CHAPTER 2

HUMAN-SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE OF GREATER PHOENIX

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Introduction

When people visit Greater Phoenix from other parts of the country, particularly large cities of the Northeast and Midwest, they often comment on its modern look and feel. “Clean,” “new,” and “functional” are words frequently used to describe this place, with good reason. Vast construction projects have transformed cottonfields and citrus orchards into new housing. Public infrastructure has spread as municipal boundaries have proved elastic and as city populations and housing developments have mushroomed. The land is increasingly changing into a built environment.

But Greater Phoenix is more than merely a set of physical accomplishments. For example, a recent comparison of the Phoenix and San Diego metropolitan areas highlighted many similarities, such as population size, global economic aspirations, sunbelt prominence, city government form, and professional sports competitions. But the article concluded that many in San Diego thought of Phoenix as a “can-do” place, able to make decisions and build its physical infrastructure faster than most booming urban areas—including San Diego.

As the author put it: “Phoenix gets things done. In San Diego, they just talk about issues” (Perry 2000). The fear expressed by one participant at a San Diego futures forum at about the same time was that, from an economic-development perspective, “Phoenix is poised to eat our lunch!” According to one leading expert on Southwest government, there is at least some truth to these concerns:

In Phoenix, at least there is some coherence in growth planning, some significant political tradeoffs have been made. That’s not the norm in San Diego where everything is about what can a given policy or vote do for a person’s district. People seem to feel better about what is happening in Phoenix. (Bridges 1999)

What accounts for these concerns? In part it is the history and development of the two places and the gradual development of values and agreements that underlie the policy process. This is what some scholars refer to as “political” or “governmental” culture. This in turn impacts community definitions of progress, process, and indicators of success and failure.

Yet the question lingers: What is Greater Phoenix becoming? Physical markers of progress in Greater Phoenix are real and impressive:

- New housing and infrastructure making new cities out of places like Gilbert, Surprise, and Buckeye that only recently were desert outposts
- A new community development in downtown Phoenix fueled by a new light rail
- A new campus of Arizona State University that will create a more vibrant downtown
- New stadiums and shifting municipal locations for the many sports teams that call Metro Phoenix home
An abundance of baseball spring training sites

A new freeway system, largely constructed since the late 1990s with a much more significant share of state and local revenues than similar but older systems

The ability to make investments in regional physical infrastructure helped to position this 21st century urban region to move forward in the global economic chase. In fact, hyper-growth appears to demand more and better physical arrangements for transportation, housing, jobs, and economic development—a form of urban chain reaction that points to a “megapolitan” future. This is a future in which Greater Phoenix expands and connects to a growing Tucson metropolitan area forming an urban corridor that becomes one of the nation’s 10 megalopolitan regions. It is projected to be home to more than 10 million people—more than 80% of Arizona residents—by 2040.

Promising as this development may appear, issues of neglect remain in other domains of community development. At a minimum, Greater Phoenix needs to ask itself: What is the human side of megalopolitan development? Specifically, some claim that human services in Greater Phoenix suffer or at least lag behind the large material investments. This is a serious charge. Is it true? Will the rising tide of economic development lift all boats, or will some be left at shore? Why is this at least a partially accepted image of the Greater Phoenix condition? And what are the public policy implications of these questions?

Good answers require both data and dialogue. This report provides some of the needed data and suggests other sources. Its goal is also to help set the stage for a community dialogue on the human-services infrastructure in Greater Phoenix.

**Human-Services Infrastructure**

At the heart of every community, system, or organization is a basic underlying framework, or infrastructure. In communities of place, this is often used as a synonym for the built environment. Yet community infrastructure means much more. Beyond the physical and formal are other evolving elements of community infrastructure including the social, civic, economic, environmental, and human connections that intersect to form the foundation of community. Building full community capacity is a long-term balancing act that requires investment in each of these domains, and sustained evaluation of the effects of such investments. To understand the strength and capacity of the human-services infrastructure of Greater Phoenix requires that we first examine what is meant by “human services.”

