

TRACING HOW GOVERNANCE SHAPES AND LIMITS APPROACHES TO  
POVERTY REDUCTION, THE INFLUENCE OF FUNDERS: A CASE STUDY OF  
TWO POVERTY REDUCTION ORGANIZATIONS.

by

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## **Abstract**

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Communities throughout Canada are organizing to find ways to support people living in poverty and remove the barriers that create or keep people living in marginal conditions. There appears to be no “right” way to create an organizational structure that is effective; communities take a variety of approaches and are inventing or adapting models to meet local needs. With limited funding dollars available, funders involvement in the governance and decision-making of organizations that they also fund raises the question of how their involvement constraints or enhances the organization.

This report seeks to document the role of funders through the study of two poverty reduction organizations in neighbouring Lower Mainland municipalities. The process of data collection and what was available and not available publicly led to new areas of inquiry. The data collected demonstrated that the presence of funders and their leadership helped in bringing “leaders” to a community table to reduce poverty. However, it does appear that the organization with the least amount of funding had a model of governance and action, which allowed them to use their small amount of dollars to leverage them to achieve a great number of projects. The influence of funders can be traced to the language used and professionalization of communication in the one organization and possibly to the less open and public distribution of information. A surprising element was the apparent lack of promotion by the funders of their commitment and support to the initiative that they are heavily invested in. Evidence from both organizations indicates that the issue of power and powerlessness has been discussed in their desire to provide an inclusive environment.

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## **Dedication**

This report is dedicated to those who are working to reduce conditions that create poverty in communities and to the organizations that empower people living in poverty to tell their story and support them as they fight to dismantle regulations, laws and practices that give rise to unjust economic conditions.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity; it is an act of justice.

- Nelson Mandela, February 2005

Communities throughout Canada are organizing to find ways to support people living in poverty and remove the barriers that create or keep people living in marginal conditions. Communities in rural and urban areas are creating structures to help relieve or ameliorate the situation. There appears to be no “right” way to create an organizational structure that is effective; communities take a variety of approaches and are inventing or adapting models to meet local needs. These models may be influenced by the knowledge or experience of the persons primarily responsible for their organization such as community development workers, city planners, social planning organizations or funders. The development of an organization may also be influenced by regional or national programs sponsored by government departments such as Human Resource Skills Development Canada, local government organizations such as the Union of BC Municipalities or private philanthropic foundations such as the McConnell Family Foundation.

Poverty reduction organizations were chosen to explore this theme as the dynamics of poverty imply that some in the community have resources and others lack resources. Who is making decisions on how best to more equitably distribute resources or ensure access to employment, housing, public transit, affordable and nutritious food is a very contested subject. The role of well paid professionals, corporations and well

meaning philanthropists is debated. I was once accused by a right leaning city councillor in Surrey as been part of the poverty industry. He may not have been supportive of the efforts to build affordable housing but he was right to challenge who speaks on behalf of people living in poverty and whose solutions to the problems are listened to and acted upon. The National Anti-Poverty Organization now called Canada Without Poverty (as of February 3, 2009) “is governed by people with experience of living in poverty” (National Anti-Poverty Organization, 2009) and is unique in its poverty eradication work because of who governs the organization.

This report seeks to document the changing role of funders through the study of two poverty reduction organizations in neighbouring Lower Mainland municipalities. Both arose out of an initiative of the United Way of the Lower Mainland, which funded the development of Community Impact Profiles (Profiles). The United Way took the leadership in the development of the Profiles because of the success of this approach in other jurisdictions including nearby Oregon. These Profiles or community report cards developed by community members, agencies and publicly mandated organizations provided communities with a wide diversity of socio-economic information that would serve as benchmarks for projects seeking to improve on a range of social measures. For example, in a community that had relatively poor high school completion rate (measured against provincial data), the Profile would then serve to mobilize community, school districts, social service agencies, and education stakeholders to set targets for improvements, so by the time the next Community Impact Profile (following availability of the next Census data) was drafted, an improved outcome would be measured for students.

This is not an evaluation of the two organizations studied, of poverty reduction initiatives or meant to explore how best to structure poverty reduction initiatives. It is a study that has a very limited scope and the focus is on the relationship of funders to organizations they fund.

The study traces two Community-based organizations in two municipalities in the Lower Mainland that took up the challenge of doing Profiles or Report Cards on their community and then initiated community responses based on the findings. One of the organizations is part of a national program with similar structures and focus, while the other is not similar to any other organization. This project will document the two differing approaches taken by these organization and consider how these Profiles led to very different ways of organizing community action for poverty reduction and in particular the influence of funders/sponsors.

### Shaping Social Outcomes through Government Programming

The question of who participates and shapes the agenda in community based activities is not a new question and has preoccupied community developers and proponents of democratic participation (Pateman, 1970). However there is a trend in Canada towards the devolution of government programs to community based organizations or to the private sector and an increasing role that private foundations have in funding needed programs including poverty reduction programs (in the absence of government funding). This has resulted in a significant shift in the loci of funding from government to that of non-elected bodies as funders. For example in B.C. after 2001, there was a major revision of funding criteria for grants, and some previously funded

activities were eliminated from many provincially programs (Klein, 2002; CUPE Women's, Committee, 2006). As a result, the United Way of the Lower Mainland and the Vancouver Foundation provided funds for activities that were previously funded by government (community development activities).

A more recent trend has been the role of foundations as intermediaries between government and agencies to deliver specific public policy programming. Stone and Ostrower (2007) write: “ Because government as a direct provider of public programs and services has diminished, a new profile of third-party or indirect government has emerged where nongovernmental entities, including nonprofit organizations, private corporation and complex networks, implement public policy through a variety of mechanisms” (Ostrower & Stone, 2007)

For example in British Columbia, the Provincial government has given funds to the United Way for a program called *SUCCESS by 6* which supports early childhood programming (Ministry of Housing and Social Development, 2009). The Credit Unions also provide funds for *SUCCESS by 6*. Funding decisions are made by a Steering Committee chosen by the United Way, with government, other donors and agency representatives. These foundations are an example of the influence that non-elected charitable foundations (both community and private) are increasingly having as governments remove themselves from funding poverty reduction or community development activities: as Canadian Foundations of Canada (2008) notes “ in light of the reduction in the services being offered by governments, the voluntary sector is increasing being asked to be more active in filling the void” (Canadian Foundations of Canada, 2008; *Social Justice Grantmaking: Finding Common Language*, 2008). The foundations

obtain funds for their programs from the corporate sector and in some cases, organizations such as the United Way/Centraide, access corporate donations and workplace campaigns supported by labour and individual donations. While some might dispute the assertion that the United Way/Centraide is a foundation, for the purposes of this project I will characterize the United way/Centraide as a *community foundation* as it technically operates as charitable non-profit with an elected board of directors. In this way it operates similarly to philanthropic foundations, that is, organizations set up by wealthy individuals or corporate companies such as TD Trust to administer charitable dollars and accountable directly to the founding family or company. The United Way/Centraide fits in the traditional description of a community foundation, which is”

A community foundation is a tax-exempt, nonprofit, autonomous, publicly supported, non-sectarian philanthropic institution with a long term goal of building permanent, named component funds established by many separate donors to carry out their charitable interests and for the broad-based charitable interest of and for the benefit of residents of a defined geographic area, typically no larger than a state (Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties, 2007, p. xx)

#### *Purpose and Objectives of the Study*

The focus of the study is to explore the influence that funders (who may also be called sponsors) have when they are also part of the governance of the project. The role of funders in social justice projects such as poverty reduction may give rise to issues of how power, privilege, empowerment and dependency operate within such organizations (Bradshaw, Hayday, & Armstrong, 2007) . The study will analyze the data through the

theories of resource dependency (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Cornforth 2005), stakeholder theory (Hung, 1998; Cornforth, 2005) and concepts of power (Gaventa 1980; Polsby, 1959; Foucault 1972).

The Research question this study explores is “How is the influence of funding agencies evidenced through an analysis of written discourses and texts that traces the work of two B.C. poverty reduction organizations, Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee?” More specifically when examining these publicly available documents, what evidence is there that access to public, private and political resources (funds, contacts, positional power) either enable or constrain the ways in which these agencies operate within the community? How do theories of resource dependency, stakeholder theory, and power inform this analysis? And to what extent do these organizational operations and governance models reflect democratic, civic and social engagement among community members and/or other organizations?

### Importance of the Research

This research will illuminate differences in approach of governance by the two community based poverty reduction organizations and map out how these differences impact the actions of these organizations. As well, given that there are currently many poverty reduction initiatives being developed in many communities throughout North America, this research will help bring attention to how organizational and governance decisions affect the actions, maintenance, sustainability and social, cultural and political impact of these organizations. The research also complements the growing literature on

the changing face of civil or voluntary organizations in the neoliberal environment they operate under.

This research will add to the discussion on the paradoxes of governance (Cornforth, 2005) and contribute to the mapping out of the resource dependency and stakeholder theories in nonprofit governance. The question on who is involved in civic society organizations and how the voices of the marginalized, particularly those living in poverty contributes to community processes, is a fundamental question that underpins this research. It is a question that is not unique to poverty reduction activities and it is hoped that the research will provide helpful theoretical and practical models that can be useful to similarly situated organizations.

This research is also of interest to practitioners and academics that are exploring the roles of funding agencies (foundations, governments, corporations). Funders are playing increasing hands-on role in organizations receiving their funds. This hands on role takes various forms and can be called: partnership, collaboration, accountability, community planning, or expertise sharing. For example, Community Foundations are now not only providing funds but also researching the issues and creating community tables that they share and control; a good example is the Vancouver Foundation Vital Signs Project (Vancouver Foundation, 2009). The Vancouver Foundation is not just giving out funds based on community needs and their mandate, but also now initiating their own community impact profiles. Vital Signs is a national program of the Community Foundations of Canada. The foundations set up community committees to engage in analysis and explore solutions and also use the profiles to decide their funding priorities.

As the description of the Vancouver Foundation suggests, the questions that inform this research should also provide insight to the increased use of intermediary organizations by government to distribute funds to agencies for programs that are government priorities. The example of SUCCESS by Six was noted earlier. Another recent example suggests that the use of intermediary organizations by government is a growing trend. If this trend continues by both provincial and federal governments, it becomes even more important to delve further into the changing relationships between funders and agencies dependent on funding.

A recent example of the use of Foundations by governments to channel funds is the setting up of the Streethome Foundation in Vancouver whose mission is to “is to ensure that all homeless citizens in Vancouver have access to safe, decent and affordable housing and support services by 2015”(Streethome Foundation, 2009, p. 1). The Provincial Government has given this foundation half a million dollars to tackle homelessness, on the basis that "Community partnerships are the best way to tackle homelessness, which is why the Province provided \$500,000 to help start the Streethome Foundation," said Rich Coleman, Minister of Housing and Social Development” (Ministry of Housing and Social Development, 2009).

The funds will be going to two housing projects, which in the past would have been funded directly by government with the sponsoring agencies fundraising for the additional funding. Now an intermediary foundation is acting on behalf of government to distribute funds. It is also interesting that the board of this new foundation is made up of corporate leaders and includes the City of Vancouver Police Chief and Vancouver’s Civil Commissioner.

Finally, the writer hopes that this project would be helpful to the two organizations researched as they seek to reduce the conditions that perpetuate poverty in their communities.

### Situating the Researcher

Feminist research is grounded in the concept that “ paying attention to the specific experiences and situated perspectives of human beings both researchers and respondents alike, may actually become a tool for knowledge building and rich understanding” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 13). It is honest about its construction as furthering an agenda and acknowledges the interconnectness between research and activism in all stage of the research project that cements the relationship between acquiring knowledge and acting with that knowledge to remove barriers. I would agree with the comments in Brooks & Hesse-Biber (2007) that this research project is derived from them or at least emerges from my interests, which have been shaped by many things. It will also be important for me to be “cognizant and critically reflective about the different ways my positionality can serve as both a hindrance and a resource towards achieving knowledge throughout the research process” (p. 17). This follows Sandra Harding notion of reflexivity defined as “the manifestation of strong objectivity through method” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 9).

As a former Executive Director of organizations in the multicultural/settlement and social planning sectors, I have been interested in the roles that many funding agencies are now playing in the organizations that they fund. This is of particular interest when funders are involved in endeavours where they provide leadership or are involved in the governance. While I no longer have a leadership role in the nonprofit or

community development sector, I am not an unbiased observer. The years of unequal or "asymmetrical" (Andreassen, 2008) relationships with funders and the ongoing pursuit of funds to meet needs of marginalized groups have provided me with a particular perspective on the power dynamics of the relationship. Over the close to 30 years of involvement, I grew to appreciate how important the partnership between funder and receiver of funds was and the challenges of meeting multiple expectations, including restrictions on using funds, such as limitations on advocacy or community development or meeting changing expectations as funding policies changed.

My experience also showed me that there are significant shifts that can be traced historically in the not-for-profit community sector. For example, there was a shift from partnership and accountability in the late 80's, to funding agencies not only funding projects but also sitting on the projects' governing committees. This was recognized as beneficial as it demonstrated the involvement of funders in the project.

At my stage in life, graduate studies are an opportunity for reflection, for exploration of the theoretical underpinning to one's practice. It is also an opportunity to codify knowledge and lessons learned from the daily toil of practice and activism. The notion that social science research is neutral /objective is impossible to accept and a post modernist approach which acknowledges the potential biases allows a student like myself to research and theorize places of former activism and interest. "Feminist researchers explain how paying attention to the specific experiences and situated perspectives of human beings, both researchers and respondents alike, may actually become a tool for knowledge building and rich understanding "(Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 13).

It is also important that I acknowledge my own position of privilege as I worked towards the reduction of poverty. Kathryn Choules (2007) says that “discourses that avoid an examination of our privileged position as complicit in maintaining systems unjust and inequitable (p. 461). During the time that I was involved with both organizations, I had a position of power and privilege, not only because of my income or professional status but also because as an elected school trustee I had a “privilege access to discourse” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 255). Van Dijk (1993) writes about the “parallelism between social power and discourse access” (p. 256). This profile gave me frequent access to the media, other elected officials, and “elites” in the communities. It provided opportunities for conversations, meetings and advocacy in ways which others working towards power reduction did not have.

I chose the two organizations Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee not only because they represent two very different governance structures whose missions are similar but also because of my familiarity with both organizations. I founded the Richmond Poverty Response Committee and established its original governance model and co-chaired the organization until the end of 2005. I worked for Surrey Social Futures and led the Community Impact Profile work that resulted in the formation in 2004 of Vibrant Surrey.

Given my personal involvement with these organizations, research bias is an important possible outcome that needs to be addressed. In order to remove overt elements of bias to this research, the case studies conducted for my study will focus on the time after I left the Lower Mainland and was no longer formally involved with either of these organizations. It is also the reason why document analysis rather than key informant

interviews were chosen to establish the case studies. Using documents for the purpose of research is least likely to be subject to interviewer biases or subjectivity.

