

The Paradoxical Consequences of the White House Faith-Based and Community Initiative for Black Churches

Lynette Kvasny
College of Information Sciences and Technology
Penn State – University Park

Roderick Lee
College of Business
Penn State Harrisburg

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine Black churches located in economically challenged neighborhoods in a northeastern US city. Employing the concepts of the organizational divide and Heek's design-actuality model, we conducted interviews with clergy at seven black churches to understand their level of ICT use and capacity to secure funding from the White House Office of Community and Faith-Based Initiatives (FBCI). Through the use of E-Government services, the FBCI is expanding public-private partnerships with faith-based organizations to implement social programs that address community challenges. Our findings suggest that Black churches are rich storehouses of local information and have a long history of providing social support and spiritual strength. This may make them logical beneficiaries of the FBCI. Paradoxically, the Black churches that provide social programs to economically challenged citizens are often under-resourced and lack the organizational capacity to secure FBCI resources.

INTRODUCTION

In the Information Society, public sector organizations are increasingly adopting the technology-enabled business strategies of the private sector (Heeks, 2001; Scherlis and Eisenberg, 2003). E-Government, the government's use of ICTs to exchange information and services with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government, is one such example. E-Government applications are

typically used “to provide public services and to empower citizens and communities through information technology, especially through the Internet” (Tat-Kei Ho, 2002, p. 434). The most important anticipated benefits of E-Government services include improvements in internal efficiency, delivery of public services, processes of democratic governance, convenience, and accessibility of public services to citizens, private and public organizations, and other government agencies. However, public accessibility of information is perhaps the most common E-Government service (Marchionnini, Samet and Brandt, 2003).

While private and public sector organizations have significantly benefited from ICT and E-Government services, the third sector has not (Gurstein, 2003). The third sector (with its various synonyms - voluntary sector, non-profit sector, civil society) is comprised of formal organizations that are not part of government and are not run to make a profit for their owners. The third sector includes a large percent of American hospitals, public universities and colleges, faith-based organizations, national philanthropic organizations like the American Red Cross, as well as local community service groups like the Salvation Army, the Girl and Boy Scouts, and the Urban League. These organizations are independently governed, fulfill many unique social functions, and differ from business and government in their values and culture (Drucker, 1990). The third sector continues to play an important role in the lives of most Americans, yet this sector is challenged to remain relevant and operate effectively in the changing world that we inhabit. Much of this organizational change is focused on developing capacity, and adapting and adopting the business practices and technologies of for-profit firms.

This paper examines one driver of organizational change - E-Government services for faith-based organizations that provide critical social services such as clothing and food banks, healthcare programs, and job training. More specifically, we examine the context of information

and communication technology (ICT) use by faith-based organizations in economically challenged, predominantly black communities as a means of understanding their capacity to take advantage of resources provided by the White House Office of Community and Faith-Based Initiatives (FBCI). The prospect of digitally privileged organizations breezing through government services online while paperbound organizations wait in line is detestable to democratic culture (Birdsell and Muzzio, 1999). Equitable delivery of E-Government services requires understanding of how the design of these services may unwittingly exclude third sector organizations, especially those in historically underserved communities.

We begin by describing the social significance of the Black Church, and then introduce the concept of the organizational divide to highlight both the strengths of faith-based organizations in understanding and serving their local constituents and the challenges that these organizations face as they attempt to strategically use ICT. Next, we use the design-actuality gap model posited by Heeks (2001) to guide our analysis of interviews with clergy. Through the use of representative quotes, we present the unique challenges faced by these organizations in accessing information, completing transactions, and interacting with the federal government through electronic channels. We conclude with a discussion of how and why under resourced black churches, logical beneficiaries of the FBCI, are disadvantaged by structural inequalities that are unwittingly exacerbated by E-Government requirements.

THE SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF THE BLACK CHURCH

Although, third sector organizations play a significant role in society, they often lag behind private and public sector organizations in their adoption and use of ICT. In addition, information systems researchers and organizational theorists have mainly been concerned with the design and

implementation of ICT in private and public sectors. Consequently, less scholarly attention has been given to third sector organizations, such as the Black Church.

