic associations is clear: to develop multi-dimensional models of effectiveness that address the distinctive qualities of civic associations.

Although scholars of social movements and interest rarely use the language of organizational effectiveness, similar theoretical and methodological debates have taken place around the concepts of success, influence and impact (Amenta and Young 1999; Andrews 2001; Andrews and Edwards 2004; Giugni 1998). For example, Gamson (1990) distinguished between goal attainment and achieving recognition in the political arena; to succeed groups needed to

achieve both. Amenta and Young (1999) have proposed a “collective goods” criterion arguing that groups should be evaluated by whether they enhance the well-being and interests of their constituency. Scholars have also shown that the impacts of movements vary depending on the institutional arena, e.g., courts versus legislatures, and at different stages in the policy process, e.g., agenda-setting versus policy enactment (Andrews 2001; Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995). Here again, this theoretical point converges with the call for multi-dimensional frameworks in the organizational effectiveness literature. Although some scholars focus on a single dimension of movement success (Luders 2006), most employ multiple indicators reflecting the complexity of movement objectives (Andrews 1997; Banaszak 1996; Ganz 2000; McCammon, Campbell, Granberg, and Mowery 2001). Overall, though, scholars have focused most closely on the policy impacts of organizations even when they distinguish between various stages of the policy process (Andrews and Edwards 2004). Thus, scholars tend to focus on only one type of outcome at a time and have not developed broader multi-dimensional frameworks to date.²

The situation in studies of interest groups is quite similar. Scholars conceptualize interest groups in terms of the role they play in policy networks, in organizational fields, or as sources of information and money for legislators. As such, they operationalize organizational effectiveness as effective interaction with outside actors, prestige in the policy environment, or influence over legislative roll-call votes (Ainsworth and Sened 1993; Austin-Smith 1993; Austin-Smith 1995; Heinz, Laumann, Nelson, and Salisbury 1997; Laumann and Knoke 1987; Smith 1995; Walker 1991). To the extent these studies explain effectiveness, they do so only in terms of policy

² A small number of studies examine differential levels of participation across movement organizations or interest groups (e.g., McCarthy and Wolfson 1996), but most studies of participation focus on individuals privileging “demand” side factors with little attention to the organizational factors that may contribute to differential participation across organizations (Jordan and Maloney 1998).

outcomes with little attention to the impact interest groups may have on membership and leadership.

Overall, our understanding of why some civic associations are more effective than others remains limited, particularly with respect to that which makes them uniquely civic: members, elected leaders, and public advocacy. Organizational scholars have developed multi-dimensional definitions of effectiveness, but they have focused primarily on bureaucratic organizations that produce goods or provide services. Conversely, studies of civic associations by scholars of social movements, civic engagement, interest groups, and unions rarely develop multi-dimensional definitions of effectiveness.

Effectiveness in Member-Based Civic Associations

We thus examine organizational effectiveness through a multi-dimensional approach, by considering outcomes that combine the accomplishment of goals with the creation of capacity. The three dimensions of effectiveness are: (1) public influence, (2) member engagement, and (3) leader development. Public influence refers to the extent to which an organization achieves its goals and acquires recognition in the public arena. Member engagement is the degree to which the organization engages members in the activities of the group, thus influencing the individuals involved and, through them, the broader community. By leader development, we mean the extent to which the organization is able to recruit, develop, and retain skilled and motivated leaders. Importantly, we find that groups vary widely on all three dimensions. Some develop leaders, while others do not. Some engage their members, while others do not. And some wield public influence while others do not.

This approach has several key strengths. First, it is multi-dimensional, recognizing that

civic associations are democratic organizations that pursue outcomes related to the public arena, their membership, and leadership. Only by recognizing these multiple goals do we accurately evaluate their effectiveness. Second, our approach considers outcomes that combine the accomplishment of public goals with the creation of internal capacity. In other words, just as firms simultaneously seek to generate profit and build financial equity to pursue long-term objectives, civic associations seek to achieve public outcomes while simultaneously building democratic capacities within their members and leaders. Finally, in a related vein, our measures of effectiveness are comparable across organizations. We focus on organizational outcomes rather than on the success or failure of a particular campaign or project. We can thus compare organizations even if they differ on the substance of the priorities or key issues they pursue.

Public Influence

Civic associations have the greatest public influence when they secure ongoing recognition from authorities in their community and routinely prevail in conflicts over policy, court cases, and in elections. Although public influence may vary depending on the purposes of an organization, organizations that achieve public influence are able to realize their goals even over the opposition of their opponents on a regular basis. We can differentiate between prevailing in specific political battles and recognition (Gamson 1990). Recognition is obtained when organizations become viewed as an authoritative advocate by political elites or become a respected source for information and analysis in public debate.

Member Engagement

Civic associations seek to involve members in their activities both as an end itself and a

way to enhance an organizations' capacity for achieving public purposes (similar to the case for leader development). Since the 1980s, many civic associations in the United States have employed extensive direct marketing to recruit and sustain membership. In these cases, membership is not generated by the local organizations and its leaders. Instead, most members receive newsletters, action alerts and financial appeals from national organizations while having no direct, face-to-face contact with the local organizational affiliate or with each other. Activities that involve face-to-face engagement and collaboration, however, create greater organizational capacity. Active membership participation not only deepens the experience of the individual and enhances the capacity of the organization, but can extend its influence within the community by engaging a broader segment of the community in organizational activities (Knoke 1990b). Members who participate in group deliberations are also more likely to commit to the outcome of that deliberation, making success more likely (Black and Gregersen 1997). Through face-to-face interaction, experiences of reciprocity, and norms of trust, participation in organizational activities can also generate social capital within the group and in the broader community. To assess member engagement, we thus focus on the extent to which members participate actively and in the collective work of an organization.

Leader Development

Leader development is critical to the effective functioning of civic associations, especially volunteer organizations. Tasks at all levels require motivating people to work together, dealing strategically with dynamic and changing contexts, and adapting to the novel and challenging circumstances that accompany the work of advocacy. In other words, leaders play key roles in devising and implementing organizational activity. More fundamentally, if

civic associations are to serve as “schools of democracy”, then generating organizational leaders who are skilled, motivated, and efficacious is one of the most basic impacts the organization can have for community leadership. We conceptualize leader development as the extent to which an organization recruits, develops and retains leaders.

In our discussion of public influence, member engagement, and leader development, we have focused most closely on the way each outcome advances an organization’s purposes. Civic associations depend on leaders to generate ideas and make organizations run, engaged members contribute time, build solidarity, and enhance an organization’s legitimacy, and public influence advances an organization’s goals and stimulates further contributions of time, energy, and money. Civic associations also have the potential to produce broader public goods that are critical for civil society and democracy. Through leader development, civic associations generate skilled organizational leaders who become community leaders beyond the organization itself, engaged members develop trust and learn valuable civic skills, and public influence introduces important citizen concerns into public discourse and policy.

Explaining Differential Effectiveness

How can we explain why some civic associations are more effective than others? Broadly, we can distinguish between arguments that emphasize factors external to the organization itself and those that emphasize the experience, commitment and activities of actors internal to the organization. Scholars focusing on factors external to the organization employ two related arguments focusing on either the civic and political context such as the availability of allies, the strength of opponents, and political opportunities or the availability of financial and human resources that enhance the likelihood of success (Goldstone 1980; Jenkins and Perrow

1977; Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 1998). An alternative view holds that organizational practices and characteristics can explain effectiveness (Andrews 2004; Gamson 1990; Ganz 2004; Jenkins 1983; Key 1964; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Walker 1991; Wilson 1973). This line of argument can be extended to include the role of leaders, and some scholars argue that leaders' decision processes, and the decisions they make, critically influence organizational effectiveness, although their analysis is usually based on single-case studies rather than on large-N studies of comparable organizational units (Baker, Johnson, and Lavalette 2001; Burns 1978; Ganz 2000; Morris and Staggenborg 2004).

Explanations focusing on factors external to the organization recognize that civic associations, like all organizations, operate in broader environments that shape their viability, structure, operations and possible impacts (Aldrich 1999; Scott 2002; Yuchtman and Seashore 1967). The most salient factors of an organization's context with respect to civic associations are the political and civic context – whether an organization works in a politically supportive environment and whether an organization operates in a community with a high density of civic organizations (Eisinger 1973; McCarthy, Wolfson, Barker, and Mosakowski 1988; Meyer 2004; Tarrow 1998).

