

Full name(s) of VIU faculty involved in the project and their Department(s): Dr. Gerald (Jerry) Bruce Hinbest, Department of Sociology Vancouver Island University

Contact person email: jerry.hinbest@viu.ca

Award: Amplify Grant

Number of undergraduate student(s) involved: one paid, possibly another volunteer.

Number of graduate student(s) involved: none

Number of community partner(s) involved: The project involves working in a participatory way with many nonprofit organizations in the community.

Abstract for the project:

In this proposal I present my plan to document how nonprofit and grassroots organizations are responding to the challenges of delivering and evaluating programs and services contracted to them by government agencies. Such challenges include increased accountability expectations, a shift from collaboration to competition among community agencies, insufficient capacity to undertake programming and accountability requirements, a more complex program environment with multiple funders and incompatible timelines, shifting agency mandates, and prohibitions against nonprofit organizations undertaking advocacy. The proposal encompasses the second of two broad activities: 1) conducting participatory action research using in-depth interviews and focus groups with people working in nonprofit organizations that deliver human services in British Columbia and New Zealand (a key emphasis of the Innovate grant proposal), and 2) building a documentary about the state of nonprofit organizations based on the interviews and focus groups (a key emphasis of this Amplify grant proposal). The film-making will be undertaken during my upcoming assisted leave, beginning in January 2019. Knowledge mobilization activities include a conference presentation and screening at the Community2University Expo conference in 2020, and dissemination of the documentary through VIU Space.

## AMPLIFY PROPOSAL

**Applicant:** Dr. Jerry Hinbest  
**Area:** Department of Sociology  
**Time Period:** January to September 2019  
**Title:** **Documenting Structural Challenges Among Nonprofit Organizations.**

### **ABSTRACT**

In this proposal I present my plan to document how nonprofit and grassroots organizations are responding to the challenges of delivering and evaluating programs and services contracted to them by government agencies. Such challenges include increased accountability expectations, a shift from collaboration to competition among community agencies, insufficient capacity to undertake programming and accountability requirements, a more complex program environment with multiple funders and incompatible timelines, shifting agency mandates, and prohibitions against nonprofit organizations undertaking advocacy. The proposal encompasses the second of two broad activities: 1) conducting participatory action research using in-depth interviews and focus groups with people working in nonprofit organizations that deliver human services in British Columbia and New Zealand (a key emphasis of the Innovate grant proposal), and 2) building a documentary about the state of nonprofit organizations based on the interviews and focus groups (a key emphasis of this Amplify grant proposal). The film-making will be undertaken during my upcoming assisted leave, beginning in January 2019. Knowledge mobilization activities include a conference presentation and screening at the *Community2University Expo* conference in 2020, and dissemination of the documentary through VIU Space.

### **BACKGROUND: THE PROBLEM**

In the early 2000s, Canada's federal government established the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI), which made numerous recommendations intended to address a growing crisis in the nonprofit sector (see Hall & Reed, 1998; Miller, 1998; Burnley, Matthews & McKenzie, 2005; Hinbest, 2008). Subsequent governments have not followed up on these recommendations, and indeed, appear to have increased the demands that have been challenging the sector. Key challenges to the sector include the retreat of government involvement in the direct delivery of programs and services – with numerous organizational impacts. As programs and services are devolved to nonprofit organizations, they take on the methods of the market. This 'marketization' of the sector is characterized by contractual and competitive project-based funding and a preoccupation with accountability (Phillips & Levasseur, 2004; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004).

My own research on the sector has focused substantially on *accountability* demands, and in particular, program evaluation (Carmen, 2007; Hinbest, 2008). Although I remain interested in understanding how these organizations meet the increasing expectations for accountability, my research has also identified a variety of ways that nonprofit organizations experience significant challenges. As others have documented, the crisis in the sector involves 1) the *capacity* of the sector to undertake the work (Miller, 1998; Hall & Reed, 1998; Scott, 2003); 2) a greatly increased *complexity* in the delivery environment, in which multiple stakeholders report across multiple jurisdictions with uneven, unclear, and often overlapping expectations of individual and partner organizations (Mullett, et. al., 2002; Hinbest 2008; Fredericks, et. al., 2002); 3) increased *competition* among agencies at local, provincial and national levels (Mullett, et. al., 2002), making collaboration more difficult to maintain within and between communities (DeFilippis, Fisher, & Shragge, 2006); and 4) *mandate drift*, as formerly independent local organizations transform themselves to meet the expectations of external funders (Hinbest, 2008, Man, 2013).

In my ongoing work with nonprofit organizations I find that the issues of *accountability*, *capacity*, *complexity*, *competition*, *mandate drift*, and *advocacy* remain onerous for those in the sector. Indeed, my reading of the sector based on discussions with those undertaking evaluation or participating with student projects is that these issues appear to be intensifying. What is particularly important for the documentary is that nonprofit organizations rarely have the opportunity to work with one another to discuss or strategize about these challenges in a collective way.