The term “Black Church” is used as a sociological and theological reference to the pluralism of black Christian churches in the US (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). Seven denominations account for 80% of the black religious affiliations in the US. In total there are approximately 75 thousand black churches that account for 25 million members (Billingsley and Caldwell, 1994).

The Black Church has been described as a mediating institution that operates in two realms of actuality – providing both spiritual and social needs, the privatistic and communal orientations. “The communal orientation refers to the historic tradition of the Black Church being involved in all aspects of the lives of their members, including political, economic, educational and social concerns. Conversely, the privatistic orientation – preaching, praying and singing – is concerned with only the spiritual needs of its members” (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990).

Through its communal orientation, the Black Church has a long history of providing self-help, facilitating social change, and fostering social cohesion (Frazier, 1964; Du Bois, 1967; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Billingsley, 1999). During the Antebellum period, for instance, social cohesion was severely hampered by legislation and social practices that denied slaves the rights to gather, learn, and communicate. Barred from social gatherings, slaves erected secret churches in the forests. These “invisible institutions” represented the first coherent and stable forms of social interaction for African Americans (Du Bois, 1967). During the period of Reconstruction, Black Churches were instrumental in creating mutual aid societies, benevolent societies and schools. In the 1960s, the works of civil rights leaders Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

and Rev. Leon Sullivan represent the most widely acknowledged interdenominational accomplishments of the Black Church (Lincoln, 1974). Contemporary Black Churches are still healthy and vibrant institutions that address many societal ills such as unemployment, drug abuse and crime that plague urban communities (Billingsley and Caldwell, 1994).

ICT is becoming invaluable to faith-based organizations engaged in their historical mission of providing spiritual and communal support. A survey conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, for instance, revealed that the Internet is being used by clergy to strengthen the faith and spiritual growth of their church members, and to enhance their ability to perform community outreach (Larsen, 2000; Larsen and Rainie, 2003). The study also revealed that most churches perceived that the use of the Web would increase their visibility in the surrounding community. In addition, 81% of the respondents indicated that they had used the Internet to retrieve information for worship services, and 77% of the respondents indicated that it was easier to access religious information online than offline. Given the longstanding presence and importance of the Black Church in advancing the interests of African Americans, these faith-based organizations stand to benefit from technology-enabled services that simplify their access to the information and monetary resources needed to support their spiritual and communal missions.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL DIVIDE

The “organizational divide” is a term in the policy literature that is used to explain the disparities in organizations’ capacity to access and process information, share and exploit knowledge, and strategically use technology to advance their mission and address pressing social problems (Kirschenbaum, Kunamneni, and Servon, 2002). The organizational divide is a key consideration for equitable E-Government systems because faith-based organizations are rich storehouses of

local information. However, they frequently lack the capacity to either use this valuable resource themselves or to share it with other community-serving organizations. If one of the goals of bridging the digital divide is to strengthen disadvantaged neighborhoods, it is critical to understand how community-serving institutions can use ICT to obtain needed resources to extend social services.

A report released by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (Robertson, 2001) suggests that an organizational divide is pervasive among third sector organizations in the US, and the foundations that support them. Many third sector organizations, especially resource poor organizations on the front lines of providing direct social services to historically underserved communities, could benefit from significantly increased support for investments in ICT. However, few grantors have a clear strategy for providing the needed ICT investments to assist third sector organizations. The organizational divide is especially salient for small, urban black churches handicapped by the lack of sufficient resources (Billingsley, 1999). Although well intentioned, E-Government programs such as the FBCI may impose standards for governance that make it increasingly difficult for under resourced organizations to compete for federal funding.

THE DESIGN-ACTUALITY FRAMEWORK

The design-actuality framework provides a conceptual scheme for making sense of the that ways in which FBCI designers' assumptions and intuitions may be incongruent with the realities experienced by under resourced black churches. Heeks (2002) defines the design-actuality gap as the mismatch between designer's conceptions and the realities that exist in the context of use. In this study, design conceptions refer to the underlying assumptions about the capabilities and technical acumen of third-sector organizations that informed the design and implementation of

FBCI services through E-Government mechanisms. Actualities refer to the current conditions that exist in the under resourced black churches seeking to obtain benefits from the FBCI.