Defining human services in a manner that captures both their dynamic nature and their context within a given community has proven to be an incredibly difficult task. Mehr (1980) probably states the dilemma best when he writes that “[human services] is a concept which means many things to many people...” (p. 3). Such ambiguity certainly has not prevented scholars and practitioners from attempting to conceptualize the field, however. And while they do not agree on all-encompassing definitions, they assert certain issues as priorities, which helps to map the general terrain of human services. Different scholars and practitioners tend to emphasize different priorities. At their core, however, they do share fundamental beliefs in the provision of increased opportunity and the enhancement of the human experience.

There is also sustained scholarly debate over whether human services are ones designed solely for those who are of lesser means and opportunity. For instance, Mehr argues:

> [t]he term, human services, has become an all encompassing phrase used to label those services provided to individuals or groups who, for whatever reason, have failed to be included in the mainstream of our society and culture, or who experience the pain and anguish of life in our troubled times (p. xiv).

However, some scholars disagree. In fact, Kamerman and Kahn (1976) assert that human services are not intended for the disenfranchised alone, but for the betterment of all community members. Policymakers are speaking to this definition when they promote public policies aimed at the general improvement of community quality of life and human well-being. Among both scholars and practitioners, however, no doubt exists that special emphasis is placed upon the provision of services to the neediest members of society.

With disagreement about the fundamental nature of human services and about who should be targeted for them, it naturally follows that there are also different priorities concerning what actually comprise the field of human services.
For example, as a national agency, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services works toward enhancing the health and well-being of all citizens, and therefore offers a broad range of services from health-related research to food and drug safety, to home-delivered meals to financial assistance to the poor. Yet a review of national interest groups, such as the American Public Human Services Association and the National Organization for Human Services, reveals that this all-encompassing approach is not a forgone conclusion, even among human services-related organizations. The American Public Human Services Association clearly aligns ideologically with Mehr and focuses solely on those services and agencies that benefit the poor the most (e.g., public welfare, food assistance, etc.). The interests of the National Organization for Human Services, however, are much broader, focusing on an integrative approach to the provision of human services across all social sectors. In an elaborate comparative study of nonprofit-sector delivery of human services in 16 major metropolitan areas of the U.S., the Urban Institute (Salamon et al., 1987) developed a broad set of human-service sub-sectors parallel to major federal domestic programs, which included:

- social services
- employment and training
- housing and community development
- health care
- arts and culture
- income assistance

Within these broad sub-sectors, there is great variation in type of program, conditions for eligibility, targeted recipients and so forth. There is ample reason to believe that all are generally designed to respond to poverty and related problems. But program by program, activity by activity, and year by year, there is great variation in approach, targeted populations, and evaluation of outcomes.

The nature of human-service definitions, disputes, and dynamics means that every local area must contend with the complexity that these variations produce. That is certainly the case in Greater Phoenix. For example, the Maricopa County Association of Governments’ (MAG) Human Services Council asserts as its priorities the human services that target children, adults, families, elderly, persons with physical disabilities and those with developmental disabilities, as well as specialized areas of interest like homelessness and domestic violence. MAG is in the process of developing important refinements of its human-services focus, described below as an excellent example of resilience solutions to human-services issues.

The Valley of the Sun United Way (VSUW) attempts to focus full community resources on the most critical human care needs of the Greater Phoenix region, and in the process build community for the region. VSUW serves as a convener, collaborator, funder, and leader in addressing a broad range of health and human-services issues. VSUW works with many community organizations across sectors helping individuals in crisis (such as the homeless) move toward stability.

Meanwhile, Arizona State University provides research and teaching emphasis on criminal justice and violence-prevention, mental-health and substance-abuse treatment, lifelong learning, gerontology, community development, quality-of-life issues, and advocacy and leadership effectiveness.

The focus of this College of Public Programs study is preparing to meet the demands on the human- and social-service sectors in Greater Phoenix in the years to come. The health of the community as a whole depends upon our collective ability to advance the well-being of the poor, the young and the old, the mentally ill, and others in need. Special emphasis is given to understanding the special needs of the Hispanic community and the capacity of the nonprofit sector, but the priorities are all-inclusive.

