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Strategies City Business Leaders Use to Improve the Quality of Life in Downtown Communities

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Abstract

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Abstract

Nonprofits serve the communities and provide a measurable impact on the quality of life. The quality of life in downtown communities can be threatened without effective strategies to overcome government budget cuts and improve community engagement. Grounded in the theory of community development and the whole-systems approach, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies city business leaders use to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. The participants were three board members from one nongovernment organization in Baltimore, Maryland. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, reviewing company documents, and obtaining public data from the company website. The data were analyzed using Yin's 5-step analysis; three themes emerged: building partnerships with community stakeholders and donors, implementing strategies for additional funding, and increasing community activities based on raised available funds. A key recommendation is to identify the types of stakeholders giving to the organization and sustaining partnerships with those types of organizations. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase community engagement, such as providing more resources, offering more charitable events, and cleaning the environment, which may benefit the local downtown communities by improving the quality of life.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study and my doctoral journey to my oldest son Jason B. Lawson, who passed away on July 6, 2021. His untimely passing at the beginning of my studies inspired me to continue living and achieve all my heart desires. The doctoral journey enabled me to stay busy until I could grieve. I love you and miss you, Jason --- my free spirit.

I also dedicate this study to my husband, Lee O. Christopher. You encouraged me to use all the resources available to reach for more. Thank you for dealing with me when I remained focused, feeding me when I forgot to eat, and understanding when I had no time to spend with you. I love you more.

Acknowledgments

I do want to thank my committee chair Dr. Peter Anthony for his quick feedback and recommendations, and text messages when needed. I want to thank my SCM for the growth in my writing. You truly opened my eyes to things that I was not aware of. Moreover, my URR, you brought me back to reality just when I thought I was done. Thanks to all of you for all your help.

To all the beauties and lovely doves of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Incorporated, thank you for your support, encouraging words, and advice. “Scholarship is what we do.”

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

For this study, I used the 2021-2022 Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework to explore strategies city business leaders use to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. As the Walden University Doctor of Business Administration consulting capstone requires, I served as a student consultant and researcher for this study.

Background of the Problem

Urban cities in America have sought strategies to deter drug dealers and gangs, lower crime, and violence, and employ more police officers on foot and patrol cars. In 2019, Stepman reported on the decline of the middle class in Baltimore. More than 75% of the population was not college educated, and 54% participated in government or low-wage service jobs in some of the city's most dangerous neighborhoods, aligned to another source reported by CBS News (2018). The streets in Baltimore, once lined with beautiful row homes, are now decayed, vacant, falling apart, and forgotten, with Baltimore statistics exhibiting a 22% vacancy rate (CBS News, 2018). The once proud city now contends with families relocating to quiet communities outside the urban jungle.

At the individual level, urban pride builds a connection in the neighborhood. From the neighborhood level, a lack of urban decay can build trusting relationships with neighbors as degraded lots are cleared up to create gathering spots and playgrounds and improve the environment. With the downtown revitalization community, a broad consensus has formed around maximizing the number of people who live in the downtown communities; a greater population will increase their ability to prosper (Ryan

& Milder, 2020). Previous studies have shown the benefits of preventing urban decay and revitalizing city neighborhoods on a smaller scale or from different viewpoints (Rahma & Al-Neaimi, 2020). Improving living environments in the urban community of Baltimore can provide a roadmap for developing healthy urban environments across the country.

Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem is that some business leaders lack strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. Therefore, this single qualitative case study aimed to explore business leaders' strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. The target population consisted of three nonprofit organization leaders, the executive director, and two board members with knowledge of the business operations. The leaders are empowered to make organizational decisions and have implemented business leaders' strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities.

Population and Sampling

The client organization was selected from a pool of organizations volunteering to participate in Walden University consulting capstone. The client organization is in the Northeastern United States in Baltimore. The executive director was the primary point of contact for the nonprofit association. I also engaged with two other board members who were most active with the membership and activities. The board members were able to provide valuable access to internal data and documents for this capstone study and guidance to other documents that were already available to the public on their website.

Nature of the Study

Several research methods are used to conduct research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Williams, 2007). Identifying the appropriate method is significant in the research process as it is the foundation of the study. Researchers use the qualitative method for inductive reasoning to explore a problem and develop a theory to stimulate ideas to resolve issues (Yin, 2018). Quantitative researchers seek to investigate the relationship between two variables and examine the relationship to find a solution utilizing describing, explaining, and interpreting collected data (Bazen et al., 2021). The quantitative researcher focuses on testing hypotheses and theories and helps answer questions in a study using numerical data; thus, this method was inappropriate. The mixed method has attributes from which quantitative and qualitative data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Furthermore, this research can be complex to carry out and interpret and requires multiple resources (Williams, 2007). I did not collect, analyze, or interpret statistical data; therefore, the mixed methods design was inappropriate for my study.

The qualitative method was appropriate for my research to help understand how individuals subjectively perceive and give meaning to their social reality. Qualitative researchers study elements in their natural settings, attempting to understand and interpret phenomena regarding the intentions that people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative data are interpretation-based, descriptive, and related to language. Qualitative data can help researchers understand the why, how, or what happened behind certain behaviors (Bazen et al., 2021).

Before research can begin, identifying the research methods are essential. I considered narrative research, interpretative phenomenology analysis, and case study method. Narrative research tells a story (Tomaszewski et al., 2020), and people can contribute to the story of the experience. Storytelling captures the participant case study's voice, which will assist the researcher in understanding the procedure. The critical criterion for using narrative research is storytelling. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) typically involves collecting data received through individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. Researchers use IPA to address highly emotional data, discursive accounts, and profound personal encounters (Charlton, 2022). The proper focus of the IPA study is to allow the research to reveal itself through the stories and narratives. According to Tomaszewski et al., the number of research topics and questions usually dictate when using phenomenology as an appropriate approach is correct. I used a single case study design to study a specific single group (Yin, 2018). A single case study is a set of procedures and processes to gather data and explore a research problem (Rashid et al., 2019). I chose a single case study over a multiple case study because my study focused on supporting my assigned consulting capstone client as one organization. Hence, a single case study fits the purpose of the study. The single case study allowed for an in-depth understanding of the people's roles within the boundaries/criteria of the case, one-on-one interviews, and observations of the participants during data collection.

Research Question

What strategies do business leaders use to improve the quality of life in downtown communities?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you implemented to improve the community's quality of life have you successfully implemented?
2. What other partnerships and collaborations have you utilized to improve the quality of life in urban communities?
3. How do investments in infrastructure and social amenities improve the quality of life in urban communities?
4. How do you assess whether the strategies to improve the quality of life in the community tried have been successful?
5. What are your benchmarks?
6. What key changes would you like to see in the community that you think would make a key difference to residents?
7. What role do you play in the success of your organization's key strategies?
8. What key barriers have you had to encounter to improve the quality of life in downtown communities, internal or external?
9. What additional information would you like to add about your organization's strategies to improve the quality of life in the downtown communities?

Conceptual Framework

The composite conceptual framework grounded in this study was the community development theory defined by Bhattacharyya (2004) in earlier writing in 1995 and the whole-systems approach by Ackoff (1999). This work can bring together stakeholders, including communities, to develop a shared understanding of the challenges and integrate action to bring about sustainable and long-term systems change (Adedokun & Kayode, 2019; Greenhalgh & Papoutsi, 2019). The community development theory is the most functional framework for community workers seeking the how and why of the desired change in a lasting context for sustainable growth.

Incorporating the whole-systems approach by Ackoff (1999) as part of this composite conceptual framework encapsulates the complexity of community development. It reinforces complex challenges that only deep approaches to community engagement require (Bhagwan et al., 2022). Ackoff theorized that there should be a focus on sustainable partnerships and stakeholders that can address community concerns and strengthen the community. The community development theory focuses on mapping the area between what a program or change initiative tries to achieve and the activities or interventions needed to achieve the desired impact. It does this by identifying the desired long-term goals and then working back from them to identify all the outcomes that must be in place for them to occur. Key constructs underlying the theory are (a) equality, (b) justified inequality, (c) fair process, (d) social justice access, and (e) participation (Varpio et al., 2020). As applied to my study, the community development theory holds the community development constructs to influence or explain bringing communities together.

Operational Definitions

Baldrige Excellence Framework: A holistic management tool senior leaders use to accomplish goals, improve results, and become more competitive (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2022).

Community development: A process by which a community identifies its needs and objectives, gives priority to them, and works on them, finding the resources which develop cooperative and collaborative attitudes in society (McKenzie et al., 2022).

Community organization: The phase of social organization in which there is a conscious effort on the part of the community to secure the services from the organizations, institutions, and local agencies utilizing recognized inter-relations (Austin et al., 2019).

IRB: Institutional Review Board is formally designated to review and monitor research. In accordance with Walden University, IRB has the authority to approve, require modifications (to secure approval), or disapprove doctoral research.

Non-government organizations (NGOs): Organizations that operate independently from government agencies (Lewis et al., 2020).

Urban development: The social, economic, cultural, and physical development of cities and the causes of the process. Another name is urban planning, the technical process focused on land design and use (Eakin et al., 2022).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Typical of every doctoral research are the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Researchers must identify their studies' limitations, assumptions, and delimitations (Delacre et al., 2019). Assumptions allow readers to contextualize the findings and assess their transferability (Patton, 2014). This doctoral study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are discussed below.

Assumptions

Assumptions are the things that are accepted as accurate, or at least possible, by the researcher and peers who will read your document (Delacre et al., 2019). It was assumed that the conceptual framework proposed in this research would be a foundation for a generalized sustainable planning framework in culture-led urban regeneration projects. I also assumed that the clients presented truthful responses and that organizational data were accurate.

Limitations

Limitations in a study are those things out of the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Challenges and limitations are always expected in research that must be acknowledged and understood (Yin, 2018). My limitations were access to historical feedback collected by community partners, data collection, and government census information. Another limitation was that my community partner is a small company with a small leadership team. Although it may be possible to conduct a study with as few as two participants (Yin, 2018), it presented a challenge to find cross-case analysis.

Delimitations

Delimitators refer to the boundaries of the research and narrow the study so that it is more manageable and relevant (Yin, 2018). My study was conducted with a community partner in an urban community in Baltimore. The study focused on finding strategies for the various community stakeholders to use to engage native dwellers and keep them from moving to the suburbs. Another delimitation was the organization's size.

Significance of the Study

The study findings may be of value to businesses because supporting the community citizens by providing resources will retain them. Cities worldwide are challenged by a broad spectrum of issues related to rapid urbanization, mass migration from cities to suburban areas, addressing environmental challenges, growing urban inequalities, and social fragmentation and loss of community (Sodiq et al., 2019). New knowledge gained from exploring local government development activities and outcomes within the urban community context provides the foundations for tracking trends (Drory, 2020). The project's goal can assist local communities and how they can influence policies to embrace, encourage, and cooperate with local organizations in developing inner cities (Drory, 2020). Inclusive governmental policies can assist in reducing the negative impact of the municipal crisis and increasing the sustainability of local resources.

A key question is what strategies can serve as vehicles for leaders to address these issues strategically to build inclusive, sustainable cities that adapt to the needs of the citizens of the Baltimore community. The findings from this study may add value to the existing strategies used by small nonprofit organizations as follows: (a) stakeholder engagement, (b) improved stakeholder buy-in and support for the organization, (c) increased access to funding, and (d) increased access to community resources.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change from this study include the potential to help retain the constituents in the community and increase the urban footprint. When community stakeholders develop effective strategies and partnerships, they have the potential for the growth and expansion of the community members. The community members pour back into the businesses and invest in the community. Over time, changes will occur, as it can have more community members building companies in the downtown area, building on the resources they need without having to go outside the community to find them. The long-term effects and profound consequences for society are the increase of social equality in the lives of the downtown community of Baltimore, Maryland.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This study aimed to explore business leaders' strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. AFB is a nonprofit organization that provides services to community members and helps provide the resources constituents need to become more engaged and empowered. As a scholar consultant working with the AFB, I understood how this organization supports community partnerships and its citizens to create a collaborative relationship. The organization's leaders are striving to improve its services and looking for more ways to achieve those goals. I used a single qualitative case study to work with this small nonprofit in downtown Baltimore Maryland.

The literature review forms the basis for the study. The literature review ensures that all the literature has been exhausted and the framework thoroughly examined. A literature review maximizes innovation, provides context and methodology, and ensures that professional standards have been met (AbuRa’ed et al., 2020). Urban areas tend to be crowded, house more compact, have fewer green spaces, and have higher crime levels

(Rahma & Al-Neaimi, 2020). The study findings can also identify how the community feels about the inequality of resources that the local government has invested in the area. The mission of the client organization is to connect communities and create strategies to build an urban village, improve the quality of life, and empower families while advocating for good schools, safe streets, and safe neighborhoods.

Literature Search Strategy

For this study, I reviewed peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, scholarly books on the topic, organizational documents, government census information open to the public that were published within 5 years, seminal sources, and a survey conducted by my client stakeholder. The databases I searched were Walden University Library's: Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, ProQuest, City of Baltimore, ERC Association, Govcensu.org, and Sage. The keywords used in the literature search Included *community development, urban cities, improving communities, connecting families, urban communities, urban development, community stakeholders,* and *whole-systems stakeholder.* The study includes 170 sources. The source breakdown includes 129 peer-reviewed and 41 non-peer-reviewed references. The non-peer-reviewed sources included seminal works, books, and government sources used to add context to the study. Ninety-five percent of the articles were published between 2019 and 2023.

Urban Development vs. Community Development

Urban and community development are closely intertwined and sometimes used interchangeably when spoken. Both contexts have a purpose for this study, as urban development in the infrastructure for improved living, empowering the community, and building more vital skills have dual standing. According to Phelps (2021), urban development covers developing the infrastructure for education, health streets, and cultural protection. The programs are usually part of a specific sector, including capacity-building measures to give special attention to slums in large cities. Rehabilitation is generally taken under conflicts of some social reform following a national incident. Community development, implied by Butler et al. (2022), is a process where community members are supported by agencies to identify and take collective action on issues that are important to them. Community development empowers community members and creates more robust and more connected communities. Community development seeks to empower individuals and groups with the skills they need to effect change within their communities (Butler et al., 2022). The development aims to build community capacity and awareness for people and community improvement.

Conceptual Framework

Addressing the Framework

The community development theory is the first portion of the composite conceptual framework, consisting of community development and whole systems thinking. The history of community organization began in 1601 with the Elizabethan Poor Law (Yerli, 2020) in England, one of the first community services to provide for those in need. Charity organizations were the trailblazers of community planning and organization. They were the first to organize in London in 1869. In America, the charitable organization was organized in Buffalo in 1877 (Bissonette, 1963). Moreover, from there, it grew in other parts of the U.S. The philanthropic organization's movement was an influential factor in the emergence of community organizations. In 1952, the community development project launched in India, with it a new era in community work (Mukerji, 1961). The 1970s brought NGOs and volunteer organizations; in 2005, we saw the emergency of corporate social responsibility (Lewis et al., 2020). We must consider the historical timeline and development to understand community development theory.

Community Development Theory

The importance of community development is essential to understanding strong relationships and collective actions for imperative growth. This section will provide some historical content to support the timeline. During the U.S. civil rights movement, community development emerged from political and social fermentation in the late 1960s (Schutte, 2022). Adedokun and Kayode (2019) defined community development as a framework for developing functional changes for individuals in their communities. Collective action is the basis of the framework of community development theory. Community development advocates for equality for all inhabitants regardless of social and citizenship activities, and eliminating their differences is the primary focus (Adedokun & Kayode, 2019). During the 1990s, community development reemerged as a political tool in policy changes, and community participation is being promoted by international institutions and national governments (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2022). Few definitions acknowledge that communities should work with their existing resources, strengths, and knowledge and less on what they did not have, which leaned on the policymakers (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2022). Many researchers tried to define what community development should mean and develop a theory to conceptualize a framework.

Conceptualizing the community development theory took on many forms. Pahwa et al. (2021) proposed that the purpose of community service was to promote solidarity. Koketso Matlakala et al. (2020) dropped the "development" in his community theory; however, Koketso Matlakala et al. borrowed from the premise of community development theory by focusing on resource mobilization, social movements and collective actions from the community. The core concept of community development is collective efficacy, as developed by Robert Sampson (South et al., 2021), and is the root of self-efficacy. It sets the core principles and characteristics of community development and distinguishes it from related approaches (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2022). The main elements of community development are increased social and economic development, increased local cooperation and self-help, and the use of expertise from other surrounding communities. The BECDD (2022) contends that because there is no consensus on community development, they must build a definition guide to propel their organization that lines up with improving the community environment. Thus, because there are many variations of community development and meanings, it has taken on many dimensions, and several models have been created to explain the phenomenon.

Dimensions of Community Development. To develop or contribute to the advancement of the community, we want to improve all dimensions of the community. Pahwa et al. (2021) theorized several community development models, including conflict, social planning, community self-efficacy, and local development, but also stressed that these models dealt with techniques like community asset building. The tools and techniques to facilitate community development are asset-based, community development corporations, social action, and locality development (Pahwa et al., 2021). Asset-based community development is based on the approach that appreciation and mobilization of individuals and community talents, skills, and assets and take focuses on needs and resources (Luo et al., 2022). The theory is that assets are found in the community stakeholders when everyone comes together.

Community development corporations are the vehicle used to deliver housing to low-mid income households. The legal structure of community development corporations reflects this indeterminacy. Because the legal parameters are broad, regulations are subject to interpretation, its enforcement mechanisms are lax, and it is intent cloudy, the organizational form of the CDC can be appropriated by agents with various perspectives and interests (Gessel, 2021). People coming together to tackle issues and support each other to improve their local area is considered the social action needed to unite the community. People volunteer their time and resources to community-owned services and networks (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2020). The social action model guides social workers in acting using empowerment practices, partnerships, alliances, and development plans. Empowering groups in the local community through social action also empowers the numbers and strength through the locality of the community. If community members can organize and communicate across social lines, it will create a foundation for a community-wide cooperative effort.