There is an amount of risk in exploring the role of funders in community organizations for someone still active in community organizations. Having weighted the potential consequences, I felt that an academic approach to the subject based on publically available documents should provide an element of analysis that would be helpful to both community agencies and funders. This research is not meant to evaluate but to examine an increasingly complex environment for funders and recipients alike and provide a perspective based on theoretical musings.

### Contemporary Influences in Community Empowerment

The discourse among practitioners in the social service sector is no longer who participates in community tables/discussions but whose interests are being served and how decisions are made. I often heard members of communities I worked in/with tell me that they were tired of being consulted as it did not mean there was transparency in how the final decisions would be made. Community agencies would articulate the same thoughts as individuals in the community as one more government ministry would hold consultations on how a program could be improved.

In this next section of the introduction, I discuss a few major socio-political and policy trends, which are shaping the ways in which community foundations and philanthropic organizations respond to social issues in communities. These will include social justice mandate of funders, corporate social responsibility, and corporatization of nonprofit boards,

There is a growing recognition by foundations that they need to look beyond providing social services to “questioning the economy structures that have created such need in the first place” (Canadian Foundations of Canada, 2008). Both the American and Canadian national community foundation organizations commissioned reports to explore the relationship between social justice and philanthropy. In these reports questions are raised about the imbalance of power between the donor (usually wealth individuals or corporation and the recipient (needy individuals) and the need to address structural change. These are important issues to consider in exploring the role of funders in the two organizations researched.

Another trend that has implication for poverty reduction activities is the growing emphasis on corporate social responsibility and its emphasis on investment in the community as a strategic outcome:

It is about how companies conduct their business in a way that is ethical. This means taking account of their impact socially, environmentally, economically and in terms of human rights. It can involve a range of activities such as: Working in partnership with local communities; Socially responsible investment (SRI) developing relationships with employees and customers; and environmental protection and sustainability. It can be seen as a form of strategic management, encouraging the organization to scan the horizon and think laterally about how its relationships will contribute long-term to its bottom line in a constantly changing world (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2009, p.1).

Another trend is the corporatization of nonprofit organizations, which are run by Chief Executive Officers (CEO) with board members who are often appointed by their

firm to sit on that board (Alexander Jeffrey A. & Weiner, 1998). The increased role that the corporate sector is playing in funding and leading community projects through the corporate social responsibility movement, which results in programs branded with corporate trademarks (for example: Coast Capital, Royal Bank, Shell Canada, and Home Depot are all examples of Canadian companies who have engaged in such practices) is similar in intent to the naming of an hockey arena or Jazz Festival. This corporate influence within the not for profit sector makes it even more important to better understand the role/influence that funders have when they participate in the governance of nonprofits or community projects where they sit at the same table-- not with millionaire owners of hockey teams-- but with marginalized disempowered people living in poverty or agency staff whose own job depends on the willingness of the funder to fund a particular program. Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) call this the “new philanthropy” which emphasizes “collaboration across groups and sectors, unconventional modes of giving and volunteering and a focus on issues rather than institutions...these donors scrutinize charitable causes like potential business investments” (p. 134).

### Methodological Overview

The two organizations, Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee chosen for this research operate in municipalities that have much in common including low income population, diverse, culturally diverse communities with a large proportion of new immigrants, high rate of population increase and demonstrated interest by the same funders. They both also have a large agricultural land base, challenges in

public transportation and a high rate of new housing construction. They differ in the size of their population and landmass with Surrey having the largest school population in BC and twice the population of Richmond.

**Table 1: Community Comparison**

Item for comparison	Surrey	Richmond	Notes
Poverty Rates 2001 Census	16.1%	22%	Census data from the City's websites
Percentage of Visible Minorities 2001 Census	46.1% 2006	59%	Census data from the City's websites
% Of the population with other language than English as their mother tongue 2001 Census	63%	66%	Census data from the City's websites
Population in 2001	347,820	171,600	Census data from the City's websites
Active Credit Unions	Coast Capital formerly Surrey Metro, Vancity, Envision	Coast Capital formerly Richmond Savings, Vancity Gulf and Fraser Fisherman Credit Union	Websites
Main Foundations (Private/Community) in these communities	Surrey Foundation Vancity Foundation McConnell Foundation United Way of the Lower Mainland	Richmond Foundation Vancity Foundation United Way of the Lower Mainland	Websites
Council committees relating to poverty reduction	Social Planning Committee **	Richmond Community Services Advisory Council *	City websites

- \*RCSAC is a committee of Richmond City Council. It is an invaluable network of agencies and provides a point of contact to the Council for input into matters pertaining to social issues. Membership include one City Councillor, two citizens appointed by council and social service agencies active in Richmond.

- \*\*The Social Planning Advisory Committee of Surrey City Council was re-established in 2007. Its purpose is to provide advice to Council and to undertake initiatives to enhance the social well-being of present and future residents of Surrey. Committee members include two City Councillors and nine community members.

As identified earlier, these two case studies were also chosen, as their genesis was a similar funding program from the United Way. A number of other communities benefited from that funding including Tri-Cities, Delta and Langley (UWLM, 2001). However Richmond and Surrey were the only two in which the poverty reduction work could still be easily traced to the initial United Way program of funding Community Impact Profiles. Both received phase two funding from the United Way through the *Communities in Action program* as it was then known and eventually separate organizations were founded with poverty reduction as their goal. One of the organization became part of a national program with 15 cities/neighbourhood across the country tied to a common approach, while the other organization is not tied to other organizations or established program. There is poverty reduction work ongoing in the other municipalities that benefited from the Communities in Action United Way program however they are not included in this study.

The methodology used for this project is case study. Creswell (Creswell, 2003) defines this approach as “exploring in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). Case study methodologies can also be used to develop and support theoretical assumptions (Merriam, 1988, p. 23).

The case study analysis will focus on a specific time period, between January 2006 and December 2008. This time period was chosen as that the writer was involved in both of these organizations before moving to Victoria in 2006 and wanted to remove any overt bias in the research by choosing a period when both organizations had been active and the writer had cut all ties with both organizations. The case study data will be limited as it is drawn only from *publicly available documents*.

The documents obtained were those that were easily accessible through websites, the BC Registrar of Societies, brochures or other agencies. One organization participated and helped the author access information by facilitating access to publicly available documents and one organization chose not to be involved. This investigative approach made it possible to obtain comparable information for both organizations through publicly available websites, annual reports and media articles.

While at first I was concerned about the ability to obtain useful and relevant information mostly through websites, this exercise was helped by the fact that publicly funded bodies and charitable organizations are required to report donations for their work and that other organizations such as the Caledon Institute of Public Policy report on poverty reduction efforts. This supplemented my original web searches so as to satisfy any concerns that there was sufficient documentation available for the purposes of this analysis.

The search for publicly available documents also provided food for thoughts in terms of the research question “How is the influence of funding agencies evidenced through an analysis of written discourses and texts that traces the work of two B.C. poverty reduction organizations, Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response

Committee?” as it proved a challenge to find public data on funds disbursement by the main funders of both organizations and raised issue of transparency and openness.

### Limitations

One important limitations of this research relate to the availability of publicly available documents or access to official minutes of the organizations. Since key informant interviews were not chosen as a technique to gather information, the data collected is subject to what van Dijk (1993) describes as “dominance relations by elite groups and institutions as they are being enacted, legitimated or otherwise reproduced by text and talk” (p. 249). In other words, the documents that will be used for data collection have been drafted possibly by the elite in the organization and might reflect a bias.

A second limitations is what is available publicly through websites or was forwarded to me by the two organizations may be prone to “ style rhetoric, or meaning of texts for strategies that aim at the concealment of social power relations, for instance by playing down, leaving implicit or understating responsible agency of powerful social actors in the events represented in the text” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 250). The released documents were drafted, edited and underwent a process of vetting by the minute taker, chair of the group and possibly the senior staff person before they appeared on the web, or released to the public. This is what van Dijk refers to as how text and talk are also subject to elite dominance. The minutes have undergone a vetting by those in power in an organization. In the same way, information gathered from news articles is to be seen in light of who has access to discourse and are not unbiased. Van Dijk (1993) notes, “ one

crucial power resource is privileged preferential access to discourse” (p. 259). As documents are examined, it will be important to keep in mind the source of the document and who created the documents.

One of the challenges in this research is to concentrate on the specific research question and not be distracted in exploring related research questions such conducting a program evaluation analysis or measuring the effectiveness of the poverty reduction initiatives undertaken by the organizations subject to this study. The temptation also exists to explore policy analysis in the context of poverty reduction. It is important however to keep to the research questions and not veer into an analysis of the broader context of poverty reduction and programs designed to alleviate poverty.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have set out the research question, situated the researcher, explained the importance of the research and provided a methodological overview that included the limitation of this research. This project explores the influence of funders/donors on organizations through case studies of two poverty reduction organizations (add names here). These organizations were chosen as they had a common initial project that engaged their respective communities. The research question will allow me to explore how the influence of funding agencies evidenced through an analysis of written discourses and texts that traces the work of two B.C. poverty reduction organizations, Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee?

In the next chapter I review the literature that explores key concepts such as theories of governance and power asymmetry. Chapter 3 will set out in more details the

methodology of my study. Chapter 4 will provide the data collected and Chapter 5 an analysis of the findings.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I will review the literature on governance briefly in order to situate the Resource Dependency and Stakeholder Theories that will guide the analysis of the documents accessed and reviewed for this study. Power relations and their asymmetry inform these theories and this will also be described, as these are key features of critical discourse analysis. The literature review takes into account the diverse academic disciplines that inform the research questions as set out in chapter one.

### Historical context of community organization research

Theoretical models of the governance of community organizations (incorporated or not as not for profits) derive from the management literature of for profit companies (Cornforth, 2005, p. 6). One of the main preoccupation in that literature is the ability of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/manager to run the organization so as to maximize the profits of the shareholders. The principal-agent theory (Mudambi & Pedersen, 2007) has the CEO as the agent for the principal or shareholders and postulates on creating the conditions for the agent to behave in ways to maximize the welfare of the principal.

This management orientation has been adapted to the context of community organizations by numerous non-profit researchers and theorists to reflect one of the predominant themes for not for profit organizations - organization effectiveness. Unlike the board of private businesses, the participation of board members is seen as altruistic and not directly linked to monetary rewards. Nonprofits are understood to be operating as a public benefit (similar to governments) and not for personal gain. The question of the altruistic nature of board member participation has been raised (Brown, 2005) for major

donors (the case in many nonprofits especially in the cultural and health sector) who might act more as shareholders in for-profit businesses. Their interest is to protect their investment in the organization and ensure that the resources are used for the purpose that they have been given. These competing discourses of altruism and business efficiency are important themes that will be used to analyze the two organizations in this case study.

### Other Research Themes

#### *Civic engagement*

Nonprofit researchers have been preoccupied with the composition of boards, the role and actions of board members and the relationship between the board and its staff and how the board contributes to organizational effectiveness (Brown, 2005). The preoccupation with the study of the Board is because the boards or the governing committees of community organizations “are an important channel for civic participation and play a critical role in connecting individual institutions to their larger environment (Ostrower & Stone, 2006, p.1). Involvement and participation on the board of a nonprofit is an important component of building social capital (Putman, 2000) in communities.

Putman describes social capital as “referring to social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity” (Clarke, 2004, p.1). While other scholars have also described the importance of social capital (for example, Hanifan 1916; Jacobs 1960’s; Bourdieu, 1980’s; Schlicht 1980’s and Coleman late 1980’s) it was Putman (2000) who popularize the term in his book *Bowling Alone*. In his book and subsequent writing Putnam explains that “networks of community engagement foster sturdy norms of reciprocity” (p. 4) and that “bridging” social capital provide for linkage to external

assets and for information diffusion. Social Capital for theorist such as Edwards & Foley (Edwards & Foley, 1998) is something used to amend or overcome the failure of the predominant economic model to incorporate non-market factors into its account of the political and economic behaviour of individuals and groups. Coleman (Edwards & Foley, 1998) views social capital “not as the norms and values of individuals per se but norms and values available as resources to those individuals who share access to that particular social context” (p. 100).

Coleman’s understanding of social capital is helpful as it “formulates social capital in terms of relational or structural factors like networks or organization, brought a much needed amendments to prevailing economic analytic models while preserving the insight that individuals and collectivities depend on a variety of resources capitalized in a variety of ways and contexts” (p. 135).

Given the emphasis on civic involvement and participation, it was important to review and understand the literature on community organization’s styles or approaches to governance so as to provide a useful framework for exploring the different ways that funders influence or shape Boards or Governing Committees.

### *The Importance of Acknowledging Socio-political contexts*

One of the challenges in research on Boards is the role that external and internal variables have in determining the outcomes for boards and organizations. Ostrower and Stone (2006, p. 624) argued that boards must be studied using strategic contingency theory; this means that the fundamental mission and tasks that face the institution that it oversees must be kept in mind. The values and mission of the organization are the

internal context in which the organization operates. Without understanding the internal and external context of the organization it is challenging to determine cause and effect. The analysis therefore pay attention to both the internal and external context of the two organizations .

#### *Personal commitment by Board members*

Other researchers have found that Boards where members make personal financial contributions and engage in fundraising were more likely to be associated with measures of improved organizational performance (Herman & Renz 2000, Green & Griesinger 1996 cited in Brown 2005, p 321). Provan (1980) explored the concept of board power that includes elite or prestige recruits, high income, and linkage with other important boards and found a strong correlation. Bradshaw, Hayday and Armstrong (2007) found that “that the literature is largely silent on issues of privilege, and discrimination and through these silences assumptions that governance processes are adequately inclusive all groups are left unchallenged” (p. 5). This is important, as there is the perception that boards of nonprofit organizations are democratically elected and inclusive of the community. However, there is little research that validates the assumption that boards are democratic and inclusive.

#### *Transparency and Accountability*

An important issue for Brown (2002) is the transparency processes of nonprofit organizations. How can transparency be measured? What is the impact of transparency on effectiveness? What is the impact of transparency on resources? Is transparency important because of the values that underlie nonprofits? There is an increasing call for fundraising transparency but should the other processes of the board and the organization

also be as transparent. Van Til (1999, as cited in Brown, 2002) states that the effective nonprofit organizations assesses and evaluates its work in an open and transparent process with its board and public. Cornforth's (2005) preoccupation is with boards public accountability and potential for democratic deficit in non-transparent boards.

#### *The Influence of External Funders*

A similar field of study is the influence of funders who while not formally on the board often yield power equal to the board and CEO. This builds on the research of Callen, Klein & Tinkelman (2003) and Fama and Jenson (1983). The preoccupation of researchers is the possibility that when the loci of decision-making becomes external driven rather than internally a board/CEO function is reduced to implementing decisions made outside of the organization's legal framework. This bears particular importance when exploring the influence of funders/donors or community elites who may be more influential than the legal decision makers of an organization i.e. the board.

