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Social Connectedness and Financial Independence Strategies Supporting Nonprofit Sustainability

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2020

Abstract

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Sustainability

by

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MBA, Capella University, 2017

MBA, University of Phoenix, 2007

BS, University of Phoenix, 2004

Consulting Capstone Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

Leaders of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) often lack strategies to ensure the sustainability of their organizations beyond initial funding, resulting in significant risk to program continuity. Grounded in social entrepreneurship theory, the purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies used by 3 leaders of a small NPO in the southwest region of the United States. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and a review of organizational documents. Through thematic analysis, 6 social themes emerged: optimization of business strategies, income and donor growth, program cost management, funding diversification, program licensing, and public awareness of NPO programs. The contributions to positive social change include the potential for educators, stakeholders, and other nonprofit leaders who wish to create or expand community programs and increase the effectiveness and reach of their organizations' plans.

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Dedication

To my genuinely amazing and incredibly supportive wife, Mary, thank you for supporting me during this doctoral journey! I realize we met during our undergrad programs, got married four days after my first MBA, and you persevered through a second MBA and a doctoral program. Also, the snacks were amazing and (likely) necessary. Thank you with all my love!

To my (departed) grandmother Joyce Neville, PhD, I want to thank you for being such an excellent teacher and an influence on my family and me. You were also the first family member to have a doctoral degree! While you were not able to enjoy this event in person, I know you are here in spirit. I will endeavor to spend the next 20 plus years in “grade one” helping others toward their academic goals.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank several faculty and mentors for their support and tolerance of my journey toward this doctoral degree. Dr. Rocky has been tireless and even now continues to push me to do better, inspiring me to “kick it up a notch.” I rise to the occasion each time. My wife, Mary, supported me even when I did not see a path forward. Thank you so much for being there and making me present! Dr. Jen, thank you so much for all the support and friendship. Kudos to Dr. Janice Garfield, who has been my second committee member and remained extremely diligent and involved in my doctoral study. I appreciate every question you asked, particularly those for which I had no immediate answer and had to find one. Dr. Peter Anthony, thank you for being my URR and ensuring that I remained on track and aligned with the spirit and the detail of the doctoral study program. Dr. Susan Davis, thank you for being my program director. Thank you to Dr. Hockin who is no longer with us. Still, I would like to recognize his legacy, specifically for interviewing me and taking a chance to recommend me to the consulting capstone program. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Jim Savard, who “accosted” me in the hotel lobby after residency in Denver, determined to find out what I intended to do once I had completed my doctoral study in the capstone program. My response was, and still is, to pay it forward and become involved in teaching others at the graduate level. Finally, I would like to extend a special thank you to my NPO LT, the vital partners in this doctoral research. We will continue to interact despite the completion of this study. You, along with the Walden faculty and family, have blessed me with your support.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are often created to provide solutions for social problems in a community, serving a clearly defined group of recipients (X. Chen, Chen, & Guo, 2019). These social-centric activities include work done for the communities, programs benefitting specific community segments, a mission defined by the NPO leaders, and improvements to the social status of the program beneficiaries (Shaw & Carter, 2007).

Some NPO leaders struggle to build enough funding to allow their organizations to achieve financial sustainability beyond initial funding or grants (Han & McKelvey, 2016). In addition to ensuring adequate funding for the NPO's programs, many NPO leaders encounter competition for the same participants and funding sources from other organizations with similar objectives (Woronkowicz & Nicholson, 2017). This competition for participants and funding may motivate NPO leaders to differentiate their organization from other NPOs with similar programs. Additionally, NPO leaders may choose to drive their NPO success through in-depth engagements in their communities and offer programs more valuable than those their competitors offer the same potential participants.

Through initial research about NPOs, social connectedness, sustainability, and social change appear to be commonly researched individually, but not frequently as a group. The value of research into social connectedness, sustainability, and social change seem tightly connected. NPO programs should connect with the needs of the community and have value for the community, and the NPO itself must remain sustainable for the leaders to continue delivering their programs.