Locality development is a model that contends that the community should play a role in the change. Gilang et al. (2021) described community building as engaging all individuals and groups from all areas. The locality model is considered one of the most appropriate models in community development. Gilang et al. conducted their study using subjects from local community business groups, youth groups, and managers of local government. The findings were that the locality development model emphasizes that community development is designed to produce more stable socio-economic conditions for local communities where they are actively involved and have confidence in their capacities. Community participation is essential because it brings public awareness of the closeness of the relationship between stakeholders in the community (Brown & Baker, 2019; Liu & Nah, 2022). Gilang et al. explained that community development aimed to empower people who carried out systematic practices to improve community welfare and increase community capacity through integrity and independence to be more nuanced for sustainable development. According to Spiliotopoulou and Roseland (2020), although tools and techniques were abundant, none were embedded in the whole-systems approach, leading to missed opportunities. Hence, productive community development, where transforming functions and enhancing community well-being and productivity, is the goal.

Productive Community Development. Community productivity has the potential for uptake, given that people are relevant to everyday life. As urban areas grow and pull resources, they continue to impact the economy, harm their locality, and create causal social challenges (Reames & Wright, 2021). Enhancing community development involves many factors to achieve improvement in the form of community capital, namely four types of productivity (a) natural productivity, (b) social productivity, (c) cultural productivity, (d) and economic productivity (Spiliotopoulou & Roseland, 2020).

- *Natural productivity* - can be obtained through ecological resources, residential restoration, food systems enhancement, and promotion of urban agricultural regeneration (Spiliotopoulou & Roseland, 2020).
- *Social productivity* - can be shown through individual and social resilience through equity, tolerance and inclusion, effective governance, and justice (Spiliotopoulou & Roseland, 2020).
- *Cultural productivity* - is from the community and individuals who reside in the neighborhood through their heritage, art, traditions, and cultural continuity. Everyone's culture is learned and passed on from person to person, enhancing the quality of life and increasing overall well-being for individuals and communities (Glegg et al., 2021).
- *Economic productivity* - the growth and productivity in the economy is the ability to produce and consume goods and services. Productivity thus becomes vital to all community stakeholders, including business leaders and policymakers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

Within productive community development, we must address housing and population growth. With the rise of urban population growth, Profiroiu et al. (2020) analyzed population trends in an urban agglomeration and viewed several indicators to evaluate the community's quality of life. The authors found that the policies had to be shared to ensure the benefits of urbanization, and access to infrastructure and social services for vulnerable groups must be inclusive. Population growth places tremendous pressure on primary resources, especially community development (Profiroiu et al., 2020). Critical issues that need to be addressed on the community level are poor local governance, weak finances, and inappropriate planning that led to the high cost of housing (Saliez, 2022). However, if urban development is correct, the cities can create jobs, offer better living conditions, increase the economy, improve social inclusion, protect ecosystems, and reduce urban poverty.

When the words urban development come up, resource availability is first discussed. Urban growth generates revenue that funds infrastructure projects and fosters a pro-environmental stance among the middle class (Wang et al., 2021). The U.S. government established a HUD Act in 1937 to outlaw housing discrimination and mortgage availability with government-backed securities (HUD, 2021). Department right-sizing in community development has become debilitating, especially when cities are depopulating with the intent of stabilization (Heil, 2022). While conducting a study of a community development system in an urban city to identify barriers, Heil (2022) showed that the community developers had strayed away from the primary focus of advocating on behalf of the community and riding the banner of political esteem. There is a growing debate that urban society is nothing more than modern and that global organizations should not be separate and cannot be excluded from the city (Ajobiewe, 2020). If this debate were to take root, we would see fewer government resources allocated to the urban areas to strengthen infrastructure and more of a need for more NGOs to step in and foster community action.

Strategies for Growth. Community development partnerships offer a resource for change as a viable resource that can be tapped into that leaders can utilize. Zuckerman (2019) posited that community development partnerships are essential for growth as the partnership missions and objectives are compatible and directly reinforce improvement initiatives and needs. Another development to combat resources is the development of community-based programs (Linyard, 2021). Locally based community programs are designed to reach people outside the traditional settings because they are independent, privately funded, charity based, and may be part of a company outreach program (Drory, 2020). Community-based programs lead the efforts to improve the community relationship as leaders consider strategic programs and community organizations. As part of the strategies for growth, we consider engaging all community stakeholders and establishing sustainable partnerships incorporating the whole-systems approach.

Whole-Systems Approach

The second portion of the composite conceptual framework is the whole systems thinking approach that involves incorporating all stakeholders as early as possible so that a specific particular and sustainable plan can be developed is highly desirable. Combining the stakeholders provides the tools and enables groups to get involved and build capacity that supports sustainability and positive relationships (Ahmad, 2021). Burbank et al. (2021) examined partnership commitments. They found that the data collected illustrated that collaborating allowed for flexibility and the opportunity to work together, reflecting the power of collaboration. The stakeholder relationships wherein the community came together had much potential as a trailblazer in standards (Burbank et al., 2021). The whole systems approach requires shifts in public policy and integrating stakeholder resources and responsibilities to achieve positive outcomes (Sharpe et al., 2018). Thus, one can interpret that if planned selective partnerships came together, it would allow for collaborative efforts and lead to shifts in public policy.

Social equality is a dimension of the whole systems thinking approach, meaning that individuals or groups are given the same resources or opportunities. Social capital can build a sense of community within a neighborhood by sharing common spaces within a city, giving each person a self-fulfilling right (Spiliotopoulou & Roseland, 2020). In their study, Zuckerman (2019) found that partnerships lead to increased civic capacity, where people could work together and solve problems to achieve joint goals. In the study the authors performed, they derived theories of change from five development partnerships that had succeeded. The partnerships further provided a platform of knowledge to show how partnerships expanded improvement in planning. Koketso Matlakala et al. (2020) also focused on his research on intentional social change within community development. Practitioners and policymakers could gain a better understanding if they followed the approach as it added a practical contribution to the research models.

Moreover, when the community can partner for social action, it can lead to a more just society (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2020). Truly equal and fair societies are more prosperous and harmonious. By incorporating social equality, the citizens of Baltimore will feel embraced and empowered. The project aims to understand how the AFB will influence the community by providing resources to create a supportive culture. Sustainability is critical in retaining its citizens; therefore, the project is essential in understanding what services are utilized for this effort.

Longevity and sustainability are a result that shows whether the community activity is successful and are the community partnerships working. Sustainability is another dimension of the whole systems thinking framework. There is a transition from a community mindset of resource-attaining to more of a positive resource-generative model of a productive and sustainable city (Spiliotopoulou & Roseland, 2020). Sustainability development goals were initiated in 2015 and have set the stage for attaining sustainable cities and communities for the past two decades (Ajobiewe, 2020). Moreover, during the change in mindset, the community is involved and engaged in all related systems and stakeholders (Spiliotopoulou & Roseland, 2020). While there is a global trend to stimulate sustainability in the urban environment, simply greening the community is not the only key (Fu & Ma, 2020). Fu and Ma (2020) discussed how the Taipei community developed a successful governing system that significantly contributed to sustainability and community development. The researchers provided various solutions to promote urban sustainability and resolve past failures. Because of its self-organization, the researchers concluded that community development could contribute significantly to the sustainability of, providing a solution to the collapse of the current climate in promoting urban sustainability (Fu & Ma, 2020). Whenever urban spaces are planned using sustainability principles, it can lead to retained human capital, resources, and improved asset performance. Mosley (2020) argued that heavy civic organizations' goal of becoming highly sustainable without government assistance is incompatible with remaining independent and takes the focus away from meeting the needs of the people they serve. Hence, even though nonprofits have gained more power and responsibility, their ability to resist government pressures is limited, as collaborative efforts cannot be avoided.

Supporting and Contrasting Theories of Community Development

As I developed my study, I considered several conceptual frameworks before deciding on the community development theory. Developing the conceptual framework early in the doctoral study is essential as it provides a guide, direction, purpose, and scope (van der Waldt, 2020). Several theories were compelling and closely related but did not precisely provide the context to support my study. Focusing on a conceptual framework elevates conceptual confusion, offering a visual organizational tool and a mental roadmap. I considered the partnership theory of change, local stakeholder theory, and corporate social responsibility theory for my research.

The Partnership Theory of Change

The instituting of a partnership of change dynamic can provide mechanisms whereby people can work together to solve significant problems and achieve meaningful goals. In a study by Zuckerman (2019), community development offered many resources for partners but also advised how sometimes these resources can be tapped. The theory of change predicts how change is expected to happen by linking an organization's or program's activities (Biswas & Lyon, 2020). In Biswas and Lyon's study, they interviewed 20 stakeholders and presented their results to the committee. The authors found that the study's results proved that there was also capacity-building capability. However, I did not consider this theory appropriate for my study as it does not go far enough to improve the quality of life of community members and social equity.

Stakeholder Theory

Beck and Storopoli (2020) introduced a new concept of urban stakeholders that emphasized the importance of strategic management and stakeholder theory to improve the relationship between public managers and urban stakeholders. In their study, Forenza et al. (2019) found that the need for coalition building among stakeholders also built community empowerment. Linyard (2021) utilized the stakeholder theory in conducting a single case study involving stakeholders in organizational decision-making to promote mutual alignment with common goals. Stakeholder engagement influences outcomes through consultation, communication, negotiation, compromise, and relationship building. Organizations getting to know their stakeholders can better understand what they want, see how engaged they are, and how strategic goals affect their goals. The concepts of stakeholder theory, though proven to be essential to community development, do not go far enough to encapsulate bringing the body together and empowering the community's needs.

Corporate Social Responsibility Theory (CSR)

CSR has taken on a broad definition and plainly stated is the way businesses conduct processes ethically that has an environmental, human, and social impact. Latapi Agudelo et al. (2019) considers the top motivator of CSR to be visibility, voluntarism, and strategic positioning, which significant companies primarily use. Lu et al. (2021) saw CSR as a direct link to a firm's financial performance. Corporations should work with the community to engage them in projects (Masum et al., 2020). Hence, there is a benefit to implementing proper CSR in firms, and there should be a right balance. Nevertheless, the priority that firms place on wealth, and not the community, is why I did not choose corporate social responsibility as the conceptual framework for this study.

Contrasting theories permit the observation of individual features through the lens of their peers. Although the new growth theory and the evolutionary-institutional approaches may appear irreconcilable in their regional growth approach, there are common factors on several vital issues (Capello & Nijkamp, 2019). The theorists agree that knowledge spillover is related to geographical location, partly linked to local generation and accumulation. Governance is now front and center in analyzing the relationship between agglomeration and economic development (Capello & Nijkamp, 2019). I decided to use community development theory mainly because of its core description of planning services. Community development allows for servicing self-help groups, running support and social action groups, building community networks, participating in inter-agency activities, undertaking needs assessments, increasing people skills, improving the quality of life, defining priorities, empowering communities, and helping individuals. This description is what an NGO services hope to provide to the community and aligns with my doctoral study.

History of Nonprofit Organizations

Community development and community organizing share the same goal: rectifying injustice to improve the lives of the people in the community that are often marginalized by the system. Sometimes, the focus is geographically defined, especially in the United States. Community development projects commonly operate in the poorest neighborhoods throughout the long history of nonprofit organizations. The history of nonprofit organizations in the United States dates to the colonial era. Minkowitz et al. (2020) stated that the colonists started programs that funded churches and built schools to help poor territories during the British colonization of the American colonies. While programs were not referred to as nonprofit organizations, charity paved the way for forming nonprofit organizations (Minkowitz et al., 2020). Nonprofit organizations are an essential outcome of legal changes and the complex evolution of the history of charitable giving (Minkowitz et al., 2020). Bush and Hadden (2019) reported that legal changes and constitutional reforms, such as the revenue act of 1917, expanded and transformed charity organizations from colonial religious controlled organizations to public, nonprofit organizations engaged in voluntary community services enshrined in the United States legal framework. Exploring the history of a nonprofit organization in the United States, Weber (2020) stated that its growth and development are anchored on six important moments.

The first notable moment was the Peabody Education Fund of 1867. After the American civil war, the country faced the enormous task of rebuilding and reconstruction (Hall, 2016). Given the costs of reconstructing that amounted to billions of dollars, the newly formed United States government turned to voluntary and private organizations to help rebuild. The Peabody Education Fund was created within the same structure to gather resources from volunteer financiers to help with charitable activities such as rebuilding (Hall, 2016). The education fund's sole purpose was to help integrate ex-slaves and whites to foster reconciliation besides promoting industrial and intellectual growth in the Southern state societies. The education received donations starting with $3 million and gave out up to $4 million to rebuild schools, train teachers, and offer scholarships (Weber, 2020). Consistently, the education fund merged with Slater Fund in 1910, Negro Rural School Fund, and Virginia Randolph Fund in 1937 to form the Southern Education Foundation. The Southern Education Foundation offered educational scholarships to Africa Americans and other marginalized communities in the South.

The second moment was the Cleveland Welfare Council-1914. After forming the Peabody Education Fund in the Southern States, the federal government created the Cleveland Welfare Council (Weber, 2020). The Cleveland Welfare Council was formed to manage and distribute donations to member organizations to minimize competition and increase service delivery to members and communities they served (Weber, 2020). The Cleveland Welfare Council was also created to promote a sense of togetherness between competing charitable organizations (Weber, 2020). The Cleveland Welfare Council currently funds and provides grants to different organizations, including youth development groups, leadership development, and arts and culture organizations (The Cleveland Foundation, 2020). The Cleveland Welfare Council facilitated the growth of nonprofit organizations by promoting cooperation and mitigating competition between member organizations.

The third moment was the revenue act of 1917. The revenue act of 1917 helped nonprofit and charitable organizations grow by allowing taxpayers to deduct and donate up to 15% of their income to charitable organizations (Duquette, 2019; Weber, 2020). The revenue act allowed the United States to fund its participation in World War 1 through private charity organizations (Weber, 2020). Besides supporting World War 1, the Revenue Act of 1917 allowed the federal government to regulate the number of charitable donations besides catalyzing the formation of larger philanthropic organizations in the United States. The Revenue Act of 1917 leveled the operational environment for nonprofit organizations. It encouraged forming larger charitable organizations that substituted government funding for critical projects and supported the war efforts.

The fourth moment was the Council on Foundations in 1949. The Council on Foundations was founded by Edward L. Ryerson in 1949 and incorporated all nonprofit organizations that offered grants (Weber, 2020). BesiThedes included nonprofit organizations that provided grants. The Council on Foundations organized training and workshops for new philanthropic organizations to prepare them for their different activities in the United States and globally (Weber, 2020). The Council on Foundations boosts more than 2000 global grant foundations, offering various programs and resources to support professional philanthropists (Weber, 2020). The Council on Foundations promoted the growth of nonprofit organizations in the United States through grants and by providing new nonprofit organizations with resources and workshop training.

The fifth moment was the Filer commission-1973. Given the complexity of nonprofit organizations and their role in the development of the United States, the laws governing charitable organizations were considered a significant barrier to the development and propagation of nonprofit organizations (Weber, 2020). Therefore, a commission led by Filer published a report in 1973 that introduced nonprofit organizations as the third sector of the American economy (Weber, 2020). Hall (2016) examined the commission's report and established that the recommendations were to develop the rules and regulations governing the sector while promoting its growth. The Filer recommendation provided guidelines for forming and operating nonprofit organizations following the laws in the United States.

The sixth moment was the independent sector C-1980. Starting in the 1980s, the independent sector is a coalition of charitable organizations whose primary role is to connect different philanthropic organizations, professionals, and leaders (Alford, 2019). The independent sector's purpose is to provide established by Alford and Frumkin (2021), bringing together different independent philanthropic organizations. The nonprofit organizations improved their political lobbying and influenced policies that favored their growth, expansion, and participation in charitable activities with limited government scrutiny. The formation of the independent sector in 1980 enhanced the development of nonprofit organizations in the United States.

Historically nonprofits were developed to fill the gap that governments did not in the residential sector addressing social needs (Dunning, 2022; Mosley, 2020). Nonprofits can hold the tax-exempt status of a 501(c)(3) from all federal income taxes, keeping the identification of a public charity (Linyard, 2021). Even though it is perceived to be an arm of the government as a compliment to the governmental sector, nonprofits have seen a shift in cash-based giving towards a contractor of government social services (Mosley, 2020). As a result, most nonprofits now rely heavily on government funding for sustainability, but they also play a significant role in forming public policy and implementation (Mosley, 2020). Because nonprofits have limited access to resources, there is an increased risk that services will not be available to the community (Linyard, 2021).

Types of Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations have played a vital role in the growth and development of the United States. In a study on nonprofit trends and impacts, Faulk et al. (2021) noted that nonprofit organizations contributed 10% of employment in the United States, accounting for 5.6% of the US GDP. As a result, of the significant contribution and impacts of nonprofit organizations, investigators have identified different types of organizations in the United States (Ji et al., 2022; Netze, 2020). Netze (2020) reported that nonprofit organizations could be classified based on association, corporation, or trust. Ji et al. (2022) examined the results of the data collected from 1626 nonprofit organizations. They reiterated that other than associations, nonprofit organizations could also be identified by the type of services they offer. Different types of nonprofit organizations operate in the United States: (1) charitable organizations, (2) social advocacy groups, (3) social and recreational clubs, (4) veterans' organizations, (5) employee beneficiary associations, and (6) trade and professional associations.