#### *Non-profit Governance Models*

Cornforth (2005) identifies a number of theories that characterize nonprofit governance. Agency theory and resource dependency theory are seen by a number of authors as fundamental to understanding nonprofit performance (Miller-Millesen 2003). This author also recognizes institutional theory. Institutional theory implies that to understand the internal attitudes and behaviours of nonprofit organizations, one must understand the external environment and its pressures on an organization" (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004, p. 133).

Agency Theory often known as Principal-Agent Theory is important in the world of shareholders governed organizations. It seeks to explain the relationship between "the

principal” or the board delegates work to another “ the agent” who performs that work. (Ali-Hassan, 2008, p.2). It is preoccupied on the behaviour of the agent and his/her interest to maximize benefits for the principal. (Brown (2005) has added group and decision making process theory as an important concept for understanding how board performance impacts organizational performance. Brown’s addition takes into account the human dynamics elements involved and hints at the importance of board culture and governance practices.

The table below describes these theories.

**Table 2: Main Governance Theories**

(Table based on Cornforth’s 2003, Brown 2005 and Miller-Millesen 2003)

Theory	Democratic Theory	Agency Theory	Resource Dependency Theory	Group/decision and Process Theory	Institutional Theory	Stakeholder Theory	Stewardship Theory	Managerial Hegemony Theory
Model	A democratic model	A compliance model	A co-optation model	A behavioural model	An structural model	A stakeholder model	A partnership model	A rubber stamp model
Board Role	The job of the board is to represent the interests of one or more constituencies or groups the organization serves.  Political	Posits a conflict relationship between the board and the CEO where the main function of the board is to control the managers  Compliance or conformance	<b>Board functions as a resource for organizations, boundary spanning (board capital concept).</b>  <b>Maintain stakeholder relationships</b>	Concerned with how information is managed and channelled, decisions are made and how groups members interact	Focus on organizational structure and processes reflect institutional pressures, rules, norms and sanctions.	<b>Based on the premise that organizations should be responsible to groups in society other than just the organizations’ “owners”</b>  <b>Balancing stakeholder needs</b>	Assumes that managers want to do a good job and will act as effective stewards of an organization’s resources Add value to top decisions	Control ceded to a new professional managerial class  Largely symbolic

## Governance Theories

The next sections summarize Resource Dependency and Stakeholder Theories and how they have been adapted for use to the nonprofit or community organizational sector in this study. The two theories offer a way to examine the relationships within and outside of the organizations under study. They can be used to map out how relationships, networks and individuals act within and outside of organizations.

### *Resource Dependency Theory*

The Resource Dependency Theory comes from the work of Pfeffer & Salancik (1978). They studied businesses and concluded, “to understand the behaviour of an organization you must understand the context of that behaviour” (p.1). when the authors describe contexts however, they are largely referring to resources that the organization has access to. The key to the survival of an organization is the ability to acquire and maintain resources as well as their effectiveness in using these resources. Organizations need to be completely self-contained or in complete control of the conditions of its existence and operation. Organizations to be successful must cope with the environment and find ways to ensure that they get the resources and information they need. As Cornforth (2005) states “from this perspective the board is seen as one means of reducing uncertainty by creating influential links between organizations and ..... to maintain good relations with key external stakeholder in order to ensure the flow of resources into and from the organization, and to help the organization respond to external change” (p. 8).

The role of the Board is therefore one that bridges between the organization and the external environment, also known as “boundary-spanning” (p.9). Boundary spanners are members of an organization who link their organization with the external environment. Boundary spanning primarily concerns the exchange of information (Langford & Hunsicker, 1996). They further define a boundary spanner “as one who attempts to influence external environmental elements and processes” (p. 1).

Cornforth (2005) calls the Resource Dependency Theory a co-optation model (p.8); by that he means that by having board/committee members with important linkages to the external environment of the agency, it is hoped that these external influences will be “co-opted” to support the work of the agency. Cornforth’s usage of the word co-optation is important as it defines the role of those board/committee members that are chosen for their ability to co-opt external influences. The co-optation includes the reduction of risk to the organization through the co-optation of threats and uncertainties (Useen 1978 cited in Hung,1998, p. 105).

In the corporate sector, it might at first glance seem strange to have board members who belong to more than one corporate board. However, the concept of interlocking directorates are seen as positive in the non profit sector as they help organizations obtain valuable resources and at the same time control other organizations through manipulation of available resources (Hung 1998, p. 105). This happens because as board members are provided access to information about finances and operations it ensures that resources will be allocated in favour of the interlocking corporations (p.104).

Interlocking of board members is a very common practice in nonprofit governance; for example the Executive Director or senior staff member of one organization might sit on the board of another similar agency in the community.

The concept of Social Power relates to the Resource Dependency Theory as Social Power is “based on privileged access to socially valued resources” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 254). The Resource Dependency Theory proposes that actors lacking in essential resources will seek to establish relationships with (i.e., be dependent upon) others in order to obtain needed resources. Organizations attempt to alter their dependence relationships by minimizing their own dependence or by increasing the dependence of other organizations on them. Acquiring the external resources needed by an organization comes by decreasing the organization’s dependence on others and/or by increasing other’s dependency on it, that is, modifying an organization’s power with other organizations (Akbari, 2005, p. 2). Resource Dependency Theory “emphasizes proactive strategies that can be pursued to deal with environmental constraints rather than viewing organizations as largely passive or impotent in relation to environmental forces” (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004, p. 133).

#### *Stakeholder theory*

This theory is based on “the premise that organizations should be responsible to a range of groups in society other than just the organizations “owners” (Hung, 1998, p. 106). The owners in nonprofit terms are usually understood to be the members of an organization if membership based. “If the ownership is the community at large, as is often the case in nonprofits, the board of directors need to have in place mechanism to identify and understand these multiple constituents (Carver 1997 as cited in Brown 2002,

p. 372). Through including different stakeholders on its governing Board or Committee, the expectation is that organizations will be more responsible to a broader public interest (Cornforth, 2005, p. 9). The Board must then learn to deal with the potential conflicting interests of the various stakeholders in order to determine mission and policies for the organization.

In this theory, a stakeholder is defined as “any group or individual who can affect, or if affected by, the achievement of a [organization]” (Hung, 1998, p. 106).

Stakeholders include staff, volunteers, union, clients, members, funders, governments, family members of clients, in fact anyone that can help or hurt an organization.

Stakeholders are identified by their interests and all stakeholder interests are considered to be intrinsically valuable to the organization.

The Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that beside the “owners” of the organization, there are many groups in society to whom the organization is responsible. Therefore the objectives or mission of an organization can only be achieved by balancing the interest (often in conflict) among these groups. This is especially important for nonprofit organization whose mission is to serve the “community” and must reconcile the various interests in order to be seen as effective and meeting community needs. This approach confirms the role of the governing board or committee as one of negotiating and compromising with stakeholders in the interest of the organization. Brown (2002) acknowledges that challenges that nonprofits face in “in balancing overwhelming needs against organizational constraints. Recognition of stakeholders, however, should be fundamental to how these organizations operate” (p. 382).

Of interest in the discussion of the applicability of theories taken from corporate governance and applied to the community or nonprofit sector is the notion put forth by Hung (1998) that stakeholder theory can be used to identify moral and philosophical guidelines for the management of the organization. Paying attention to stakeholders interests requires managerial attention to attitudes, structures, and practices in an organization (Furieux, 2006). This may be best illustrated with an example. Recent demographic changes in the Lower Mainland population required organizations to develop and provide services that were language and culturally relevant such as the UWLM (United Way of the Lower Mainland) ADAPT program. New immigrant groups became legitimate stakeholders whose needs led organizations to change their attitudes, structures and practices.

Van Til (1999 cited in Brown 2002, p. 382) sums up this concept in this way: “the effective nonprofit organization assesses and evaluates its work in an open and transparent process with its board and public.” The concept of transparency is important for nonprofits that operate to benefit the community and it requires board process and structures that allow stakeholder participation.

There is already a pool of research on how board members perceive their role and a number of researchers including Cornforth (2005) and Brown (2002) who have explored the relevance of the role that Board members play according to stakeholder theory. A question that arises from the research is the concept of responsiveness to stakeholders (once identified) and how that responsiveness to community is impacted by the composition of the board/committee or how best to structure governance to meet stakeholders interests.

## Power Theories

There is a vast literature on the concept of power and asymmetrical relationships. As a basis for the analysis I will use the writings of J. Gaventa (1980) who is interested in the question of quiescence or non-participation in situation of uneven power relationships. “In situations of inequality, the political response of the deprived group or class may be seen as a function of power relationships, such that power serves for the development and maintenance of the quiescence of the non-elite” (Gaventa, 1980, p. 3). Gaventa (1980) cites Nelson W. Polsby (1963) who states, “in the politics of community, power may be studied by examining who participates, who gains and loses and who prevails in decision making” (p.5). Gaventa (1980) suggested that the mechanism of power in the political arena is the resources – votes, influences, and jobs. In the contexts of resource dependency these ‘power resources’ include funds, networks, contacts and leverage opportunities. Another author Prem Chadha (2005) details the various sources of power in the management of organizations. This is a useful typology in looking at the various actors in our case studies: referent, expert, charisma, positional reward, and coercive forms of power. Another typology that might be useful in coding the documents is the distinction between power over, power with, power to and power within (Veneklasen & Miller, 2002).

There are similarities in terms of the role of those who yield power in communities and the colonization process that occurred in the past. The comparison can be made because of our earlier identification of access to resources as a key indicator of power. Gaventa (1980) describes this as “in the first instance, the development of domination or the colonizing process, involves the prevailing of the colonizer over the

allocation of resources in the colony, owing to superior resources of the former, such as capital, technology, or force ( p. 31).

The concept of non-decisions as a result of uneven power relationships is of importance in the context of governance of organizations. Bacharach and Baratz (1970) and (Gaventa, 1980) state that “ non-decision-making is a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before the are voiced, or kept covert..... Another aspect of power is the “mobilization of bias” (p. 14), which is sustained through decision-making and non decision-making.

Of particular relevance to an analysis of governing boards is the possibility to “squench a threatening demand or incipient issue through norms, precedent, rule or procedure” (p. 14). This is a common form of yielding power often disguised as *Robert’s Rule of Orders*. (Henry M. Robert & al, 2004) where formal rules and regulations dictate how discussion and debate will be handled and how the agenda for meetings will be set. The chair of the meeting yields considerable power in how the meeting will be run. Michael Parenti (1970) makes an important observation on the ability of the powerless to influence an agenda. One of the most important aspects of power “ is not to prevail in a struggle but to determine the agenda of the struggle – to determine whether certain questions every reach the competition stage (cited in Gaventa, 1980, p. 24).

The notion of an elite group in a community having constant power is challenged by Polsby (1959). He argues that the notion that the same people participate, or lead or decide matters of importance in a community is not the only possible explanation or even the most plausible (p. 232). He also does not link power with economic elitism,

relegating this to a Marxist position. This concept speaks to the need not to presume that the influence of donors overrides the influence of others in a community and that it should not be assumed that those with wealth or in a position to provide grants will always be in position of driving the agenda.

### Critical Discourse Analysis

As will be described in more detail in chapter 3, the theories that have been described here have been used to create a framework for analysis. In looking at how these theories apply in the two organizations being studied, the methodology of critical discourse analysis will be used. Critical discourse analysis is a good fit for the research questions for this case study because it provides a means by which to critically examine the extent to which the organizational structures, processes, practices or activities enable or constrain the organization's ability to operate. Critical Discourse Analysis provides helpful insight on the role of discourse “in the (re)production and challenge of dominance [which is] defined as the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 250). This will be important in the coding and reading of the texts assembled for this research. Van Dijk (1993) states “we may examine the style, rhetoric or meaning of texts for strategies that aim at the concealment of social power relations, for instance by playing down, leaving implicit or understating responsible agency of powerful social actors in the vents represented in the text” (p. 250). Critical Discourse analysts take a socio-political stance as their “critical targets are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate condone or ignore social inequality and

injustice. That is, one of the criteria of their work is solidarity with those who need it most” (p. 252). The understanding of what is meant by solidarity with those who need it most varies and provides debates in community on how best to reduce poverty. An understanding of Critical Discourse Analysis will help inform the documentary analysis of the texts and especially provide insight on how words and the omission of words be related to power, dominance or quiescence.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

I will begin by providing an overview of the two organizations being studied, and review why they were selected and then outline the methods used for this study. I will describe the type of documents that I will be using to collect data from, the rationale in using websites for this research, how I will analyze the documents and outline how the data will be coded.

### *Using websites as a research methodology*

A recently graduated PhD student from OISE has classified website into five types: Brochure, Magazine, Direct, Appeal and Community (Ryan, 2008). Ryan (2008) draws from a range of scholars (Deibert, 2000; Barraket, 2005; Nesen, Danziger & Venkatesh, 2007) to suggest that the “Internet is a democratizing medium that increases egalitarian interaction and social change and that online associations are characterized by voluntary, public, interaction, which encourages democratic participation and civic engagement” (p. 2). This relates to concerns of the need for nonprofit boards to be accountable and transparent. The Internet has proven to be a useful tool for many organizations engaged in advocacy and public education.

The amount of information about an organization on its webpage became a component of analysis in itself as it revealed a lot more about an organization in the presence and absence of certain documents and information.

**Table 3: Specific web searches**

City websites	Word poverty and the name of the organization	Council and relevant committees minutes
One local newspaper	Poverty and the name of the organization	6 months back newspaper as it is easily accessed plus for 2007 through microfiche
Websites of organizations that are members/partners named for the organization	Mention of the relationship or link to the organization	Reference in programming
Website of funders/donors	Announcements of funding	Description of involvement
Other websites of importance	Poverty Reduction organizations	Mention of the two organizations researched

*Publicly available documents***Table 4: Potential Documents that can be used for data collection**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Data</b>	<b>Access</b>
Governance documents	Numbers, names and affiliation of governors, structures and policies	Website or through correspondence
Publicly available Minutes	how decisions are made and by who, actions/projects, role of governors vs. staff	E-mail updates from RPRC and through correspondence VS
Annual reports, brochures, newsletters and other publications	Objectives, value, mission, accomplishments, action plans and activities	Through the web or correspondence
Budget/financial statements	How is money spent, funds needed to run the organizations and donor/funders	Through CRA, Annual Reports, Report to funders on websites or access to paper documents
Newspaper and media articles	How are these organizations portrayed, key spokesperson, frequency and type of questions asked by the media	Google search and archives of the local newspapers. Possibly search of Vancouver Sun and local CBC news coverage
Minutes of local city council and relevant committees	Influence of the organization on council, coverage of issues and attention paid to reports, who acts as the spokesperson when addressing councils	Search of Richmond and Surrey municipal websites for past council and committee meetings.
Websites of the two organizations	Type of public information available, words used to	Organization websites

	describe organization, ease of involvement, primary contact points, what the websites focus on	
Other documents from funders (name the funders specifically)	How funders describe their role in their AGM reports, reports to their donors, program and funding descriptions	Search of funders websites
Websites of participating organizations (name the organizations specifically)	Description of their involvement, analysis of how central participation is to the core of their activity	Organization websites

I also subscribed to the e-mail list for both organizations to receive as encouraged from the website regular newsletter and information from both.