The second explanation that scholars provide for an organization's effectiveness focuses on available organizational resources. The impact of resources on the founding and survival of interest groups and movement organizations is well established (Cress and Snow 1996; Edwards and Marullo 1995; Edwards and McCarthy 2004; Minkoff 1993; Walker 1991). For example, Minkoff (1993) found that the number of individual members reduced the likelihood of disbanding for women's and racial-ethnic organizations in the US from 1955 to 1985, and Cress and Snow (1996) found that material resources increased the viability of local homeless

organizations in U.S. cities. Although one could enumerate a more exhaustive list of resources, for civic associations the crucial organizational resources are the amount of revenue and the number of members. Funds may be taken as a signal of organizational strength, and they can be deployed to support a variety of organizational efforts from major public programs to training and other capacity building projects. Organizations with more members have a greater pool of possible participants, and, like financial resources, larger numbers of members may signal broader legitimacy for a group and its claims.

Overall, we argue that context and resource inputs are, in fact, important factors in explaining the differential effectiveness of civic associations. However, their contributions are partial and indirect. By incorporating elements of organizational practices into a context and resource-based explanation, we gain much greater explanatory power and pinpoint the organizational and leadership mechanisms through which civic associations become more effective. Moreover, resource inputs and context are indirect in that they are largely mediated by organizational practices. To have any bearing on organizational effectiveness, a favorable political and civic context or abundant resources must be recognized and engaged strategically by organizational leaders in ways that contribute to the accomplishment of leader development, member engagement, and public influence (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Ganz 2000; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Kurzman 1996; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

Thus, to explain variation in the effectiveness of civic associations along these three dimensions, we consider explanations focusing on organizational practices including the efforts of leaders to enhance organizational capacity and achieve public purposes. Our framework consists of three interrelated elements (1) the number of core activists, (2) the quality of their governance practices (3) their activities or they undertake to enhance organizational capacity and

achieve public purposes.

Figure 1 provides a schematic overview and allows us to highlight key points on our framework. Civic associations must meet the following conditions to achieve effectiveness in leader development, member engagement, and public influence. First, they require a critical mass of highly committed activists. Second, elected leaders must work well collectively, and third, they have to be able to translate their work into outputs. At the same time, civic associations must be generative—in the sense that they do not want to deplete their capacities, but instead build their capacities for future action. As we show in Figure 1 we expect that the impact of available resources and civic and political context is indirect and mediation by organizational practices, and we expect that the effect of core activists and governance operates at least in part through the strength of an organization's support and program activity.

[Insert Figure 1. Organizational Effectiveness Framework]

Before moving forward to describe these elements of our explanatory framework, we should note that our analysis gives little consideration to organizational structure. This is because there is relatively minimal variation in structure, and the way the Sierra Club works locally makes it particularly vulnerable to variation in the quality of its local leadership – something that might vary far less if the structure were more centralized. Overall, the structure of local groups is particularly decentralized although there is some variation in how integrated Groups are in Chapter operations.

Core Activists: Highly committed activists often play a critical role in volunteer-led organizations (Ganz 2000; McCarthy and Wolfson 1996). For civic associations that mainly rely

on volunteers, core activists who are committed to the organization's work are critical. They conduct much of the administrative work that is necessary for an organization to be operational. We can distinguish between core activists who are defined by their commitment and leaders who are defined by holding titled positions in an organization. Organizations with greater numbers of core activists are better equipped to design and carry out more diverse and viable programs. Core activists also are likely to have been active for longer periods of time providing a major source of stability to the organization.

Governance: Civic associations that devote the time and effort to establishing sound governance practices can enhance the quality of both strategy and implementation, leading, in turn, to more support and program activity thereby generating greater organizational effectiveness. Thus, we ask whether it makes any difference to the effectiveness of the organization as a whole to be governed by a team that works well together.

Fundraising and Support Activity: The key point with support activity is that organizations that devote effort to enhancing organizational capacity will be more effective, although the impact of fundraising and support activity is likely to be indirect through its effect on the breadth and quality of publicly focused program activity. One critical form of support comes through the efforts to mobilize financial resources which can then be deployed to support other activities and by carrying out fundraising activity leaders build capacity and skills. Support activity also includes engaging new members, building leadership through training and retreats, and organizing events to build solidarity and community.

Program Activity. Finally, we consider the quantity and range of activities that groups undertake, expecting that groups with more vibrant activity will be more effective at leader development, member engagement and public influence. Program activities can take many

forms including educational events, lobbying, writing reports or press releases, endorsing candidates, holding demonstrations, and organizing social or recreational events. Program activity serves as a kind of intermediate outcome, and, in fact, some studies treat it as an indicator of organizational effectiveness. However, we distinguish between program activity as an organizational output and the more basic effectiveness outcomes which programs can help to generate.

The Sierra Club: A Comparative Case Study

We address the question of organizational effectiveness in civic associations by examining the local groups of a national environment organization, the Sierra Club. This case provides an excellent setting for studying the effectiveness of local civic associations within a broader national association. Although the Sierra Club has been studied extensively by historians, sociologists, and political scientists, this prior research focused on the national organization, leaders, and campaigns rather than on the local leadership and organization (Brulle 2000; Cohen 1988; Devall 1970; Dunlap and Mertig 1992; Gottlieb 1993; Mundo 1992; Shaiko 1999; Snow 1992).³ In this section, we describe relevant context on the organization's history, structure and operations. Then, we describe the strengths of the Sierra Club as a case for studying local civic associations and the logic of our comparative case study design.

Historical and Organizational Overview

The Sierra Club, one of the leading national environmental organizations, is based in San Francisco with another major office in Washington, D.C. and 27 regional offices throughout the

³ Similarly, prior studies conducted internally by the Sierra Club have sampled individual members or leaders for their opinions and characteristics, but offer little insight into the organization's overall structure as a multi-tiered organization.

United States. Although it was founded in 1892, the modern Sierra Club grew in three distinct waves after World War II. By the end of the 1960s, it had grown from six California Chapters to 32 chapters spread across the country. During the 1970s, the number of local groups grew from just three to 174. And finally, during the 1980s, individual membership grew from 181,000 to 600,000, and today reaches 750,000.

The national club is governed by a fifteen-person board of directors elected by mail by the membership at large. The National Board conducts organizational business through seven governance committees and numerous subcommittees, a committee structure the groups and chapters emulate. The national organization is what Shaiko (1999, p. 44) calls a “full-service public interest organization” that pursues a wide range of activities and goals. Although the parent organization, as a 501(c)(4), can endorse national candidates and engage in electoral activities in local communities, the national Sierra Club conducts its business through a variety of related entities that include the Sierra Club Foundation, a 501(c)(3), the Sierra Student Coalition, Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund (formerly the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund), and Sierra Club Books.

The Sierra Club’s 62 chapters are divided roughly into one chapter per state. The main exception is California, where there are twelve chapters plus a single state-level lobbying organization that serves as an intermediary between the California chapters and the national organization. There are also 343 local groups that are each affiliated with a chapter, although the number of groups per chapter ranges from 0 to 17. Each chapter is governed by an Executive Committee (ExCom) that includes representatives of each local Group. Local Groups, in turn, are governed by their own ExCom.. Both Group and Chapter Excoms are elected by mail-n ballots

sent to members residing in their jurisdiction. The mean size of a Chapter ExCom is 12.5 members, and the mean size for a Group ExCom is 7.1. Figure 2 depicts this structure.

[Insert Figure 2. Sierra Club Structure of Chapters, Groups, and Elected Leaders]

Like many other national associations since the 1980s, most members have joined the Sierra Club by responding to a direct-marketing appeal. Members are then assigned to a local Group and Chapter based on their residence, and usually have no face-to-face interaction with the organization (Mundo 1992; Shaiko 1999). However, unlike other major environmental organizations, the Sierra Club has especially high levels of participation. One survey conducted in 1978 found that 10% of Sierra Club members considered themselves active in their Groups, and 15% reported participating in an outings activity (Shaiko 1999).⁴ By comparison, approximately 20% participated in the highly contested 2004 election for the national board. More important for our study is the fact that there is significant variation among groups, suggesting that differences in leadership, organization, resources, or local context may influence participation.