Heeks and Bhatnagar (2001) postulate that the success or failure of an ICT-enabled service such as E-Government can be measured by examining the gap that exists between the ways in which opportunities and constraints are conceived (“Where the design wants to get us”) and the actualities into which it is introduced (“Where we are now”). Thus, the two stakeholders in the model are the designers who conceive of the design and the intended users of the system who represent the local actuality. The design-actuality model is based upon the fit of factors along seven dimensions: information, technology, processes, objectives and values, staffing and skills, management systems and structures, and other resources (particularly time and money). Using these seven dimensions, researchers and policymakers can compare the designers’ conceptions with the users’ actuality to uncover gaps in the ICT or policy interventions, as well as ways to address the gaps. Convergence and divergence on these seven dimensions is used to explain the success and failure, respectively, of an information system. This model is summarized in Figure 1, and explanations for each dimension are provided in Table 1.

table 1 and figure 1 here

RESEARCH APPROACH

The design-actuality framework was used to guide this interpretive study of the organizational divide and how it is evidenced in under-resourced black churches. We conducted interviews with clergy at seven black churches in low-income neighborhoods in an urban city. All of these churches participated in a city-sponsored technology program that provided computer equipment. Consequently, all seven churches had computers. The interview protocol focused on the actual and intended use of ICT to advance the social mission of the church. Each interview

averaged 45-60 minutes, and was recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts were then analyzed by mapping concepts that emerged from the data to the seven categories in the design-actuality framework.

The interviews were part of a needs assessment for a broader action research project in which the researchers' would work with the churches on capacity building projects that employed ICT. Clergy were interested in seeking FBCI funds to support existing programs such as food and clothing banks, health promotion, and programs for the youth and elderly. Ministers also expressed interest in offering additional services including HIV and substance abuse counseling. In what follows, we present the design assumptions expressed through the FBCI documentation and the actualities expressed during the interviews with clergy.

FINDINGS

The Design: White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

The FBCI is an E-Government program designed to make sure that third sector organizations can compete on an equal footing for federal dollars, receive greater private support, and face fewer bureaucratic barriers (FBCI, 2002). The FBCI is an outgrowth of the Expanding Electronic Government element of the President's Management Agenda. Initiated in 2001, the Expanding Electronic Government effort is designed to improve use of the federal government's ICT investments by reducing government's paperwork burden on citizens and businesses, and improving government's response time to citizens. This effort is guided by three principles: 1) movement from bureaucracy to citizen-centered practices, 2) results-oriented and measurable improvements for citizens, and 3) market-based solutions founded upon the principles of E-

Business. A key goal is for citizens to be able to access Internet-based government information and services within three clicks (Office of Management and Budget, 2003).

Through the FBCI, the federal government assists faith-based organizations in providing social programs in their communities and enlists these organizations as partners in improving the lives of disenfranchised citizens. This represents a major shift in American policy that has traditionally separated religion and government. The Federal government has often not been willing to partner with these faith-based. Instead, it has put in place complicated rules and regulations that hinder faith-based organizations from competing for Federal funds on an equal footing with other, larger charities (FBCI, 2002).

Although the FBCI seeks to level the playing field and reach out to third sector organizations, the initiatives' designers must contend with the structural inequities that shape the broader social context in which the system will be used. For this reason, the Executive Order charged departments to conduct audits to identify barriers to the participation of faith-based and community organizations. The results revealed “a funding gap exists between the government and third sector organizations. Smaller groups, faith-based and secular, receive very little Federal support relative to the size and scope of the social services they provide” (FCBI, 2001). Limited accessibility of federal grant information was cited as the primary reason for the funding gap.

Federal discretionary grant programs typically announce the availability of funds in the Federal Register and on the program's or the respective Department's Website. These sources are not everyday reading for small faith-based and community groups; these places are regular information sources only for organizations that have already decided that they might have a chance to win Federal funds and that can dedicate staff attention to monitoring funding announcements (FCBI, 2001).