Charitable Organizations. Charitable organizations fall under the IRS tax code 501(c)(4). Charitable organizations comprise many nonprofit organizations registered in the United States, with over one million charitable organizations. Charitable organizations in the United States support the education of needy students and provide affordable housing and food to low-income households and communities (Netze, 2020). Charitable organizations also include groups concerned with the welfare of animals and organizers of amateur sports (Netze, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, Finchum-Mason et al. (2020) examined the responses of 500 philanthropic organizations to the effects of Covid-19. They found that established philanthropic organizations increased food donations, sanitizers, and masks. Finchum-Mason et al. stated that large philanthropic organizations partnered with others to help low-income people or those experiencing homelessness due to Covid-19. Comparable findings were reported by Paarlberg et al. (2020), who investigated American resilience during Covid-19 and found that charitable organizations played a crucial role in collecting and donating emergency funds to affected people and community hospitals. Therefore, through their donations and active participation, philanthropic organizations have helped meet the needs of low-income communities through food and affordable housing, besides facilitating education for students from low-income households.

Social Advocacy Groups. Social advocacy groups are nonprofit organizations classified under the IRS tax code 501(c)(4), promoting different political and social initiatives. In the United States, social advocacy groups raise funds to lobby political organizations to support their cause or educate the public about government policies (Austin et al., 2019). Austin et al., while investigating corporate social advocacy and public interest, analyzed data from 1,214 participants and found that corporate advocacy organizations influenced the political views of the general population through their education and public training. Similarly, Parcha and Kingsley Westerman (2020) found that corporate statements on controversial issues influenced their followers' attitudes. In agreement with Parcha and Kingsley Westerman, Tarin et al. (2021) found that corporate social advocacy organizations have influenced how Americans approach issues of race as they advocate for social justice and equality. Social advocacy groups improve the general public's knowledge of controversial problems besides advocating for policy change on behalf of the people and members.

Social and Recreational Clubs. Social and recreational clubs are nonprofit organizations classified under the code 501(c)(7). Social and recreational clubs are nonprofit organizations in the United States created to organize recreational activities to promote socialization and positive interaction among their members (Netze, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the social and recreational clubs organized sports and socialization activities such as painting or music that helped their members overcome stress due to the lockdown (Czekanski et al., 2021). Martin et al. (2021) established that recreational and social clubs used digital platforms to guide their members through different exercises during the Covid-19 lockdown that helped them relieve stress. Through their active engagement, social and recreational clubs helped their members interact through amateur music, painting, and exercises during Covid-19, thus mitigating the negative impacts of stress.

Veteran Organizations. Veteran's organization is filed under the IRS code 501(c)(19) and comprises active and retired armed forces members. Veteran organizations were created to provide members of the armed forces with different services and meet their various needs in the United States (Mercier et al., 2023). Purposefully, veterans' organizations are designed to meet veterans' healthcare and housing needs, both active and retired members of the United States armed forces (McCaslin et al., 2020). Veteran organizations are funded by donations and government grants (Netze, 2020). Therefore, veteran organizations are designed to help active and retired members of the United States armed forces reintegrate into civilian life by meeting their medical and housing needs.

Employee Beneficiary Associations. Employee beneficiary associations are filed under code 501(c)(9) and comprise professionals or employees working for a single employer. Employee beneficiary associations can also be formed by members of the same union (Netze, 2020). Employee beneficiary associations are created to help members with monetary support to facilitate them in an emergency, illness, or accident (Netze, 2020). Tang et al. (2022) found employee beneficiary associations to benefit the employees and their families when their members were incapacitated by an accident or illness. Thus, employee beneficiary associations in the United States are used as a cushion against the inevitable by employees.

Trade and Professional Associations. Trade and professional associations are nonprofit organizations classified under IRS code 501(c)(6). The trade and professional associations nonprofit organizations are tasked with improving their members' businesses and business conditions (Peng et al., 2021). Joseph (2019) established that social and professional associations improve the operational capability of their members through education and training. Moreover, the trade and professional associations connect their members to professional opportunities and engage in political lobbying for favorable business policies for their members (Wihry, 2021). Examples of trade and professional associations in the United States include real estate boards, chambers of commerce, unions, and business leagues. Other nonprofit organizations that operate in the United States include fraternal societies, domestic fraternal societies and associations, teacher retirement fund associations, cooperative organizations that finance crop operations, and supplemental unemployment benefits trusts. Historically, the growth and trends in a nonprofit have grown in popularity and as a resource in the community.

Trends in Nonprofits

The growth of nonprofit organizations in the United States has experienced an upward trajectory since the American colonial times. Hall (2016) established that with most nonprofit organizations developed in the 1950s, the number of nonprofits has grown from 13,000 tax event profits to more than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations in the 20th century. Globally, nonprofit organizations employ 7.4% of the global workforce. Twentynine percent of employees in nonprofit organizations are volunteers, while 70% of the staff are paid workers (Faulk et al., 2021). Minkowitz et al. (2020) studied the history and growth of nonprofit organizations in the United States and found that the number of employees in nonprofit organizations increased from 0 to 1% in 1900. The number of employees in nonprofit organizations rose from 3% in 1960 to 9% in 2000 (Minkowitz et al., 2020). Faulk et al. (2021) reported that nonprofit organizations in the United States employ 10% of the workforce and account for 5.6% of domestic product growth. The total annual revenue of nonprofit organizations is $2.62 trillion yearly (Faulk et al., 2021). As a result, we can see the growth and increased revenue among nonprofits and in corporate size. The trends in the growth of nonprofit organizations can also be examined in terms of donations and revenue.

The amount of donation giving has increased in America and is encouraged by the IRS through qualified deductions. The amount of donations by nonprofit organizations has increased exponentially (Chapman et al., 2022; Faulk et al., 2021; Tian & Konrath, 2019). Tian and Konrath (2019) stated that in 2021, 56% of Americans donated to charity, signifying a 1% increase in donations during pre-pandemic periods. Comparing contributions by age, Konstantinou and Jones (2022); and Chapman et al. (2022) reported that 60% of baby boomers donated to charity while 57% of Gen Z donated to charity. The increase in donations to charity increased nonprofit organizations' contributions by 4.1% in 2021 (Faulk et al., 2021). Despite the growth in 2021, Faulk et al. (2021) acknowledged that many donations plunged in 2020. However, most nonprofit organizations experienced a significant rise in their donations between 2015 to 2019. In

2020, 37% of nonprofit organizations in the United States reported decreased contributions because of Covid-19 (Chapman et al., 2022; Faulk et al., 2021). Overall, the donations given by nonprofit organizations are influenced by individual contributions to charity.

Nonprofit organizations increased their donations to offset deficits caused by decreased federal government funding. Lu et al. (2019), while investigating the commercial revenue for nonprofit organizations in the United States, found that as government grants and funding decreased, nonprofit organizations enhanced their contributions through donations and grants. In concert with Lu et al., Lemoine and Richardson (2020), in a literature review, found that a decrease in government funding fueled the growth of nonprofit organizations facilitated by individual donations in the United States. Mato-Santiso et al. (2021) and Lemoine and Richardson's findings established that many nonprofit organizations lost funding because of the nondisclosure of their financial performance. However, with policies supporting online financial disclosure, donations from individuals and the federal government have doubled the number of grants and scholarships nonprofit organizations offer to the low-income communities they support.

Besides donations, the financial revenue of nonprofit organizations has increased. Omondi-Ochieng (2019) quantitatively investigated the financial performances of 990 nonprofit firms in the United States between 2009 to 2016. Omondi-Ochieng found that increasing returns from assets improved nonprofit organizations' financial performance in the United States. However, the economic efficiency of nonprofit organizations has reduced, with a 1.45% return on assets and 70% of the revenues spent on services without returns. Ressler et al. (2020) investigated nonprofit organizations’ donations in the social context and, using the new Internal Revenue Service release of e-filed nonprofit reporting forms, found an increase signifying growth in revenue and donations.

Conversely, Faulk et al. (2021) stated that despite the increase in revenue and donations of nonprofit organizations, the Covid-19 pandemic negatively impacted their performance, leading to some closure. The high operations costs also have limited nonprofit organizations' contributions and charitable events they can participate in (Faulk et al., 2021). Besides the impacts of Covid-19, nonprofit organizations' financial performance has improved due to donations and returns from their assets.

Social And Economic Challenges in Urban Areas

Transport Problems

Urban cities face different social and economic challenges. Bush and Doyon (2019) conducted a quantitative study to evaluate various social and economic difficulties facing residents of urban areas, such as traffic jams when going to work. Bibri (2019) investigated how transport contributed to social and economic challenges for urban city residents. Bribri established that city residents face challenges finding parking for their vehicles to interact with their colleagues face-to-face, negatively impacting their social lives. In agreement with Bush and Doyon, and Bibri, Wiggan et al. (2020) also evaluated how transport problems affect urban residents' social and economic lives. Bibri also found that urban residents experience transportation challenges when they commute long distances to workplaces, which takes much of their social time. The evidence reviewed indicates that transportation is one of the challenges affecting city residents' social and economic life.

Transportation is one of the challenges affecting city residents. Through a quantitative study, Capolongo et al. (2020) evaluated the effect of vehicles on city residents' social and economic life. They established that transportation affects the social life of city residents because gardens and spaces meant for recreational activities have been converted into parking lots. South et al. (2021) also examined how transportation influenced urban residents' social and economic life and reported that traffic jams cause congestion to city residents, affecting their social lives. Van der Hoeven and Hitters (2019) investigated the link between transportation challenges and the economic vitality of urban residents. They found that transportation costs such as bus fare and parking fees affect the economic life of city residents struggling to put food on the table. Combining the evidence reviewed, one can conclude that transportation affects urban residents' social and economic life.

Transportation is one of the contributors to the social and economic challenges of urban residents. Kozhimannil et al. (2019) conducted a systematic literature review to evaluate urban areas' social and financial difficulties. They established that spending time in traffic jams and long trips to work consumes that could have been utilized in economic and social activities. Similar findings to Kozhimannil et al. were recorded by Redondo-Sama et al. (2020), who evaluated the impact of transportation on city residents' social and economic life. The transport system uses public spaces that could have been used for games, processions, and markets that enable people to be social and generate income, thus affecting their social and economic life (Redondo-Sama et al., 2020). Buffel et al. (2021) also examined how transportation influences urban residents' social and economic lives. Buffel et al. highlighted that traffic makes it hard for people to mingle freely on the streets, limiting their social lives. Transportation affects city dwellers' social and economic lives by denying them a chance to freely interact with one another by taking spaces meant for social and economic activities.

Solis et al. (2020) revealed that transportation affected city dwellers' social and economic lives. Solis et al. recruited 345 city residents to discover various social and economic challenges facing city dwellers. They reported that 67% of city dwellers use personal cars when going to work, thus unable to socialize with other passengers. Awada et al. (2021) also recruited 213 participants through an online survey to investigate the impact of transportation on city dwellers' social and economic life. They established that road expansion sometimes leads to the demolition of stalls along the road, which affects the financial lives of city dwellers who earn their income from selling along the route. Corroborating with Solis et al. (2020) and Awada et al. (2021), He and Jia (2022) also investigated how transportation impacts the social and economic lives of city residents. He and Jia established that a poor transport system affects entrepreneurs who rely on public transport systems to transport their commodities, leading to poor economic life. Researchers have demonstrated that transportation affects city dwellers' social and economic lives.

Insufficient Housing

Insufficient housing affects the social and economic lives of urban dwellers. Zhao and Malikopoulos (2022) conducted a meta-analysis study to examine the effect of inadequate housing on urban residents' social and economic life. They reported that city residents experience congestion due to insufficient housing, distracting their social lives. In concert with Zhao and Malikopoulos, Bono et al. (2021) examined how poor housing affects city residents' social and economic lives. They found that city residents pay high rates for houses because of inadequate housing, thus affecting their financial lives. Leal Filho et al. (2019) also investigated how inadequate housing influenced urban residents' social and economic life. They reported that urban residents with housing problems are not socialized with friends because they cannot host them at their homes. Furthermore, thus, we can conclude that insufficient housing affects the social life of city residents.

Some studies have revealed that insufficient housing is one of the challenges affecting city residents' social and economic lives. Ignatieva et al. (2020) evaluated the effect of accommodation on the social and economic vitality of city residents and, after assessing the impact of housing on the social and economic lives of city residents, established that insufficient housing leads to hiked rent which leads to a challenging economic life for city dwellers. Hobbie and Grimm (2020) also examined how poor housing influenced urban residents' social and economic life. They stated that inadequate housing has increased high-rise buildings, limiting social interactions. Viana et al. (2022) examined the effect of insufficient housing on city dwellers' social and economic lives. They reported that inadequate housing causes congestion and crowding, affecting urban residents' social status. Combining the evidence reviewed, one can conclude that transportation affects urban residents' social and economic life. Combining the evidence discussed so far, one can conclude that insufficient housing limits social activities among city residents.

Shortage of proper housing affects the social and economic lives of city residents. Zeng et al. (2022) conducted a systematic literature review to evaluate urban areas' social and economic challenges. They revealed that low-income city residents could not afford better housing, affecting their financial lives. Similar findings to Zeng et al. (2022) were recorded by Zwierzchowska et al. (2019), who evaluated the impact of insufficient housing on the social and economic life of city residents and reported that poor housing strained the economic life of city residents who are forced to live far away from their workplaces. Fitzgibbons and Mitchell (2019) also examined how inadequate houses influenced urban residents' social and economic lives. They reported that housing challenges affect the financial status of city residents as they will have to go the extra mile to get comfortable houses. Insufficient housing influences the social and economic life of city residents.

Criminal Activities

Crime is one of the challenges affecting the social life of city residents. Finewood et al. (2019) evaluated how criminal activities affect city residents' social and economic lives and found that increased crime rates hinder city dwellers from making new friends, thus affecting their social lives. Supporting Finewood et al. findings, Bitsko et al. (2022) also conducted a meta-analysis study to examine how crime activities affected city residents' social and economic lives. They reported that criminal activities create fear among city residents, challenging interacting with new people. Ferreira et al. (2020) also investigated the effect of illegal activities on city residents' social and economic lives. They established that criminal activities disrupt social order in the city, negatively influencing city residents' social life. Illegal activities affect city residents' social life because they disrupt social order in the town.

Criminal activities such as theft affect city residents' social and economic life. Reddick et al. (2020) investigated the impact of criminal activities on city dwellers' social and economic vitality. They reported that illegal activities such as burglary and robbery with violence reduce safety among city dwellers, which prevents them from mingling with other people through social events. In concert with Reddick et al. (2020), Goetz et al. (2020) also evaluated the link between criminal activities and the social-economic life of city residents. Goetz et al. reported that illegal activities such as terrorism hinder community collaboration and trust, affecting their social lives. Kandt and Batty (2021) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the impact of criminal activities on city people's social and economic life. They found that criminal activities such as robbery and theft create chaos and confusion, hindering the social engagement of city dwellers. Illegal activities such as terrorism affect the social life of city residents because of fear.

Crime destabilizes the economic life of city dwellers. Riley and Gardiner (2020) conducted a cross-sectional study to evaluate the impact of criminal activities on the economic life of city residents. They established that city dwellers are forced to live in a gated community for more expensive security reasons, affecting their financial balance. In agreement with Riley and Gardiner, De Leon-Martinez et al. (2020) also investigated the effect of criminal activities on urban cities' economic and social life. De Leon-Martinez et al. established that taming illegal activities involves hiring security services within residential areas, thus affecting the economic life of city people. Sodiq et al. (2019) also conducted a cross-sectional study to examine the influence of criminal activities on city dwellers' social and economic life. Research conducted by Sodiq et al. revealed that criminal activities such as violence and assault hinder free interaction among people in the city. Illegal activities such as assault and violence affect the economic life of city residents because of safety cost-related issues.

Pollution affects the social and economic life of social and economic vitality of city residents. Duan et al. (2019) conducted a systematic literature review to investigate how pollution affects city dwellers' social and economic life. In a systematic literature review, Duan et al. revealed that a dirty environment makes socializing difficult for city people. Zhang et al. (2019) also evaluated the effect of pollution on the social and economic life of city residents. They reported that many cities experience air and water pollution, leading to diseases that require financial management and economic instability. Diao et al. (2021) investigated the effect of pollution on the social and economic life of city residents. They revealed that noise pollution requires the installation of soundproofs in residential houses, which causes economic challenges to city residents. Hence, the potential increased installation cost due to soundproofing pollution is one of the challenges affecting city residents' social and economic life.

The various effects of pollution on city residents' social and economic lives are numerous. Zuniga-Teran et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study to evaluate how pollution affected city dwellers' social and economic life. They reported that a dirty environment discourages people from attending social events that affect their social life. Ferreira et al. (2020) also investigated the impact of pollution on the social and economic vitality of city residents. They revealed that noise and air pollution affect residents' ability to mingle freely because the lack of fresh air affects their social life. Water pollution causes city residents to incur water purification costs to get clean water (Reddick et al., 2020). The evidence reviewed indicates that managing water and air pollution is an additional cost to city residents, affecting their economic status.

Strategies Nonprofit Organizations Use to Improve the Quality of Life

Recruiting, Training, and Retaining Volunteers

Leaders of nonprofit organizations may recruit, train, and retain volunteer employees to improve the quality of life and retain people in urban downtown areas in the United States. For example, DuBois (2019) investigated the promises and pitfalls of upper-class retention policies for keeping families in downtown urban areas. In addition, DuBois discovered that nonprofit organizations recruit, train, and retain top-talent volunteers to assist in service delivery to downtown communities, encouraging them to stay. Recruitment ensures incremental improvement in rebuilding failed cities in the United States by promoting quality of life for those communities. Cull (2019), in agreement with DuBois, examined the implementation and training sustainability of communities in downtown areas in the United States. The findings indicated that competent staff could enhance quality and improve service delivery. As a result, nonprofit organizations recruit, train, and retain skilled volunteer employees to promote quality and improved services, thereby retaining people in downtown areas.