Membership dues flow directly from individuals to the national organization, and a portion of the dues from members in their areas go to Chapters, based on a subvention formula. Chapters may choose whether and under what conditions to distribute funds to their local Groups. Chapters and Groups also engage in local fundraising to support their activities and projects.

⁹ These estimates are based on a survey conducted in 1978 with members of five major environmental organizations, preceding the dramatic growth in Sierra Club membership that occurred during the 1980s. Current levels of engagement are probably lower than these estimates, but compared to other major environmental organizations engagement is still likely to be higher in the Sierra Club (Bosso 2005).

The Sierra Club distinguishes its programs as conservation work (campaigns, lobbying, advocacy to protect habitat, passing legislation, public education, etc.), outings (hiking, camping, trail maintenance, etc.), electoral activities (endorsing candidates), and efforts intended to strengthen the organization itself (training, recruiting, fund raising)—work it carries out at the national, state, and local levels.

Strengths of the Sierra Club as a Case Study

The Sierra Club's role as a major environmental organization increases the visibility and relevance of our findings. For example, Amenta and his colleagues (2005) found that the Sierra Club was one of the ten most covered social movement organizations in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s gaining far more coverage than any other conservation or environmental organization. Social movement scholars regard environmentalism as an exemplar of contemporary social movements. These characteristics include a reliance on direct membership recruitment, the relative affluence of movement supporters, reliance on relatively routine or non-disruptive tactics, and the centrality of post-material values to their mission (Berry 1999; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Putnam 2000). Even though the Sierra Club is not representative, in any simple sense, of national environmental organizations or the movement as a whole, it has played a critical role throughout the movement. In addition, its structure and programmatic activities have changed in ways reflective of broader shifts in environmentalism.

We have argued that civic associations are distinguished by the fact they are membership based, governed by elected leaders, and pursue public goals. The Sierra Club shares these characteristics and is an important exemplar of contemporary civic associations. Funds are

generated from members who pay dues and elect local, state, and national officers.⁵ State and local units, although not distinct financial entities, are self-governing, choose their own leaders, and conduct their own affairs within a broader national framework. As a civic association, the Sierra Club defines its purpose as “enlist[ing] humanity to protect the environment and enjoy the natural world.”

In addition, the Sierra Club combines elements of a newer professionalized organizational model with the federated organizational form. This structure holds particular interest to scholars because of its potential to combine local action in a national framework (Nonprofit Sector Strategy Group 2000; Oster 1996; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000). Historically, many organizations developed a multi-tiered structure as a way to combine local action with national purpose—at the same time, grounding national action in local purpose—a structure that continues to be used by influential contemporary organizations such as the League of Women Voters, MADD, NAACP, NEA, NOW, and most trade unions. At the local and state level, the local units of national federated organizations constitute a crucial set of actors because of their visibility and connections to other localities and to national politics through the larger organization.

Finally, the Sierra Club’s openness to academic inquiry made this research possible. The opportunity to study the Sierra Club with the full cooperation of its leadership permits a much richer understanding than more typical studies that rely on fragmentary or indirect evidence. The Sierra Club’s commitment to learning is reflected in their willingness to make the findings and insights from this study and the data collected publicly available to benefit other organizations

⁵ In 2002, dues from regular and life members constituted 28.6% of the Sierra Club’s revenue. The proportion of revenue from member dues is greater than any of the other national environmental organization for which there is comparable data such as the National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, Center for Health, Environment and Justice, Earth Island Institute, and the Rainforest Action Network ((Bosso 2005)).

and the broader scholarship on these questions. The Sierra Club's leaders have devoted enormous time to the development and implementation of this project which accounts for the breadth and quality of the data.

Comparative Case Study

Our study is both a single-case study of the Sierra Club and a multi-organizational study in which we make systematic comparisons across the numerous local sub-units of the Sierra Club. As a case study, our research is situated within an important tradition of single-organization studies (Kanter 1977; Lipset, Trow, and Coleman 1956; Michels 1959; Selznick 1949; Zald 1970). A major strength of these studies is their ability to delve deeply enough into the workings of one of a broader class of organizations to discern the key mechanisms at work.

We also follow a tradition of scholars who hold the organizational context constant to conduct cross-sectional analysis of variation in units of the organization (Edwards and McCarthy 2004; Hammer and Wazeter 1993; McCarthy and Wolfson 1996; Pennings 1976; Webb 1974). Examining the public influence of advocacy groups poses the methodological challenge of conceptualizing and measuring appropriate indicators of effectiveness and assessing the causal impact of organizational characteristics alongside rival explanations. By comparison, studies of interest groups administered to a random sample of organizations are poorly equipped to examine effectiveness because of the lack of comparability across units (Knoke 1990a; Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Walker 1991).

Data Collection and Measurement

We initiated the National Purpose, Local Action (NPLA) project in the summer of 2003

as a result of discussions with Sierra Club leaders concerned about the unrealized potential of their 750,000 members, 343 local groups, and 62 chapters. Conversations within the Sierra Club began in December 2002 when its Organizational Effectiveness Governance Committee formed the “Bowling Together” task force to assess the Club’s social capital and identify barriers to its growth. Given limited information on local organizations within the Sierra Club, the task force asked fundamental questions that could only be answered by collecting, analyzing, and reflecting on new information. This initiative is the most recent in a series undertaken by Sierra Club leadership to strengthen the effectiveness of local groups and chapters including efforts to encourage an activist culture, improve communications, offer organizer training, and provide resources to encourage local participation in national campaigns.

Data Collection

The unit of analysis for this project is one Group or Chapter with a particular focus on the elected Executive Committee (ExCom). All of the Sierra Club’s U.S. Groups and Chapters were included in the study, except for those that were in reorganization in September 2003.⁶ For this paper, we present data on Groups because Groups and Chapters differ in important ways including their scope, staff support, and governance. We describe each of our four data sources below, and the process we used for collecting the data.

(1) *Interviews with ExCom chairs focusing on organizational structure, activities, and efficacy.* From October 2003 to January 2004, we conducted 50-minute telephone interviews with 368 Group and Chapter Executive Committee chairs focusing on questions of organizational structure, leader and member participation, activities, networks, practices,

¹ Reorganization status refers to organizations that do not meet minimal standards, such as an elected ExCom, and that are receiving assistance from the national organization to reestablish the organization in a community.

community assessments, and effectiveness. The University of California at Berkeley's Survey Research Center conducted these interviews, and we achieved a 90.6% response rate.

(2) *Written surveys with Executive Committee members on background, leadership, and organizational practices.* The 15-page ExCom Leader Survey (ELS) was completed by 1,624 ExCom members. The surveys were completed prior to participation in local meetings to assess organizational practices led by volunteer facilitators conducted from October 2003 to February 2004. Sessions were based on the aggregation of key elements of data gathered in the individual surveys and reported on by individual ExCom members. Within the ExComs that held a self-assessment meeting, 68% of ExCom members completed the survey, as did 51% of all ExCom members. The survey includes closed-ended and open-ended questions on the background, leadership experience, goals and motivations, and organizational practices of local leaders, as well as their evaluation of the practices and efficacy of their own ExCom. We use this data both to characterize individual leaders and aggregate it to assess the leadership of each Group.

(3) *Secondary data available from the Sierra Club.* We were provided extensive data on Groups, Chapters, and members compiled by the Sierra Club for a variety of organizational purposes such as membership size, average tenure, leadership size and positions, financial resources and expenditures, and staff positions. These indicators have allowed us to assess the validity of our survey measures with independent information thereby increasing our confidence in the data collected from our survey instruments.

(4) *Secondary data on community context.* We constructed measures of demographic, economic, political, civic, and environmental characteristics of the community in which Groups work. This data is derived from the U.S. Census and other relevant sources.

Effectiveness Measures

Public Influence Measure: We examine public influence in terms of the contributions of Sierra Club groups to the protection of the environment in their communities. We measure public influence based on 22 questions from our interview with ExCom chairs. These items evaluate theoretical dimensions of goal attainment and recognition described above, and they capture public influence in the electoral, community and advocacy domains in which Sierra Club groups operate. ExCom chairs evaluated how accurately a series of statements described their Group or Chapter where 1 indicated “not very accurate” and 5 is “very accurate.” Question items are presented in Appendix Table A1. Our confidence in the validity of these items is buttressed by further analyses described in our methodological appendix. We aggregated items constructing a single indicator of public influence based on the mean of all 22 items. The scale is highly reliable ($\alpha = .928$) and has substantial variation (mean = 3.2 and s.d.=.7). Descriptive statistics for public influence and all other variables are reported in Table 1.