*Brief overview of the two organizations studied*

Vibrant Surrey (VS):

“Vibrant Communities”, is the brainchild of Paul Born of the Tamarack Institute ([www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca)). The Vibrant Communities framework promotes a multi-sector collaboration approach to poverty reduction and is described as a “network of national sponsors and local organizations committed to exploring a new approach to poverty” (Born 2008). This multi-sector model believes it is necessary to have governments, business and others in leadership in a community represented in the steering committee that provides direction to the poverty reduction initiative. The Vibrant Communities initiative has received funds from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Federal government through Human Resources Skills Development Canada, the Royal Bank and others (Vibrant Communities, 2009). The United Way/Centreaide throughout Canada also supports and provides leadership to the Vibrant Community

initiative in each of the 15 target communities. Under the Vibrant Communities model each community sets up multi-sector organizations following the parent body model.

One of these initiatives is Vibrant Surrey. The Goal of Vibrant Surrey is to “encourage and facilitate collaborative efforts to reduce poverty and the issues related to poverty, thereby enhancing the quality of life for all who call Surrey home” (Vibrant Surrey, 2007). Initially Vibrant Surrey funds were held by Community Innovations Inc (Plan for Action and Learning 2007 to 2010, p. 33). Since October 2007 Vibrant Surrey has become Vibrant Surrey Poverty Reduction Society (S-52474 Certificate of Incorporation, 2007) and is also a federally registered charitable society able to receive funds and issue tax receipts. The registered address for the Society is a downtown major law firm and it is the same firm that drafted the incorporation documents and maintains the necessary paperwork (Society Annual Report Form 11 Ministry of Finance , 2007). The law firm advertises itself as: Bull, Housser and Tupper LLP, and “is one of Canada's premier law firms”.

The two co-chairs from the *Vibrant Surrey Plan for Action and Learning 2007-2010* are listed as staff members from the United Way and Coast Capital. The incorporation documents list the board members as of August 3, 2007 as staff from two funding agencies, four Executive Directors from Surrey based agencies, and one university professor who at the beginning of the initiative worked for one of the funding agencies. Only two of the named directors live in Surrey.

Vibrant Surrey has a number of committees. It is unclear from public documents how the board relates to the committees. The Operation Committee “acts as the primary decision-making body for Vibrant Surrey” (Vibrant Surrey, 2007, p. 30). They have three

strategic teams (Research & Evaluation, CED, and Economic Security) that “ have been established to follow through on the initial strategies identified in the strategic plan” ((Vibrant Surrey, 2007, p. 30). The outcomes to date of Vibrant Surrey as listed in *the Plan for Action and Learning, 2007 to 2010* and on the Website (as of February 8, 2008) include:

- *Project Comeback*,: This is a project of the Newton Advocacy Group Society and is defined as a “Community Action Project that helps homeless day labourers to find sustainable employment and independent housing” (Vibrant Surrey).
- the *Surrey Social Purchasing Portal*: This project sponsored by Community Innovations Inc is described as “ facilitating the targeting of existing everyday business purchasing to suppliers of goods and services to blend business and social values” (Social Purchasing Portal, 2008). This project no longer functions and has been removed from the Vibrant Surrey website as an outcome (Lepage, 2009) .
- *Seeing is Believing* led by Canadian Business for Social Responsibility, it is a program that provides business executives with an opportunity to engage first-hand with community to –better understand social issues and explore business solutions to poverty, homeless, employability and youth-at-risk” (Canadian Business for Social Responsibility, 2008). The website also reports that Lloyd Craig, the President & CEO of Coast Capital Savings led a tour to Surrey in November 2005.

- Other items on the web site include Research Documents such as *Emerging Trends in Poverty in Surrey 2006*, and *A Community Learning Plan*.

A newsletter is sent to those who sign up for it electronically. The weekly Newsletter lists community events and training opportunities. This newsletter is also posted on the website. There is no information on the website as to meetings of any of the Vibrant Surrey committees and task forces. Only general community meetings are promoted such as a meeting to discuss the Living Wage Campaign, which is held at lunchtime during the week, is advertised in the newsletter.

#### *Richmond Poverty Response Committee (RPRC)*

The City of Richmond had a poverty rate of about 24% when a local community committee was organized in 2001 (Richmond Poverty Response Society, 2009). The Committee emerged after the then Children and Family committee of the Richmond Community Services Advisory Council (RCSAC) commissioned a report on poverty and families in 2000. The RCSAC is in part appointed by the Richmond City Council, reports annually to the Council and benefits from a small yearly grant and limited city staff support.

The goals of the RPRC are to “work towards alleviating the effects of poverty in our community” (Richmond Poverty Response Society, 2009). It identifies itself on the website as a coalition of Richmond residents and agencies working together to reduce poverty and the impacts of poverty with research, projects and public education.

From the beginning the Richmond Poverty Response Committee, while having ties to the agencies and public bodies in Richmond, was independent and self-

administered with its own funds, chairs and governance structure. It chose to raise funds for specific projects and ask community agencies to receive these funds and implement the projects ensuring that funds for poverty reduction activities were distributed through out existing stakeholders in the community. The Committee continues to be very active and to sponsor community involvement in projects ranging from the monthly “Stand up for Housing”, to the *Richmond Shares* website that acts as a portal for persons with items to donate to others. As of December 2008, the following task forces were active: affordable housing, transportation, food security, faith communities housing group and *Richmond Shares*. The Food Security task force has begun so many projects that it is in the process of forming its own independent society. Among the successes listed on the website, the RPRC list:

- Developed and implemented 2 web-base resources that provide information to low-income individuals and families: a Low Income Resource Directory ([www.yourlibrary.ca/lird](http://www.yourlibrary.ca/lird).) to improve access to information for low-income people and agencies serving them and Richmond Shares website ([www.richmondshares.bc.ca](http://www.richmondshares.bc.ca)) which encourages year-round donations of items such as household supplies, appliances and clothing to low income people.
- The Advocacy Task Force worked with CHIMO Crisis Services (a social service agency in Richmond) to establish Richmond Advocacy Program with trained volunteer advocates and a pro bono legal clinic. CHIMO now provides this service and recently received 3 year funding of \$75,000 per

year from the BC Law Society. It is the only lay program that is funded by the Law Society.

- The Food Security Task force recently secured multi-year funding to implement the action plan identified in the Richmond Food System Environmental Scan and Action (Act Now Funding, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority). A Richmond Food Assessment (2006) was done. The Task Force created a vision for a sustainable food system for Richmond "Gardens for Garden City" proposal that was influential in recent council votes regarding the Garden City Lands.
- The Affordable Housing Task force has been working towards creation of a positive climate for affordable and accessible housing by lobbying local government for 5 years – City has adopted Standards of Maintenance by-law, developed an affordable housing strategy and is reviewing legalized suites.
- The Faith Communities Housing Group, Following an initial workshop in 2005, created a group of members of Richmond's faith community continue to meet on a regular basis to discuss ways to alleviate the effects of poverty in Richmond, particularly housing issues.

The Richmond Food Bank administers funds for the RPRC and has remained unincorporated as of February 2009. The Committee and task forces meet monthly and meetings are open to anyone interested in participating. The RPRC and its task forces employ an administrative coordinator to take minutes and provide communication support. From the beginning of its existence, the decision was made to

free up the volunteer members of the committee for the important tasks of planning and working on projects rather than take minutes and do the administrative work. A contracted project coordinator works with the RPRC members to implement the projects. Many of the projects such as Richmond Shares are however lead and driven by community volunteers. The committee and its task force welcome community members, people living in poverty, agency staff, faith communities leaders, union members and anyone interested in participating to take on roles in its organizational mandate.

The name of the co-chairs of the Committee and the Chair of the task forces can be found on the website with their contact information. The current co-chairs are two Richmond community members who are not affiliated/representing with an organization. One of the co-chairs used to work with a youth and family agency, the other is works as a purchaser, is a long time advocate for affordable housing and is active in the housing co-operative movement. Anyone in the community can sign up to receive notification of meetings and the minutes of the meetings they chose to attend.

The Food Security Task Force projects and work grew quickly due to the interest of the community and public issues in Richmond such as the Garden City Lands potential development. The decision was made recently (January 2009) to incorporate the Food Security task force into a nonprofit society so that it could access more funding and develop projects that might not be directly related to poverty issues.

## Analysis of Documents

The document analysis was done through a coding process. Coding as described by Rossman and Rallis (1998, as cited by Creswell, 2003, p. 192) “is the process of organizing the material into “chunks” before ringing meaning to those “chunks”. For the two case studies in this project, the process of coding involved first creating a list of indicators based on the literature review and study of the theories of resource dependency, stakeholder and power. These indicators were grouped to their relevance to the theoretical concepts, which are examined in this research. This type of coding is called a priori coding.

**Table 5: Research questions and a priori coding**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>A priori coding</b>	<b>Emergent coding</b>
Does access to public, private and political resources (funds, contacts, positional power) either <i>enable</i> or <i>constrain</i> the ways in which these agencies operate within the community?	Composition of the board Evidence of actions Link between funder priorities and the action of the organization	Transparency of decision making
How do theories of resource dependency, stakeholder theory, and power inform this analysis?	Board composition – who is and who is not there Link between projects and funders priorities Stakeholders who is present and how those stakeholders are managed by the organization Resource dependency: how is the agency incorporating those with access to resources into the work of the agency.	Prominence of funders involvement on their website
And to what extent do these organizational operations and governance models reflect democratic, civic and social engagement among community members and/or other organizations?	Board/committee composition Information on public documents	Who is not included

New philanthropy/ corporate social responsibility?	Link between corporate agenda and the work of the agencies funded by the corporation	
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The researcher however also let the texts dictate other codes/indicators (emergent coding) as documents through which to find new observations, insights or themes that go beyond those generated by the explored theories. One example of a new indicator was the ability to obtain information on the website on the organization governance structure.

The data was analyzed using discourse analysis methodology (van Dijk 1993). Discourse analysis is described as “an approach to the analysis of language that looks at patterns of language across texts as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the texts occur,” (Partridge, 2006, p. 1). Discourse analysis is an effective method for data analysis of the from the two organizations because it:

considers the ways that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. It also considers how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourses. Discourse analysis examines both spoken and written texts (Partridge, 2006, p. 2).

The literature review is informing the coding and data gathering. The main ideas that were explored in the literature review and their apriori codes are described in the table below:

**Table 6: Themes and Codes**

Themes	Code
Socio-political context	Mission of the organization
Commitment of board members	Who are the board members and their personal engagement
Transparency and accountability of the organization	What is available and how easily is it available
Influence of External Funders	Presence of funders on decision making bodies
Mapping of resources and access to resources	Links between decision makers and resources
Boundary spanners	Role of decision makers (board member) to provide resources to the organization
Role and access of stakeholders to decision making	Who and how are the stakeholders involved
Power inequality	Who has access to resources Key decision maker within organizations
Interlocking of Board Members	Mapping of involvement of board members

By definition, the two case study organizations are part of what is described as “civil society” organizations. Civil society is defined by one theorist as “ the space of uncoerced human association” (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004, p. 132) . Civic society organization serve a number of roles that include: carrying out a variety of public or quasi-public functions i.e. services to communities, has a representative function of social organizations outside the state, and engages in the building of citizenship skills (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004, p. 133).

Neoliberalism has affected civil society in a number of aspects. Eikenberry & Kluver (2004) argue that the “ incorporation of private-market values by the nonprofit sector appears to be detrimental to democracy...and compromises the nonprofit sector’s role in civil society roles as value guardians, service providers and advocates, and

builders of social capital (p. 138). Neoliberalism includes a restructuring of the welfare state, deregulations of private enterprise and the introduction of market ethos on civil society such as competing for contracts, performance based contract competition and commercial revenue generation.

In B.C since 2001, there has been an increasing number of for profit companies successfully winning contracts from government for employment support services that used to be delivered by the nonprofit sector. For example “JobWave” is a program that finds employment for income assistance recipients. A privately held company called WCG International HR Solutions, a Canadian subsidiary of Providence Service Corporation, delivers the program in BC (Job Wave).

Another trend that bears exploring in the document analysis is how assertive the donor or funder organizations have been in branding the organization with their mark. It will be important to trace the priorities of the donors through the actions and programs of the two case study organizations. Is the organization the recognizable entity with its own ability to generate support and programs or is it dependent on the interest of the donors/funders and their pre-existing support for certain programs?

The literature review in Chapter 2 demonstrated the importance of governance and how it is structured in an organization. Who has control/power within the organization, who is let in the organization and who is left out will be important to code. How are stakeholders involved and who are identified, as stakeholders will be important coding criteria.

## Summary

The data collected was collected from publically available documents and this was used to complete one level of the analysis using a critical discourse analysis lens. An overview of feminist research provided a perspective for the author on how to situate herself vis a vis the research. Other lenses include: actions that relate to the organization's resource dependency, relationships with stakeholders and how power dynamics and asymmetrical relationships influence the dependency on resources and relationship with stakeholders. A number of the coding reflect current debates on civil society and the role of the corporate sector through its philanthropic programs and promotion of a more corporate model for governance of civil society organizations.

## Chapter 4: Findings of the Study

### *Introduction*

The first set of data that will be highlighted will compare features of both organizations as they were coded in publicly available documents. The second set of data will use a discourse analysis approach to data collection and analysis. As noted earlier, the research was limited to public documents that were obtained mostly through websites and other public repositories, for example the Canadian Charities Listing from the Canada Revenue Agency. As discussed in the introduction chapter, no interviews were held with key informants, residents or professionals involved with these two organizations. The only time that contact was made was initially through a letter to both organizations to ask for documents. A subsequent conversation took place with the Richmond Poverty Response Committee about how I would receive their strategic plan and reports to funders. It was a challenge to restrict myself to easily available public documents because, through my network of contacts, I could easily have had discussions with people involved or obtained other documents. In the end the research methodology lead to new research paths and analysis but more limited data collection. I also restricted my search to documents in English. Both organizations operate in diverse communities. In the case of the Richmond Poverty Response Committee a large majority were Chinese speakers (Mandarin and Cantonese) and in the case of Vibrant Surrey the majority were Punjabi speakers. However, no documents appear to be available in languages other than English.