A web portal (www.fbc.gov) was designed to serve as a starting point for organizations to learn about the available FBCI programs and resources. A common electronic portal at

Grants.gov enables grantees to find and apply for grants, and to complete transactions related to all Federal grants. These grants are offered by a number of federal agencies including the US Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, and Agriculture.

Unfortunately, many faith-based organizations do not have the Internet access and the competencies to use the online tools to access information and submit grant applications. For instance, a study of 75 faith-based organizations in the city in which this study was conducted found that 65% did not have Internet access or email capability (Lee, 2003).

In response to these problems, Rebecca Beynon, special assistant to the president of the FBCI commented “its possible to apply for grants without computer access” though “its easier to find out about it with Internet access” (Michalski, 2003). Beynon suggested that the alternative is to view the Federal Register in public libraries. It should be noted, however, that the Federal Register is published daily online. Furthermore, since many of these special announcements have a thirty day deadline, it is unlikely that the paper-based Federal Register will offer much relief, especially to third sector organizations in communities that lack public library facilities and/or a culture that utilizes library resources. For instance, a pastor in our study stated, “I don’t even know where a local library is. The closest library, well now, see, I’m thinking miles ...I don’t even think we have a public library – I may be wrong. I don’t know where it is!” (Reverend Smith).

If organizations submit paper-based applications, they also have to request a waiver, which typically takes about two weeks to process. According to the e-GRANTS website “Applicants who are unable to submit an application through the e-GRANTS systems may apply

for a waiver to the electronic submission requirement. To apply for a waiver, applicants must explain the reason(s) that prevent(s) them from using the Internet to submit their applications.” Thus, the design decision to manage the FBCI program with the e-GRANTS system is based on the assumption that organizations applying for Federal funding will have regular access to the Internet as well as the capacity to prepare and manage grant proposals online. Organizations lacking Internet access are not barred from participation, but they face additional burdens when using the paper-based alternative. The organizational divide is exemplified by this disparity in access to and use of an e-Government system that serves as the primary gateway to FBCI resources that empower faith-based organizations to build local solutions to community challenges. The technology becomes another instance where many third sector organizations come up short (Michalski, 2003).

The Actualities: Faith-Based Organizations

When delving further into understanding the capacity of under resourced black churches to leverage FBCI resources, we found that all seven churches had computers. However, two churches did not have Internet access. Interestingly, one church without Internet access had a website, while a church with Internet access did not have a website. Websites were used primarily to increase the churches’ presence and visibility in their local communities and to explain their beliefs. Most posted sermons, calendars and other basic information. A few implemented interactive features such as spiritual discussions, fundraising, and prayer via email. As evidenced in the quotes below, the website design features are consistent with those found Larsen’s (2000) study of Internet use by churches.

We do [have a website] and in fact, let me put it this way, it is under construction but we’ve had a website for a few years now...It has not been as maintained as

well as it could have been, it was more just kind of an informational kind of thing....If you went to our site you would see, you know, who we are, what our general philosophy is, where we meet and that kind of thing. But we, I want it to be more interactive and more dynamic and fluid... We have had a website from the very beginning, I just don't think that it has been as good as it could have been, you know as dynamic as it could be. (Reverend West)

It [the Internet] allows you to broaden your audience as far as being able to preach sermons on the Internet, to be able to state your beliefs, display mission statements. It's a way to inform the community, and so I do think it is a way of being able to reach a different audience, especially because many people today are Internet users. (Reverend Jones)

Right now, it's [the website] more outreach, so that people know our days and times and services, information of our radio broadcast, information of upcoming events...One person calling everybody, because as you continue to grow, that becomes increasingly more difficult. So I'd like to go to that inreach, so to speak, once we get flowing good with outreach. (Reverend Wright)

While the websites were used to portray a positive external presence, the clergy noted a number of problems in the physical infrastructure of the building needed to support the technology. For example, electrical wiring and telephone lines had to be replaced before installing computers and other contemporary office equipment.

[There is no Internet access o]nly because the phone lines not being ready and with this old building... That was like one of my goals for the upcoming year, with the access to the internet, because the children would like that and we would like to do that too. That's one of the things that we do have. We do have two offices on the third floor and both of them have access to the internet. So it is not far. (Reverend Hatfield)

Clergy with Internet access and websites reported that occasionally they faced difficulties making their payments to the Internet Service Providers and Website hosting companies. In addition, the computing infrastructure posed a significant barrier to accessing E-Government

services. Some churches, for instance, had older computers with limited memory, slower processing speeds, and insufficient hard drive space to support contemporary Web-applications and software.