[Table 1 About Here]

Member Engagement Measure: Our measure of member engagement is the degree to which members participate in group activities. Like many other civic associations, Sierra Club organizations have more members than participants. Although participation can take many forms—ranging from participating in an organized hike to attending a fund-raiser—we focus on the number of individuals who participate on a regular or time-to-time basis. Our measure is based on two questions asked in our phone interview with the chair of each local organization. We asked the chair to estimate the number of people who participate regularly in the activities of

the group, and we asked the chair to estimate the number of people who participate from “time-to-time”. Our measure is the sum of these two estimates. The average group has 37 participants, and the median is 27.

Leader Development Measure: We measure leader development using a four-item scale that captures the size of the organization’s leadership and its ability to recruit and retain leaders. Leaders are defined as individuals holding named positions; this includes elected members of the ExCom as well as other non-elected positions such as committee chairs. We use two separate estimates for the leadership size. The first comes from our phone interview with the ExCom chair, and the second is calculated based on an online database maintained by the Sierra Club. Although the measures are highly correlated, we use both indicators in our scale because each is susceptible to error of accurate recall for the phone interview and consistent reporting for the online database. Two additional measures assess the difficulty the organization faces in recruiting leaders. In our phone interview, we asked chairs to assess how difficult it was to recruit candidates for Executive Committee elections, and we asked a similar question to ExCom members regarding the difficulty in filling leadership positions (such as non-elected committee positions). These two items were reverse coded so that high values indicate disagreement and low values indicate agreement. All four items were standardized, and the scale is based on their mean ($\alpha=.613$).

Context, Resource and Leadership Measures

We measured the civic and political context in three ways and found that all three tell a similar story. First, we examined context using objective indicators derived from external data such as college graduates (percent), median household income, civic organizations per capita,

and voting in the 2000 presidential election.⁷ Second we calculated the member density as the per capita number of Sierra Club members in a group's territory. This measures the concentration of Sierra Club members in the community, providing an indication of the community's receptivity to the work of the organization. And third, we used the chair's assessment of allies, opponents, and local government based on six specific questions with the chair of each group. We found variation on all three measures, and they were all are highly correlated with one another. We include further details in our methodological appendix on these measures and their relationship to one another. In this paper, we use the chair's assessment of the civic and political context although alternative measures produce similar results and do not alter our substantive conclusions. This measure also provides the most stringent test of our argument because the chair's assessment has a stronger relationship to all three effectiveness measures than member density or objective indicators.

We measure resources with two straightforward measures: the number of members in a group and the financial resources that a group receives from the larger organization as a transfer. As described above, members are assigned to Groups and Chapters based on an individual's zip code, and our estimate is based on data provided by the Sierra Club in August 2003. The median membership size is 1091, and the mean is 1962. Our measure of financial revenue was calculated from annual reports submitted by Sierra Club groups to the national organization for the 2003 fiscal year. Transfer revenue is skewed; the median is \$924, and the mean is \$1568.

We measure core activists based on a question from our phone interview with the ExCom chair in which we asked "How many volunteers spend at least 5 hours per week on Sierra Club

⁷ Population measures such as the proportion college graduates, household income, and population size were constructed from 2000 US Census by matching zip codes to the boundaries of Sierra Club groups. Voting data is matched on the primary county for each group and was compiled from Polidata Demographic and Political Guides (www.polidata.org). Data on civic organizations were calculated using the data files from the National Center for Charitable Statistics matching zip codes to boundaries of Sierra Club groups.

work?” As described above we make a conceptual distinction between leaders who hold titled positions and core activists who are defined in terms of their large commitment of time to the organization. The median is 4 and the mean is 5.1 core activists for Sierra Club groups.

To measure governance, we created a composite scale based on items from the ExCom Leader Survey of governance processes. Our summary scale aggregates twelve dimensions of governance practices focusing on aspects of deliberation (goal setting, planning, decision-making, adaptation, meetings, and inclusiveness) and implementation (delegation, initiative-taking, collaboration, accountability, rewards and recognition, and establishing shared norms). We expect governance to enhance leader development and also encourage greater member engagement and public influence. Our measure aggregates the responses provided by individual ExCom members for each Group. Specific items are listed in Appendix Table A.2. The governance scale is highly reliable ($\alpha=0.915$).

We measure the efforts to enhance organizational capacity in terms of local fundraising and support activities. Local fundraising is measured as the total revenue raised by the group; the median is \$1629 and the mean is \$6119. Like transfer funds, locally raised funds are measured for fiscal year 2003 from reports to the national organization. Support activities include efforts to develop capacity through retreats and training, build solidarity through social events, and engage new members with specific forms of outreach.⁸ We constructed a scaled based on the chair’s response to seven questions about the regularity with which the group carries out specific support activities ($\alpha=.66$, $\text{mean}=2.36$, $\text{s.d.}=.58$).

Programs include the specific conservation, electoral, and outings activities that groups do. Conservation refers to efforts to shape the public and political agenda through activities like

⁸ We also measured communication such as advertising upcoming events, but these activities are quite common and have minimal variation in our study.

lobbying, holding educational events, and organizing marches or demonstrations. Electoral activities include efforts to influence elections for candidates or ballot initiatives by mobilizing voters and making endorsements. Outings are activities designed to bring people into natural settings for social, recreational and service purposes such as a group hike or trail restoration project. Items measuring support and program activity were taken from our phone interview; our question asked the chair to indicate “how often your group or volunteers acting on behalf of your groups” have done an activity during the past 12 months. Response categories were regularly, sometimes, rarely, or never. Activity measures are reverse coded such that higher values indicate more frequent activity. Appendix Table A.3 also lists the program activities included in these scales. All three scales are reliable and exhibit high levels of variation (for conservation: $\alpha=.90$, $\text{mean}=2.72$, $\text{s.d.}=.48$; elections: $\alpha=.82$, $\text{mean}=2.48$, $\text{s.d.}=.76$; outings: $\alpha=.72$, $\text{mean}=2.47$, $\text{s.d}=.72$).

Analysis

We turn to our explanatory analyses presenting models for public influence followed by member engagement and leader development. For each outcome we present a comparable set of analyses beginning with a base model that considers the relationship to available financial resources, members, and the political and civic context. We then introduce dimensions of organizational practices in separate cumulative models – specifically, in model 2 we add the number of core activists, and in the following models we add governance (model 3), locally raised funds (model 4), support activities (model 5), and program activities (model 6). The rationale for this sequencing is based on expectations about the factors that are causally prior in explaining effectiveness as illustrated in Figure 1. For example, we expect that core activists play

a fundamental role generating support and program activities, and that support activities play an important role in generating program activity, and so forth.

We examine our expectations about the possible indirect or mediating effects in our model using formal mediation tests (Baron and Kenny 1986; Preacher and Hayes 2004). When the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable is carried through another variable, that variable is considered a mediator. Broadly, we consider two kinds of mediation effects that follow from our explanatory framework: (1) whether resources and context are mediated by organizational practices such as governance and (2) whether core activists, governance, and support activities are mediated by a group's program activity

Public Influence

Table 2 presents OLS regression models for public influence. We begin in Model 1 by examining the impact of membership, transferred revenue, and context on public influence. The civic and political context has a substantial positive effect on public influence, and membership size has no discernible effect on public influence. Surprisingly, the amount of revenue that groups receive has a negative and significant effect (only at the .10 level) on public influence.⁹

[Table 2 About Here]

In model 2 we introduce the number of core activists and this measure has a significant positive

⁹ The amount of funds groups receive as transfers has a small negative though nonsignificant correlation with all three dependent variables. For public influence and member engagement that relationship approaches conventional standards of statistical significance when membership is included in the model. Further analyses and investigation of case level patterns suggests that the modest negative relationship between transfer funds and effectiveness reflects chapter level differences in patterns of allocation to groups. This is supported by supplementary analyses in which we specify the “svy” command in Stata to assess clustering. Transfer funds does not attain statistical significance in model 1 for public influence and member engagement with this specification of the model.

effect and model 3 shows that governance does as well though it is more modest. Local fundraising is significant and positive in model 4 and support activities are significant in model 5. Finally, in model 6, we find that conservation and electoral programs have significant positive effects on public influence, and the effects of support activities and core activists are nonsignificant in the full model. We note that the explanatory power of the model increases substantially from .15 to .53 when organizational factors are included along with political context. More specifically, we also note the increase in R-sq. from .30 in model 4 to .53 when program activity is included. The results for conservation and elections suggest that regardless of whether groups operate in favorable or hostile environments, they can exert influence by developing programs that engage the public and authorities.