Previous researchers have found that NGO staff recruitment and retention of volunteer staff could improve the quality of life and retention of people in urban downtown areas in the United States. In their quest to understand urbanization and strategies for encouraging people to stay in downtown areas, Welford and Yarbrough (2021) found that nonprofit organizations can offer quality and improved services by recruiting, training, and retaining talented volunteer staff. Quality and improved services promote the quality of life of people, thus resulting in increased retention in downtown areas. Conversely, Wong and Shaheen (2019) wanted to understand the state of sharing economy and evacuations in downtown areas and the retention of people in such regions of the United States. After analysis, the researchers found that training and retaining NGO volunteer staff improved the quality of life, resulting in a high retention rate of people in downtown areas in the United States. Qualified and skilled nonprofit organizations' employees provide improved service delivery to the communities, improving their quality of life and retention.

NGOs' recruitment, training, and retention of volunteers leads to improved quality of life and retention of people in urban downtown areas in the United States (DuBois, 2019). Ma (2021) used a quantitative study design to comprehend the quality of life, crime prevention, and retention of people in downtown areas. The study outcome established that nonprofit organizations had implemented measures to recruit, train and retain the best employees to provide vital and significant services to the communities downtown, thereby increasing their motivation to stay in these areas in the United States. Having discussed recruiting and retaining NGO volunteer staff and extending earlier findings, Ma did not use diverse sample sizes to generalize the results. In addition, the investigators used only one geographical location. They investigated the relationship between NGO staff recruitment, training, retention, and improved quality of life to retain people in downtown areas from a general perspective (Ma, 2021). Given the findings reviewed, it is evident that NGO staff recruitment, retaining, and training volunteer staff could result in improved quality of life and retention of people in the urban community of downtown Baltimore Maryland.

Providing Free Social Amenities

The nonprofit organization provides complimentary social amenities for people in downtown areas, enhancing their retention. Del-Real et al. (2021), in agreement with Ma (2021), investigated what the downtown people want and shareholders' opinions, priorities, and perceived challenges in downtown areas in the United States. People need various social amenities for improved lifestyles, such as schools, hospitals, clean drinking water, and shelter, which could result in improved quality of life and retention of people in downtown areas in the United States. Goldberg-Miller (2019) analyzed creative cities on the municipal agenda in New York City's downtown areas in the United States. Through a qualitative study with 21 semistructured interviews, Goldberg-Miller noted that nonprofit organizations ensure the retention of people in downtown areas. It offers the services by providing social amenities, including healthcare service centers, building schools, providing clean drinking water to the communities, enhancing food security, and providing housing facilities for improved quality of life among the people. The articles reviewed indicate that nonprofit organizations offer complimentary social amenities for people in downtown areas to enhance their retention and encourage their community engagement.

Participating in Responsible Investment

Participating in responsible investment activities in downtown areas could result in improved quality of life and retention of people in these areas. Mega (2019), through a quantitative study, Mega found that if people engaged in responsible investment activities, their quality of life and standard of living could improve, resulting in their retention in those areas. Mega also revealed that nonprofit organizations participate in responsible investment among the communities through various investment schemes and groups, thus improving business activities in these areas. In addition, some nonprofit organizations offer grants to groups for investment activities, resulting in improved quality of life and enhanced retention of people downtown. Conversely, Visser et al. (2020) conceptualized the construction of community livelihood strategies and the utilization of community-based youth-serving organizations in rural America. The findings demonstrated that downtown areas experience economic insecurity. As a result, the nonprofit organization participates in responsible investment. It encourages community members to invest in various financial schemes and programs to improve their income level, thereby increasing retention in downtown areas in the United States.

Promotes Awareness for Specific Issues and Give Incentive for Change

Nonprofit organizations that promote awareness of specific issues can incentivize change among downtown communities. Agreeing with Visser et al. (2020), Rigolon and Nemeth (2019) investigated the socioeconomic model, people, place, and policy change for improved quality of life among downtown communities in the United States. Rigolon and Nemeth found that one of the strategies adopted by nonprofit organizations to enhance the improved quality of life and retention of people in downtown areas is creating awareness for specific issues, such as responsible investments and providing incentives for change among communities in downtown areas. Contrariwise, Shifflett et al. (2019) examined green infrastructure for urban watershed management and people retention in downtown areas in the United States. The researcher revealed that promoting awareness regarding specific issues and providing incentives for change, such as giving gifts and rewards for efforts made by the people, could result in improved quality of life and retention in downtown areas (Shifflett et al., 2019). Thus, if more community partners become more engaged and incentive members with gifts during community activities, it would be one strategy to assist the NGO to have more productive activities. The strategy of incentives would be one less challenge that the NGO would have to offset among the other challenges that nonprofit organizations face.

Challenges Faced by Nonprofit Organizations in Supporting Communities

Nonprofit organizations serve the communities, and their goals are to impact society as much as possible with its available resources. Operating a nonprofit has common issues that any company may have to address. However, their challenges are often daunting, including limited funding and talent retention.

Limited Funding Opportunities. Limited funding opportunities impede nonprofit organizations from supporting communities in the United States. Through qualitative research, Lerner and Secondo (2020) examined the participation in budgeting and funding for nonprofit organizations in the United States. Lerner and Secondo established that inadequate funding could significantly challenge nonprofit organizations. Limited funding results in insufficient service delivery to the communities, thereby impeding its support to community members. Caguas (2019), agreeing with Lerner and Secondo, investigated nonprofit organizations and Latinx community workers' experiences of support services in downtown areas. The researchers demonstrated that nonprofit organizations faced challenges such as inadequate funding opportunities to facilitate various support services to the community (Caguas, 2019). The limitation of funding results in difficulties in providing quality services to the community, such as building schools, hospitals, and clean drinking water. Thus far, studies reviewed indicate that limited funding opportunities impede nonprofit organizations from supporting communities in the United States.

The findings revealed differing views regarding the relationship between limited funding opportunities and nonprofit organizations in supporting communities. As a result, Lerner and Secondo (2020) indicated that inadequate funding is a great challenge for nonprofit organizations and that limited funding results in insufficient support to the communities, thereby hindering support to community members. However, Caguas (2019) reported that nonprofit organizations faced scarce funding opportunities to facilitate various support services to the community (Caguas, 2019). The limitation of funding resulted in hitches supporting vulnerable communities. While Caguas extended previous studies' findings, the investigators used one set for the research and examined the association between limited funding and support service providers to the community. In addition, the investigators also used undiversified sample sizes to generalize the results. As a result, Caguas suggested that further studies be conducted using a diverse sample size. Thus far, the articles reviewed indicate that limited funding opportunities impede nonprofit organizations from supporting communities and retaining talent in the United States.

Challenges in Talent Retention. Nonprofit organizations face challenges in terms of talent retention in their organization, thereby impeding support to the community. A quantitative study with 134 community action agencies in the U.S. examined community sustainability and the support of nonprofit organizations in the United States. Wright and Reames (2020) established that low talent retention in organizations and limited funding negatively affect community-based organizations by obstructing their service delivery. The lack of qualified staff and the high staff turnover rate influenced the service offered to the community among nonprofit organizations (Wright & Reames, 2020). In agreement with Wright and Reames, Alizadeh et al. (2021) analyzed nonprofit organizations and volunteer leadership development in the community through a quantitative study. Alizadeh et al. opined that inadequately skilled volunteers and low retention of talented employees would likely result in limited-service delivery to the community. Studies reviewed reveal that nonprofit organizations face the challenge of talent retention in their organization, thereby impeding support to the community.

Inadequate talent and retention of employees may limit service delivery and support to the community among nonprofit organizations in the United States. Such talent retention limitations could hinder nonprofit organizations' support services to the community (Lerner & Secondo, 2020). Philip and Arrowsmith (2021), in agreement with Lerner and Secondo (2020), examined the limits of staff involvement, employee participation, and support services among nonprofit organizations in the United States. Philip and Arrowsmith found that inadequate talent retention due to poor management and inconsistent training could result in nonprofit organization's limited-service delivery to the community. In contrast, Paxton et al. (2020) investigated the use of emotional donations and volunteer employee retention for nonprofit organizations in the United States. The investigators found that a lack of enough volunteer staff and low volunteer employee retention could limit the provision of support to the community in downtown areas (Paxton et al., 2020). The research scholarship reviewed indicates that inadequate talent and retention of employees could limit support to the community by nonprofit organizations in their provision of support to the community. Whereas Paxton et al. attribute the challenges of low retention to poor management, lack of skill, lack of talent, and lack of funding, all of which will inadvertently impact the services delivery to the community and is a challenge that the organization should address.

Transition

In Section 1, I introduced the business problem, which is that some business leaders lack strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. In addition to the business problem, Section 1 contains the background and the nature of the study. This qualitative single case study aimed to explore business leaders' strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. The target population was the three board members from the NGO in Baltimore, Maryland. The literature review explores the research phenomenon related to NGO and community development. In the review, I discussed the history of NGOs, the different types of nonprofits, the challenges and limitations, and the relationship to community development theory and the whole system approach. Bhattacharyya's (1995) community development theory was this study's conceptual framework, bringing together the shared understanding of challenges, integrating action, and sustaining change. The organization's leaders may use the findings from this study to support their mission and retain local community members as retention solutions may be developed. Empowering the community and teaching the members the skills they need could incorporate more of the dimensions of the whole-systems approach to social equity and sustainability.

In Section 2, I provide the research purpose, my role as the researcher, my research method and design, the population and sampling, research ethics, my data collection techniques and instruments used, and the data analysis. The analysis provides the needed criteria to substantiate the reliability, validity, and ethics used in the study.

In Section 3, I used the 2021-2022 Baldrige Performance Excellence Program to conduct an in-depth interview with the client organization. I concentrated on the framework's main topics: the organizational profile, leadership, customer relationships, measurement, analysis, knowledge management, workforce, operations, and results. I provided an overall assessment of the framework with the results of the interview answers, and I summarized the findings and provided recommendations.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I include an overview of the study's purpose, the researcher's role, information on the participants, research design and methodology, population and sampling, data collection techniques and tools, data analysis, and reliability and validity. I conducted interviews via Zoom/Google Meet and email as the principal data collection method. I reviewed the organization's documents and website to gather historical data and explore the strategies that the organization has used.

Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem is that some business leaders lack strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore what strategies city business leaders use to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. The target population consisted of three leaders of the nonprofit organization, the executive director, and two board members with knowledge of the business operations and empowered to make organizational decisions, who had implemented strategies business leaders use to improve the quality of life in downtown communities.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role is to collect data and analyze the information to address the research question within the client organization. In my role as a scholar-consultant, the goal is to solicit trust so that the retrieved information is meaningful to discerning the business problem (Saunders et al., 2016). I used the Baldrige Excellence Framework (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2022) as a guide in my capstone program to interview the leaders, collect data, and answer the research questions. I had no direct relationship or knowledge of my client organization AFB. Still, I have worked in the nonprofit industry for 20 years as an intrinsic part of the executive team and board of directors.

Ethical behavior and practices in research must be followed, and I followed the guidelines outlined in The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (NCPHSBBR, 1979). Implementing the practices of *The Belmont Report* helped ensure that I followed the Walden University directives on ethical research, the required consent form had been reviewed and agreed upon with the client organization, and confirmed the memorandum of understanding was. Participants reviewed the consent form and replied with “I consent.” The basic principles of the *Belmont Report* are (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (NCPHSBBR, 1979). Participating individuals should be treated with respect, even if they refuse to continue the research – throughout the interview and after their participation ends (Kennett-Hensel & Payne, 2018).

As I was accepted into the consulting capstone program at Walden University, the capstone coordinator facilitated the introduction of my client organization and its program director. The agreement between the university and the client organization had already been established, and it was left to me to establish the needed rapport and working relationship. I interviewed the organization’s leaders and reviewed organizational documents in this study. The interviews were conducted via Google Meet. The interviews were semistructured and consisted of open-ended questions. The client and I spent time discussing the organization and the mutual goals and potential outcomes and expectations of the study. The client representative and I conducted biweekly Zoom meetings to gather background information and to keep me abreast of the current standing and activities currently being administered in the organization.

To mitigate researcher bias and uphold the integrity of the data collection process, I referred to my interview protocol as my guide. The client-organization leader and I adhered to the scheduled interview time. I followed a planned set of interview questions for the day. The questions and answers were transcribed and saved in a shared drive. The participants could go and re-read the answers and clarify any responses. The process allowed me to stay focused on representing the research question, avoided personal conversation deviation, and explained and allowed member checking.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) provides a guide on conducting the interview properly, from preparing the questions to knowing the topic, and provides an overall better understanding of the interviewees' experiences (Roberts, 2020; Rowlands, 2021). According to Roberts (2020), there is an increased need to develop an interview protocol as it will add value to the competence of the researcher and the strength of the interview questions. Roberts introduced the protocol cycle for novice researchers as follows: (1) adopting a qualitative attitude, (2) developing interview questions that align with your research question with the support of your chair, (3) developing an interview guide, (4) test out the questions and strategies, (5) take the time to review and reflect on the effectiveness of the interview questions, and (6) used what was learned to strengthen the interview process.

Participants

I conducted semistructured interviews and reviewed organizational documents to obtain data about the research question. Participants in this study were the leaders of my client organization who worked closely with developing strategic planning and program initiatives. The eligibility criteria to participate in this study were (a) to be members of the board of directors with the client organization, (b) to be actively involved in the strategic planning of the organization, and (c) to have success implementing community activities.

Because the organization is small, I interviewed the executive director and two board members. Walden University consulting capstone coordinator paired me with my client organization via email to make the initial introductions. I emailed the client organization's CEO to start communication and establish communication preferences and schedules. We used biweekly communication also by telephone as needed to answer questions for follow-up or reschedule Google meetings. The CEO introduced the other board members via emails, and we established a schedule that co-coincided with their monthly board of director meeting. I gathered the initial information via emails requesting corporate documents. The organization recently conducted a community survey asking pertinent questions of its members and submitted the survey results to me. I was allowed to review the questions and add a couple of my own before the executive director disseminated the questionnaire. The board members were responsible for creating and distributing the survey via emails to the members in the organization's database.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

In choosing a research method, the researcher can choose between (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, or (c) mixed methods (Williams, 2007). The Walden University Consulting Capstone requires qualitative research (Walden University, 2021a). Qualitative research methods are a holistic approach that allows the researcher a high-level detailed view of the actual experiences (Williams, 2007). The element of posing questions and the researcher's attempt to explain lends credence to inductive rather than deductive reasoning (Williams, 2007). The qualitative research method is the most appropriate for my case study, and this approach will allow me to effectively interview participants to explore the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2016). I was able to interpret data from the participants to contribute to the strategies the nonprofit leaders use to improve the quality of life for the urban community in downtown Baltimore.

Quantitative researchers seek to investigate the relationship between two variables and examine the relationship to find a solution by describing, explaining, and interpreting collected data (Bazen et al., 2021). The quantitative researcher focuses on testing hypotheses and theories and helps answer questions in a study using numerical data; thus, this method was inappropriate. The mixed method has attributes from which quantitative and qualitative data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Furthermore, this research can be complex to carry out and interpret and requires multiple resources (Williams, 2007). I did not collect, analyze, or interpret statistical data; therefore, the mixed methods design was inappropriate for my study.

Research Design

I conducted a single case study design for my study. A qualitative case study is a methodology that researchers use to help explore a phenomenon through various data sources, and it seeks to extract the context through different data sources (Rashid et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Qualitative research designs include ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, phenomenology, and case study (Yin, 2018). Each method has its characteristics specific to how to collect and analyze data. A single case study was appropriate to explore business leaders' strategies to improve the downtown communities' quality of life.

Research design and data collection are vital to a doctoral study, and researchers must understand the foundations to avoid pitfalls in their research (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019). Ethnography is a way of learning from people and the different aspects of their lives in specific groups and how they interact through various interviewing processes, observation, analyzing the information obtained, and presenting the findings (Weinstein & Ventures, 2000). I did not explore cultures or groups or how they interacted with each other, so an ethnographic design study would not be appropriate for this research. Grounded theory research concerns uncovering such things as social relationships and behaviors of groups (Alam, 2020). This study's results reflect the board members' experience in the client organization, not groups or cultures. Narrative designs are usually used in clinical trials to collect and analyze the accounting of people's experiences with clinical outcomes, coping, and quality of life (Bhalla et al., 2021). The narrative design did not align with this study's purpose because the past lives of the board members would not be related or used to implement strategies to improve the quality of life in the downtown communities. Phenomenology design researchers seek to understand the experiences and perspectives of those living through these experiences (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019). The phenomenological design was inappropriate because the personal feelings of the board members of the client organizations were not a factor in the strategies the business used to improve the quality of life in the downtown communities.

Walden University Consulting Capstone requires the student scholar to use a case study design (Walden University, 2021a). A case study design is used to gain concrete, in-depth knowledge about a specific world phenomenon, allowing for exploring key case characteristics and meanings (Zhou et al., 2019). Within a case study design, there are four options: holistic single case study, multiple case study, single case study, and embedded multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2018). A holistic single case study builds from implementing a unit design as a basis to assume a global implication. Holistic means that the researcher should consider the context and the relationship to the phenomenon that Yin (2018) believes inseparable (Yazan, 2015). Multiple case design implores using several closing-related single case studies to develop a more in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Zhuang, 2022). Multiple case study was not appropriate for this study, as I only explored a single case. When the case is split between multiple units of analysis, then it is embedded (Feitosa et al., 2020). The research question for this study addressed the strategies that nonprofit leaders used to improve the quality of life of the urban community in downtown Baltimore. The single case study design was appropriate for this study, as I collected data from one client organization and conducted data analysis to present the findings and offer recommendations.

Data saturation was achieved with the data of this study. Researchers can consider data saturation attained when the point of data collection is reached by not adding anything further to the databank (Alam, 2020; Fusch & Ness, 2019). According to Alam (2020), there are three stages, first, redundancy of the information; second, referring the respondents (already considered) without knowing their responses; and third, fewer outcomes in the coding or references (NVivo). The data collected in this study took place until I determined there was no new data related to the research question to be collected.