### **RESEARCH APPROACH**

I will conduct a series of in-depth interviews about the experience of those working in British Columbia nonprofit organizations, and how they are coping with changing demands, challenges of funding and staffing, and where they perceive the key challenges lay in the present and near future. I have strong contacts within the local community among nonprofit human service agencies, based on my work in program evaluation and involvement of representatives of nonprofit organizations in my classes (local organizations include Haven Society and the Vancouver Island Crisis Society). I also have contacts in Victoria (Victoria Social Innovation Centre, Family Services of Greater Victoria) and in the lower mainland (Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre of British Columbia).

I have also recently been in communication with people who have been active in researching the nonprofit sector in New Zealand – Dr. Margaret Tennant of Massey University, a leading author of research on the New Zealand nonprofit sector, and Dr. Garth Nowland-Foreman, Co-chair of the organization Community Research, and a director of LEaD Centre for Not for Profit Leadership in New Zealand. Both individuals have agreed to introduce me to a variety of people in Auckland and Christchurch, including representatives of nonprofit organizations willing to be interviewed for my research. I have obtained a Global Engagement Travel Grant to support my travel to New Zealand in February and March of 2019. I am applying for an Innovate grant to cover some of the costs of travel for the research component of this project. The key focus of the Amplify grant is the documentary.

Working with nonprofit organizations in British Columbia, I have come to realize that there is a serious information gap within the sector that has been exacerbated by current funding processes. *Competition* among organizations that compete for government contracts has eliminated many of the incentives and opportunities for agencies to cooperate in sharing information, collaborate on joint ventures, and learn from their own or others' experiences (Mullett, et. al., 2002; Mulroy, 2003). In part this relates to the kinds of information inputs they have access to. The *Community2University* series of conferences and the *Community Based Research Canada* network bring people together to share learning and best practices, and do this by linking community organizations with university scholars and students. Yet I remain aware that much of the scholarly literature examining nonprofit issues and concerns is never read by those working in nonprofit organizations. I have seen the excitement among those attending the conferences when they discover that they are not alone, and others are experiencing the same issues and challenges as themselves. This leads to the value of creating a documentary suitable for diverse audiences.

### **DOCUMENTARY**

In my teaching since 2012 I have been exploring the use of film to document social issues. In an international field school I used digital story-telling (short documentary film-making) to have students explore and share their observations (Friedus & Hlubinka, 2002; Scott & Garner, 2013). Similarly, in teaching qualitative research I have found that film-making represents both an excellent mode of qualitative analysis, and a mode of inquiry with which students are knowledgeable and proficient. Further, in my Community and Social Action course (SOC1 325), I have students use film to profile community agencies. Some of these profiles have been used by agencies for promotional work, and have been shown on local television. I have taken workshops on documentary film-making, and have worked with faculty and students in the Media Studies department to support student film-making with local nonprofit organizations.

By filming most of the interviews, I will take this type of film-making and information sharing to a new audience – particularly to other nonprofit organizations within British Columbia and beyond. This is a participatory approach to both the research and sharing of findings and analysis. My goal is to have the content with which I can create a documentary that can be shared at a future *Community2University Expo*, and online through Vancouver Island University. The key is for those in nonprofit organizations to hear about issues directly from their peers.

There are over four-hundred nonprofit organizations in the Nanaimo catchment area. There are thousands on Vancouver Island, and tens of thousands in the province. Including grassroots organizations, there are over two-hundred thousand nonprofit organizations in Canada – making Canada’s charitable and nonprofit sector the second largest in the world (after the Netherlands) (Lasby & Barr, 2014). The proposed documentary film-making is relevant both locally and more broadly within the province. It will enhance the local community as well as the university, and allows me to take it to a broader community and audience. By film-making about my work with nonprofit and grassroots organizations I hope to fill some of the gaps in the professional and scholarly discourse about on-the-ground experiences of those in the nonprofit sector, and also share this information in an accessible way with those in nonprofit agencies.

I recently taught a course on Sociology and Film (Summer 2018). In that course, students created documentaries as their main course project. Several of the students in this class as well as my other upper level classes over the past four semesters have excellent skills and knowledge relevant to filming and editing a documentary project such as mine. I plan to hire one student to assist with this process. I plan to use Final Cut Pro for Mac systems for editing, and already have all of the camera accessories needed for the project. The student research assistant will provide camera and filming assistance, some logistical work in setting up interviews and focus groups, and background research on the organizations prior to interviewing. We will work together on editing the documentary, depending on skills and availability.