This definitional complexity remained apparent when we talked with a small and experienced group of human-service practitioners in the Phoenix area. Asked to define human services and the human-services infrastructure in Greater Phoenix, they offered the following:

- Human services are “about meeting a defined need in the community, providing opportunities to those who cannot achieve them on their own. Providing a link between needs and resources. It is also a network, but very loosely based. This network is inconsistent, and not as well tied together as it could be. It is made up of government, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations.”

- They do a lot with not enough, and the “a lot” is not enough. We have explosive growth, and the human-services infrastructure is not keeping up with growth. Just look at the West Valley. The kind of growth is low-income wage growth, and it is transitory. So, people come here without support systems in place. The sector is trying its best, but it’s not enough.

- Human services is really the social-service structure and network, at least in this capacity. It is a structure; it is systems, comprised of programs and services. It is intended for everybody, but there are programs that are very targeted toward people who need greater assistance. One example is in the senior-services area; it is not just for low-income seniors. It is for everyone, and it is all over the city. Therefore, the programs reach all sorts of demographic groups at the senior level.

Clearly, how the human-services field is defined and viewed depends on the perspective of the observer. To this point, we have reviewed perspectives of experts. Still other angles amplify the variation in perspective that accompanies human-service
Figures 1, 2 and 3 help to illustrate this and to describe elements of traditional human-service infrastructure. These illustrations are each equivalent to snapshots: reality in Greater Phoenix, as elsewhere, means much is in motion.

From the viewpoint of a potential client entering the human-services arena for the first time, the network of services is potentially overwhelming (Figure 1). Because both public and private human-services providers are linked through a shared network of interests, funding sources, and clients, it behooves the potential client to enter the network at the “right” place. If she does not enter the network through an optimal entryway, or is not evaluated by the right caseworker, she may not receive all the services needed or available. While agencies can be graphically portrayed by experts as a connected network, they are not all necessarily directly connected with each other. For example, while basic services such as housing and food are often directly linked, services related to crisis intervention and to psychotherapeutic services are not necessarily directly connected (Figure 1). Similarly, people in need who have been hospitalized may not receive the full complement of services available and useful in recovery, depending on the skill of a hospital discharge planner. As one recent article notes, “In human services, the discharge planner is the equivalent to the supply chain or logistics specialist in the new economy. Just
not as highly valued or compensated” (Hoffman, 2007). So while a potential client may have access to a variety of services through a network of human-services agencies, it is rare that any one agency fully assesses all of a client’s needs and provides for them.

Of course, human-services agencies are connected not only through shared clients and shared causes, but also by a network of funders. For example, if one were to look at the actual and potential funding sources of Chicanos Por La Causa, a prominent local nonprofit agency that serves a largely Hispanic population, one can ascertain that funding comes from a variety of sources (Figure 2). Like the human-services sector itself, funding sources for the agencies that comprise it are both public and private, and are interconnected through shared interests and (sometimes) clients. In the case of a local nonprofit organization like Chicanos Por La Causa, funding sources could originate from a variety of agencies at the federal level, through connections to state and local agencies, and through other nonprofit organizations as well. Thus, when one follows the money trail of a nonprofit agency—rather than the trail of services, in the case of the client perspective—the human-services sector looks like a different but equally complicated network.

To gain a broader understanding of the region’s human-services sector, however, we can view the interaction between both funders and service providers. As demonstrated in Figure 3, the human-services sector in Greater Phoenix is made up of an interconnected network of federal, state, and local agencies; national, statewide, and local nonprofit organizations; and national, statewide, and local foundations. In addition, national, state, and local research institutions are engaged in evaluation, research, and education within the human-services domain. Yet, while the flowchart in Figure 3 indicates the scope of the human-services sector, it does not capture the sheer magnitude of the sector in Greater Phoenix and its reach into communities. Nor does Figure 3 portray the vast differences in scope, authority, and public accountability among individual agencies of this sector. For example, the Arizona Department of Economic Security alone, which houses all the state’s social service programs, employs more
than 10,000 people and has more than 230 offices throughout the state. This agency operates in collaboration with hundreds of other public and private agencies that provide service and funding for the human-services sector.