### *Document collection*

Documents were collected over a period of six months (October 2008 to March 2009) from both organizations. A great number of documents were first collected and

then sorted through so that only comparable data for both organizations was set aside for use in the analysis. As indicated in the methodology chapter I relied on publicly-available documents from websites, the BC Corporate and Personal Property Registries, newspapers and brochures. I subscribed to the e-mail list for both organizations to receive (as encouraged from the websites) regular newsletters and information. I also looked at the Canada Revenue Agency Charitable listings for information. Since Vibrant Surrey only received charitable status on November 26, 2008 they had not filed a charitable return yet. The Richmond Food Bank charitable status did not provide any useful information on the Richmond Poverty Response Committee.

The following documents were chosen from each organization to use comparable data:

#### Richmond Poverty Response Committee

Planning Session of January 27, 2007

Goals and Action Plan for 2007

Brochure: “Be part of the solution.....”

How RPRC Functions (from UWLM 2006-2007 application)

E-mails updates with minutes received after signing up on the website

#### Vibrant Surrey

Society Annual Report November 11, 2008

Constitution and By-Laws August 2, 2007

Moving Toward Solutions undated

Plan for Action & Learning 2007 to 2010 undated

Bridging the Gaps and Consolidating Strength January 2007

Newsletters for 2008 and January to March 2009

Websites:

[www.vibrantsurrey.ca](http://www.vibrantsurrey.ca) and [www.vibrantcommunities.ca](http://www.vibrantcommunities.ca)

[www.richmondprc.org](http://www.richmondprc.org) and [www.richmondshares.bc.ca](http://www.richmondshares.bc.ca)

## Data and Results

### *E-mail newsletters*

Newsletters distributed through e-mails and/or available on websites have become an important way for organizations to link up with their members, and the community at large. *Vibrant Surrey* sends out weekly listings of meetings, learning opportunities, newly released reports, fundraisers that relate to its mission and activities in Surrey. There is no information on Vibrant Surrey committee meetings, board of directors meetings or minutes of any of the committees identified as making up Vibrant Surrey. It is the same newsletter as posted on the website of the organization. An anonymous person edits the newsletter. The first paragraph of each newsletter states:

“Our aim is to provide quick mentions of useful information that will take less than a minute to scan and will link you to further information if you want to pursue it. You are receiving this newsletter because you or your organization participates in Vibrant Surrey, or you attended a Vibrant Surrey sponsored event and gave us your email address” (Vibrant Surrey Newsletters).

The *Richmond Poverty Response Committee* asks interested persons to indicate in who are interested in the actions of the RPRC to specify which task forces they want to be involved in and if they want to receive all e-mails or just that for the taskforce they want to get involved in. E-mails sent to those who signed up include information about

the next meeting of the steering committee or task force, minutes, updated information about RPRC projects and important community mobilization information, such as the recent extreme weather alerts and need for volunteers. The project coordinator's report is also included in the mailing. The administrative coordinator signs the e-mail updates/newsletters. A sample of what the newsletter looks like is set out in the table below.

**Table 7: Sample newsletter Richmond Poverty Response Committee**

<p>“The next meeting of the Richmond Poverty Response Committee is: March 5th 4:30-6pm Richmond Caring Place Room 320  <b>Agenda</b> <a href="http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Agendas/PRCAgendaMar05_09.pdf">http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Agendas/PRCAgendaMar05_09.pdf</a>  <b>February 5 Minutes</b> <a href="http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Minutes/PRCJan08_09.pdf">http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Minutes/PRCJan08_09.pdf</a>  <b>Coordinators Report</b>  <a href="http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Reports/coordinatorreportfeb09.pdf">http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Reports/coordinatorreportfeb09.pdf</a>  <b>Housing Report</b> &lt;<a href="http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Reports/affhousingFeb09.pdf">http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Reports/affhousingFeb09.pdf</a>&gt;  <b>Faith Housing Communities Group Report</b>  <a href="http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Reports/FHousingreportfeb09.pdf">http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Reports/FHousingreportfeb09.pdf</a>  <b>Finance Committee Report</b>  <a href="http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Reports/financereportFeb09.pdf">http://www.richmondprc.org/documents/Reports/financereportFeb09.pdf</a>  Limited copies of the above documents will be available at the meeting.  Your rsvp to <a href="mailto:admin@richmondprc.org">admin@richmondprc.org</a> &lt;<a href="mailto:admin@richmondprc.org">mailto:admin@richmondprc.org</a>&gt; is always appreciated!” (Source: e-mail newsletter of March 2, 2009)</p>
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Sample information that is contained in the newsletter: send out the March 2, 2009

### *Organization Websites*

Each organizations maintains a website. The websites were consulted regularly. The RPRC site is copyrighted to 2009 and the Vibrant Surrey site is not dated.

### *Feature of the websites*

*Vibrant Surrey:* The website has the logo of the national initiative and the following main categories: who we are, what we do, resources, media room, and participants. There appears to be an intranet on the site for “members”. Information apart from the newsletters is archival and there is little current and updated information.

During the week of March 21 to March 26, an updated document *Moving Toward Solutions: A bi-annual update on innovative poverty initiatives in Surrey, British Columbia* was added to the list of documents on the organization. It is not dated but appears to be a report for 2008.

The website is very clean cut and not cluttered. It presents a professional appearance with minimum information on activities or on the governance of the organization. There are a number of documents available through the website for download. These documents relate to the strategic plan of Vibrant Surrey or background information on poverty in Surrey. There is no link to the organizations that make up Vibrant Surrey and no search engine on the site. The funders are featured on the main page of the site with the tagline “Vibrant Surrey thanks our financial investors for their leadership, support and encouragement” (Vibrant Surrey).

*Richmond Poverty Response Committee:* The website reproduces the logo and colors of the organization. The left hand column of the home page features upcoming meetings and the home page is updated to feature current articles. On March 26, it reproduced an article from the Richmond News on the role of the Richmond Poverty Response Committee volunteers in the Stand for Housing over the past year. The pull down menu includes: home, about us, our committees, how you can help, if you need help, publications, and contact/subscribe. There is a search engine on the site and a column with recent postings. Partners/participating organizations are linked to their websites and names and contact info of the co-chairs, taskforce chairs and the two contracted staff persons are listed on the website. There is a page on the website, “show your support” which asks interested individuals to help in the advocacy work of the

RPRC: “From time to time, issues surface that impact the less fortunate in our community. Making the public aware of these issues and helping all levels of government make an informed decision is an important part of our work. Letters to the editor of the local newspapers and to our community’s elected officials is encouraged. To be informed of current events, check our home page frequently.” (Richmond Poverty Response Society, 2009)

There is a gallery of pictures taken at various events, reports produced by the RPRC or relevant to its work and information on its sponsors. The funders are listed in a separate page called “our sponsors” with the tagline “The work of the Richmond Poverty Response Committee is proudly supported by”. (Richmond Poverty Response Society, 2009)

*Who is involved in the organization?*

The two organizations have very different governance models that are not easily compared. Vibrant Surrey has a board of directors and an operation committee. The accuracy of the current partners list or members of the operation committee is not known as the only dated document was *the Plan for Action & Learning 2007 to 2010*. The Richmond Poverty Response Committee has a steering committee and a number of task forces. Both organizations use the word “partner” to indicate involved organizations. The RPRC does not indicate in its minutes if the person at a meeting is representing an organization or is a community member. Where possible I connected individuals with organizations they represent on the RPRC. Lists were obtained from websites and other documents.

*Named Partners of Vibrant Surrey*

The list of partners comes from the Vibrant Communities site (Vibrant Communities, 2009) as I could not find establish the accuracy of the list in the *Plan for Action & Learning 2007 to 2010*

**Table 8: Named Partners of Vibrant Surrey**

Tim Baillie,	BC Professional Firefighter's Association
Bill Beatty,	Sustainable Employment Network Inc.
Sonya Boyce,	Surrey Women's Centre
Denise Darrell,	South Fraser Women's Services Society
Stephen Dooley,	National Institute for Research on Sustainable Community Development (Kwantlen University College)
Gill Eston,	Service Canada
Param Grewal,	Progressive Intercultural Society
Ray Hudson,	Surrey Board of Trade
Susan Keeping,	Newton Advocacy Group Society
Asja Major,	National Crime Prevention Centre
Sean Markey,	Simon Fraser University (Surrey Campus)
Cameron McBeth,	Kla-how-eya Aboriginal Centre of Surrey Aboriginal Cultural Society
Aileen Murphy,	City of Surrey
Michel Pouliot,	Pacific Community Resources Society
Daisy Quon,	Coast Capital Savings
Irene Gannitsos,	Vancity Community Foundation
Mark Seeley,	Ministry of Community Services
Lesley Tannen,	Downtown Surrey Business Improvement Association
Monika Verma,	Self Employment and Entrepreneur Development Society
Annette Welsh,	South Fraser Community Services Society
Linda Western,	United Way of the Lower Mainland
Michael Wilson,	Phoenix Society
Lesley Ann Woodman,	DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society

**Table 9: Board Members of Vibrant Surrey Poverty Reduction Society**

Board Members of Vibrant Surrey Poverty Reduction Society as of September 24, 2008 from the annual general meeting report filed with the Corporate and Personal Property Registries:

Bill Beatty	Sustainable Employment Network Inc
Sonya Boyce	Surrey Women's Center
Susan Keeping	Newton Advocacy Group
Daisy Quon	Coast Capital
Sean Markey	Simon Fraser University, Surrey Campus
Lesley Ann Woodman	DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society

*Partners and members from the Richmond Poverty Response Committee*  
This has been generated from their Website.

**Table 10: Richmond Poverty Response Committee Partners and Members.**

BC Teachers Federation, Richmond teachers association
CDA Mental Health Association, Richmond
Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Gilmore Park United Church, yes through their fundraiser
Richmond Family Place,
Richmond Food Bank Society
Richmond Fruit Tree Sharing Project
Richmond Women's Resource Centre
St. Alban's Anglican Church,
The Salvation Army
Vancouver Coastal Health
Volunteer Richmond
Plus individual citizens including:
Co-Chair Mary Phillips
Co-Chair David Reay
Mary Gazetas Co-Chair Food Security Task Force
Neil Smith Chair Transportation Task Force
Cecilia Hudec Chair Faith Communities Housing Group
Manar Hamza Chair Richmond Cares Task Force

**Table 11: Attendees at the planning session of January 27, 2007**

The Planning Session for January 27, 2007 listed the following persons as attending:

David Reay	
Neil Smith	
Margaret Hewlett	Richmond Food Bank Society
Janice Lambert	
Charis Nathan	
Linda McNab	Richmond Women's Resource Center
Belinda Boyd	Vancouver Coastal Health
Nicole Kay	
Lynda Brummitt	Staff
Kristi Bjarnson	Put Kids First
June Humphries	Salvation Army
Jason O'Brien	Staff food security Task Force
Mary Phillips	
Jennifer Hill	Richmond Health Department
Brian Campbell	
Mary Gazetas	Richmond Fruit Tree Sharing Project
Deneanne Quamme	

*Partners link to Vibrant Surrey and the Poverty Response Committee*

Websites (if available) of named partners were searched to find references to Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee. This was done to examine the web of relationships that exist between the two case study organizations and those organizations that are listed as partners, I searched websites to see if there was a reference to the organization as a member of the initiative either Vibrant Surrey or the RPRC. Where I found a search engine, I also searched for the word “poverty” as a way to discover the organization involvement with a process of poverty reduction. The word poverty was also searched (if a search engine was present) to ensure that if for some reason the engine could not find the name of the organization (Vibrant Surrey or RPRC) , I might find reference to the organization through the word poverty. I also looked at links on the partner organizations websites to see if the partners provided links to Vibrant Surrey or the Richmond Poverty Response Committee. The findings were surprising as very few partners of both organizations highlighted their involvement in poverty reduction or their involvement with the two case study organizations. For example: a search of the Phoenix Society website did not yield any result for Vibrant Surrey, so I looked also at the series of links on the website. There was no search engine to search for the word poverty.

The partner organization is listed and then coded NO if there is no mention at all, YES if there is a mention and a description of how it is mention is added. I have separated the funders out and placed them in the next section. I did not search the government websites apart from both municipal governments, which are also discussed in a separate section.

**Table 12: Mention on their website by partners/members of Vibrant Surrey**

X mark organizations with a person on the board of the Society

BC Professional Firefighters Association	no
Community Innovations Inc.	There is no website but described as a for-profit organization which supports entrepreneurs in other documents
xDIVERSEcity Community Resources Society	no
Downtown Surrey Business Improvement Association	no
Kla How Eya Aboriginal Centre of SACS	no
Kwantlen Polytechnic University, National Institute for Sustainable Community Development	no
Ministry of Community Services (ex officio)	
National Crime Prevention Centre (ex officio)	
Newton Advocacy Group Society	Yes has a link and explanation of Vibrant Surrey
Options Services to Community	no
Pacific Community Resources Society	Yes on its advocacy page highlighting the networks and coalitions the organization belongs to.
Phoenix Society	no
Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society	no
Self Employment and Entrepreneur Development Society	no
Service Canada (ex officio)	
Simon Fraser University, Surrey Campus	Only in reference to the professor who is on the board of Vibrant Surrey
South Fraser Community Services	no
South Fraser Women's Services Society	no
Surrey Board of Trade	one mention for the Economic Forum Sept 08 organized by the City and only found by using the word poverty not Vibrant Surrey. The reference is from a paper by Sean Markey but with SFU letterhead in his

	bio, it is mentioned that he is board member of Vibrant Surrey
Surrey Women's Centre	no
Sustainable Employment Network Inc	no

**Table 13: Mention on Website of Partner organizations of the *Richmond Poverty Response Committee***

X marks organizations, which receive project funds from the work of the RPRC

BC Teachers Federation, Richmond teachers association	no website was found
CDA Mental Health Association, Richmond	no
Family Services of Greater Vancouver	no
Gilmore Park United Church	yes through their annual fundraiser
Richmond Family Place,	yes Richmond Shares
xRichmond Food Bank Society	yes information and link
xRichmond Fruit Tree Sharing Project	yes as partners through the food security task force
Richmond Women's Resource Centre	yes mentioned as involved in the RPRC
St. Alban's Anglican Church,	yes working in conjunction with
The Salvation Army	no
Vancouver Coastal Health	yes involvement in RPRC
xVolunteer Richmond	yes through the low income directory

*Funders link to the two organizations*

I reviewed the website of the identified funders in reference to the grants that they have given to the two organizations. I also looked for references to their commitment to poverty reduction. I was surprised to discover how challenging it was to find out information on funding priorities and community involvement and how limited the information was. I searched for references to grants from 2007 to 2009 where possible. Coast Capital mentioned their commitment to Vibrant Communities through the Surrey and Victoria initiative. The United Way mentioned their interest in community capacity building through their support of "poverty tables". I also searched the charitable database from Canadian Revenue Agency for the United Way of the Lower Mainland and Vancity

Community Foundation. Neither charitable returns for 2007 yielded information about the two case study organizations. Vancity Community Foundation Annual Report for 2007-08 also did not highlight the contribution of the foundation to the two organizations.