The costs associated with this project that this Amplify proposal is to address are for a MacBook Pro (13”, 512 GB HD, 8 GB RAM) computer that will be capable of running Final Cut Pro for editing. I have a PC laptop and computer, but they cannot run this software, which is the one of choice for this kind of project, and for a new film editor such as me. The library has computers available for students and faculty that can run Final Cut Pro, but the amount of time I will need to use the computer would make using those computers prohibitive – they are in high demand, and cannot be taken on the road for travel. The grant will also allow me to purchase Final Cut Pro software.

### ***PRODUCT: DOCUMENTARY & KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION***

The primary output for this work will be the documentary film. This will have significant input from nonprofit organizations as I hope to be able to conduct a follow up focus group with key informants to get their feedback on issues as they review the draft version of the documentary.

An important feature of process is that the documentary will be participatory, and address the needs of community organizations. As such, the focus groups and the documentary itself represent opportunities for engagement and dialogue. The documentary will be presented at appropriate conferences, and available through VIU Space to participating organizations.

### ***REFERENCES:***

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**Jerry Hinbest- Structural challenges among nonprofit human service organizations TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET**

	VIU INNOVATE GRANT	VIU AMPLIFY GRANT	VIU GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT GRANT (awarded)	PI PRO D FUNDS (Previous Purchases)	
	Cash	Cash	Cash	In-Kind	Justification
<b>CATEGORIES</b>					
<b>Personnel Costs</b>					
Primary Investigator (Project Lead)					
Co-applicant					
Post-docs					
Graduate Students					
Undergraduate Students	2,520				Research Assistant 140 hours @ \$18 / hr, including benefits
Community Researchers					
<i>Add more rows as needed</i>					
<b>Sub-Total Personnel Costs</b>	<b>2,520</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>Travel Costs</b>					
<b>Budget NOTE:</b>					If VIURAC is unable to fund >\$5000, most of the Innovate funds (\$3,020) will be directed to student wages and travel. \$1920 will go to PI travel and the remainder of the PI travel will be self funded.
Primary Investigator (Project Lead)	5,000		1,750		Local travel: ferry \$800, mileage \$700, meals \$400
Co-applicant					New Zealand travel: accom. \$2100, meals, \$1000
Post-docs					New Zealand travel: air / local transit \$1750 (GEG)
VIU Students	500				10 travel days to Victoria & Vancouver - ferry +
Other					
<i>Add more rows as needed</i>					
<b>Sub-Total Travel Costs</b>	<b>5,500</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,750</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>Research Project Costs</b>					
Materials and Supplies		3,000			Macbook Pro 13" \$2600, Final Cut Pro \$400
Equipment				607	Camera / video equipment
Facility Rental					
Vehicle/Vessel Rental					
Equipment Rental					
Catering					
Photocopying					
Telephone and Long Distance					
Services					
<i>Add more rows as needed</i>					
<b>Sub-Total Research Project Costs</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>607</b>	
<b>Knowledge Mobilization Costs</b>					
Publication Costs					
Workshops/Symposiums					
Conference Attendance					
<i>Add more rows as needed</i>					
<b>Sub-Total Dissemination Costs</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,020</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>1,750</b>	<b>607</b>	

<b>Funding Summary:</b>	
INNOVATE	8,020
AMPLIFY	3,000
GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT	1,750
IN-KIND (previous expenses)	607
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST</b>	<b>13,377</b>

# **Innovate & Amplify Project Team, Roles and Responsibilities**

## **Jerry Hinbest: Principle Investigator (PI) and Project Lead**

**Qualifications:** Jerry is a full-time regular faculty member in the sociology department, and has over thirty-five years of progressively responsible experience in inter-disciplinary applied social research in private sector, federal and provincial government, nonprofit organization, and university settings, with extensive experience in program evaluation using quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Jerry has been researching the nonprofit sector for over twenty years. The current work builds on Jerry's doctoral research on accountability transformation in the nonprofit sector. For the past seven years, Jerry has been developing skills related to documentary film-making, taking courses, applying this approach in eight courses, and working with other faculty and professional film-makers to develop skills.

**Responsibilities:** Jerry will be responsible for all aspects of project design and implementation, research design, logistical planning, research assistant supervision, interviewing, conducting focus groups, writing, film-making and editing.

### **Education:**

- Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Educational Studies, University of British Columbia (2008)
- Master of Arts (M.A.) Sociology, Queen's University, Kingston (1995)
- Bachelor of Arts (B.A., Honours) Sociology, University of Guelph (1979)

### **Key Memberships:**

- Canadian Evaluation Society (CES)
- American Evaluation Association (AEA)

## **To be hired: Undergraduate Research Assistant**

**Qualifications:** A research assistant will be hired with understanding of research through undergraduate study, and skills in video film-making and editing. I have several students in mind who have taken courses with me and have demonstrated skill and knowledge in these areas.

**Responsibilities:** The student research assistant will provide camera and filming assistance, some logistical work in setting up interviews and focus groups, and background research on the organizations prior to interviewing. We will work together on editing the documentary, depending on skills and availability.