One clear finding in Table 2 is the substantial and robust effect of civic and political context on public influence. This effect persists in all models including our measures of organizational practices, and there is no evidence that the effect is mediated by internal organizational factors. On the other hand, it explains less than half of the variance the full model explains, when the organizational processes and practices are included. For public influence, although our results support the claim that a favorable civic and political context enhances a group's ability to shape social and political change, it also underscores the fact that its influence is highly dependent on what its local leaders make of the context in which they find themselves. We find strong evidence for the critical role of core activists in generating public influence; this effect is independent of context and resources and persists when governance, fund-raising and support activity are included. In addition, we find that program activity – especially conservation and electoral – plays a major role in shaping an organization's public influence. However, the effect of core activists and support activity is substantially reduced in model 5. We

investigate whether the effect of core activists and support activities operate in part through their indirect influence on program activity.

Baron and Kenny (1986) delineate four conditions that must be true for a variable to be a mediator: (1) the initial independent variables must be correlated with the outcome (public influence); (2) the initial variables must be correlated with the mediator (conservation programs); (3) the mediator must affect the outcome variable; and (4) the effect of the independent variables on the outcome while controlling for the mediator should be statistically smaller than in a model without the mediator. Results in models 4 and 5 provide evidence for the first and third conditions. Bivariate correlations of conservation activity with support activities ($r=.35$) and core activists ($r=.38$) provide evidence that the second condition is present. The correlations with election activity are also significant for support activity ($r=.29$) and core activists ($r=.29$). Finally, we use Sobel tests to provide a formal test of the fourth condition that the effect of the independent variable (core activists or support activity) is reduced when controlling for the mediator (conservation or election activity). Conservation activity mediates the relationship between core activists ($p<.01$) but not support activity. In addition, we find that election activity mediates the relationship between support activity ($p<.05$) and core activists ($p<.10$). Overall, then, mediation tests support our claim that core activists and support activity have an indirect effect through their influence on an organization's program activity.

Member Engagement

Table 3 presents negative binomial regression models for the number of participants in Sierra Club groups. Negative binomial regression is appropriate for estimating models with count data and is preferable to the Poisson model when there is substantial overdispersion as in

this case (Long and Freese 2006).

Model 1 indicates that the number of members has a positive and significant effect on the number of participants, but unlike public influence the broader political and civic context does not effect member engagement nor does the amount of transfer revenue. This result differs from public influence and runs counter to expectations of political opportunity theory which would anticipate a favorable context to encourage participation. The interpretation for the number of members appears straightforward – that more members provide a large pool of potential participants.

In model 2 we find that the number of core activists has a significant and positive effect on member engagement, and this effect persists in subsequent models. We also find that the number of members is not significant. Model 3 shows that governance has a positive and significant effect on participation, and this effect is also robust across subsequent models. Local fundraising has a positive and significant effect in model 4 although support activity does not in model 5. Finally, we find that core activists, governance, local fundraising, conservation, and outings activity are positive and significant in model 5.

Overall, participation is explained by the presence of committed activists, how well leaders devise and implement plans, and the strength of their fundraising and program activity. When it comes to mobilizing participation, it is not surprising that more activity – both conservation and outings activity – is related to greater participation. It is important to note that, even with activity in the model, core activists continue to have an independent (if more muted) effect, a finding consistent with the claim that the scope and range of activity has a strong relationship to the number of people able to commit the time and effort to leading that activity.

We examine whether the core activists mediate the relationship between the number of

members and participants and whether outings program activity mediates the relationship between local fundraising and participation.¹⁰ The presence of a significant correlation between members and core activists ($r=.38$) alongside the results in models 1 and 2 provide evidence of the first three conditions for mediation. Results from a Sobel test ($p<.001$) provide additional support for our interpretation that the effect of members on member engagement is indirect operating through the number of core activists. Additionally, we find that outings program activity mediates the relationship (in part) between local fundraising and member engagement ($r=.26$; Sobel $<.001$). Thus, we find that Groups that undertake more fundraising enhance their capacity to carry out more outings program activity. Given the robust finding for governance, these groups may also do their activities better and create an internal environment more conducive to regular participation by members.

[Table 3 About Here]

In sum, we find that explanations of participation that focus on context and available resources are insufficient. Civic and political context plays no apparent role. The pool of organizational members has a modest positive effect that operates mainly through the number of core activists. Financial resources provided to the group are also insignificant although locally generated revenue is quite important. Core activists, governance, fundraising and program activity drive mobilization far more than external factors and dramatically improve our ability to explain differences in participation across Sierra Club groups. We should also underscore the result that different kinds of program activity matter for public influence and member

¹⁰ For mediation tests, we use the natural log of the number of participants. OLS models using this measure generate comparable results to the negative binomial regression models in Table 3.

engagement with recreational outings activities playing a more central role for member engagement. Outings are the most important kind of program activity for member engagement. This may be because outings programs typically entail clearly defined activities in contrast to conservation and electoral activity which is more episodically organized around issues and elections. Moreover, outings activities are by definition collective activities in the Sierra Club while conservation and outings activities can be carried out by one or a very small number of individuals. Most interesting, however, is the strong relationship between the number of core activists and the extent of Group activity, especially recreational activity. This suggests that the choices leaders make about how much time to invest and where to invest it has a major impact on the levels of broader membership participation.

Leader Development

In our final set of analyses we examine OLS models predicting leader development using our scale that measures a group's ability to recruit and retain leaders. In model 1 we find a pattern that resembles those for member engagement; the number of members has a significant and positive effect while the civic and political context and transfer revenue are not related to leader development. As with member engagement, model 2, 3 and 4 reveal the positive and significant effects of core activists, governance, and local fundraising. In model 5 and 6, we find that support and program activities do not have a significant effect on leader development. Core activists, governance, and local fundraising have robust effects in all models in which they are included. As with member engagement, mediation tests provide support that the number of core activists mediates the relationship between members and leader development.

[Table 4 About Here]

With leader development, the civic and political context and transfer revenue are not part of the story. Members, again, is significant in initial models though mediation tests suggest that the effect of members is indirect. Given that core activists are also an important factor in our explanation of leader development, we want to highlight the significance of focusing on recruitment of a highly committed core team of leaders, not as an alternative to broader member engagement, but as a prerequisite for it – if they turn their energy to the creation of program activity to engage others. We also note that the impact of governance is much more robust and direct upon the development of leaders than upon member engagement and public influence. Thus, the consequences of a well functioning leadership team manifests itself indirectly and are perhaps less obviously when it comes to broader participation and influence, but those effects are quite direct and apparent for recruiting and retaining leaders.

Before turning to a broader discussion of the conclusions and implications of the paper, we can offer a few summary comments on the analyses of leader development, member engagement, and public influence. There are important differences across the outcomes such as finding that certain kinds of program activity are more likely to yield public influence while others are more consequential for leader development. Available resources matter for member engagement and leader development, and a favorable civic and political context has considerable impact on public influence. Yet, these factors only tell a small portion of the broader story about why some civic associations are more effective than others. Moreover, taken together, the results tell a consistent story about the importance core activists, governance, support and program activity for organizational effectiveness. Groups that have more highly committed

activists, whose leaders work together effectively, that devote time and energy to building the capacity of their organization through fundraising and other support activities, and that organize and implement strong programs to pursue their public goals generate greater effectiveness across quite different outcomes.

Discussion and Conclusions

We began this paper by pointing to the lack of multi-dimensional and systematic efforts to understand why some civic associations are more effective than others – a question of major significance for understanding organizations and contemporary politics. To develop our framework for the study of effectiveness in civic associations, we looked to work by organizational scholars who study effectiveness in service-providing and goods-producing organizations and to work by scholars who study civic associations including social movements and interest groups. Through this process we developed and articulated a three-tiered conception of effectiveness that sees civic association as “schools of democracy” – sites wherein individuals learn through interaction the skills of democratic practice to pursue collective purpose. From this perspective, the accomplishment of leader development, member engagement and public influence are each equally important dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of civic associations.