DES is the 900-pound gorilla in the Arizona human-services room.

Several points seem clear. To begin, the human-services sector of Greater Phoenix is broad, diverse, and complicated. As one local expert put it, the human-services sector really is not a “system.” Rather, human services are “…unlike highway systems or railroads. Human-services needs are more complex than throwing up a building. Physical infrastructure is, by and large, formulaic. Human needs and conditions are not formulaic. The physical infrastructure plays into the human-services infrastructure. The physical is happening so rapidly that human services can’t keep pace either, with the mobility of people.”

It is also clear that, among the 1,000-plus nonprofit and government organizations providing human services in Greater Phoenix, there are many links and some redundancies; there is both collaboration to meet pressing needs and competition for scarce resources. For example, feeding homeless people is an important collaborative task, yet leaders of two organizations involved in this effort at the Phoenix Human Services Campus question whether it makes sense for a downtown-area church to also do so.

Governance of this vast sector is very much a story of shared power and responsibility. Overall, the human-services sector has significant latent power of shared interests, as well as the power of coalition. The potential is deep, but the power map is complex and diffuse. As “Good to Great” guru Jim Collins puts it, particular groups of social-sector service-providers may have to answer to such varied governance authorities as “…a nonprofit board composed of prominent citizens, an elected school board, a governmental oversight mechanism, a set of trustees, a democratic religious congregation, an elected membership association or any number of other species of governance…” (Collins, 2005, p. 10). When relatively autonomous groups of service-providers such as volunteers, civil servants, public unions, and tenured faculty are added to the mix, it is clear to Collins that human-service leaders “…simply do not have the concentrated decision power of a business CEO.”

To better understand both competition and collaboration within the human-services domain, the simple direction is the one made famous in film and literature: “Follow the money” (All The President’s Men), or “Show me the money” (Jerry Maguire). To do so, one must examine a dense matrix of intergovernmental and private funding that supports human services. There are many grants of various types and purposes flowing from federal, state, and local governments to support human-services efforts. Other major sources of funding include individual donations of time and money, corporate grants, foundation funding, and user fees and charges. To follow the money in this arena usually requires original research, putting together financial information from many sources and controlling for double counting among levels of government. There is no comprehensive “human-services budget” for Greater Phoenix or any other urban area.

In short, while “follow the money” represents sensible advice, it is hard to do. The most extensive examination of this region’s human-services budget was done as a part of a massive Urban Institute study of spending and funding in 12 urban regions of the United States (Hall and Altheide, 1984). This study has not been fully replicated but important trends revealed by tracing financial flows at that time appear to remain. The first is that the largest share of funding for the overall nonprofit human-services sector is from government (combined federal, state and local)—about 40% of total revenue. Combining this with user fees and charges (about 27%) means that less than one-third of nonprofit revenue for human-services activities comes from private, voluntary sources. A similar pattern was found in the other 11 urban sites studied.

These data were gathered during the domestic budget cuts of the early years of the Reagan presidency. Since many of those cuts were restored and augmented, and since subsequent growth in domestic and entitlement budgets is well documented, it is likely that this general pattern remains, in Greater Phoenix and elsewhere. This is important because of the well-discussed trend toward “stovepipe” or “silos” funding and programs within human services. That is, among the many grants and programs that governments fund, there are different specific requirements and targets. Simply understanding all resources that are available and all conditions for their use is a challenge. Linking available categorical resources to broad
agency goals is a craft that requires constant attention, as Figure 2 suggests. Yet the importance of government funding to the sector demands a narrow funding and programmatic perspective that may detract from agencies’ central missions. For some key players in the human-services delivery world, the Catch-22 is that survival instincts based on noble goals may over time breed dependence and goal displacement.