When we asked how these organizations were currently using ICT, only two churches used the computer to support internal business processes such as payroll, job advertisements, and record keeping. For clergy at these two churches, computers were often perceived as improving organizational efficiency and costs, which enable these small churches to operate on par with larger, better resourced churches in the suburbs.

Well, here first of all we have our records on computers. We do our payroll on computer. We do mail mergers. We are in the process of having our website done. We are using a company called Webmedly only because UCC, the domination that we are in, suggested it and they gave us a good rate. We also have email that we use and a lot of times our executive ministry has to correspond that way because our schedules are so different. For most things, we won't hold meetings- using email and net grouping that type of thing. (Reverend Hatfield)

Certainly, with technology you can respond to people better with reduced time and being more available whether it's through email and having that available or through the fax and having that available. (Reverend Evans' administrative assistant) works on the Internet and the word processor so he can get things out. You can get a ton of things out with a minimum of people. In terms of the money, you save as a result of having the technology is awesome. Uhm, so its less, its cheaper. And it is particularly important for small churches with small congregations. It allows you to be as efficient and effective as a larger church with more resources. So it really saves you a ton of money if you can get the people who can use it because that's were the small churches run into problems because you have to have the budget to pay \$35,000 - \$40,000 USD to get that kind of person. (Reverend Evans)

Organizations were finding that they saved on telephone and postage costs by using email. One church noted how the move from papers and faxes to email and the Internet is

environmentally responsible. However, email is no replacement for follow-up and face-to-face interaction.

I believe that it (email) has enriched it, but we try to be very careful. I am always saying if you send me email make sure I have a hard copy, especially with the problems that I'm having with my computer. But I also stress that it (email) should not be your only form of communication. You should follow up with a phone call or follow up with a personal one-on-one visit because that's where the hindrance would come in. And people will, especially when there is a discrepancy or an disagreement, people will say, "well I did send an email" (emphasis added and laughing takes place). That's not always good enough; the other part of hindrance could be just a misinterpretation of the content. (Reverend Hatfield)

While clergy embraced technology, they tended to rely on the goodwill and volunteerism of members. Only Reverend Evans' church had a salaried administrative assistant to work in the main office. Even so, Evans and all of the others we interviewed relied on the voluntary labor of members who contributed their skills to further the outreach activities of the organization.

Remember we have those persons that you met earlier. They were all techies. That's my little group that I work with, the techie stuff. They can become a cohort... Those computers came from one of my members' jobs. We wrote the letter and we went and got the computers and we set it up, and I had one of my members' put all this software on and all that. (Reverend Banks)

None of the organizations had a line item in their budgets for technology. "We just go for it, you know, we make it happen. If we want anything, look we just tell the church we want this and we are going to get it and we are not going to the bank for it and the church produces." (Reverend Banks) Like labor, technology resources were acquired through strong personal relationships. This suggests that the hours that the clergy spend at the church may play a major role in improving the organizational capacity.

[The city] has a lot of small churches that are really Sunday morning churches where they come and they're not open 7 days a week and I believe that that's a factor. Many pastors are not full time pastors. So most of their work is not done necessarily Monday through Friday in the office where you need the same amount of technology, and I think many of them do things from home. (Reverend Jones)

The minister's professional background skills and experiences may also increase the church's ability to leverage technology.