To explain differential patterns of effectiveness, we identified prevailing explanations. Some have argued that organizations working in more favorable civic and political contexts will be most effective. Another view contends that the availability of human or financial resources is critical. Finally, others have argued that organizational practices (reflecting the choices and efforts of leaders) influence effectiveness. Employing original data collected from several

sources, we used multivariate analyses to evaluate the effect of favorable context, available resources, and organizational leadership, practices and programs on effectiveness. Political and civic context is an important factor for public influence though it is partial, and context plays no apparent role in engaging members and developing leaders. We find some support for the importance of available resources, but the effects are more modest than proponents would expect and they are largely indirect – operating through organizational factors that we have identified. This is because available resources and context must be perceived and acted upon by leaders. Our organizational practice framework provides greater explanatory power and helps specify the way that context and resources matter while also exerting independent effects on the effectiveness of civic associations.

This study of the Sierra Club's organizational effectiveness contributes to ongoing debates about the role of civic associations within sociology, political science, and organizational behavior. Although a new and fruitful dialogue has begun between social movement and organization scholars, we believe that both fields will benefit from a more sustained examination of leadership and the processes within organizations (Andrews and Edwards 2004; Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Davis, McAdam, Scott, and Zald 2005; Ganz 2000; Ganz, Voss, Sharpe, Somers, and Strauss. 2004; McCarthy and Zald 2002).

Like most large, national civic associations, the Sierra Club has wide variation in the performance of its local organizations. Some leaders gain valuable skills and motivations through their work while others become discouraged. Some groups involve hundreds of members in their activities while others have less than ten. Finally, some groups wield significant leverage in their communities by shaping public debate, influencing elections and public policies.

Many scholars and influential theories would direct our attention to context that groups operate within and the resource inputs that groups obtain. This is a reasonable place to start and our analyses show some support for these expectations. Groups with more members generate greater participation, and those working in more favorable political environments do report greater influence. Our more important contribution in this paper is to show the viability of examining dimensions of organizational practices as determinants of organizational effectiveness across distinct outcomes.

Methodological Appendix: Response Bias, Aggregation of Individual Surveys, Validation of Public Influence Measure, and Civic and Political Context

Response Bias: Overall, the response to our phone survey and ExCom leader survey were remarkably high, minimizing the likelihood of significant nonresponse bias. However, we undertook a comprehensive analysis to assess possible bias in our datasets. To assess response bias, we drew on the secondary Sierra Club data. Since this data included information on all the groups, we could assess the extent to which participating groups differed from those that did not participate on key organizational characteristics: (1) the number of individuals holding leader positions in the group, (2) the number of ExCom members, (3) the percentage of ballots returned in the 2003 National Board election, (4) the number of members in the group, (5) the average leadership tenure, (6) the average number of leadership positions held by each individual leader.

In evaluating our phone interviews with group chairs, we compared the means of participating groups to non-participating groups and found no statistical difference between them on any of the six indicators. We evaluated the ExCom Leader Survey (ELS) in the same way. We compared ExComs for which we had ELS data to ExComs for which we did not on the same six dimensions. We found that non-participating group ExComs had slightly smaller leadership cores than those that participated. Thus, our ELS data is slightly biased because the group ExComs that participated tended to be the ones with larger leadership cores. (Results of these analyses are available from the authors.) In sum, our response bias analysis gives us confidence in the data. While some parts of the data are biased against smaller ExComs, on the whole our data is representative.

Aggregation of Individual Data: Another challenge we faced in using ELS data grew out of the fact that although individual leaders completed the survey, we are primarily interested in

the collective assessment by ExCom members of their group. Therefore, we had to avoid the situation in which the opinion of a single ExCom member—if he or she were the only one to fill out the survey—could be taken as the collective judgment of the whole group. To determine whether groups with high rates of participation differed from those with low rates of participation, we conducted a response bias analysis using several measures of demography and leadership commitment. We found that ExComs with 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%, and 90% response rates were statistically indistinguishable from ExComs with 100% response rate on these dimensions. We thus included data from any ExCom with at least a 50% response rate from its ExCom members. Further, to ensure that we do not draw conclusions about the ExCom from too few surveys, we included in our analysis only ExCom with three or more respondents. We thus had sufficiently complete data on 182 (53%) ExComs to include them in our analysis of questions relying on aggregation of assessments of individual ExCom members as reported in the ELS.

Public Influence Measure and Chair's Assessment of the Civic and Political Context:

One of the major concerns in the literature on organizational effectiveness and for us in conducting this research is the validity of our measure of public influence. This is especially true for studies like ours that rely primarily on reports from a single individual. Prior research provides mixed evidence on the validity of self-report measures with some studies finding strong congruence between subjective and objective measures ((Kalleberg and Moody 1996)) or between independent evaluations from different observers or constituencies ((Gormley Jr. 1982)). Other studies present a less favorable assessment. For example, in a study of social service providers Herman and Renz ((1997)) used ratings by staff, funders, and board members finding low correlations across these three groups; however, in a separate analysis of the most

and least effective organizations they found much higher levels of agreement across raters suggesting that individuals may be better able to distinguish between doing very well, very poorly or somewhere between ((Herman and Renz 1998); (2000)).

We looked closely at the data we collected for evidence to help judge the validity of our public influence measure. Broadly, we asked whether there was (1) consistency between the chair and the ExCom, and (2) to what degree the chair's perception matched other objective indicators. To assess consistency between the chair and the ExCom, we identified four questions on the Chair's phone survey that had comparable counterparts on the ExCom Leader Survey. This included measures of whether the Group was getting better worse than the past, how important political influence is in organizational goal-setting, how inclusive decision-making processes are, and whether the organization builds on the skills and expertise of its members. In all four domains, we found consistency between the Chair's individual response and the ExCom's general assessment (details available upon request).

In addition, we assessed the degree to which the chair's perception matched other objective indicators. Because objective indicators of public influence are not available, we gauged the Chair's trustworthiness by examining her subjective response to questions about the political friendliness of the community with objective community indicators. To develop the self-report measure of civic and political context, we drew on the chair's response to six questions in our phone interview. We asked the chair to evaluate the accuracy of the following statements where one indicated "very accurate" and five was "very inaccurate" and three was "in the middle".

- (1) Government in this area is generally favorable to our goals.
- (2) Most elected officials hold positions that conflict with ours.
- (3) Government in this area has committed substantial resources and effort toward improving environmental quality

- (4) Progressive groups and movements are very strong in this area.
- (5) The environmental movement is very strong in this area
- (6) Conservative groups are very strong in this area.

All items (except number six) were reverse coded so that higher values indicate a more favorable context. Analyses showed that the chair's assessment was highly correlated with two other measures of context: the density of Sierra Club membership ($r=.460$, $p<.05$) and a scale of objective social and political indicators based on the number of civic groups per capita, Republican presidential voters in 2000 as a proportion of all voters (reverse coded), the proportion of college graduates (25 and older), and the proportion college students ($r=.53$, $p<.05$).

We also ran a simple regression of the chair assessment on membership density and examined the outliers from the regression. First we examined cases where the chair assessment is much lower than expected, given the membership density in the area. If the differences are merely due to subjective differences between chairs, then "objective" measures of the community context—like the vote for Gore, the education level, the degree to which the environmental community is organized, and the pollution index of the community—should not be much worse than average. If, however, the chair assessment actually measures something that membership density does not, then the objective measures of community context should show that this is actually a tough community to work in. We found that among the outlier cases, 81% were in an area where objective measures of community context were more than one standard deviation worse than the average on at least one of the four objective measures (note that in most of these cases, the % vote for Gore is less than 1 s.d. below the average).¹¹ Conversely, in examining cases where the chair's assessment is better than expected given the member density,

¹¹ This means that the % Gore should be less than 38.2%, the % College Grad should be less than 16%, the # of environmental groups in the area should be less than 2.2, and the pollution index should be greater than 15.8.

we found similar results. In 76% of the cases, the objective data indicate that there is good reason for the chair assessment to be higher than member density.¹²

This examination of cases where there are large differences between member density and the chair assessment gave us more confidence in the chairperson's assessment. It seems that in more than three-quarters of the cases where the chair assessment is very different from member density, the subjective assessment is well-grounded in the objective data that we have. It is thus possible that the chair assessment is capturing a more well-rounded picture of the community. In addition, with respect to our public influence measure, it gives us greater assurance that the chair's assessments are grounded in reality.