Population and Sampling

This study's population consisted of the executive director and two board members of the nonprofit community stakeholder organization. There were 11 board members, and I conducted semistructured interviews with two directors to obtain historical information and organizational processes. The eligibility criteria to participate in this study were (a) to be members of the board of directors with the client organization, (b) to be actively involved in the strategic planning of the organization, and (c) to have success implementing community activities. As a student scholar, I was chosen to participate in this capstone after a review of my academic profile and completing an interview with the capstone program director. The client organization was selected based on its nonprofit status and having established a real-world business problem that needs to be solved.

I used the purposeful sampling method to select the participants to answer the research question. Purposeful sampling is a technique frequently used to identify and select participants to ensure they meet the study's criteria (Doyle et al., 2020). Adequate sample size should be used to ensure that the research question can be answered (Doyle et al., 2020). According to Linyard (2021), it should be explained when a limited sample size is appropriate. The justification for the number of participants in this study is the result of the size of the organization. Data saturation was reached as interviewing the board members did not provide new information.

Ethical Research

Walden University students must complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) research requirement program and obtain a certificate of completion (ID: 11054130). The course ensures that students understand the requirements for ethical research, principles, risk, informed consent, and social and behavioral research. All students must pass with an 80% or better. Students must also attain IRB approval before research can be conducted as it confirms mutual understanding and scope of the student and reduces the potential harm to the human subjects and the university (approval: 03-23-22-1084950).

Client participants were not incentivized to become involved with Walden University's Consulting Capstone. However, solving the client's real-world problem benefits all parties involved as it helps to gain insight into the current literature. The university obtained a signed research agreement from the client organization before assigning them to a student scholar. Informed consent was obtained from all participants to ensure they understood the purpose of the study, the risks of participating in the study, weighing all the options of participation, and knowing the benefits. Participation in the study was voluntary, and no payment was exchanged for participation. Participants were informed they could withdraw anytime by notifying me of their desire. If any participant had been removed from the study, I would have destroyed all information from the interview process pertaining to the specific interview.

Researchers are responsible for protecting the confidentiality of the client organization and all participants involved (Pakis et al., 2022). The names, titles, and identifying information were kept obscured and concealed. I stored the files in an encrypted folder named "My client org," and the participants were labeled (board 1, board 2). Personal identifying numbers will be deleted and saved in a password-protected computer, file, or external hard drive. The data will be stored for 5 years after completion of the study in a secured location, which I have identified in my home office. Following this process will ensure that I am the only person with access to the data.

Data Collection Instruments

For qualitative research, several methods of collecting data can be used, including interviews, transcripts, or direct observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I gathered data through semistructured interviews via Zoom and Google Meet, historical corporate documents, and the organization's website. The researcher is the primary data collection instrument and should minimize bias and assumptions. Data collection took place with semistructured interviews, reviewing company documents, and obtaining public data from the company website.

The data collection process consisted of nine open-ended questions. The interview process used an interview protocol (see Appendix A). An interview protocol is used as a guide for the interviewer and sets the structure (Roberts, 2020). The interview process consisted of me asking questions, taking notes, and recording the responses. The participants were asked follow-up questions to gain insights into vague answers or clarify for further understanding. During the interview process, I listened and helped the interviewee feel relaxed so they felt comfortable and willing to share. Company documents helped to facilitate my analysis and triangulation of the information and historical data. The data collected should be validated through triangulation (Yin, 2018). Saunders et al. (2016) support using company documents to correlate information received from the participants' interviews. Furthermore, the organizational documents provided examples of historical strategies to implement the company's vision statement, which assisted with data saturation and triangulation. Triangulation of data collection enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collection process.

Member checking was used to confirm information previously received from the participants for credibility (Pathiranage et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2016). Researchers use member checking to validate the credibility of the results during the interview process (Fusch & Ness, 2019). Member checking involves the participants reviewing my summary of their responses and confirming that my transcription meets the intent of their responses. The participants were able to review a copy of the transcription for accuracy. All notes were copied into a shared Google Drive, allowing the participants to make corrections.

Data Collection Technique

Structured interviews are a type of interview in which the interview is structured, the questions are planned, and every participant gets the same questions. Semistructured interviews allow for a flexible structure for the interviewees to express themselves freely (Yin, 2018). The method by which the semistructured interviews were recorded is through Zoom. One of the limitations of my study was the location of the company; to circumvent the distance, Google Meet was the preferred method of communication and provided the ability to see visual feedback to questions (Pathiranage et al., 2020). The recording was then transcribed using a Microsoft add-in that eliminated errors from manual transcription or researcher bias.

I also collected data by reviewing the company documents that the executive director supplied. I received a copy of the company's strategic plan and SWOT analysis. I also reviewed information from the company website about the mission statement and corporate values statement. The documents gave me an insight into the company's original strategies for comparison on where they would like to go. These documents provided the historical makeup of the company. I conducted internet searches to gain access to publicly posted interviews with government officials and staffers from civil society organizations concerning the community's redevelopment and government census statistics. The census and redevelopment information provided statistics on the number of people moving in and out of the urban communities.

There are disadvantages to collecting data when conducting interviews. A disadvantage is that the interviewer may give an inkling of opinion or bias by how the question is read, leading to a high risk in data validity (Yin, 2018). Because of this, bias can be considered a disadvantage in qualitative research. The interviewers' characteristics can also influence the data collection process and the features of the respondents. According to Ahmad et al. (2021), both problems give the researcher potential disadvantages to be aware of in preparing for the interview process.

There are also advantages that researchers should be aware of when collecting data when conducting interviews in a study. One advantage of collecting data when interviewing is the observance of the facial expressions and gestures of the informant. The facility of such observation helps the interviewer to evaluate the meaning of the verbal responses given by the participant. Another advantage to interviewing can be the ability to observe the informant's reactions or to ask for more explanations, should the interviewer need them (Ahmad et al., 2021). As a researcher, I am aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of the interview process and followed the interview protocol established (Appendix A) in the data collection process.

Member checking was used to verify the data collected during the interview and interpretation process (Stanley, 2021). I utilized an interview protocol when I conducted the interviews, followed by the member checking for accuracy and feedback, thus validation. Using data triangulation, I compared interview responses with my review of company documents.

Data Organization Techniques

To organize my data, I purchased an online and desktop version of Endnote 20 to store articles, documents, and all resources in one place. The online capability allowed for retrieving articles while away from home. The Endnote Library makes filing, organizing, and note-taking seamless (Endnote, 2022). References can be sorted by keywords, authors, year, and title and are easily annotated (Endnote, 2022). All data will be stored according to the standards set by the IRB. All raw data/documents will be stored in a password-protected file on my computer for 5 years. I will keep the files in an encrypted folder named “My client org,” and the participants were labeled (board 1, board 2). The computer is also password protected. I also took notes in a personal journal during the interviews that were used as a reference to clarify a question for additional information. I typed my notes in a Word document in google notes and saved them in the client folder.

Data Analysis

A prerequisite for qualitative data interpretation is deep and insightful interactions with the data (Xu & Zammit, 2020). The researcher should surround themselves with the data and maintain constant contact, ensuring the analysis process is rigorous and productive (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Gaining helpful information in data analysis involves working with the data, processing, transforming, inspecting, and completing informed conclusions (Raskind et al., 2019). Rigor in qualitative analysis belongs to the process and its trustworthiness. Triangulation is viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity and boost reliability using multiple methods of information from different sources (Fusch & Ness, 2019). In this study, I used methodological triangulation, which involves multiple methods of data collection, including interviews, organizational data, and public records (see Fusch & Ness, 2019).

Moreover, I used the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework 2021-2022 to gather themes and arrange results to continue building on the conceptual framework. To gain insight into this case study, I utilized Yin's analysis technique of (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding (see Yin, 2018). I compiled the data through the interview process, review of company documents, review of the organizational website, and the Baldrige Framework. I disassembled the data, taking the data section by section to better understand the company's strengths and weaknesses. I reassembled the data using the Baldrige Framework scoring system. The Baldrige process scoring guidelines are based on strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to the criteria applying an evaluation process, based on responses from my client organization, and assessed a score from 0 to 100 in increments of 10. Then, I interpreted the results to ensure completeness and accuracy. The results from the scoring were used to prepare the recommendations and answer the research question.

The data analysis process reviewing began with the reviewing of the interviews and the transcriptions of the audio. After the transcription was cleaned up for accuracy, NVIVO was used to identify themes, common topics, and repeated patterns. Utilizing Yin's (2018) five-step process analysis, I then used a data analysis process to collect, disassemble, reassemble, interpret, and compile my results. I was able to identify themes used to explore business leaders' strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities by assembling all the data collected. Then, I disassembled the data into different categories, reassembled the data, and coded the data into specific themes. I analyzed the themes considering the conceptual framework. I used methodological triangulation to correlate the findings to the conceptual framework and presented how the strategies could help answer the research question.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Collecting data utilizing the organization's data and documents, interviews, and compiling the findings from this study. The data were collected via semistructured interviews with the organization's leaders, reviewing organizational records, and reviewing public data. Utilizing the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, data were collected for managerial, leadership, and operational procedures to gather data to address the organization's mission. Then, comparing the study's findings to the literature on community development and the strategies used to improve the quality of life in the downtown communities ensures reliability. I conducted member checking to ensure the accuracy and dependability of the data collected. Reliability concerns the faith one can have in the data obtained from using an instrument (Mohajan, 2020). Researchers use reliability to measure consistency, precision, repeatability, and trustworthiness in research (Mohajan, 2020). Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which the research procedures are documented, allowing someone to follow and critique the process. The interviews were recorded using Zoom or Google Meet. The interviews were transcribed, and the leaders were allowed to review the transcripts for accuracy. I saved the transcripts in a shared Google Drive, and the executive director could go in and update them.

Validity

Validity concerns what an instrument measures, the meaning, and the interpretation of the scale (Mohajan, 2020). Yin (2018) described that there are four elements to facilitate validity in a study, (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility is the confidence that can be placed in the study's findings. Credibility establishes whether the research findings present plausible information drawn from the participant's original data and is a correct interpretation (Yin, 2018). For validity, I obtained data from semistructured, Zoom and Google Meet interviews, organizational documents, reflective journaling, and member checking. Transferability is the degree to which the research results can be transferred to other contexts or settings (Yin, 2018). As I collect the data for the study to allow the external readers to interpret the findings and draw their conclusions. The study intended to explore the strategies business leaders use to improve the quality of life in the downtown communities in Baltimore, Maryland. The findings could potentially be helpful to other NGOs in a similar context. According to Hayashi et al. (2019), confirmability is the last criterion of trustworthiness that a researcher must establish. It concerns the confidence level that the research study findings are based on the participant's narratives and words rather than the potential researcher biases. Ensuring the confirmability of the study involves member checking, also known as participant validation, which is a technique for exploring the credibility of the results (White et al., 2021). Data is returned to the participant to check for accuracy and confirm the understanding that the information aligns with their life experiences (Stanley, 2021).

Member checking, reflective journaling, and methodological triangulation were used to ensure that the study was free of researcher bias.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I restated the purpose statement for the study and my role as the researcher. The targeted population consisted of three nonprofit organization leaders empowered to make organizational decisions to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. In Section 2 of this study, I explained the research methodology. For this single case study, I functioned as the data collector, gathered data through semistructured interviews, obtained organizational data, and described purposeful sampling. The sample size was sufficient to achieve data saturation to answer the research question. Member checking and triangulation were used to ensure the reliability and validity of the study.

In Section 3, I use the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program 2021-2022 to conduct a full assessment review of my client organization. My focus was on the organizational profile, strategy, customer relations, measures, workforce, leadership, knowledge management, operations, and results concentrating on the organization's strengths and weaknesses. I concluded with Section 3, summarizing findings, application for professional contributions for practical action, the implication for social change, recommendations for future research, and my reflections.

Section 3: Organizational Profile

AFB is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit community organization in the northeastern United States. AFB is an independent NGO alliance of parents, educators, and community activists devoted to supporting families. The intent of this qualitative single case study was to explore what strategies city business leaders use to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. After completing semistructured interviews with participants of this study, thematic findings were identified. Data analysis was performed of the themes identified (a) community involvement, (b) empowering families, (c) connecting communities, and (d) advocating.

In Section 3 of this study, I used the Baldridge Excellence Framework to analyze how leaders at AFB work to accomplish the organization's mission and vision. The organizational profile includes essential background information when applying the Baldridge Excellence Framework (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2023). The Baldridge Excellence Framework organizational criteria consist of seven categories focusing on the organization's mission, vision, and values (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Baldrige Organizational Profile

Note: From the National Institute of Standards and Technology. (2023, January 9). *Baldrige excellence framework (Business/Nonprofit)*

Key Factors Worksheet

Organizational Description

This qualitative single case study explored city business leaders' strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. AFB is a nonprofit community activist devoted to supporting families and building sustainable futures. AFB's mission is to help families lives and advocate for great schools, safe streets, and vibrant neighborhoods, all the factors that matter most when families decide where to live. Services are provided by connecting communities through events that help create an "urban village." Empowered families are given access to quality educational opportunities, cultural experiences, and excellent public resources. Core advocacy is achieved by connecting government officials, business leaders, and grassroots community representatives to issues that matter to parents and children. Workshops, events, activities, and quality family time are hosted to help establish lasting community relationships.

Organizational Environment

Product Offerings. AFB empowers families by providing access to quality educational opportunities and cultural experiences, advocating for public resources, and connecting with the community. AFB offers workshops and hosts events and seminars that connect families to help them make choices that support education goals, activities for quality family time, and lasting friendships. AFB provides advocacy for public resources, public transportation options, and community stakeholders to create safe, tight-knit neighborhoods. Membership is free for most to connect to resources and friends.

The funds raised through membership help to continue the programming and advocacy work. Membership levels and benefits, Believer-Free or Charm City Champion - $50, are paid annually. The believer-free membership type entitles members to a newsletter, event invitation, and an opportunity to add their voice to advocacy. Charm city champion membership entitles the members to fun and valuable swag, city museum entry discounts, science center discounts, national aquarium discounts, and discounts on café Gia (free pasta meals – children).

Mission, Vision, and Values. AFB's mission is to advance the well-being of children and families and provide accurate, reliable, and compelling data relating to the eight results areas. The organization's eight program results areas are Babies Born Healthy, Healthy Children and Children Enter School Ready to Learn, Children Successful in School, Children Completing School, Children Safe in Their Families and Communities, Stable and Economically Independent Families, and Communities That Support Family Life. To identify and promote policies and programs that improve the quality of life for the state's children and youth. The vision is to engage families and students so they can be effective advocates for themselves and their communities.

The focus is to help build stronger families because parents who are economically robust and connected to other parents are more likely to be involved in their children's learning. The organization's core competencies include providing counseling services to empower parents and students to become stronger and that through empowerment, they can be collaborators in the community's network. The counseling services cover resources for education, networking, community outreach, social bonding, and activities.

Workforce Profile. The workforce profile for AFB consists of an executive director (ED), an outreach liaison, an outreach contractor, two marketing consultants, and a 13-member board of directors. There are various volunteers in different neighborhood zones to organize school fairs, family field days, adopt family nights, and multiple events. The ED provides day-to-day oversight and is the only paid position. The ED is also responsible for all bookkeeping, scheduling of events, deliveries of supplies, and event oversight. The ED leads advocacy, recruits members activates volunteers, forms partnerships, builds awareness, and manages staff/board. AFB’s workplace profile is shown in Figure 2.

Advocacy is developed on the board level. The board advocates education issues and ensures every zone participates in a school fair and choice coaching sessions. The board advocates walkability and development, ensuring every zone participates in walk-to-school and bike-to-school days. Furthermore, the board advocates on matters of crime and police-community relations and provides every zone hosts a police-community forum. The Outreach team and marketing consultants are all contractors to fill in for strategic objectives and action plans. The outreach liaison organizes 90% of all the meetups and moms’ nights out. Contractors were used for marketing and social media, graphic design, accounting, taxes, and researching/evaluating.

Figure 2

AFB Workplace Profile

Assets. AFB's assets include a shared desk office, a warehouse, and iPad. AFB is currently working on trademarking its intellectual property. AFB has a satellite office that members can walk into but is not staffed. Visits are made by appointment only.

Regulatory Requirements. AFB is a nonprofit organization regulated as a 501 (c)(3) organization. Nonprofits are formed and operated under the laws of the individual state in which the corporation was created. Each state has a nonprofit statute allowing for developing organizations designed to carry out charitable goals not associated with profit-making. AFB was listed on their state's site as active and in good standing. Nonprofit organizations are often required to register to participate in fundraising activities with the state in which they solicit. The AFB registration number was verified. Nonprofits must file Form 990 annually (Faulk et al., 2021), and failing to comply with IRS rules regarding tax filing can result in the loss of nonprofit status. AFB must ensure that all employees are first aid certified and have sexual abuse and customer service training. Environmental training is needed for events.

Organizational Relationships

Organizational Structure. AFB is a nonprofit organization providing community development and advocacy services in the northeastern region of the United States. The organizational structure consists of the executive director, who is responsible for the daily operations, forms partnerships, build awareness, manages staff/board, leads advocacy, recruits members, and activates volunteers.

The board of directors governs AFB. AFB accepts ongoing applications for members to the board from community members representing diverse people, neighborhoods, and professions. Anyone that is committed to the success of the city and the family is eligible. The requirements are submitting a 200-word statement on “how you can contribute to the organization's mission” and another letter about your 5-to-10-year vision of defining and achieving success for city families.

Customers and Stakeholders. AFB is an alliance built on the membership of families committed to city living. The key market segment for AFB is the local community it serves and the primary stakeholders (see Table 1). Other community stakeholders include city public schools, the curriculum project, PTO organizations, small businesses, and board of directors’ members.