The Future: Human Services in Greater Phoenix

What is the current state of the Phoenix human-services infrastructure, and what might it become? The sustained population growth of Greater Phoenix, a well-known driver described elsewhere in this volume, is central to understanding the human-services context. This growth can be viewed positively as both the cause and, over time, the effect of a sustained economic boom that is the envy of many places. Yet population growth, even of the more diverse type that Greater Phoenix has tended to receive, is not necessarily a greater good. Significant human, environmental, and even spiritual side effects are seen and forecast. Relentless population growth and collateral building and development raise significant questions about sustainability of the area and about the resilience and well-being of the people who inhabit it. These concerns are well articulated in a recent report from Seattle:

“Growth” has been a buzzword in our society. More is better. But are more people, more highways, more factories, more consumption intrinsically better? Cancer, too, is growth—growth out of step with the body, the larger system it depends on. A co-intelligent community, conscious of its internal and external interconnectedness, would not seek endless growth of its material “standard of living.” Rather, it would seek sustainable development of its “quality of life,” as manifested in the welfare of its members, the vitality of its culture and the health of the natural environment in which it was embedded.

(http://www.co-intelligence.org/S-sustainableSeattle.html)

Far more important than population growth per se is the way it is incorporated into a 21st century Greater Phoenix context. Exactly how the relationship between growth and human services evolves will be dependent on many factors and many choices. The future is unknown and must be the focus of a continuous “learning governance” approach. Yet the contours of the human-services infrastructure, and known demographic trends, offer a starting point for thinking about potential future outcomes.

To begin: On the strength side, there is the draw—the reason people flock to Greater Phoenix in the first place. Those migrating here are a diverse group, but they generally share in the promise of the place. A new job, a new lifestyle, meeting new neighbors from around the globe, and other elements of a hopeful and promising future represent both reasons for coming to Phoenix and potentially powerful shared resources for newcomers and the community. Thus, population growth can be seen as a positive human-services force, a resource for volunteerism, community building and general source of human capacity. In addition, dynamic Greater Phoenix growth patterns strongly suggest the need for a human-services infrastructure that is nimble and flexible, able to learn, collaborate, and match resources in creative ways.

Naturally, significant challenges associated with continued rapid growth should also be examined. Some of this growth will equate to additional demand on the existing human-services institutions described in this report. One logical reaction in a system that can be said to be comparatively under-funded will be for human-services advocates and managers to stress the need for additional funding and institution building for the future. Indeed, in a recent comparison of like cities and states, MAG ascertained that, in 2005, Arizona received fewer funds through Community Development Block Grants than did other states with comparably smaller numbers of residents; Phoenix received approximately $9 million less than the average comparable municipality. In addition, according to a recent Morrison Institute report, Arizona ranks 48 out of the 50 states in spending on healthcare per capita—health being one of the primary human-services focuses.

But as important as funding parity is, it would be a mistake to stop with a plea for more resources. For one thing, such pleas at a time of lean state and local budgets are less likely to be heard. More importantly, to prepare for the growth and change that will define the area, it is vital to think about what this human-services infrastructure system could and should become. To start that process, it is useful to examine advantages and assets to build on as well as to think “outside the box” about ways to achieve desired human-services changes. A community dialogue about human services in the future of Greater Phoenix could begin by asking important questions such as:

- What is the public and private investment in regional human services?
How has this total investment changed over time and by per capita measures?

How does the Phoenix area compare to other urban regions in human-services investment?

What are the differences in financial conditions among sub-sectors of human services in the Phoenix area?

Other good questions are likely, but answers are difficult because data are lacking. To better understand and improve the region’s future human-services infrastructure will require better information and evaluation of efforts. This could include:

- A Greater Phoenix human-services budget by functional areas of human services
- An inventory of needs, assets, and human-services delivery mechanisms by geographical sub-regions of Greater Phoenix
- Comprehensive, objective evaluation of existing human-services interventions that are systematically connected in larger system evaluations
- A region-wide community indicators effort that specifies desired human-services outcomes and measures to track progress toward those goals

These and other forms of information could be brought together in a community-wide strategic planning process that should be deep, inclusive, well designed and facilitated. Such a process could examine human services as a whole and articulate a purpose and design for the future that would build a more coherent, efficient and effective human-services infrastructure. Ultimately, this process could be invigorated by and result in innovative approaches that might well move from traditional views of human services described earlier in this chapter to ideas about desirable human development outcomes and how to get there. One framework for that discussion is the “resilience perspective,” the topic of a separate chapter in this volume.

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