¹² These are Groups where the % vote for Gore is greater than 57%, the % college grad is greater than 33%, the # of environmental groups in the area is greater than 4.0, and the pollution index is lower than 10.4.

Figure 1: Organizational Effectiveness Model

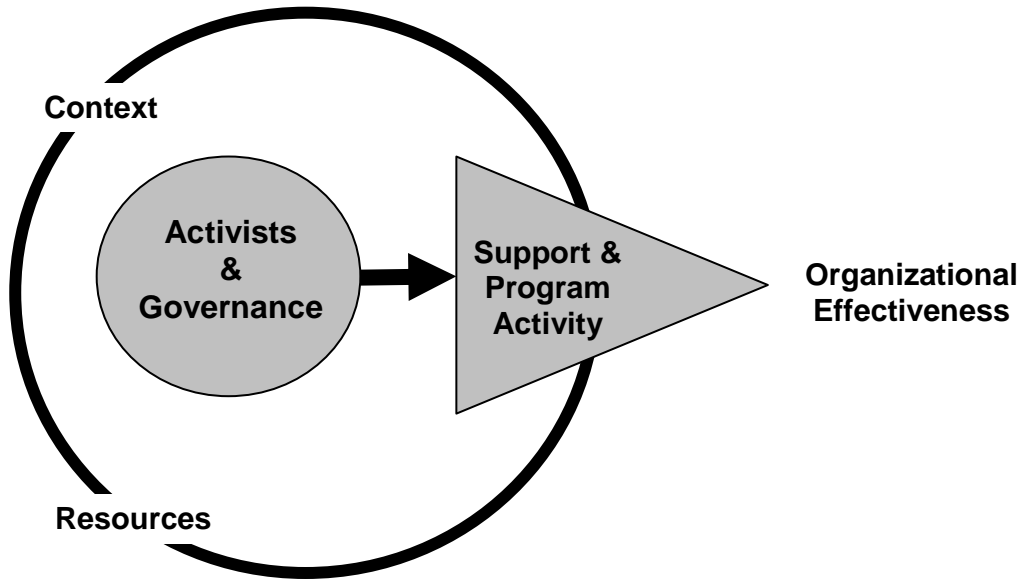


Figure 2: Structure of the Sierra Club’s Volunteer Leadership

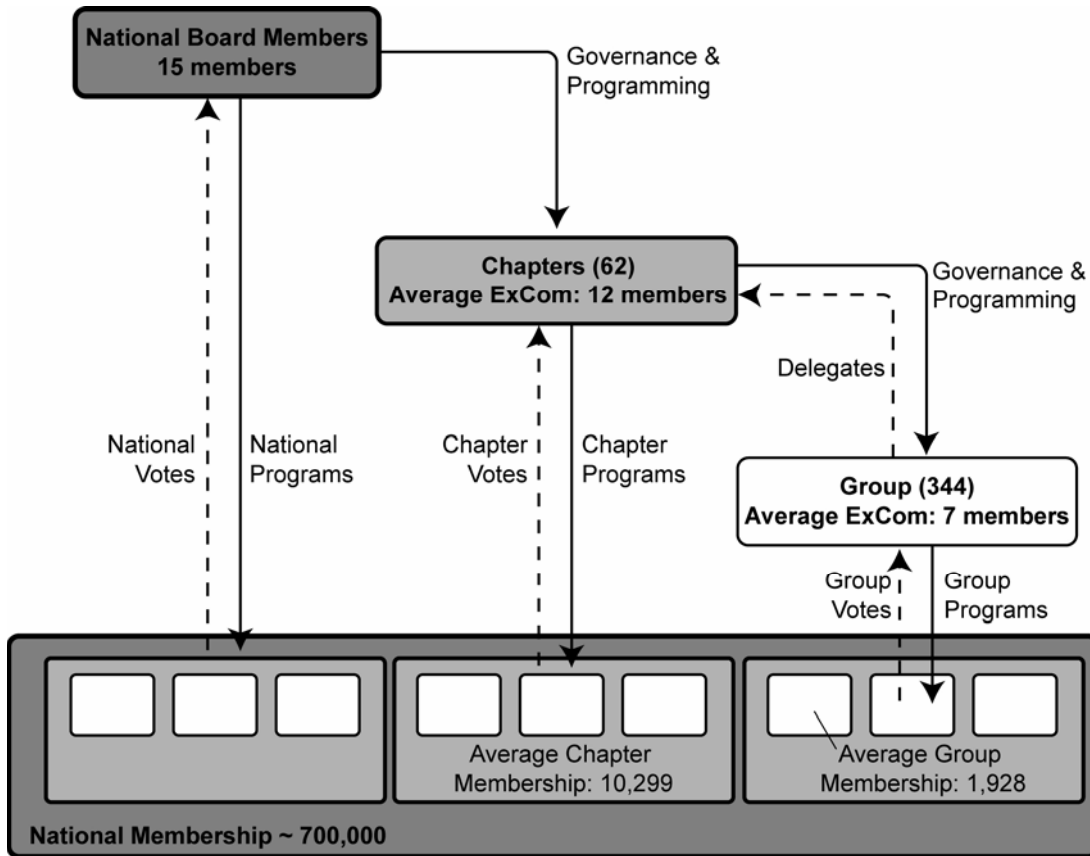


Table 1. Characteristics of Sierra Club Groups

Variable	Description	N	Median	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Leader Development	Scale of leader development	177	0.37	0.60	2.65	-5.8	8.4
Member Engagement	Number of participants, logged	176	3.33	3.36	0.77	0	5.2
	Number of participants	176	27.0	37.3	32.0	0	185
Public Influence	Scale of public influence	181	3.16	3.18	0.69	1.0	4.6
Transfer Revenue	Total funds received (2003), logged	199	6.83	5.68	2.98	0	9.3
	Total funds received, 2003	199	924	1568	2075	0	11492
Members	Total Group Members, logged	200	7.0	7.1	1.03	4.7	9.6
	Total Group Members	200	1091	1962	2333	110	14060
Civic & Political Context	Scale for assessment of civic and political context	182	2.43	2.51	0.80	1	4.7
Core Activists	Number of core activists, logged	182	1.61	1.53	0.75	0	3.9
	Number of core activists	182	4.00	5.11	5.69	0	50
Governance	Scale for governance practices	199	3.39	3.36	0.38	2.1	4.4
Local Funds Raised	Total funds raised (2003), logged	199	7.40	6.98	2.48	0.0	12.3
	Total funds raised (2003)	199	1629	6119	18208	0	224547
Support Activity	Scale for community building, organization building, and new member engagement activities	180	2.29	2.36	0.58	1	3.9
Conservation Activity	Scale for conservation program activity	180	2.76	2.72	0.48	1	3.6
Election Activity	Scale for electoral program activity	178	2.50	2.48	0.76	1	4
Outings Activity	Scale for outings program activity	180	2.60	2.47	0.72	1	4

Table 2. OLS Regression Estimates of Public Influence, Sierra Club Groups

	Public Influence					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Total Transfer Funds (logged)	-0.029+	-0.028+	-0.027+	-0.027+	-0.025+	-0.025*
	0.016	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.013
Total # Members (logged)	0.052	-0.045	-0.041	-0.058	-0.035	-0.072
	0.052	0.053	0.053	0.053	0.053	0.049
Political/Civic Community	0.315**	0.349**	0.353**	0.346**	0.359**	0.314**
	0.064	0.061	0.06	0.06	0.059	0.05
Total # of Core Activists (logged)		0.311**	0.286**	0.250**	0.149*	0.054
		0.064	0.065	0.067	0.075	0.067
Governance Summary			0.214+	0.182	0.138	0.08
			0.123	0.123	0.123	0.103
Total Local Funds Raised (logged)				0.040*	0.03	0.01
				0.02	0.021	0.018
Support Activities					0.262**	0.081
					0.091	0.083
Conservation Programs						0.559**
						0.095
Electoral Programs						0.229**
						0.063
Outing Programs						0.045
						0.062
Constant	2.187**	2.303**	1.575**	1.590**	1.143*	0.234
	0.336	0.318	0.524	0.52	0.536	0.488
N	180	180	180	180	179	174
Adj. R2	0.15	0.25	0.26	0.27	0.3	0.53