Table 1

Key Customers and Stakeholders Requirements

Key customers and stakeholders	Key requirements	Alignment
Community members	Families committed to city living.	AFB staff provide services and programming to ensure that the members have the resources that they need to become empowered
Small businesses	Work with the organization to provide resources and supplies	AFB maintains relationships with community leaders to ensure continued opportunities to align supplies and donations for students and resources for families
Local institutions	Work with organizations to provide volunteers for adopt-a-family and back-to-school drives.	AFB maintains relationships with community leaders to ensure continued opportunities to align supplies and donations for students and resources for families.
Board members	Accountable for adherence to governance and compliance, advocacy of issues on this level with education, infrastructure, and public safety.	Directors evaluate and monitor and support the values and mission of the organization. Advocate on educational issues, issues of walkability and development, and issues of crime and police-community relations.

Suppliers and Partners. The AFB leaders work closely with local community party partners to build mutually beneficial relationships. Some of the community partners include local ice cream parlors, coffee shops, photographers, delis beverage companies, print shops, bookstores, bars and grills, and local markets. AFB leverages the resources to engage young professional families, helping them to find fulfillment. Encouraging parent education, special programs, neighborhood networking, adult meeting spaces, and more. AFB promotes many community events throughout the year that support resources, simplify information, research money-saving incentives, and highlight the vibrant culture of city living.

The leaders of AFB use various tools to bring services to the community and showcase them to the members: social media, e-newsletters, workshops, sponsored events, and educational activities. Ongoing communication is posted online in the events section of the company website and is updated and dated regularly for easy access.

Organizational Situation

This qualitative single case study explored business leaders' strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. The following section addresses the competitive advantage of the assigned client and investigates the environment and the potential improvements to remain relevant. AFB leaders need to understand the advantages and disadvantages of the competitive environment and the opportunities to increase the organization's success.

Competitive Environment

Competitive Position and Changes. Other organizations offer similar services and programs within the community, but none do everything that AFB does. So, there is not any direct competition. Grant funds and financial support to match organizational needs are limited. The number also limits events to prevent competition for marketing to $250 per event. More financial support from the government, corporate, private, and individuals is essential to improving performance and will constantly evolve. The critical short-term action plan is to become a city-wide initiative.

As families move and grow in the community, opportunities exist to expand to create programming that meets the community's needs. Collaborating with community stakeholders allows for resource advantages that can be incorporated. The leaders of AFB hope to provide family meetups in key neighborhoods to help maintain and improve the living experience in the city for residential families.

Comparative Data. AFB is unique in all the areas they touch in the community; no direct data resource can compare them to another organization. They use the data from the census reports to compare city data for statistical data. The only negative with the census report is the frequency with which the information is conveyed: every 10 years. Moreover, the data is only as accurate as the information from the USPS mail. If the mail has been tampered with or not forwarded, then not all information will be recorded.

Strategic Context

To understand the strategic context of an organization is to consider its strategic advantages and challenges. AFB's advantage is its ability to choose its educational path and educational and fun family resources in the city. The strategic challenge is for AFB to continue establishing public school/parent roundtables, partner with school systems, and train school leaders on parent and child needs. The organization continues hosting fairs connecting parents to schools to various programs.

Performance Improvement System

AFB's approach to process improvement is by surveying the membership. The leaders and the community members to identify what changes would need to improve the living conditions for them to stay. The survey responses helped to offer feedback on what services the members liked and wanted to see more. Furthermore, the survey identified the resources families needed for their children and schools to make it a safe learning environment. The information will prove invaluable to AFB to help leaders understand ways to improve services and the experiences their clients enjoy from the organization.

Leadership Triad: Leadership, Strategy, and Customers

Leadership

Leadership is the accomplishment of an organization's goals utilizing human assets and direction. One can be successful if one can collaborate well to a particular end through various circumstances (Yuliastuti & Tandio, 2020). Adedokun and Kayode (2019) noted that recent initiatives revealed that the participation of community members in development activities is influenced by the leadership style exhibited by community leaders. The NGO works with community leaders to ensure the programming meets the community's needs.

Senior Leadership

AFB has a board of directors and an executive director that serve in leadership roles. The executive director and the board of directors collaborate to manage the organization's day-to-day operations. The organizational director partners with the community partners and fosters relationships through outreach and joint ventures. The ED partners with volunteers and local businesses to facilitate activities to engage the community.

Vision and Values. The executive director sets out to deploy organizational vision and values in every event in their programming. The ED ensures that the organization's online website and pages reflect its mission and identify its values. The mission statement continues to be re-evaluated to reflect its values and vision. The NGO is a small growing organization and will continue to change and improve as it evolves, and so will the vision.

Promoting Legal and Ethical Behavior. The ED and the board of directors have an ethical responsibility to report as an NGO donor reporting to government agencies and to make information available to the public. The information available to the public includes 990 tax returns yearly and financial statements. In addition, all employees and volunteers must adhere to a code of conduct and are given a non-disclosure agreement not to release and share any company information.

Communication. The executive director communicates with the board members regularly, primarily by email. The ED and board members communicate mostly by phone with the workforce. The board members meet weekly by Zoom to discuss events/activities and planning. Should community members need a callback or has a complaint, return phone calls are limited to specific board members.

Developing Mission and Values. The organization's senior leaders continue to evaluate their mission statement to ensure that their mission to retain local community members and retention solutions may be developed. As the organization has grown, the mission statement has evolved, but the senior leadership always aligns the mission and values with the organization's mission. The programs and activities also project the mission; examples of the organization's core values are personified. However, the leadership knows that the mission has to be developed and adapted constantly, and they grow as an organization.

The Focus Toward Action. AFB's focus on action comes from the feedback from the membership questionnaires that provide unmeasurable guidance on concerns and comments. All Board members provide feedback by reviewing the meeting comments, and an action plan is implemented to address them. Programs, activities, and solutions resources are voted in based on the feedback from the responses. The questionnaires are critical to decision-making and how resources are deployed within the organization.

Governance and Societal Responsibilities

Governance System and Performance Evaluation. AFB is a small organization. Currently, there is no formal governing structure in place. The working structure is casual. Performance is evaluated by attendance at meetings and events. The leadership as it stands is there is a president, vice president, board members, and the ED.

Board members are encouraged to attend meetings and participate equally in decision-making.

Law and Regulation. AFB complies with all state laws and government compliance as a 501(c)3. The board members are tasked with reviewing legal issues like trademarks and copyright. The board members also review all contracts, prepare policies and procedures and develop operational procedures.

Ethics and Society. AFB's goal is to help make the city a better place to live and is family focused. AFB desires to use businesses to cater to the city families to help increase the operating of the town budget. The critical focus is supporting and strengthening the communities by hosting family and fun-centered activities in their neighborhoods. AFB leaders aim to ensure that all programming is ethical and promotes professional behavior.

Strategy

Strategy Development

Strategic Planning. The ED is a relatively new ED to the organization, so the strategic plan currently in place was one that they inherited. The strategy for them at the current moment is to follow through on the plans currently in place to grow the organization. A strategic planning meeting is planned every 3 years for AFB leaders. It was not always aligned with core member needs because of minimal involvement from the membership base. It is based on what the board members have experienced on feedback from the membership base or participation in the organization's activities. The process usually is initiated by a board member, and then a document is created with input from all members. The board members strategically developed the type of programs they believe will draw members, the partnership they plan to develop in the community, activities and resources, grants, and donor relationships. AFB has had a SWOT analysis performed to assist what areas they wanted to develop as an organization. That analysis helped them develop many of their programming and focus areas for membership.

Innovation. The strategy process for incorporating innovation at AFB includes the openness to try new and different engaging community activities. For example, AFB hosted a dinner for the 'Mom's night out' and a 'Beer and Ballet' session at a brewery. The leaders believe that not being afraid of new ideas stimulates innovation. AFB leaders also survey events so members can give suggestions for other community activities they would like to see.

Strategy Considerations. AFB's strategic advantage is its positive community position and its partnerships with community stakeholders. A current challenge for the organization is constantly accessing the community to meet the members' needs. Collecting data from the different events via surveys and feedback from the members that live in the community is important. Maintaining a database of who receives mail and lives in the surrounding areas helps to build programs that attract potential members.

Work Systems and Core Competencies. The partnerships that AFB has built and relied on vary across all business arenas. AFB can rely on marketing personnel for promoting events and social media. AFB can rely on contractors' partnerships to process legal and accounting requirements for the organization. Strategically partnering with these alliances supports the organization's core competencies and mission.

Strategic Objectives and Considerations. For the ED, the key strategic objective is to increase the number of members of families and maintain the number of families living in the city by offering them the benefit of programming focused on their family needs and membership growth. Another strategic objective is to increase its funding support and marketing efforts so that potential donors will help support the programs consistently. The ED for AFB establishes the short- and long-term goals and how best to pursue them. The board of directors considers the needs of all key stakeholders and comes together to discuss the objectives and plan. The Board then seeks the best strategic avenues to reach those goals.

Strategy Implementation

Action Plans Development and Deployment. Action plans provide a checklist to help achieve goals that have been set. It is an essential part of the strategic planning process and helps improve teamwork planning. Action plans, whether that includes holding an event, or canceling an event, how are going to attain more funds for an event, are developed at board meetings, through communications and emails, as needed. The long-term marketing plan is to highlight the gems of the city and the attractions that will draw the families. Also, the action plans include meeting parents in the community and at their schools to engage new potential family members. AFB has performance projections they would like to attain in the future short-term and long-term goals (see Table 2) below.

Action Plan Implementation and Resource Allocation. AFB facilitates all events and resources for members. Information is organized and explained to volunteers, staff, and contractors. The events and resource sharing are initiated. After each event, everything is reviewed for the process of improvement. Because the budget is small, the appeal is sent to community stakeholders for grants or sponsorships. AFB acknowledges a need for a membership specialist to focus on membership acquisition.

Workforce Plans and Performance Measures. AFB has expanded its workforce from 1 to 1.5 staff members with additional support for events to engage members. There are thirteen board members. Currently, board members and contractors fill the need for strategic objectives and action plans. Contractors include two marketing personnel, one outreach, one graphic designer, one black family marketing, one accounting, and one volunteer researcher. As noted before, there is a need for a membership specialist to focus on membership acquisition. Performance is measured by participation in activities and board meeting attendance. Building family bonds with each other as much as they work around the community and families that live around them. The NPO leaders have embraced bringing their families to work as a team.

Action Plan Modification. AFB recognizes that when there is not a large turnout at an event, there is no alignment with the community's needs. Then, AFB does not duplicate the event, and resources are allocated elsewhere. Other feedback on the event comes from the emails sent from the attendees, in which recommendations can be made to improve the event.

Customers

Customer Expectations

Customer Listening. AFB listens to its customers and determines products and services based on historical relevance and what members request. AFB performs an annual survey where customers can give feedback on their experience with the organization so that the input is constant and relevant to guide the program's direction. AFB also observes customer interaction at the events and reads the email newsletter to see what members click on and their reactions. AFB also asks for feedback at the event to see how the families are enjoying the event. A volunteer will speak to each person one on one to solicit feedback.

AFB members must live in the city and have children. The segment fits into the organization's mission to engage families to empower them to live in the city. Product offerings or program offerings are based on funding through partnerships from grants, government funding, and small business partnerships. Through collaboration efforts, the ED and the board of directors determine the budget and can choose the programs that will be put together to meet the community's needs. If private corporations offer additional resources, programs are expanded based on that funding.

Customer Segmentation and Product Offerings. AFB defines its key customers in its mission and company description. Their customers are any family living in the urban city of Baltimore with children. AFB offers many local resources that are not age-specific, cultural-specific, or defined to educational backgrounds. The mission is marketed to all families and children.

The customer segmentation and product offerings work seamlessly together. AFB continues to find activities that engage families and encourage children to become involved. AFB offers resources to families for school-related programs and community involvement activities that are safe and expand relationships. AFB's goals are for families to build bonds and network with other families and local stakeholders.

Customer Engagement

Relationship Management, Access, and Support. Building customer satisfaction and engagement is essential to maintaining relationships with customers. AFB continues to build relationships with members when they connect at community events and hosting events for the families. AFB engages members in person, online, and through the newsletter. AFB encourages members to seek information and support. Emails are sent twice a month to encourage members to ask for the programming they want. AFB continually instills in members the formation of the membership and client organization relationship.

AFB competes with other regional NGOs for information for families with little children. However, AFB is local, and there is no other direct distribution of information in the local market. If AFB does not send out the newsletter regularly, members will not have the opportunity to trust the information they receive because it will not be timely or relevant.

Complaint Management and Fair Treatment. AFB is a small organization, so negative feedback is taken seriously and addressed with the board. A board member will contact the members and speak to them to try and address the issue. In this negative context, the board will take the necessary steps to turn the member's confidence in the organization around and ensure future satisfaction in other events.

Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, and Engagement. Customer satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and engagement with AFB programs are determined by what members take the time to complain about or discuss. The participation numbers or turnout of members at the events and the amount of interest for closeout events generate information for AFB. The event size varies from small events of 7-10 people to significant events of 200+ people. The board members monitor and discuss each function's successes.

Voice of the Customer. AFB uses and interprets the U.S. Census data on the population and demographics in the area. Unfortunately, that information from the Census is only available every 10 years and may not be accurate year-over-year after it is taken. The organization also utilizes data from the U.S. postal service on the returned mail to advise them on residents moving from the area. AFB does pay attention to the moving habits of families in the cities. That demographic information provides important city makeup of the residents in the area when planning activities.

The customer’s voice is significant, so outreach to the members for ideas on what programming interests them and their families is highly desired. AFB does surveys at the end of events to attain member feedback. The feedback guides the organization on whether an activity is well received, whether to repeat an event, and how to improve the event. The returning smiles of the neighbors and membership signups gauge customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the lack of event attendance. Through social media and email, AFB solicits ideas and feedback.

Results Triad: Workforce, Operations, and Results

The results subsection used the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework to analyze business leaders' strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. The method that was used to evaluate the business leaders are the (a) approach, (b) deployment, (c) learning, and (d) integration (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2023). The strategies are evaluated using the four factors in the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework. The information from the framework results and the feedback were provided to the leaders identifying the SWOT analysis. I will provide data in the following sections to assess the AFB organization's leadership, strategy, customers, measurement, workforce, operations, and knowledge management.

Workforce

Workforce Environment

Capability and Capacity Needs. The ED believes that AFB is at its activity capacity based on funding. The ED considers that fundraising, operations, finance, programming, and events could be more productive if there were more workforce assistance. Still, understanding the limitations go hand in hand with the funding. The entire body is focused on doing more with less and training the team not to take on more than they are financially capable of to support and increase creativity. All board members must embrace the mission and vision of the AFB and work towards upholding it.

Workforce Climate. The workforce climate at AFB is positive. All board members are volunteers and are engaged in the organization's mission. There are no benefits or payments in exchange for services. All board members create performance measures and improvement goals as a team. All members are encouraged to promote the organization’s mission and values actively.

Workforce Engagement

Assessment of Workforce Engagement. The leaders of AFB are driven to work fulfilling the organization’s mission of improving the quality of lives of the members of the communities it serves. The leaders focus on working and meeting the needs of the family bonds with each other as a work unit first. The organization represents that the community starts from within and into the community. There is no assessment administered to the workforce of AFB. The ED communicates weekly via email with the board to see what is working and get suggestions for activities. Open communication allows any concerns to be aired and voiced, and feedback is readily given. Through this consistent and weekly communication, the ED can learn about any indicators of engagement and satisfaction in the work environment.

Organizational Culture. AFB's organizational culture includes open communication, weekly board meetings, creative community activities, and ideas. The ED incorporates as much as possible in the organizational culture to extract peer support. The organization overall is a place that exemplifies family bonding, compassion, bonding, and partnership. To offer quality services to the community, the workforce must exhibit high levels of engagement, commitment, and performance. Board members are empowered to offer feedback, creative support and suggestions, funding avenues, and partnership opportunities.

Performance Management and Development. AFB is a small nonprofit organization with limited funding and resources. The workforce is a volunteer force with only contract positions. The only position paid is that of the ED, so there are no resources for rewards or incentives. The ED does offer end-of-the-year certificate awards in appreciation at the annual GALA to board members. There are no formal leadership development processes and no succession plan for leadership. Most board members have achieved personal and professional development levels, so they give back to the community by volunteering their time. The organization is small and was started fifteen years ago by the previous ED. The ED's vision is that AFB will have established enough goodwill in the community that the organization will continue to flourish and build on its mission in the community.

Operations

Work Processes

Product and Process Design. AFB's current work process is to follow the prior administration's programming, learn from each event's successes, and build on them. They are using each family's responses and attendance records to set standards. AFB does recognize that not having processes in place does open the door to innovation and improved work processes that will ultimately increase performance and core competencies.

Process Management and Improvement. AFB's most important process is securing permanent donors and establishing long-term stakeholder relationships. Without those permanent revenue streams, AFB remains unstable to rely heavily on individual giving and unsteady membership dues. Stable support is necessary for programming, and stability is key to increasing activity that aligns with the organization's mission. The daily operating process is shifted to ensure that funding goals are met and the goals are established.

Operational Effectiveness. A community assessment is planned to determine the community's immediate needs; a formal community assessment survey has never been performed. AFB chooses the community's needs and sets the expectations for meeting those needs. The primary requirement is connectedness—bond building and connecting people with people so they stay in the city and Baltimore. AFB can identify the needs of specific programming and services through community interaction with community stakeholders, partnerships, engagement, and referrals. One example is the annual carnival Stoop Soiree gala and auction to connect communities and empower families across Baltimore. The annual fundraising event has been reimagined to increase resources and drive programming. AFB was awarded a grant to support the GALA by a local hospital that will help implement the programming and success of the event to increase fundraising.