Well, before being here as Pastor, I worked for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission as the Chief Counsel's, Executive Secretary and I was a part of a program that I was working toward my MOUSE certification and I got all the way to the last testing for Access and PowerPoint and that when I came here as a full time interim, so I didn't get to finish that program, but I have been certified in all the other office products. Computers have always been fascinating to me, I'm a gadget person, so it was fine, and it was not an intrusion on me at all. (Reverend Hatfield)

Church leaders were aware of the FBCI, and felt that owning and using ICT was required if they were to be taken seriously by their constituents, by their community and by the federal granting agencies. When asked about a newspaper article that discussed the inability of black churches to capitalize on FBCI funding, one minister noted:

It did two things. I think it helped us to look at where we are. Where are we in the scheme of what the expectations are as far as for our communication, "What are they looking for you to have?"... The other thing was... "How are you being good stewards of the finances that you receive?" So there is again some expectations about what is the public perception of a congregation that is so outdated that they're still using typewriters... Because, if the people you're serving, if they are far more advanced than the church itself, you got problems. (Reverend Smith)

Churches had to not only keep up with the members of their congregations; they also had to keep up with the technical acumen of their peer institutions and society more broadly.

However, in becoming more business-like in their organizational pursuits, there is a belief that the church may lose its spirituality.

Why can't we as a church do the same thing? This is something that I tell my church all the time. "Hey ya'll, why do we have to be 30 years behind the rest of the world? You leave here and go to your job, you sit there (typing sound) all day long and come home and give me a headache about getting computers so that we can (typing sound) all day long." (laughter) And that is just keeping it real. And

so you got the churches that have picked up the concept and you know they call them your mega churches and they run with it and the issue is sometimes you can't tell them from any other corporate business. You know they take the spirit of God out of it. But we want to keep it. It's church and we ought to have everything that world has, because it's that old gospel song. "My father's rich and he has many houses and land in which the world he is in, if he is rich and I'm his child and I'm rich." And I want everything that they got for the kingdom so we can run right along with them. (Reverend Banks)

Clergy felt that technology could help them to communicate with entities outside of the church. In sharing of ideas and information, faith-based organizations could help each other stay relevant and abreast of societal issues. This need to stay relevant was seen as crucial for building solidarity and collective effort among the churches to take on large social problems like crime, poverty and health.

Well you know ummm we are always sharing ideas and information. We are always trying to connect ourselves to the world. If the information technology is hooked up and we are able to utilize the information, whether if it's for research, if it's for just exploring other ideas and options, if it's for staying in touch with ummm you know the cutting edge things of society, then of course. If we use it, you know it will benefit us, but if we use it correctly and I guess the question that I would have is "How can the Church better utilize the technology that is there for us?" Ahhh as a whole, and I am not talking about the individual church setting as an island, but all the churches connected. If we are really concerned about poverty you know and premature death ummm criminal activities then how do we connect with one another to do something about the problems? (Reverend West)

DISCUSSION

In this study, we conducted interviews with clergy at seven black churches to understand their level of ICT use and capacity to take advantage of resources provided through the FBCI.

Regrettably, these churches have been largely unable to utilize this E-Government service due to a number of concept-reality gaps that were exposed during interviews with black clergy (see Table 2).

Table 2 here

The clergy and the designers of the FBCI share similar objectives, values, and motivations. Both believed in the strong social orientation of the church, and agreed that the

government should support these outreach efforts, especially in disadvantaged communities. According to Davis, black ministers generally viewed the FBCI as “a major new antipoverty initiative and an endorsement for the black churches that have long served as a safety net in poor communities” (Davis, 2001: 414).

Gaps emerge, however, along the remaining dimensions. In terms of technical gaps, access to the e-GRANTS online portal remains somewhat problematic even for organizations with computers and Internet access. All seven churches lacked the technical capacity to participate. Even when university faculty offered capacity-building assistance and the clergy could network with other churches to create the combined capacity to participate, the clergy in this study thought the application process was too cumbersome.

In addition to the lack of trust in the ability to raise sufficient social capital to compete for grant funding, these churches had poor physical infrastructures. Most of the community-based services were housed in church basements, some of which have fallen into disrepair. As a result, upgrades in the quality of the facilities are required before the technology can be installed and used. However, under resourced organizations do not have the means to improve their facilities. For instance, a church that is required to purchase a van that is critical to the social programs that serve their constituents may not be able to afford an electrician to rewire the building for a technology lab that is not vital to its mission. One church our study received 15 new computers through a grant provided by a foundation, but initially lacked the chairs and tables on which to place the computers.