I did not capture data from the McConnell Family Foundation who funds Vibrant Surrey indirectly through Vibrant Communities/Tamarack Institute. I have however made reference to the way that certain characteristics of Vibrant Surrey relate to their relationship to the Vibrant Communities initiative.

Vibrant Surrey:

*United Way of The Lower Mainland:* the only mention was of Vibrant Surrey receiving funding. The United Way of the Lower Mainland has set aside staff time and has heavily invested in Vibrant Surrey and Vibrant Communities and I searched to see if it was featured as a key initiative of the organization. Vibrant Surrey is described on the United Way (UW) website as an example of UW funded programs supporting people living in poverty and is said to be “ a poverty reduction coalition for Surrey that focuses on reducing poverty through community economic development and income security improvement strategies” I also looked at the United Way of Canada website (United Way of Canada) because all 15 Vibrant Communities cities have, as a major partner, their local United Way. There was no mention of Vibrant Communities on the national website. The United Way of the Lower Mainland priorities were identified as

“United Way brings together community partners to prevent problems and to create lasting change in three focused areas so that: More children in the Lower Mainland are developmentally ready for school by kindergarten - More children 6-12 are healthy,

happy and resilient - More seniors are independent and contributing to the community”  
(United Way of the Lower Mainland)

*Vancity Community Foundation:* Little information is available on the Foundation. I could not find any mention of their involvement or grants to Vibrant Surrey on their website for 2007 or on their latest Annual report (2007-2008). Funds of \$20,000 were given to Vibrant Surrey through the Pacific Community Resource Society in 2006 and \$1,500 to the Front Room for a program with homelessness persons regarding dumpsters.

*Coast Capital Savings Credit Union:* Funding for Vibrant Surrey is identified “as one of a number of significant and strategic partnerships with organizations in our local communities” (Coast Capital Savings Credit Union)

Coast Capital identifies community economic development as a community funding priority. “The Community Economic Development (CED): We aim to increase sustainable employment and affordable housing in our communities. To that end, we support two local organizations participating in the national Vibrant Communities initiative: Vibrant Surrey and the Quality of Life CHALLENGE in Victoria.” (Coast Capital Savings Credit Union, 2005, p. 15). Coast Capital also supports *Seeing is Believing* identified by Vibrant Surrey as one of their projects.

Richmond Poverty Response committee:

*Coast Capital Savings:* Funding for the RPRC is not identified for 2008.

*United Way of the Lower Mainland:* There was mention of a grant under their poverty reduction and community capacity building priorities.

Vancouver Coastal Health: The award of the grant towards the food security task force is mentioned.

*City of Richmond:* see below.

*City websites*

Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee differ in their relationships with their council and city hall. A planning staff person is on the leadership/operation committee for Vibrant Surrey. There is no official relationship between Vibrant Surrey and the Social Planning Advisory Committee of Council except through the same senior planner. No city staff participates in the Richmond Poverty Response Committee however the RPRC is a member of the Richmond Community Services Advisory Council (RCSAC) which is an advisory committee of council. A city staff and a city councillor participate in the RCSAC.

*City of Surrey*

I could not find any evidence of Surrey City funding for Vibrant Surrey. I searched a number of times the City of Surrey website paying attention to Council minutes, Corporate Reports, Social Planning Committee Minutes and documents relating to the *Social Well Being Plan* for the City. The only mention of Vibrant Surrey that I could find was on a page under community partners with links to the following organizations:

- Community Services in Surrey
- Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness
- Vibrant Surrey
- Metro Vancouver Urban Aboriginal Strategy

I could not find any reference to presentations at either City Council meetings or the Social Planning Advisory Committee by Vibrant Surrey. The City does not list poverty reduction as a priority in its current social planning activities. It has however invested in the *Surrey Homelessness and Housing Fund* and supported the development of Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society to manage the city affordable housing

funds. No relationship with Vibrant Surrey can be traced through the board of directors of the Society. I also searched for the word poverty. I could not find any direct reference to Vibrant Surrey. The reference to “poverty” were in the *Plan for the Social Well-Being of Surrey* adopted in 2006. I also tried “Living Wage” on March 28, 2009, which was one day after a public Vibrant Surrey event on the Living Wage campaign. There was no hit on the City website.

#### *City of Richmond*

The City gives has supported the Richmond Poverty Response Committee with a small grant each year for the past few years (\$6,000). There is no direct link to the Poverty Response Committee on the website. There are indirect links through the Richmond Community Services Advisory Council and Volunteer Richmond Directory of Community Services. Reports from the Richmond Poverty Response Committee can be found on the City’s website as well as presentations that have been made on issues of affordable housing and food security (especially in relationship to the Garden City Lands). There were 20 hits for the word ‘poverty’ mostly relating to presentations from the RPRC, grants awarded to the committee, and the need to involve the RPRC in discussions on the affordable housing strategy. The City’s Policy Planning mandate includes “poverty” named as one of the social issues along side affordable housing, homelessness, gaming and other issues.

#### *Newspapers and media*

Richmond and Surrey have two main community newspapers. I searched the four newspapers for references to the organizations and poverty. I also searched for the two co-chairs of each organization in case that for some reason the search engine was not able

to register the name of the organization or the word poverty. Web searches for community newspapers are limited because there is only 90 days of archives and not all articles are available. Since I was searching both community newspapers and using the criteria, I felt confident that if there had been media interest over the past 6 months when I first began searching I would have been able to capture the data. Community newspapers are a good source of information as to what preoccupies residents and community leaders. A search of the four papers was done a number of times over the last six months. The table below is from a search made on March 28, 2009.

**Table 14: Media references about the two organizations**

Community Newspaper	Name of the Organization	Poverty
Surrey Leader	no	None about Surrey
Surrey Now	no	None about Surrey
Richmond Review	2 for RPRC in last 90 days	2 in reference to the RPRC
Richmond News	2	none
Province	no	none
Vancouver Sun	no	
Other	MacLeans online VS	

To verify that the search engine for the newspapers was working, I put in “shooting Surrey” and obtained 22 results. I also tried “living wage” for Surrey and had no hits although there was a public meeting on the Living Wage held the day before the search. I also used “affordable housing” for Richmond because the RPRC has been very active in housing issues and obtained a number of hits.

#### *Planning Documents*

Each organization drafted a strategic plan. Vibrant Surrey drafted a *Plan for Action and Learning 2007 to 2010* with a separate strategic plan for 2006-2009. These documents are not dated or authored. The RPRC meets yearly to establish a strategic plan

and outcomes for the following year. For comparative purposes I used the documents from the Planning Session of January 27, 2007, which produced the Strategic Plan for 2007. The strategic plans of both organizations reveal what priorities they have identified for the next year/years. These documents also serve to formulate grant applications and to evaluate what has been accomplished for the past year. The strategic documents should also be able to reveal the webs of stakeholders and resources that the organizations identified.

The RPRC document is similar to the other documents researched. It is simple and reflects a preoccupation with action and identification of tasks. The document starts off with an update on each task force and a review of the mission statement. It then identifies gaps in services that should be explored in the upcoming year and with a review of the current projects supported by the RPRC. A special mention is made of Linkages “all of the needs that we focus on are all interconnected and we need to keep that in mind” (Richmond Poverty Response Society, 2007, p. 5). The document ends with a number of suggested new initiatives and directions. The *Goals and Action Plan 2007* picks up the themes of the Planning Session and identify specific tasks towards the goals. The language is simple and direct and concrete with projects identified for completion in the upcoming year. A fair amount of the goals involve marketing/outreach to the community at large. Transportation was identified in 2007 as a gap in service and a new task force suggested. The project coordinator wrote the document with the help of the administrative coordinator. The day was facilitated by a member of the board of Richmond Food Bank.

Vibrant Surrey planning documents are similar in tone and language to the other documents reviewed. It appears to have been written by a professional(s) and reflects also the Vibrant Communities language and a preoccupation with framing the discussion on poverty through a “multisectoral coordination” lens. The document starts with a review of what Vibrant Surrey is and the state of poverty in Surrey. It then addresses the beliefs and principles of the organization and in particular address the issues of exclusivity “we are inclusive not just with issues but also in membership”. (Vibrant Surrey, 2007, p. 8). Targets are set for poverty reduction (see below). Unlike the RPRC, Vibrant Surrey articulates an understanding of poverty “we believe that poverty is more than just a lack of income. It is multidimensional – including things like safe and affordable housing, a feeling of hope for the future, participation in community, financial savings, etc. A variety of factors outside of an individual’s control outside of an individual’s control poverty: age, gender, ethnicity, migration, health, physical and developmental ability etc.” (p. 10). A *framework for change* and a *theory of change* is also articulated. A *Portfolio of Strategies and Initiatives* for 2007 is outlined. They are:

“1. Demonstrate the benefits of working within a community development approach; 2. Increase economic security through income and asset building; 3. Increase understanding of poverty and poverty reduction best practices through research and evaluation; and 4. Develop and implement a community learning plan. “(Vibrant Surrey, 2007)

These four strategies and initiatives are picked up in the Strategic Plan for 2006-2009 with specific suggested tasks. Vibrant Surrey has build into its work learning and evaluation components and a detailed map of outputs, learning constructs, and outcomes.

A number of projected initiatives relate to internal learning outcomes and building up of poverty reduction internal resources.

The suggested Vibrant Surrey initiatives are couched in planning language. An example of the planning language is “ Create a strategy for addressing barriers to economic security for immigrants, youth, women and aboriginals” (Vibrant Surrey, 2007)

It is unclear from the language of the strategic document for Vibrant Surrey what is its role in implementing the suggested projects. What is its role versus that of the agency whose mandate is for example to “meet the needs of sexually exploited women and youth”. It appears to act as a social planning council bringing together service providers to meet service delivery needs. Advocacy does not seem to be a function of Vibrant Surrey. The RPRC, like Vibrant Surrey also appears to act as a “social planning council’ bringing people together to engage in projects that have been identified but is also engaged in the development and implementation of these projects.

### *Governance*

Both organizations have chosen models of governance that involve their broad and diverse membership. The RPRC appears to have an inclusive model where everyone is welcome to contribute and take leadership roles as appropriate. The co-chairs are community members who act as spokespersons and provide leadership to the work especially in terms of advocacy and city policies. The project coordinator attends meetings of the Richmond Community Services Advisory Council and provides leadership for project management. Both co-chairs are quoted in media and speak on behalf of the RPRC at City Council. Vibrant Surrey with its focus on involving the leadership of the community is more agency/organization based. From the available

documents it appears that the staff from the main funders of Vibrant Surrey act as co-chairs and act as spokespersons/representatives of Vibrant Surrey. A search of the Internet found that the United Way staff person was described at a number of meetings as representing Vibrant Surrey along with the current staff person Al Vigoda. The website does not refer at all to the Board of Vibrant Surrey Poverty Reduction Society. The only reference is to the fact that Vibrant Surrey is a registered society with charitable status.

RPRC has a consensus decision-making model. Vibrant Surrey is also committed to a consensus decision making model. Both organizations work through member organizations for project implementation. For example, the RPRC works with Volunteer Richmond to maintain the *Low Income Directory* and Vibrant Surrey with Newton Advocacy Group to implement *Project Comeback*, which places homeless day labourers in sustainable jobs.

#### *Richmond Poverty Response Committee*

The Steering Committee is the main governance structure with a small executive committee whose role pertains to finances and human resources. The quote below describes the governance model of the RPRC.

“ RPRC is able to amalgamate its *diverse membership with utilization of a flat governance model and consensual decision making* for achieving poverty reduction objectives in the community. This approach enhances working relationships in the community and the congenial social environment *enables volunteers and services providers to work together as individuals from the community and partnering agencies have equal representation for the management of any projects.* Within this structure

there are many opportunities for leadership and all members are encouraged to engage at the level and interest that they have.” (Richmond Poverty Response Society, 2006)

“RPRC Steering Committee *oversees the development and implementation of all projects (determined through consensus) determines budgets for committee activities and the allocation of time contracted staff.* The Steering committee has co-chairs who are both volunteer members. Task Forces are subcommittees that focus on specific areas of activity and projects and each have their own chairs or co-chairs. The steering committee meets monthly with updates and reports provided on all activities of the steering committee and task groups, by committee chairs and staff. Committee members also provide update information from their areas of interest. Annually in January/February a day retreat is held for all steering committee members. The retreat includes a review of the accomplishments and activities of the year and identifies the priorities and goals and objectives for the next fiscal year.

“The *executive consists of the co-chairs of the steering committee and chairs of the task forces.* It meets as needed to review the progress of planning and activities, budgets and contracts. Sponsoring or host agencies are identified from the membership to sponsor/host funding on behalf of the committee as the RPRC itself is not a non-profit organization.” (Richmond Poverty Response Society, 2006)

#### *Vibrant Surrey*

There is a Leadership Roundtable “which include leaders from every sector of our community” (Vibrant Surrey, 2007, p. 29). The Operations Committee appears to be the main governance structure. Its relationship to the board of the organization cannot be determined from the publicly available documents.

“In consultation with membership, *the Operations Committee acts as the primary decision-making body for Vibrant Surrey*. The key responsibilities include the overall management and administration: human resources, financial management, communications, outreach, planning and evaluation as well as liaison with related initiatives.” (p. 30)

The Plan also note that “ many groups and individuals choose to make valuable contributions in other ways without joining the Leadership group”. It could not be determined from the documents that are available what is the undertaking to become part of the Leadership Roundtable verses contributing in other ways. Government representative are “ex officio” which means “that they do not officially represent their department and that they also take care to refrain from exerting influence on the management of Vibrant Surrey” (p. 32 )

Vibrant Surrey defines its governance model as that “ of a coalition led by a representative committee that makes decisions in behalf of the larger group” (p. 33)

#### *Coordination Role*

Both organizations view themselves as coordinating the efforts towards poverty reduction. The language is very similar. Vibrant Surrey language is also shaped by its membership in the Vibrant Communities initiative. It describes its work as a “comprehensive multisectoral initiative” (Makhoul, 2007, p. 1). Vibrant Surrey documents reproduce the language of Vibrant Communities, which tends to use the latest community development jargon and theories. Words such as social capital, asset building, comprehensive, holistic and multisectoral are used in the documents. The RPRC documents tend to have less community development jargon but like Vibrant

Surrey highlight the need for the involvement of all sector of the community towards poverty reduction.