Standard errors reported below coefficients

+ significant at 10%; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Table 3: Negative Binomial Regression Estimates of Member Engagement, Sierra Club Groups

	Member Engagement					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Total Transfer Funds (logged)	-0.031	-0.031+	-0.031+	-0.029+	-0.028+	-0.019
	0.019	0.017	0.017	0.016	0.016	0.016
Total # Members (logged)	0.240**	0.085	0.098+	0.071	0.084	0.06
	0.057	0.056	0.055	0.054	0.054	0.06
Political/Civic Community	-0.008	0.036	0.043	0.022	0.022	0.01
	0.071	0.063	0.062	0.061	0.061	0.059
Total # of Core Activists (logged)		0.505**	0.473**	0.408**	0.352**	0.313**
		0.069	0.069	0.07	0.078	0.081
Governance Summary			0.374**	0.292*	0.264*	0.220+
			0.125	0.124	0.126	0.12
Total Local Funds Raised (logged)				0.077**	0.073**	0.040+
				0.021	0.022	0.022
Support Activities					0.153	-0.049
					0.096	0.102
Conservation Programs						0.227+
						0.118
Electoral Programs						0.077
						0.078
Outing Programs						0.299**
						0.077
Constant	2.101**	2.260**	0.930+	0.982+	0.725	0.226
	0.368	0.333	0.552	0.543	0.562	0.598
N	175	175	174	174	173	168
Log-Likelihood	-785.33	-762.25	-754.57	-748.48	-743.98	-711.1
Pseudo R-squared	0.01	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.07

Standard errors reported below coefficients

+ significant at 10%; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Table 4. OLS Regression Estimates of Leader Development, Sierra Club Groups

	Leader Development Summary Scale					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Total Transfer Funds (logged)	-0.062	-0.075	-0.072	-0.073	-0.072	-0.059
	0.069	0.061	0.057	0.056	0.055	0.057
Total # Members (logged)	0.642**	0.173	0.237	0.152	0.172	0.094
	0.219	0.207	0.193	0.19	0.193	0.218
Political/Civic Community	0.201	0.305	0.323	0.279	0.316	0.329
	0.268	0.24	0.222	0.218	0.218	0.223
Total # of Core Activists (logged)		1.689**	1.434**	1.245**	1.066**	0.960**
		0.253	0.239	0.243	0.273	0.294
Governance Summary			2.413**	2.251**	2.111**	2.084**
			0.446	0.44	0.445	0.452
Total Local Funds Raised (logged)				0.211**	0.212**	0.186*
				0.072	0.075	0.08
Support Activities					0.47	0.39
					0.327	0.362
Conservation Programs						0.009
						0.417
Electoral Programs						0.085
						0.28
Outing Programs						0.289
						0.272
Constant	-4.085**	-3.519**	-11.742**	-11.691**	-12.306**	-12.226**
	1.378	1.234	1.901	1.86	1.944	2.15
N	176	176	176	176	175	171
Adj. R2	0.05	0.25	0.35	0.38	0.39	0.37

Standard errors reported below coefficients

+ significant at 10%; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Table A.1: Public Influence: Scale Items

Advocacy Influence

- State government leaders consult with us on environmental issues.
- Our efforts have placed important environmental issues on the political agenda.
- Our Group's [Chapter's] efforts have led to stronger enforcement of environmental standards and regulations.
- Local government leaders consult with us on environmental issues.
- Public officials take stronger stands on environmental issues because of our work.
- Local governments adopt new policies as a result of our advocacy.
- Our Group [Chapter] has helped to delay or block efforts that would have harmed the environment.
- Officials at public agencies consult with us on environmental issues.

Community Influence

- Our Group [Chapter] has been successful at raising awareness about environmental issues.
- The local media turns to us as an important spokesperson on environmental issues
- People in this area view our Group [Chapter] as a respected voice on environmental issues
- Our Group's [Chapter's] activities and positions are covered regularly in the local media.
- Our Group's [Chapter's] statements and reports influence public debate.
- Our Group [Chapter] is well known in the community
- Our Group [Chapter] is an important leader among community environmental groups
- We are key players in environmental policy issues in this area.
- Businesses leaders and groups know they have to deal with us on environmental issues.

Electoral Influence

- We help elect pro-environmental candidates that we endorse or support.
 - Candidates for local office place a high value on our endorsement.
-

Table A2: Governance Practices: Scale Items

DELIBERATION	IMPLEMENTATION
<p>Goal-Setting Our ExCom has clarity about what we are supposed to do.</p> <p>All the members of our ExCom have a clear sense of what we are supposed to do. Our ExCom has explicit group discussions about whether or not to undertake a project.</p> <p>Planning Our ExCom has clear gameplans to guide our projects. Our ExCom has explicit discussions about committing resources to achieve our objectives. Our ExCom considers multiple approaches to achieving our objectives. Our ExCom works collectively to develop our gameplans. Our ExCom considers particularly innovative ways to do the work.</p> <p>Decision-making Our ExCom has a clear facilitator for discussions about particular projects. Our ExCom brainstorms alternatives before deciding what to do. Our ExCom has a clear decision-making process for choosing among alternatives. When our ExCom resolves conflicts, we all accept the resolution.</p> <p>Inclusiveness Our ExCom regularly consults with other Group or Chapter members in making decisions. People outside the ExCom participate in decision-making processes.</p> <p>Adaptation Our ExCom has clear benchmarks for measuring our progress throughout our projects. Our ExCom avoids mindless routines, i.e. falling into patterns without noticing changes in the situation during our projects.</p> <p>Our ExCom evaluates our work partway through our projects.</p> <p>Our ExCom makes changes based on re-evaluation. Our ExCom evaluates our work at the end of projects.</p> <p>Meetings Our ExCom has an agenda for our meetings.</p> <p>Our ExCom invests time in celebrating our work. Participants in our ExCom feel comfortable disagreeing in meetings. Our ExCom meetings start and end on time. Participants come prepared for our ExCom meetings. Our ExCom meetings are productive. I feel energized at the end of our ExCom meetings.</p>	<p>Delegation My responsibilities are clearly defined in Group or Chapter projects. People (or groups) in charge of projects delegate responsibility effectively. I have people who are accountable to me.</p> <p>Initiative I have room for the exercise of judgment or initiative. We have to make many "judgment calls" as we do our work.</p> <p>Collaboration I have to work with other members of a team to do my work.</p> <p>A lot of communication and coordination is necessary with other members to generate outcomes. I depend heavily on other members to get the work done.</p> <p>Accountability Our ExCom holds people accountable for doing what they say they will do. I feel accountable to someone (or group) to complete my responsibilities.</p> <p>Rewards Excellent performance pays off on the ExCom.</p> <p>The ExCom reinforces and recognizes individuals that perform well.</p> <p>Our ExCom recognizes all kinds of good work.</p> <p>Norms Expectations for member behavior on this ExCom are clear.</p> <p>We agree about how members are expected to behave. Our ExCom holds members accountable for meeting group expectations.</p>

Appendix Table A.3: Program and Support Activities: Scale Items

Conservation Program	Elections Program
Members Contact Officials	Endorsing candidates/issues
Members Write Letters to Editor	Mobilizing Voters
Contacting Local Media	Promoting candidates to the public
Attending Public Hearings	Recruiting volunteers for candidates
Issuing press releases	Sponsoring a debate/forum
Sponsoring petitions/tabling	Sponsoring Canvassing
Participate in Community Events	
Holding Press Conferences	Outings Program
Sponsoring Rallies/Marches	Hiking/Biking Trips
Presenting in Public Schools	Sponsor Clean-up/Restoration
Relating with other organizations	Service Outing
Relating with community leaders	Backpacking/Mtn. Climbing
Relating with public officials	Technical Trips
Meeting with government agencies	
Meeting with legislators	Support Activities
Presenting at Public Meetings	Training programs
Relating with local media	Organize retreats
Meeting with advisory committees	Social events
Relating with business leaders	Celebrations
Participating in lawsuits	Send materials to new members
Drafting policy/legislation	Make personal contact to new members
	Hold meeting for new members

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