The churches in our study are operating on the brink, and the gap grows ever more troublesome when observing the processes, staffing and skills, management and structures, and other resources. Prior research has shown that black churches are particularly dependent on

volunteers to support social services (Chaves, 1999). With the exception of worship services, almost all other activities that take place at the majority of black churches are organized on an ad hoc basis and are almost always fully supported by volunteers (Persons, 2004). Dependence on volunteers results in high turnover, which makes it difficult for churches to implement technology-based solutions and to maintain computer equipment consistently. Churches that are dependent of volunteers for staffing also face significant financial pressures. Together, these barriers impair the churches' ability to focus on programmatic details, which can shortchange the quality of social programs and result in problems with the granting agency (Lane and Lanza-Kaduce, 2007).

Delivery of high quality social programs is hampered by the organizations' inability to obtain external funding. The Black Church, for instance, continues to be an institution with limited capacity to sustain fundamental business activities such as certification of need, case management, standardized operating procedures, and standard hours of operation (Persons, 2004). The churches in this study often did not have the financial, human and technology resources to devote to business planning, program development and grant writing. Consequently, their ability to compete for and successfully administer grants was limited.

This is consistent with the finding reported in a national survey of 750 black churches sponsored by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Researchers found that only the smaller percentage of black ministers perceived their churches as beneficiaries of the FBCI program. "Since 11 percent of the ministers reported receiving money from the government to provide social services, but only 2.6 percent said that they were FBCI funds, the actual percentage receiving FBCI grants must fall between those figures" (Bositis, 2006). The survey

results also suggest that there was insufficient outreach to black churches concerning the FBCI. While 75% of the respondents were vaguely aware of the FBCI program, 66% did not know about the rules and details for participating, and only 16% had been contacted about applying. Only 11% reported applying for grants. The churches that applied tended to be larger, had higher revenues, and were suburban. Those that received government funding tended to be large churches with high yearly revenues, churches in the Northeast and Midwest, Methodist churches, and churches with progressive or moderate theologies. “[E]ven larger and wealthier black churches need legal advice and help with paperwork, policy information, the formation of collaboratives, and program evaluations, while the needs of smaller and (especially) rural black churches are even greater—so much so that many are not interested in participating because they believe that they lack the capabilities to apply” (Bositis, 2006).

These gaps illustrate that well-intended E-Government initiatives aimed at serving faith-based and community-based organizations may have the unintended effect of creating preconditions that preclude small, under-resourced organizations from equal participation. This serves to amplify the organizational divide. One reason for the persistent organizational divide is that, in the US, disparities in computer and Internet access have historically been framed at the individual and household level. From 1995 through 2004, for instance, the National Telecommunication and Information Administration produced a series of reports that chronicled computer and Internet access and use by various demographic groups. Government interventions such as the E-Rate funding for technology in schools and community technology centers helped to ensure that Americans had access to technology. Falling prices for computer equipment also made technology more affordable to middle and low-income households. As the number of US

households and citizens gained access through schools, workplaces and public institutions such as churches and libraries, government attention to disparities that go beyond mere access waned.

A persistent organizational divide negatively impacts the mutual relationship between government and third sector organizations. On the one hand, Lipsky and Smith (1990) observe that government calls upon these organizations to take the lead in addressing the nation's social problems by providing social services. On the other hand, most third sector organizations depend upon government for a majority of their revenue. As government officials provide additional funding to these organizations, there is increasing pressure to maintain accountability over these resources and adhere to legislative and administrative mandates. Thus, government imposes increasingly stringent contract requirements, administrative oversight, professional staffing and budget reporting requirements as conditions of receiving federal resources. And, as demand for social services increases, federal budget cuts in social spending have forced nonprofit agencies to compete more aggressively for funds. In the face of high demand, government officials are pressured to ration services to those organizations with demonstrated competencies in managing federally funded programs. Oftentimes, small black churches have not had the opportunity to develop and demonstrate these competencies.