*Vibrant Surrey*

“We help grow local poverty reduction efforts by building networks and increasing opportunities for collaboration. Every sector of the community including business; city, provincial and federal governments; social service sector; labour and private citizens have joined Vibrant Surrey.” (Vibrant Surrey)

*Richmond Poverty Response Committee*

“The membership of the Richmond Poverty Response Committee is a network of representatives of service agencies, organizations, government, funders and citizens, including people living in poverty. The mandate of the committee is to alleviate poverty in Richmond and address gaps identified through a variety of community reports on poverty, housing and food security. The diversity of the committee membership ensures coordination, cooperation and collaboration to prevent duplication of projects, programs, services and events. “ (Richmond Poverty Response Society, 2006)

**Table 15: Summary information on the two organizations**

<b>Element/indicator</b>	<b>Vibrant Surrey</b>	<b>Richmond Poverty Response Committee</b>
Legal Status of the organization	Incorporated as a nonprofit in Fall of 2007	Remains non incorporated with administrative funds held by the Richmond Food Bank
Mission statement	To reduce poverty in Surrey	A coalition of Richmond residents and agencies working together to reduce poverty and the impacts of poverty with research, projects and public education
How the organizations describe itself on its website	We are a collaborative solutions-driven organization that unites leaders from every section of the community	The RPRC is a group of community volunteers representing the faith community, community organizations, local social services and members of the public – including those affected by poverty.
Who is welcome to	Vibrant Surrey participants include service	The RPRC welcomes the

attend meetings	agencies, businesses, governments, funding agencies, non-profit groups, associations, and individuals who care about our community. They participate on strategic teams in order to focus and amplify our efforts and their expertise. Meeting logistics are not publicly available	participation of any community member, professional or organization interested in helping to alleviate the effects of poverty in our community. Meeting logistics are posted on the website and open to everyone
Meeting times	Unknown for operation committee but probably between 9:00am to 5:00pm as the membership is staff of organizations	4:30pm to 6:00pm to allow community members to participate
When last updated	Regular posting of information	Weekly newsletter
Governing committee	No information on the website. Five person Board of directors according to the papers filed with the Registrar of Societies and in the 2007-2010 Plan of Action there is an operations committee that acts as the primary decision-making body with the chair identified as the United Way planner. There is also an interim co-chair who is a staff member of Coast Capital	Called the steering committee, has two volunteer co-chairs – currently two community residents, the chair of each task force and others (from the website)
funders	United Way of the Lower Mainland, Coast Capital, McConnell Family Foundation, VanCity Community Foundation	United Way of the Lower Mainland, Coast Capital, City of Richmond, Vancouver Coastal Health
Who is the public voice	The staff person – Director and a search of the internet indicated that the Chair/UW rep attended meetings as representing Vibrant Surrey (Living Wage Roundtable Minutes May 9, 2008)	The two Co-chairs of the steering committee and the Project Coordinator
Presentation to city hall committees or City Council	Does not appear to have been made over the past 2 years	
Identification of participating agency with the organization	See separate table	See separate table
Funding for 2007	258,410 April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008 07-10 strategic plan	41,129 August 07 to October 08 UW progress report 2008
Influence at city hall word search of poverty	Only one hit for Vibrant Surrey through the link under Social Planning	A number of hits related to the advocacy work of the RPRC
Office or virtual	Office located in the Phoenix Society building	Virtual with admin coordinator and project coordinator working out of their home office. Some files at the food bank because of their financial responsibilities

## Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis provides a means by which to critically examine the extent to which the organizational structure, processes, practices or activities enable or constraint the organization's ability to operate. It also provides helpful insight on the role of the discourse in the production and challenge of dominance which is defined as the exercise of special power by elites, institutions or groups that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality. “ (van Dijk, 1993, p. 250). The documents and websites that were used for the data collection for this study are discourses that have been shaped by who has produced them, who has approved them for “publication” and who has access to what information. The following observations can be made from the data collected:

1. The use of language is different in the publicly available documents from both organizations. RPRC tends to use less jargon and more accessible language. Vibrant Surrey language is more written and geared to professionals working in the field of community development.
2. There is accessible information to a community resident on the RPRC site and the names and contact information of key leaders are available.
3. The Vibrant Surrey website and documents are undated and authors unknown. The website does not contain information about who should be contacted apart from the staff person who is listed on the Media page or who are the current co-chairs or board of directors are.
4. The timing of meetings for the RPRC is orientated to providing accessibility to both professionals working for agencies and community members. While the

timing may be a challenge for working moms or others, an effort has been made to be inclusive.

5. Generally RPRC material including minutes of meetings are available to anyone who asks and there is an open membership to anyone who might be interested in participating in the efforts to reduce poverty.
6. Vibrant Surrey reveals little information beyond those involved in its leadership/Operations Committee. It is unclear if anyone not affiliated with an agency or government is involved and how a community resident could get involved. The documents indicate that community residents and people living in poverty are welcome to be involved but documents consulted are silent on if there are currently any community residents involved. Internet research revealed two anti-poverty organizations operating in Surrey, The Dogwood Anti-Poverty Society and ACORN (Building Power for Low and Moderate Income Families and their Communities) Surrey. It is unclear if anyone from these two organizations is involved with Vibrant Surrey.
7. Community volunteers provide the leadership of the RPRC with staff assisting in project implementation and administrative responsibilities. Vibrant Surrey from the document consulted is lead by two co-chairs who are staff of funding agencies.
8. The RPRC encourages and implements advocacy on behalf of people living in poverty providing a webpage with information on who to contact. Vibrant Surrey appears to play a role more of an education role although they have signed the

Living Wage petition and are involved with other Vibrant Communities in this initiative.

9. Vibrant Surrey is interested in involving leaders on their roundtable while the RPRC is interested in creating “opportunities for leadership and all member members are encouraged to engage at the level and interest they have.”

### Summary

An extensive search was made through websites to fully understand the tentacles weaved by both of these organizations through their communities, and to obtain publicly available documents. The data obtained was able to provide information as to stakeholders, where resources came from, the governance of the organization and who generally was involved in its activities. However as will be discussed in the analysis, it was what was not available that proved to be the most interesting data gathered. The data provided a profile of two organizations with similar missions and goals but with very different ways of moving forward with their goals. One tends to be more reflective and planning orientated while the others identifies gaps and works with others to find solutions to these gaps with less time for reflection.

The next chapter will provide an analysis of the findings through the lenses of the literature review to answer the questions that are at the core of this project.

## Chapter 5: Analysis and Conclusions

### *Introduction*

The data collection provided data from what was collected and also what was not able to be collected towards answering the research questions. The research question was: How is the influence of funding agencies evidenced through an analysis of written discourses and texts that traces the work of two B.C. poverty reduction organizations, Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee? More specifically when examining these publicly available documents, what evidence is there that access to public, private and political resources (funds, contacts, positional power) either enable or constrain the ways in which these agencies operate within the community? How do theories of resource dependency, stakeholder theory, and power inform this analysis? And to what extent do these organizational operations and governance models reflect democratic, civic and social engagement among community members and/or other organizations? The literature review explored two governance theories, the socio-political context of funders and theories of power.

The collected data was carefully examined to ensure that similar documents were compared for both organizations as one organization has a more public policy regarding its documents and the other appears to be more inclusive in making available governance documents. The purpose of the analysis is to determine how the data and literature review provide an understanding to the research questions. In no way should the analysis be seen as a critical evaluation of the two organizations. It is only meant to contribute to the body of knowledge on how organizations preserve access to resources in a very competitive environment.

*Resource Dependency and stakeholders theories*

Both of these theories address the need of organizations to maximize their access to resources and their relationship with competing and supporting stakeholders in a community. Resource dependency theory is preoccupied with how an organization maximizes access to resources while effectively using them. It seeks to explain why organizations try to control their context. In the literature review Cornforth (2005) emphasized the role that the board plays in terms of creating influential links between organizations and maintaining links with key external stakeholders. In light of the resource dependency theory, it would appear that Vibrant Surrey has been able to capture resource producing organizations through having key funders providing leadership and involving potential other funders from the federal, provincial and city on its leadership roundtable. The organization funding for 2007 reflects its ability to capture resources for its work- its budget is about a quarter of a million dollar. It has been provided an office in the Phoenix Society new building and benefits from the support of the two local universities (Simon Fraser University and Kwantlen Polytechnic University) for in kind donation of meeting space etc. It appears to be able to use “social power” as defined in the literature review as “based on privilege access to socially valuable resources”. The multisectoral leadership table approach conceptualize by Vibrant Communities captures the need of organizations to maximize their access to resources defined not only in terms of dollars or in kind donations but also in terms of access.

Few of the organizations involved with Vibrant Surrey appeared to publicly see their involvement in Vibrant Surrey as an important source of socially valuable resources. The lack of identification to Vibrant Surrey (through a search of the websites) by

members of the Leadership Roundtable was a surprising finding. Only two of the 11 social service agencies provided information on their involvement in Vibrant Surrey. One of them is the Newton Advocacy Group that was an initial member of Vibrant Surrey and has received strong support for its *Project Comeback*. Either the agencies do not use their website to maximize their prestige through linkage with an organization that has funder support or else involvement with Vibrant Surrey is not seen to enhance access to resources. The RPRC fared better with more partner agencies having some reference to the RPRC on their website. This was mostly because of links to the Richmond Share website or the Low Income Directory, projects of the RPRC.

The Richmond Poverty Response Committee does not appear to have sought key influencers who can help to obtain resources. No funders or government representatives are identified as participating beyond staff from Vancouver Coastal Health Richmond Health Department. The committee is not made up of executive directors or senior managers from many of the City's social service agencies. However it does appear that from the way the RPRC functions that its committee members act as "boundary spanners" who help to link the RPRC to the external environment, and to resources. Even though members active with the RPRC are not the "elite" in the community (not the moneyed or heads of well resourced organizations), they can link the work of the RPRC to a wide network of resources. It appears to have successfully "co-opted" social service agencies who might have felt initially threatened by the RPRC as an organization competing with them for scarce resources (funds) through the judicious use of other organizations to administer the grants and lead projects. In many ways, the RPRC is very dependent on other organizations to undertake their projects. The two-chairs are active in promoting

the work of the RPRC to civic government and in the community.

Relationship with the City government – a potential key resource differs for both organizations. Vibrant Surrey has a city planner on staff but from public documents, it does not appear that Vibrant Surrey has been able to influence policies in the City. The work on housing and homelessness is done through a separate committee (<http://surreyhomelessnessandhousing.org>) and predates Vibrant Surrey. The RPRC receives a small grant from the City and actively pursues an advocacy agenda through speaking at Council or Planning Committee meeting, press releases, or media stories. It may be that by having less government ex officio members and no staff of funding agencies on the committee, the RPRC is freer to be active in advocacy efforts to promote changes in city policies. It may also be that as community residents the co-chairs have more opportunity to try to influence city council or other levels of government. Community volunteers are often more available to corner a city councillor at a local event and have an impromptu policy conversation.

Stakeholder theory addresses the issue that an organization is responsible to a broad range of stakeholders not just the “owners” of an organization and that the objectives of an organization can best be achieved by balancing the interest among these groups. The literature review highlighted the need for organizations to pay attention to how the community viewed its responsiveness to community needs. Vibrant Surrey has 20 plus organizations as part of its Leadership Roundtable including all the major social service agencies in Surrey, the City and government ministries excluding the regional health authorities. These appear to be the major agencies that seek funds from the same funders as Vibrant Surrey. Neither of the two identified groups of poverty activists (ACORN and

Dogwood Anti-Poverty Society) operating in Surrey are part of Vibrant Surrey (from the information obtained). Vibrant Surrey identified its stakeholders as the “leaders of every sector of the community”. The sectors that have been identified at this point do not include non-affiliated citizens, labour, faith communities, community neighbourhood organizations or poverty activist among others.

The RPRC has few of the major social service agencies active on its steering committee although as noted earlier it partners with these agencies to deliver projects. The major government ministry involved is the regional health authority. Its stakeholders are identified as “individuals and partnering agencies”. A great deal of effort has been made to ensure that the voice of community members (including those living with poverty) are heard through its governance model: “This approach enhances working relationships in the community and the congenial social environment enables volunteers and service providers to work together as individuals. Its 2007 strategic plan highlights the need of the RPRC to reach out to immigrants whose first language is not English so that they can also access the services offered by the RPRC.

### *Transparency*

Transparency was identified in the literature review as an important concept for nonprofits that operate to benefit community. Transparency was defined as dependent on board process and structures that allow stakeholder participation in the Literature Review. As data was gathered for both organizations and their funding agencies, a surprising element was the apparent lack of public information on finances, activities and governance at least easily available on websites. If the internet is “a democratizing medium that increases egalitarian interaction and social change and that online

associations are characterized by voluntary, public, interaction, which encourages democratic participation and civic engagement” it should be a tool that allows community and stakeholders easy access to important information on an organization and an enhanced transparency and engagement. The RPRC appeared to have a transparent open process of involving stakeholders in the community with open meetings advertised on the web and through its e-mailed newsletter/updates. Information on its projects, achievements, and priorities were found on its website with contact information for staff and co-chairs. Financial information was not available on the website. The inclusive model of allowing participation by all interested in its poverty reduction work in its steering committee and task forces increased the level of transparency. Advocacy positions or the development of new projects would be known to anyone interested in receiving minutes or checking the website.

Vibrant Surrey has a reduced level of transparency to the general public. It may be that it defines its shareholders only as those participating in the Leadership Roundtable . As noted in Chapter 4, there was little information available on who was providing leadership to the organization, its meetings or activities. A brief look at other Vibrant Communities sites Calgary and Edmonton ([www.vibrantcalgary.com](http://www.vibrantcalgary.com) and [www.vibrantedmonton.ca](http://www.vibrantedmonton.ca)) indicated that there was also little information on governance meetings. However Calgary had a message from the Executive Director on the website and Edmonton had a message from the co-chairs and information on its leadership council. I also searched for Vibrant St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador ([www.envision.ca](http://www.envision.ca)) and could not find any information (through internet search) on who is on the leadership council. The best source of information proved to be the Vibrant

Communities website (Born, 2008) where information was listed as to participants in each cities' leadership table. The literature review questioned the growing trend of Civil society organizations to behave as private sector organizations “ incorporation of private-market values by the nonprofit sector appears to be detrimental to democracy...and compromises the nonprofit sector's role in civil society roles as value guardians, service providers and advocates, and builders of social capital “ The appeared lack of transparency as to who, how and what decisions are made in Vibrant Surrey appears to be related to the overall national initiative. Even though the United Ways across Canada have supported and provide leadership to each of the Vibrant Communities initiatives, there is very little supportive documents as to why this approach is seen as providing results in poverty reduction or to justify the amount of staff time invested in the leadership of Vibrant Surrey. Compounding the move to private market values in the nonprofit sector is the recent changes to the BC Registrar of Companies by which nonprofit societies only now need to report annually on Form 11 the date of their annual general meeting and who are the directors. There is no longer need to file financial statements or a full annual report with a description of activities. The annual report for Vibrant Surrey filed on November 25, 2008 contained for example no mention of the number of members of the society or other information that would inform its activities.