Security and Safety Preparedness. Currently, the NPO does not have a way to process registrations and follow up with families effectively. They are trying to build a way to collect and analyze data to compile audience analytics for historical feedback. The leaders believe that this historical data will provide information that will be valuable to learn from other families. The company is looking into creating a safety committee to ensure emergency preparedness. During COVID, many events were held online, so safety has not been an issue. However, now that things are returning to normal, AFB wants to create an emergency preparedness plan for the in-person events. AFB wants to address the lack of volunteers to manage open exits and unattended children. The NPO sees this area as an opportunity for growth.

Supply-Network Management. AFB does not partner with outside organizations to meet organizational needs. The supply network partnership needed would only be for financial and nonprofit legal assistance. By partnering with these organizations, AFB would ensure that everything they do is done according to government regulations and filing requirements. The ED communicates what is needed to the suppliers and the performance in compliance with the board's needs.

Innovation Management. The strategic process for the organization's leaders for incorporating innovation at AFB includes the openness to try new and different community activities. All leaders determine new ideas and opportunities and are open to suggestions that yield positive performance objectives. AFB leaders can also cancel programs that are not performing well or are counterproductive to the organization's mission.

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Measurement, Analysis, and Improvement of Organizational Performance

Performance Measurement, Analysis, Review and Improvement. The critical component of this NPO is membership—the ability to track the membership count and how they and the membership perform over time. The NPO did not track this information consistently in the past but requests registrations by the families it serves. They also track how many families make the most phone calls for services and send emails. The NPO utilizes Mailchimp, NEON, and Google spreadsheets/forms to view attendance and responses. Investing in a database that can store this information can be the first step to keeping this information in a reliable lookup portal. The organization's performance is based on the performance of fundraising and attendance. The workflow is divided among board members to ensure that it is fair and that no one is overburdened and tired. An organizational chart is outlined with duties and responsibilities. The target demographics of the community direct the organization's strategic plan and are projected 5 years out. The company does not have performance reviews in place currently.

Information and Knowledge Management

The ED verifies everything that comes in before it is published on social media (i.e., Mailchimp, website, analytics). The website is a resource service guide, so the information must be current and relevant. The organizational data are also available to the public. Board members also have access to the information. Building organizational knowledge is not a challenge, but constantly sharing it or finding ways to incorporate it is the challenge. The focus for the organization is how much it can empower the members and less on the organization. AFB has started producing webinars and videos on YouTube that offer a glimpse of the life of the city of Baltimore. AFB hopes to build a resource library to direct families to quick resources.

Collection, Analysis, and Preparation of Results

This qualitative single case study aimed to explore business leaders' strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. Data collection took place with semistructured interviews, reviewing company documents, and obtaining public data from the company website. I interviewed the executive director and two board members of my NPO in Baltimore, Maryland. The following themes emerged: (a) building partnerships with community stakeholders and donors, (b) implementing strategies for more funding, and (c) increasing community activities based on increased available funds. The three themes that emerged represented the strategies the three NPO leaders used to improve the quality of life in the downtown communities.

Thematic Findings

The research question guided the study: What strategies do business leaders use to improve the quality of life in downtown communities? The documents and the participant's responses to the questions answered the research question. I used methodological triangulation, which included semistructured interviews and document analyses with data collection, which resulted in three themes. The three themes provided information on the themes used by the leaders to develop strategies to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. The strategies were (a) building stronger partner relationships, (b) implementing strategies to increase access to more funds to sustain more activities, and (c) increasing programmatic activities to increase member engagement. The identified strategies can benefit the NPO leaders, increasing sustainability and social responsibility for the client organization.

Theme 1: Building Stronger Partner Relationships

By networking with other stakeholders in the community, the NPO will build mutually beneficial relationships that will ensure the success of their programs and develop better resources for their constituents. In agreement with Bhattacharyya (1995) and Ackoff (1999), Hajjar et al. (2020) contend that when community partners collaborate from the formation with a shared purpose, there is a higher level of productivity and increased community outcomes. The strategy is that member retention in the community enriches them and the other stakeholders by ensuring buying power in the neighborhoods, walkability, and visibility of the businesses. It will provide networking and word-of-mouth communication. Furthermore, an NPO relationship with stakeholders will allow the NPO to know their stakeholders, develop resources more accurately as they develop those built relationships and understanding, and use that to develop internal processes and better successful strategies over time. Figure 3 below shows the different partnership levels the organization has developed, with some of the benefits each level allows.

Figure 3

Building Stronger Partner Relationships

Corporate Sponsor Levels & Benefits

Charles Street Donation: $15,000	Inner Harbor Donation: $10,000	Pimlico Donation: $5,000
• Prominent logo listing on Corporate Sponsor web page • Logo & link featured on all website pages • New sponsor announcement in next weekly email • Logo & link included in quarterly newsletter • Included in our annual report	• Logo listing under Charles Street sponsors on Corporate Sponsor web page • Company name featured on all website pages. • New sponsor announcement in next weekly email • Included in our annual report	• Logo listing under Inner Harbor sponsors on Corporate Sponsor web page • New sponsor announcement in next weekly email • Included in our annual report

Business Membership Levels & Benefits

Fort McHenry
Donation: $1,000

- Website listing
- New member announcement in next weekly email
- Logo & link included in all weekly emails and quarterly newsletter.
- 1 social media posting per year (approximately 6,000 followers and growing)
- Included in our annual report

B&O Railroad
Donation: $500

- Website listing
- New member announcement in next weekly email
- Logo & link included in quarterly newsletter
- Included in our annual report

Patterson Park
Donation: $250

- Website listing
- New member announcement in next weekly email
- Business name listed in quarterly newsletter
- Included in our annual report

Event Sponsorship Levels & Benefits

Limited to 1 sponsor at this level per event

- Company name listed as Presenting Sponsor.
- Prominent/featured logo at top of event graphic and any event signage
- Vendor spot to promote your business
- Logo and link an any event email invitations
- Tagged on Facebook event and/or included in a a

Limited to 4 sponsors at this level per event

- Logo featured under Baltimore Sponsor on event graphic and any event signage and emails
- Company listed as Supporting Sponsor
- Vendor spot to promote your business
- Thank you in weekly e-mail blast following event including name and logo

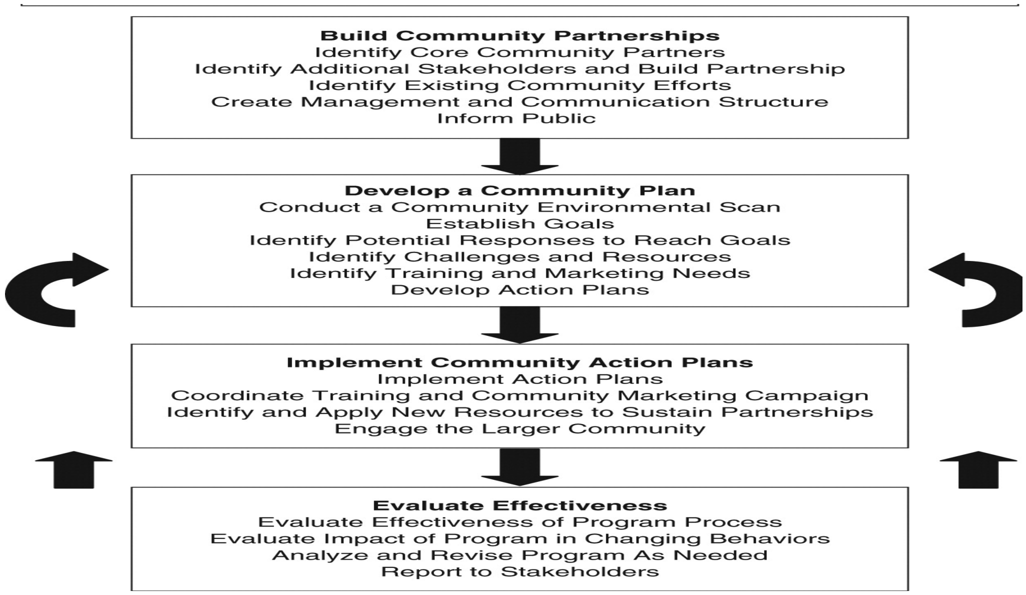
Limited to 10 sponsors at this level per event

- Business Name under Family Sponsor on event graphic and any event signage and emails
- Vendor spot to promote your business
- Thank you in weekly e-mail following event including name listing
- Included in annual report

Building strong community partnerships starts with success in collective action. Comments from Participate B attribute success to school partnerships for PTO and businesses for sponsorships. Participant A expressed that the partnerships with local school systems were essential to providing resources to families engaging new members. To ensure inclusive partnerships, building a plan, developing a plan, implementing a plan, and evaluating effectiveness allow the organization to connect with leaders at partner organizations to promote engagement. Hence, having a defined community agreement and understanding underlines core partnership rules (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Building Community Capacity to Address Critical Issues



Note: Cited from: Fruhauf, C. A., Bundy-Fazioli, K., & Miller, J. L. (2012). Larimer county alliance for grandfamilies: A collaborative approach to meeting a community need. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, *31*(2), 193-214. https://doi.org/10.1177/0733464810385094

Theme 2: Implementing Strategies to Increase Access to Funds to Sustain More Activities

The success of the NPO is the increase in membership and activities, which will only be achieved with increased funding. The NPO can demonstrate improvements in programming if it can improve fundraising and sponsorship in its actions—the dedication of board resources to solicit funds for its programmatic thrust. Berenguer and Shen (2020) still document NPOs' struggle with access to government funding and the competition to secure access to funding. Furthermore, even though the NGO is a perceived arm of the government (Dunning, 2022), having more options in which the government can spread those funds is a challenge for the NGOs. In community development, competition is typical in relief efforts. Donors are willing to donate to organizations they see performing social responsibility and providing tangible help in the community. AFB leverages its community involvement. See examples of their community action strategy in action in Figure 5. Although the organization has secured funding from partner donors successfully in the past, more can be done to increase the amount if the organization can utilize better tracking of success matrixes. Participant A expressed that the organization did not want to spend the time planning events to ask for donations simultaneously and considered it relatively insensitive in garnering participation. The participant did acknowledge that it was a challenge to find that balance. All participants agree on the importance of donor giving and leveraging partnerships.

Figure 5

AFB Strategies to Increase Funds

Theme 3: Increasing Programmatic Activities to Increase Member Engagement

The next theme that emerged was the need to increase programmatic activities to increase member engagement. Brown and Baker (2019) theorized that the more community engagement embodied would invoke more community capacity. Leidig and Oakes's (2021) model for project-based community engagement provided a systematic view of how an organization can receive positive features and deliverables with intentional consideration when engagement is facilitated. AFB BOD members have discussed the possibilities of growing activities and the size of the events to allow more people to attend functions. Many options are hampered by the funding that sets the tone for each function. Table 2 reflects the current and long-term desired member engagement for the organization.

Table 2

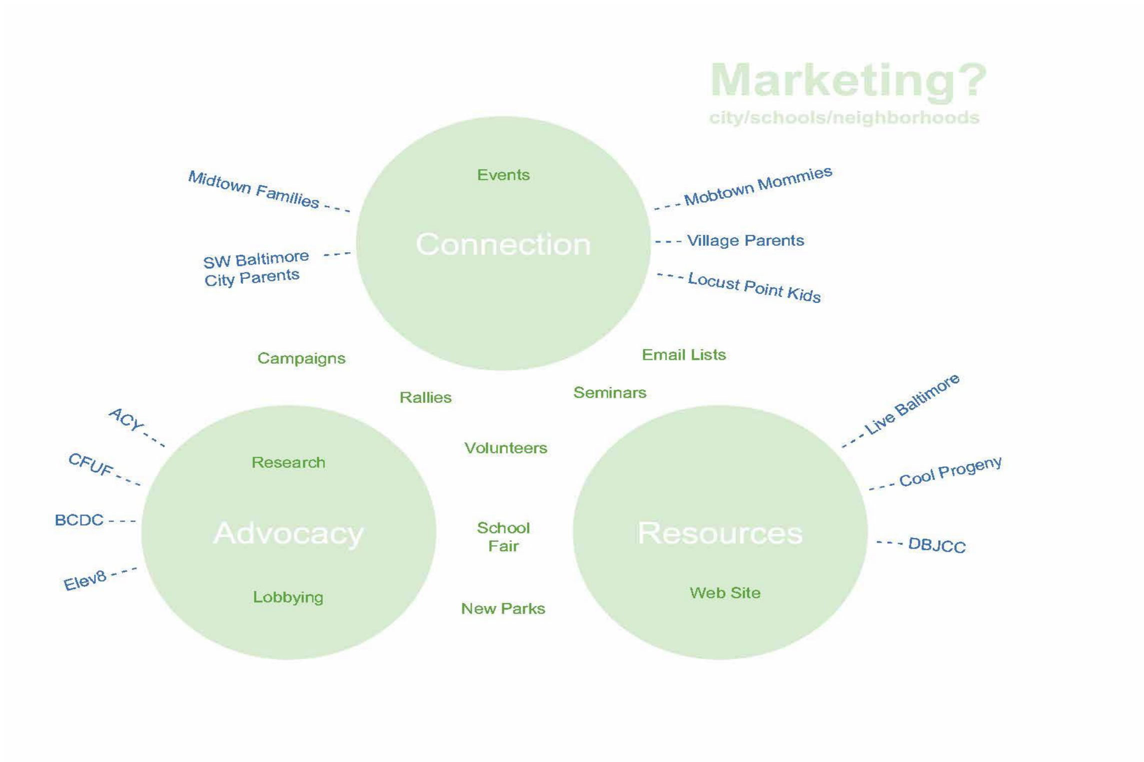
Performance Projections

Short-term performance projections:
Membership numbers: 5,000 memberships
Number of e-newsletter readers: 3,000 readers
Number of Social media followers: 5,000
Number of participants at Meetups and programs: average 20 for nights out and 150 for family meetups
Long-term performance projections:
Census Numbers in key neighborhoods
Membership numbers: 7,000 memberships
Number of e-newsletter readers: 5,000
Number of Social media followers: 7,000
Number of participants at Meetups and programs: average 25-40 nights out, 150-200 family meetups

Moreover, the leaders believe ending this challenge would significantly improve the process. Having the resources to implement more activities and pay for support staff may aid in offerings the NPO hopes to achieve in the long-term strategies. The member history shows that members increase for the NGO as revenue increases. Free memberships also went down, and AFB will spend more time determining why that aspect of services would decline. Participant C expressed that workers and volunteers try to organize information after an event. They come together, compare notes, and see how to improve the process. The goal is to increase member participation and have more events. The breakdown of AFB activities is depicted in Figure 6, shared by the board.

Figure 6

AFB Field Activities



The challenge to increase member engagement and activities is partly due to revenue. The more donor and grant contributions the NGO receives are attributed to the increased activities and programming offered. AFB's level of activities depends on the funding levels and the availability of funds. Organizational stability, from steady and consistent dues to funding, has not yet been established.

Product and Product Results

The NPO leaders continuously seek various activities (see Table 3) and ways for the community to connect. The goal is to increase the community's bonds so the community neighbors can build together. The result will be that Baltimore's urban population will increase. Local community stakeholder partnerships will flourish. The residents will stay and live harmoniously; thus, the businesses will flourish and grow through increased membership.

Table 3

Current Event Offerings

Adopt- A-family	PTO roundtable	Walk to school day
Back to school supply drive	School and programming fair	
Neighborhood meet up	Stoop Soiree	
Dad's night out	Stories to your stoop	
Family science night	Teacher thank you!	
Fizz pop boom science show	Toddler dance party	
KN95 masks & test kits distribution	(Virtual) New babies on the block	

Customer Results

The NPO leaders use customer satisfaction as a guide to gauge customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is also determined by the customer smiles, returning neighbors, and membership signup—the lack of event attendance evidence dissatisfaction. Table 4 reflects the activity of the member history over the past three years results for paid and free memberships. Also, the members' annual survey (see Table

5) is taken for feedback on event activities and to give the organization direction for future activities. The annual survey is critical to the board as it leads the strategic direction for activities.