Despite these barriers to participation in the FBCI, all of the clergy in our study have an interest in participating and have variety of social service programs already in place. However, this potential capability needs to be enhanced by technical training, including grant application training, help in forming collaborations, resources for supporting the salaries of skilled workers, assistance with technical support and program evaluation, and better access to information. The design-actuality framework is a useful tool for assessing the capabilities, interests and

information needs that serve as barriers between under-resourced black churches and their participation in the FBCI, and can be used to inform the design of equitable E-Government systems that meet the needs of diverse users.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we conducted interviews with clergy to enhance our understanding of these organizations' use of ICT and their capacity to obtain resources provided by the FBCI. Using the design-actuality framework as a guide, we identified gaps in multiple areas that negatively impacted small black churches' ability to secure funding from the FBCI. This structuring of privilege and disadvantage is not novel. Prior studies of third sector organizations and government interventions have also identified design-reality gaps. However, the findings reported in this study demonstrate that E-Government services designed to streamline access to information and efficiently handle transactions may unwittingly exacerbate the challenges faced by under resourced organizations. Faith-based organizations deserve additional attention because they are non-traditional users of technology and, as such, have remained largely unexamined by information systems researchers. Yet, government is increasingly calling upon these organizations to provide social services and spiritual guidance to those in need.

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Figure 1 : Design-Actuality Gaps

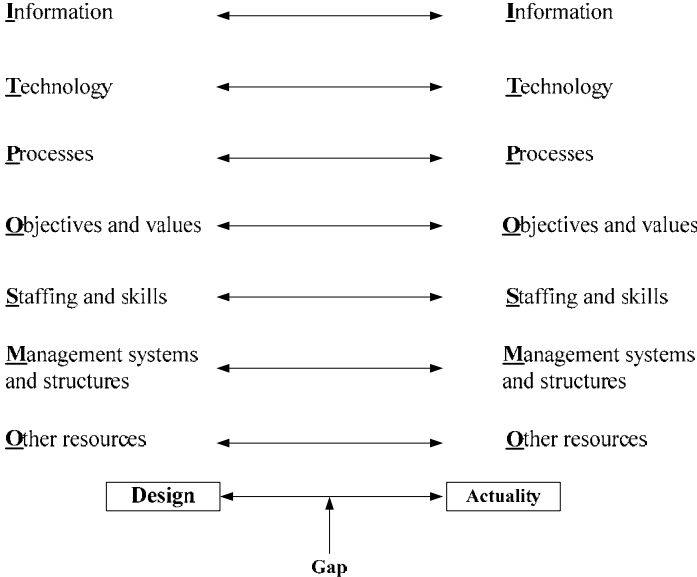


Table 1: Dimensions and Definitions

Dimensions	Description
Information Dimension	Information provided by the system verses actual information needs, and the extent to which the organization can access the information.
Technology	Technology capacity required for participation versus actual technology capacity of target organizations.
Processes	Technical features in relation to existing processes in third sector organizations.
People: Objective, Values and Motivations	Values and objectives incorporated into the system in relation to objectives and values in third sector organizations.
People: Staffing and Skills	Staffing and skill levels that exist in the nonprofit sector verses those required to participate in the process.
Management and Structures	How well the system matches the management and organizational structures that exist in the social sector.
Other Resources	Conceived and actual resource requirements and consists mostly of money and time.

Construct	Design Conception	Current Realities	Gap
Information	Centralized services and information online	Limited access to online information resources; no history of library patronage	Medium
Technology	Computers with Internet access and acumen to use them effectively	Access to requisite ICT – Internet, email, word processing, financial software, desktop publishing; some skill in using them; build environment can't support computers	Large
Processes	Capable of generating competitive proposals and administering grants. E-Government streamlines process	Volunteers with technology and grants writing experience; some track record of seeking and successfully implementing grants	Medium
Objective, Values and Motivations	Compassion, social outreach, organizational efficiency	socially and spiritually oriented, strategic vision that included ICT, organizational efficiency	None
Staffing and Skills	Organizations are expected to have the human capital necessary to adhere to the new standards of governance	Rely primarily on volunteers with technical and organizational expertise; part-time ministers	Large

Management and Structures	Required formal management functions such as budgeting, project planning, and business strategy.	Informal management functions that are often developed in a reactionary manner	Large
Other Resources	Intended benefactors have the money and time to adapt to the standards imposed by the government.	Limited time and financial resources; small size	Large

Table 2: Design-Actuality Gap Summarized