Civil Society organizations key attribute is participation of citizens acting in the public sphere between the state and the household. There are discussions in academic and community settings on the “uneasy interface between representative governments and “non-representative” civil society organizations . (The Network Society, 2008, p. 2).

Putnam (2000) and others have popularized the notion that involvement and participation in associational civil society organizations build social capital.

### *Influence of funders*

The question of the influence of funding agencies on the work of two B.C. poverty reduction organizations, Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee could be answered, that for the organization that has more funding agency involvement, there is less openness and transparency and ability for community to be involved or have access to information. It appears to be more of an inclusive closed network of organizations rather than the open engaged model as described in its *Plan for Action & Learning 2007 to 2010* with community and agencies involved in a leadership table. I am using “appears” to characterize what I am observing because I want to remind the reader that the data collected was only what was available publicly and what appeared available to a member of the public. It may not be possible to directly trace the more closed model of Vibrant Surrey to the involvement on the board and as co-chairs of two of the funders. However it could be argued that as funders they have two roles, one as members of the decision making committee of Vibrant Surrey and the other one as part of staff of agencies that will make funding decisions. As funders they hold the key to the success of the organization obtaining funds and unlike others at the table may not need to act as boundary spanners or link with others in the community to obtain resources for the organization. They sit at the table with “privileged access to socially valued resources” in their hand. One project that can be directly linked to the influence of funders for Vibrant Surrey is its involvement with *Seeing is Believing* as this is also a project funded and supported by Coast Capital in the two regions it is involved in the Vibrant

Communities initiative. The Richmond Poverty Response Committee in the same way has benefited from the role of the Vancouver Coastal Health staff on the Steering Committee and Task Forces who have had direct links to some small pool of funding available for food security work.

The level of participation of community agencies in both Surrey and Richmond is very different. All major social service agencies are participating in the Vibrant Surrey with their executive director or senior staff named as part of the leadership or operation committee, while in Richmond, a small number of social service agencies are participating and if so with lower level staff. It could be inferred that this is because in the case of Surrey agencies, they are acting in light of the Resource Dependency Theory to find ways to ensure they get the information and resources they need and also ensuring that they influence their external environment by participating in a project so obviously supported by key funders. The Resource Dependency Theory “emphasizes proactive strategies that can be pursued to deal with environmental constraints rather than viewing organizations as largely passive or impotent in relation to environmental forces”. In Richmond, social service agencies do not get the same benefit by participation in the RPRC as funders are not present or involved in its leadership.

If the funders have been able to influence the direction of the work of Vibrant Surrey, it is surprising that the investment of the funding agencies in terms of staff and allocated funds is not made more visible to their own stakeholders and those for whom it depends on resources. Under Resource Dependency Theory a foundation, funding projects, just like the agencies it funds needs to “maintain good relations with key external stakeholders in order to ensure the flow of resources into and from the

organization, and to help the organization respond to external changes”. The McConnell Family Foundation ([www.mcconnellfoundation.ca](http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca)) who is the main funder for the Vibrant Community initiative maintains a page with resources on its involvement in this initiative including the amount of funds it has set aside for it.

### *Power*

The dual role of funders as they sit on community boards has been pointed out in the above paragraph. They bring with them access to resources not only for the Vibrant Surrey and the RPRC but also for the other agencies that are participating on the same decision making body. They provide opportunities for participating agencies to be seen supporting a program in which funders are invested. The literature review discussed the concept of uneven power relationships and the resulting quiescence of those who do not have power. The literature review informed the gathering of data about the decision-making or governance of both organizations. Reference was made in the Literature Review to the way that rules and regulations governing debate, discussion and decision-making is a form of power and that chairs of meetings yield considerable power. Reference was made to the writing of Michael Parenti (1970) on the ability of the powerless to influence an agenda. In the case of the two case study organizations, the powerless are the people living in poverty whose voice should influence the projects and directions taken by both organizations. In Vibrant Surrey, those living in poverty are probably most strongly represented by Newton Advocacy Group who works directly and only with people living in poverty from single mom to working poor labourers. The Richmond Poverty Response Committee has a number of community residents living in poverty involved and the Richmond Food Bank, Women’s Resource Center, the

Salvation Army who work directly with residents living in poverty.

The RPRC has made statements in its document on how it operates on the issue of unequal power,

“ RPRC is able to amalgamate its *diverse membership with utilization of a flat governance model and consensual decision making* for achieving poverty reduction objectives in the community. This approach enhances working relationships in the community and the congenial social environment *enables volunteers and services providers to work together as individuals from the community and partnering agencies have equal representation for the management of any projects.* Within this structure there are many opportunities for leadership and all members are encouraged to engage at the level and interest that they have.”

It could be argued that Vibrant Surrey in its model of involving “leaders of each community sector” has wrestled with the issue of uneven power relationship by identifying only leaders as participating in the Leadership Roundtable or Operations Committee so that everyone around the table has more or less equal power because of the position they hold. No community member or no one explicitly identified as living in poverty appears to be identified so far from the public documents as involved in either the Leadership or Operation Committee. From the evidence collected it appears that an initial determination of what constitutes a leader in community has been made that excludes non-affiliated residents, faith groups, poverty advocacy groups etc. It should be noted that Vibrant Surrey does hope to increase its membership by 2010 to “include 60 non-profit organizations including faith, social service, civic and labour, 30 government representatives, 100 individuals experiencing poverty, 50 community representatives and

25 business organizations” (Vibrant Surrey, 2007, p. 10). A Community Roundtable is also mentioned in the *Plan* which “is an open forum for all sectors including business, labour, non-profit, residents and all levels of government. The Community Roundtable will undertake tasks that will lead to an increase in Surrey’s community capacity to build economic and social opportunities with the purpose of enhancing the quality of life and reducing poverty” (p. 42). However there was no reference to this group on the website and in no other publicly available documents. The statements of belief of Vibrant Surrey speak to the commitment to inclusive membership. “we are inclusive not just with issues but also in membership. We have a commitment to fostering new relationships, with a special emphasis on ensuring that low-income residents shape solutions meant to address their needs. .... We ensure a safe, non-judgmental environment where everyone can share their knowledge, experience and stories.” (p. 9). Vibrant Surrey has the building blocks of dealing with uneven power relationship and including a diversity of voices including those that are not “elites” in their work. It is impossible to know why at this point, there is no reference to the involvement of a broader segment of the Surrey community in its work. Vibrant Surrey has been active for a number of years and is in the final 18 months of its *Plan for Action & Learning* and information should be now available of a move towards a more inclusive committee structure.

There is another way to view power, not just in terms of uneven or asymmetrical dynamics but also how someone with power can help move forward work on poverty reduction. It is a valid way also of looking at the data gathered on the case study organizations. Vibrant Surrey by having “leaders” on its governance committee co-chaired by staff of two powerful organizations – powerful because of their access to

funds and well-established community roots, can move forward a poverty reduction agenda. This should in theory allow the organization to be able to have access to politicians, be involved in policy formulation with the City and put poverty reduction on the forefront of public debate in that community. It would also support the Resource Dependency Theory as the co-chairs and others on the committee with important connections or linkages would ensure that these external bodies would be “co-opted” to support the work of Vibrant Surrey. I searched for evidence of that but was disappointed that I could not document such a co-optation within Surrey. The only evidence that I could find is that the participation by Vibrant Surrey and its adherence to the model of Vibrant Communities allows them to seek funding from the Tamarack Institute from the funds made available by the McConnell Family Foundation.

The Richmond Poverty Response Committee does not appear to have anyone on its current steering committee with “power” or “elite” status. It could be argued that one current co-chair did seek municipal election (and lost) and has a bit of name recognition for having been prominent in campaigns for affordable housing and the Garden City Lands. There is no one linked to the prominent political group or in a senior position in a big social service agency. Their ability to generate funds is minimum compared to other social service organizations in the City. It is barely equivalent to one full time staff position. Its community power appears to be more based on their ability to generate media for campaigns that resonate with the community and City Council. They were able to get the city to adopt an affordable housing strategy and also to start the conversation of the Garden City Lands. They are also able to motivate other groups to be involved in the issues and provide resources such as the extreme weather shelter started

by St. Albans Church and the yearly fundraising event by Gilmore Park United that goes towards a variety of programs for people living in poverty. This appears to be how they use their “power”.

From the data gathered it appears that funders have been able to use their institutional power to gather all prominent players in the community in the Leadership Committee through their leadership of Vibrant Surrey and support projects like *Project Comeback* and *Seeing is Believing* that they are also funding. The listings of projects in Vibrant Surrey *Moving Towards Solutions* cannot be directly linked to the funders’ presence and leadership in Vibrant Surrey from publicly available documents. A project that had high funder support, the *Surrey Social Portal* is no longer active.

The funders’ role in the Richmond Poverty Response Committee cannot be determined beyond their granting of relatively small grants (a total of \$42,000 for 2007) and cannot be identified with the outcomes or projects of the RPRC.

### *Language*

Discourse Analysis asks us to consider “ the way that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations”. The first glance at both websites and the documents they contain seen through the lens of critical discourse analysis reflects two very different worldviews. The RPRC site is used to transmit information and bring ordinary people to the work with the minimum of jargon, the Vibrant Surrey site uses more professional language, appears geared to other professionals and gives out very little information for someone interested in getting involved. Particularly striking

was the lack of dated documents on the Vibrant Surrey site or updates on initiatives.

Both websites appear to accurately reflect the influence of their leadership. The Partners of Vibrant Surrey are generally a group that is used to jargon, well developed strategic plan and documents with long reflective consultative process. Process is an important part of the documents examined. There are well-researched information pieces on the current state of poverty in Surrey and benchmarks established. The RPRC comparable plan quickly passes to action after gaps have been identified and little time is spent on process or wordy documents to establish the rationale behind its actions. The documents are mostly free from jargon. The RPRC establishes its priority based on a monthly gap analysis and what interest its members and others in its network. The RPRC does have on its staff a “professional” former Executive Director of a social agency but the language and framing of the issues is couched in active non-jargon language.

Critical discourse analysis provides a way to question how discourse reproduces and challenge dominance defined as the exercise of “social power by elites, institutions, or groups that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality”. The data I think does indicate that the funders in their leadership of Vibrant Surrey have had an influence in their development of the documents and how Vibrant Surrey is defined and presented. The focus on providing background statistical information, the complex governance structure, the language of outcomes, the well-defined understanding of poverty and the theory of change reflects the leadership of funders interested in full documentation and ties to current models of poverty reduction. The approach is also probably in part dictated by Vibrant Communities through its power

to make available matching funds from the McConnell Foundation. However the language is intimidating and inaccessible to an ordinary person interested in poverty reduction. It is the language of “professional” rather than community.

Van Dijk states that texts can be examined for “strategies that aim at the concealment of social power relations, for instance by playing down, leaving implicit or understating responsible agency of powerful social actors in the texts” (p. 250). When examining publicly available documents, I have considered van Dijk words as a possible reason for why it was not possible to identify the current leadership or current composition of who is involved in Vibrant Surrey or why there appears to be some disparity between the words of exclusivity and current membership on the Leadership Roundtable or Operations Committee. This is a presupposition that I find hard to contemplate.

The Richmond Poverty Response Committee might on the other hand find itself attracting more social service agencies to its committee or task forces if the discourse included more of a planning element or a less activist language. It would have to carefully consider however that so far it has succeeded in its mission to provide space for both professionals and community members and weigh the pros and cons of changing its current strategies.

## Summary and conclusions

*How is the influence of funding agencies evidenced through an analysis of written discourses and texts that traces the work of two B.C. poverty reduction organizations, Vibrant Surrey and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee? More specifically when examining these publicly available documents, what evidence is there that access to public, private and political resources (funds, contacts, positional power) either enable or constrain the ways in which these agencies operate within the community? How do theories of resource dependency, stakeholder theory, and power inform this analysis? And to what extent do these organizational operations and governance models reflect democratic, civic and social engagement among community members and/or other organizations?*

The process of data collection and what was available and not available publicly led to new areas of analysis. Non-profit organizations are not as “public” as one would have initially expected. Tracing how funders allocate funds or how organizations whose “owners” are the community govern themselves is more of a challenge than what I had expected.

The availability of funds for poverty reduction activities especially for those organizations that engage community to make structural changes is limited. There is very scarce provincial funding and currently very restricted federal programs. It results in a fierce competition for funding and programs that hold funders attention. Private and community foundations are providing an important source of funding for programs that initiate poverty reduction activities. These foundations operate with a dependence on philanthropic dollars from corporations and individuals. The British Columbia

government has also recently begun to use community foundations to place program dollars for redistribution. With limited funding dollars available, funders involvement in the governance and decision-making of organizations that they also fund raises the question of how their involvement constraints or enhances the organization.

The data collected demonstrated that the presence of funders and their leadership helped in bringing “leaders” to a community table to reduce poverty. It was not possible to determine how they helped outcomes for the organization because not enough information was available. In terms of budgets, the organization with the funders at the table had more than five times the budget than the organization that did not have funders present. However, it does appear that the organization with the least amount in their budget had a model of governance and action, which allowed them to use their small amount of dollars to leverage them to achieve a great number of projects. It was also possible to trace how this agency had influenced policies in Richmond and initiated a number of projects that are now well anchored in the community.

The influence of funders can be traced to the language used and professionalization of communication in the one organization and possibly to the less open and public distribution of information that was available. A surprising element was the apparent lack of promotion by the funders of their commitment and support to the initiative that they are heavily invested in. It would make sense that having chosen to engage and support through staff time an initiative, that there would have been more of a branding and identification with that initiative.

Evidence from both organizations indicates that the issue of power and powerlessness has been discussed in their desire to provide an inclusive environment.

The RPRC has organized itself to ensure opportunity for all voices to be heard. This is demonstrated by its choice of language in documents, its meeting times that allows for working residents to still participate and the importance of non affiliated individuals in the leadership of the organization. Vibrant Surrey documents demonstrate an understanding of the challenges of having around a common table individuals with various levels of positional power – funder, government officials, executive directors of social service agencies and individual residents who may be themselves living in poverty. It has however proven harder to demonstrate using public documents how this is currently implemented. The voice of the powerless appears to be voiced through the agencies that serve them such as the Newton Advocacy Group and the voice of community residents through its representative government i.e. City hall staff. The lack of information on who is involved or provides leadership in the organization could be interpreted as a way to restrict involvement that might dilute the current structures.

Both organizations are dedicated to facilitate collaborative efforts to reduce poverty. They have organized differently and have chosen different paths to obtain resources for their work. It is the hope of this writer that this report might contribute to their work to improve the lives of people living in poverty in Richmond and Surrey.

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