Table 4

Member History

	2021	2022	2023
Paid	17	21	44
Free	7596	4989	5558

Table 5

Results of Survey - Programs Desired

Casual	13
Kid-friendly	24
Workshops/social	2
Seminars/political	1
Playdates	1
Date night/adults	1
Other	2
Advocacy	2
Park dates	2

Workforce Results

The NPO leaders continue to build on improving community engagement by offering resources through activities. The NPO leaders have embraced programs but also the funding sources to support its mission. The assets have grown over the years but have not been consistent. AFB has partnered with local educational programs and held community fairs, fundraisers, workshops, and contests. The organization is establishing steady partnerships with local community stakeholders to maintain the funding. The funding results are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

AFB Revenue Streams by Year

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Foundation	44,000.00	35,000.00	15,000.00	68,000.00	95,000.00
Government				17,500.00	26,013.00
Individual contributions	29,587.00	3,183.00	2625.87	5,483.63	732.12
Membership dues	662.00	20,968.00	474.18	2,109.58	2,242.65
Fundraising			-		29,117.00
Corporate	120,753.00	76,740.00	37,540.00	9,275.00	14,086.06
Totals	195,002.00	135,891.00	55,640.05	102,368.21	167,190.83

Leadership and Governance Results

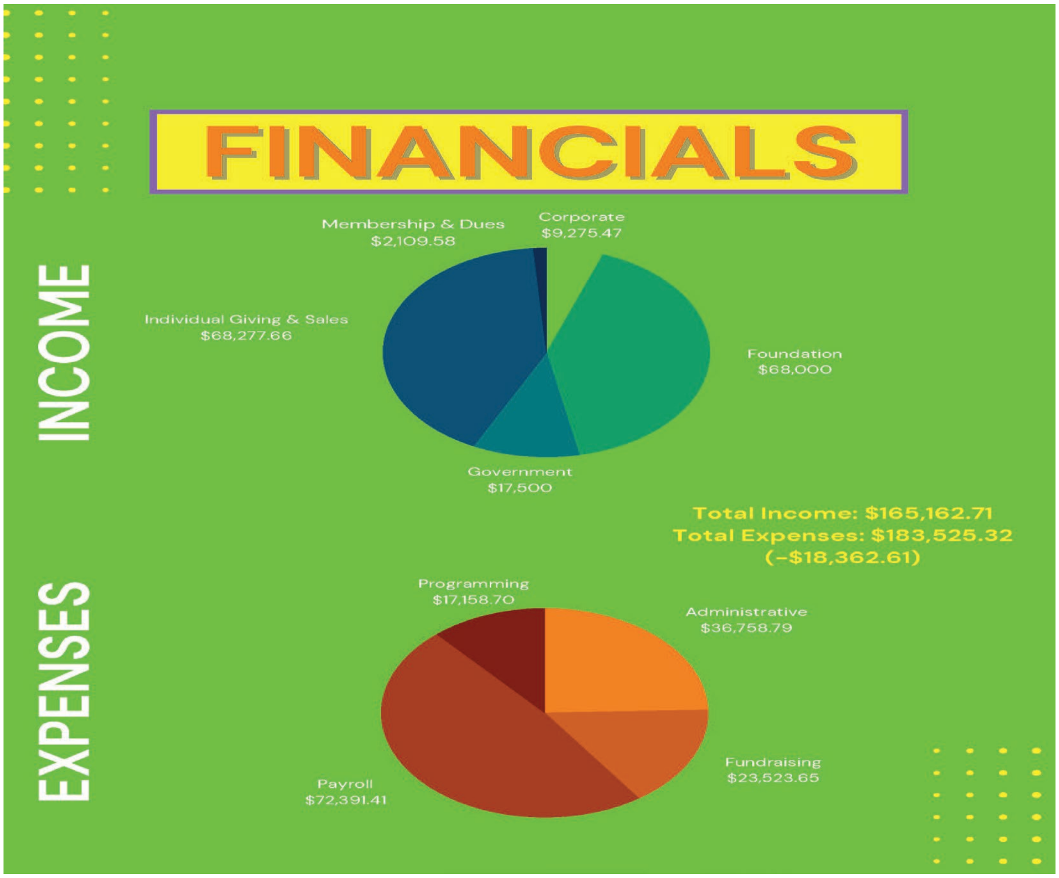
All board members are leaders, and there are not necessarily senior leaders. Everyone is engaged in partnership development within the community and neighborhoods. Open relationships are encouraged to establish more robust governance and accountability. The administration is small but divided amongst the various urban communities to get feedback to facilitate activities. The ED ensures that everything is in governmental compliance with rules and regulations and confirms legal, ethical, and societal compliances. All board members are encouraged to make ethical decisions to support all community programming. 501c regulations require that certain obligations be adhered to and complied with. Because of the organization's size, there is no gauge of the effectiveness of the senior leadership.

Financial and Market Results

The NPO is a small nonprofit that sustains its programming on the gifts of donors and government funding. The leaders seek to increase budgeted events from $250 per event to a higher number. They have remained relevant to a very conservative budget that does not cover medical insurance for its single staff. The NPO currently has 5000 unpaid members, so developing a plan to have members contribute $100 each would make a substantial difference and is of utmost importance. Figure 7 reflects the organization's financial position showing income versus expenses. The financials show that the NPO income levels do not cover the expenses it reflects and that increased giving are in dire need. The current year's loss is 18% short in earnings and can only be covered by increased membership dues, fundraising, or stakeholder partnerships.

Figure 7

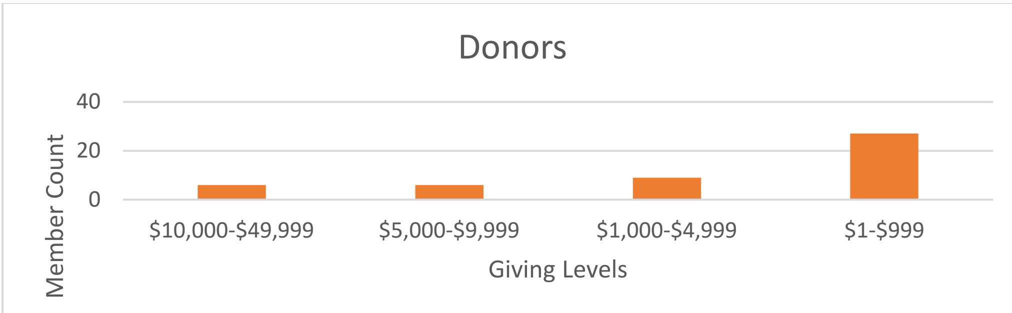
AFB Current Financial Position



The areas of improvement and growth are directed toward donors, grants, fundraising, and establishing consistent partnerships with community stakeholders. As shown in Figure 8 below, the current donor levels show the largest area of giving is in the single-giving donors or individuals. Although the organization has declined in its inability to conduct in-person activity due to COVID, AFB predicts that the trajectory will change now that restrictions have been lifted.

Figure 8

AFB Current Donor Levels



Key Themes

Process Strengths

Process analysis identifies opportunities and improves operations (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2022). Upon using process analysis, the organization can evaluate the business and pinpoint what is and does not work within the operation. AFB's community engagement practices worked well and drew plenty of participation. The organization utilizes social media and word of mouth to attract constituents; events are always at total capacity. Although the desire is to have more funding to offer more, the organization does a great job with activities for the budget.

Another strength of the organization is the workforce, in which they communicate well. AFB's communication process was identified as repeatable and corroborated through emails and weekly meetings. Having a collaborative board is a great asset to any organization.

Process Opportunities

AFB’s organizations have some transactions that appear to be weaknesses, including fundraising capabilities, membership retention and dues collections, and inability to track activity trends. The NPO has no formal performance improvement system nor a formal assessment of its performance improvements. The organization would like to develop a strategy to evaluate audience analytics. Creating a standard way to track trends will allow the leaders to determine the success of the activities and their impact on the community. There is an opportunity to develop formal organizational data and a customer survey collection system. With a formal system, AFB will better understand its customers and offer feedback to its potential partners.

The increase in donations is the biggest challenge for the NPO leaders, so sustaining growth in that area is vital. Developing and maintaining a strategic plan from multiple sources is the primary goal of the organization's objective. Encouraging the members to find value in paying annual membership dues versus free membership would help lessen the burden of raising funds.

Another opportunity for the NPO to understand activity trends is the implementation of customer satisfaction surveys, but to input them in a database system so that the information can be sorted and analyzed. The data can be used to quantify members’ satisfaction and offer the leaders valuable information and critical measurement indicators.

Results Strengths

The NPO strength outcomes are based on (a) performance and performance results, (b) customer results, (c) workforce results, and (d) leadership and governance results, (e) financial, market, and strategy results (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2022). AFB was able to provide result strengths in two of these categories. The organization has grown in building positive bonds in community engagement from successful partnership grants, general fundraising, and program activities. In addition, continuous workforce communication yields positive membership satisfaction. AFB has worked hard to keep its engagement high with limited resources and has seen significant results and strengths with increased funding.

Results Opportunities

AFB has several opportunities as a small organization***;*** as it grows**,** opportunities will emerge. There is an opportunity for corporate partnerships, governmental and local partnerships, as well as public support when the community becomes familiar with who the organization is. Another opportunity is the growth in membership base with the increase in potential revenue streams and increased activities marketing directed toward increasing membership. With increased funding, AFB can hire additional full-time support to assist the ED and pull some of the marketing and media in-house and some of the activities to set up the activities from the volunteers.

Project Summary

The ability of nonprofits to raise funds is essential to any organization, whether large or small. Fundraising is integral to any business model, spearheads the organization’s mission and funds activities, and sustains the organization's future. There are several advantages to developing a fundraising plan so that the organization does not have to rely on the donation of the members so heavily. Failure to achieve the necessary contributions from corporate donors has periodically placed the NPO in precarious situations. The intent of this qualitative single case study was to explore business leaders' strategies to improve the downtown community's quality of life. As a scholar consultant, I was assigned to AFB by Walden University’s administration. I gathered and reviewed the organization’s internal and external controls as a consultant. The population of this single case study consisted of three board members, which included the executive director and two other board members located in Baltimore, Maryland. The participants were involved in the organization's strategic direction and day-to-day activities, with a strong background in nonprofit management. They facilitated donation grant writing which helped the organization remain solvent.

In this study, I used the community development theory and the whole systems approach, incorporating the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program as the performance framework to understand the AFB organization in-depth. To get data, I gathered information via semistructured interviews with the executive director and the two board members and reviewed organizational data. I also obtained data from the organization's website. After analyzing the data collected and reviewing the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, three themes emerged related to AFB’s process strengths, process opportunities, results strengths, and results opportunities. The key themes were (a) building partnerships with community stakeholders and donors, (b) implementing strategies for more funding, and (c) increasing community activities based on increased available funds. Strategic recommendations that could help AFB's leaders include (1) using the positive building bonds of community engagement, (2) increased fundraising and marketing, and (3) continued workforce communication. The findings and recommendations of this study may help NPO leaders improve their overall funding and sustain their organization's financial stability.

Contributions and Recommendations

AFB requires the support of community stakeholders and members to support their mission. By working as a student researcher and utilizing the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, I have identified successful strategies and recommendations to assist AFB in achieving its goals. The themes of this study can help organization small nonprofits increase their funding, develop more robust marketing and donor strategies, and encourage donor giving. Moreover, the findings in this study show the connection between stakeholder engagement and nonprofits. Rendon et al. (2021) showed a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources with community stakeholders in the context of partnerships. Throughout the analysis, the connection between partnerships and nonprofits was evident. The need for sponsorship development is evident. Nonprofits can utilize this study to contribute to strategies to support an emphasis on donor development and a focus on growth partnerships in their mission statement.

Application to Professional Practice

NPO leaders find fundraising essential to nonprofit work and raising awareness about their mission to attract supporters. Without a clear strategy, stability in the organization will be in jeopardy. By applying the findings in this study, NPO leaders can address challenges to address fundraising, membership contribution, and overall sustainability. Collaboration between the NPO and the community stakeholders is the strategy for this study. Establishing the relationships between the external stakeholders will solidify the successful implementation of sufficient ties needed to remain relevant.

The NPO could glean valuable information if they could track the data from their various activities. Effective feedback from the members could communicate to potential stakeholders the benefits of donating to AFB. The board members could adopt a survey feedback method to determine customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction through (a) maintaining a member attendance record in a reliable database system, (b) disseminating a survey, (c) tracking member requests for activities, and (d) gathering formal and informal volunteer feedback. The information can be compiled and compared as an aggregate and used to compare AFB to competitors, according to the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (2022).

The results of this study may add to the existing knowledge of innovative strategies to improve fundraising for nonprofits. The findings may also help fill gaps for NPO leaders in fundraising strategies. The NPO leaders seek to strengthen their formal fundraising efforts. My recommendations are as follows: (a) compound the social media platform that they are currently using, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, and add donation links advertising that is currently being utilized that shows value to the stakeholders, (b) Once data software is identified collect the data and formalize it to support that claims that the programming is successful, (c) create new unique, innovative ideas, (d) ask for member giving during favorable times of the year, i.e., Christmas, tax season, (e) identify the types of stakeholders that are giving to the organization and partner with that type of organization.

NPO leaders may find it beneficial to explore community development and whole systems approach to improve business practices. Other theories considered for this study can also be reviewed for a deeper understanding. The Baldrige Performance Excellence Program was used as a guide for studying the organization's leadership profile, performance, strategy, customers, operations, workforce, measurements, analysis, and results. The NPO leaders can also use the Baldrige framework to assess the organization for improving the overall mission of the organization.

Implications for Social Change

The social change implications revolve around job stability, creation, and community economic enhancement. The Walden University degree programs ensure that students' education impacts social change in their field (Walden University, 2023). All students' doctoral studies must include the impact of social change within the community. Nonprofits are vital to social change and the community, so the implications will not go unnoticed. The more funding and increased donations that AFB can generate will increase its ability to increase its social change efforts. By increasing funding, you increase advocacy awareness and resources to the community. The increased contributions will expand the social change programming that will benefit community outreach and enrich the lives of those in the community. The findings of this single case study may result in a positive social change by providing the NPO leaders with strategies to increase their process with increased donations.

Recommendations for Action

This section will include recommendations for the NPO leaders to use for immediate action and explain the importance of the study. The interpretation of the study is gathered from the data collected and knowledge of the subject matter. The research study revealed that improving or increasing the donations covers many steps, including (a) compounding the social media platform that they are currently using, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn and adding donation links advertising that is currently being utilized that shows value to the stakeholders, (b) once the software is identified collect the data and formalize it to support that claims that the programming is successful, (c) create new unique, innovative ideas, (d) ask for member giving during favorable times of the year, i.e., Christmas, tax season, (e) identify the types of stakeholders that are giving to the organization and partner with that type of organization. Although AFB has successfully utilized social media to impact activities and promote events, they have not taken advantage of soliciting donations. The lack of staffing and social media assistance is an area that the board can tap into. The executive director should speak honestly and openly and ask for help from the board or outside volunteers. The objective is practical and doable, and if instilled, the organization should see a viable difference. The results of this study can assist NPO leaders in developing strategies to improve and sustain operations. The results of this study may be disseminated via literature searches, social media platforms, conferences, and word of mouth with leaders of other nonprofits.

Recommendations for Further Research

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the strategies business leaders use to improve the quality of life in the downtown community. In conducting my research, I explored a small NPO in Baltimore, Maryland. Making references to one location in the Northeast United States can be transferable. Still, no area is the same, and each state is tinted by different races and cultures, communities, sizes, and even stakeholders. Because of this limitation, I recommend expanding this study to identify other cities and neighborhoods. I would also use other conceptual frameworks to identify strategies to improve fundraising revenues. Using another conceptual framework may present a different view for NPO leaders. The study's limitation is the organization's size, and future researchers could expand to a larger organization with a larger sample size to reflect a broader view.

Reflections

Walden University Consulting Capstone Program allowed me to participate as a student scholar and conduct a qualitative single case study. I was allowed to partner with an NPO in Baltimore, Maryland. The consulting capstone program was spiritual, challenging, and rigorous. I joined a study group called 'Dr. of Determination' early on in my studies. We met weekly and discussed tips to help us progress through this program at Walden. If it was not for my study group and an accountability partner, I am unsure how I would have made it through the program. A doctoral program is not for the weak. I learned a lot about myself. I admit that writing is not my most substantial area, but I am a strategic thinker with a lot to offer as an individual. I do see how much I have grown in this process. I am not great, but I am better than I was. I learned that even through this learning process, I can teach someone something I have learned and make the process easier. I believe that going through this process with my client, we both learned how to break down the different components of the organization to see the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities.

If I could have changed anything, I would have liked to have the University explain the Baldrige system better. It was unclear, and I wish there had been a better approach to making it more straightforward. If the system is unclear to the student scholar, it is tough to understand what you should be doing with your client organization. I spent extra time researching online information on Baldrige and buying books to understand; it could have been better spent. I do not regret the research. I understand Baldrige more and learned about the different components and the Communities of Excellence. The hardest part of this journey was sacrificing the time with family and friends and giving up functions and events to study while taking classroom studies with deadlines and journal reading requirements. I am thankful for the lifelong friends that I have made along the way. I was unsure how to make friends on a virtual platform, but I did. I have evolved as a student scholar at Walden University, and my chairs will forever be a big part of that.

Conclusion

This qualitative single case study aimed to explore what strategies city business leaders use to improve the quality of life in downtown communities. To assist NPO leaders with additional information, identify successful strategies to improve the organization's sustainable processes, and increase donations. The Baldrige Performance Excellence Program allowed me to work as a consultant with my client organization to conduct a SWOT analysis to identify improvement opportunities. Learning the skills necessary to understand the Baldrige system allows me to cross industries effectively.

During the research process, I have identified one key component essential to the client organization that will improve its fundraising efforts. The most critical component was for the NGO to gather the membership activity and event attendance activity data to send to the stakeholders. Gathering that data to reflect the success of activities would provide evidence and facilitate more donations.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Exploring What Strategies Business Leaders Use to Improve the Quality of Life in Downtown Communities.

1. At the start of the interview process, I introduced myself and my background.
2. The participant organization was allowed to read the Informed Consent agreement and provide their consent via email, agreeing to participate in the research.
3. I thanked the lead representative for allowing me the opportunity to work with them to resolve their business problem.
4. I asked if the digital meetings via Zoom or Google Meet were acceptable, knowing that everything was recorded so that we could collect the necessary data for the project.
5. We agreed on a schedule with the date and time, and I agreed to send the questions from the Baldrige Framework ahead of schedule so they can be prepared to answer them.
6. When all questions in the weekly meetings were answered in the timeframe allotted, I saved the responses in a shared folder so that the respondent could review them at her leisure should she change her mind later about a response. My questions are marked in Black. Her responses are in Red.
7. We agreed that may be more questions to follow as I compile the information from the responses.

The interview protocol ends.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies to improve the quality of life in the community have you successfully implemented in the past?
2. What other partnerships and collaborations have you utilized to improve the quality of life in urban communities?
3. How do investments in infrastructure and social amenities improve the quality of life in urban communities?
4. How do you assess whether the strategies tried have been successful?
5. What are your benchmarks?
6. What key changes would you like to see in the community that you feel would make a key difference to residents?
7. What role do you play in the success of your organization's key strategies?
8. What key barriers has your organization had to encounter to improve the quality of life in downtown communities, internal or external?
9. What additional information would you like to add about your organization's strategies to improve the quality of life in the downtown communities?