Problem Statement

Success in social connectedness and financial independence are necessary for NPO leaders to ensure long-term organizational sustainability (Moldavanova & Goerdel, 2018). Ceptureanu, Ceptureanu, Luchian, and Luchian (2018) found that approximately 40% of new NPOs' community-based programs (CBPs) survive only through initial program funding. The general business problem is that NPO leaders who are unable to continue delivering their CBPs may consequently terminate their charitable activities. The specific business problem is that some NPO leaders lack strategies to create social connectedness and financial independence to support sustainability for longer than 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies NPO leaders use to create social connectedness and financial independence to support organization sustainability for longer than 5 years. The targeted population for this study was the leadership team (LT), comprised of three executives and board members, of a NPO located in the southwestern U.S., who have previous experience in developing successful NPO sustainability strategies. The implications for positive social change are that the findings of this study may help NPO leaders and their executive teams acquire new knowledge and implement a social connectedness and financial independence framework that supports the sustainability of the organizations and their programs. Also, the results of this study have the potential to create and drive advocacy to extend an organization's reach through new and expanded CBPs, benefiting the citizens of a community.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative single-case design for developing a deep understanding of the strategies used by NPO leaders to further their social connectedness and financial independence. I structured this research study to explore and analyze strategies that NPO leaders have created and applied to the operations of their organization. This analysis required rich data and identification of themes to determine whether the results from the leaders' strategies increased the sustainability of the NPO. A quantitative research method was not appropriate for this research because participants of quantitative data collection techniques would have had to choose from a small set of answers provided by the researcher for each of the interview questions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015). Additionally, the quantitative research method does not include any procedures to capture data to describe the opinion and attitude of each participant (Saunders et al., 2015). The mixed-method was inappropriate for this research because this research is a qualitative single-case design and contains no quantitative research elements.

I considered three qualitative research designs: (a) action research, (b) case study, and (c) phenomenological designs. Action research is a systematic investigation by educators to collect and study data that can help develop practices (Mohajan, 2018). I eliminated action research because it has little support from noneducators. I also rejected using the grounded theory design because it would require the collection of data to create a theory that is itself grounded in the data (Mohajan, 2018). I considered a phenomenological research design because of the focus on a wide range of vibrant and open-ended observations originating from the participants' experiences (Ridder, 2017; Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). Nonetheless, a phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because I wanted to explore solutions that could improve NPOs' sustainability, rather than focus on leaders' experiences. I chose a revelatory case study design for this research after eliminating the other considered research designs. Yin (2018) published a description of the revelatory case that appears appropriate for this research. I had access to a NPO's detailed strategies, plans, and employees not generally available to researchers. Access to the NPO's full policies, programs, and employees allowed me to study the organization and research strategies that support the NPO's social connectedness and financial independence.

Research Question

What social connectedness and financial independence strategies do NPO leaders use to support sustainability for longer than 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to increase your organization's social connectedness and financial independence?
2. What methods did you find worked well to increase your organization's social connectedness and financial independence?
3. How do you determine the effectiveness of the strategies you use in delivering the desired outcomes?

4. What were the key barriers to implementing your organization's strategies for social connectedness and financial independence?
5. How did your organization address the key barriers to implementing its strategies for social connectedness and financial independence?
6. What else can you share with me about your organization's strategies for social connectedness and financial independence?

Conceptual Framework

I used Schumpeter's social entrepreneurship theory (SET) as the framework for this research. Schumpeter (1934, 1942) created and expanded his definition of SET through his concept of strategic entrepreneurship. Schumpeter used SET to describe how organizations make decisions to develop and sustain a competitive advantage. In his research, Schumpeter argued that entrepreneurs are the primary creators of economic growth. Stevenson and Jarillo (2007), Dees (2007), and Jones and Donmoyer (2015) expanded on Schumpeter's original work that explained social entrepreneurs drive social change in the NPO sector through crucial variables: (a) adopting a mission to create social value; (b) pursuing new opportunities to serve the defined purpose; (c) innovating, adapting, and learning; and (d) demonstrating accountability to the beneficiaries of the NPO. Jones and Donmoyer (2015) also pointed out that social entrepreneurship continues to attract additional advocates explicitly interested in increasing social change. Yusuf and Sloan (2015) applied Schumpeter's concept of SET to NPO decision-making, noting the creation of a NPO is often the result of a desire by the founders to accomplish something. Tan and Yoo (2015) observed that NPOs are increasingly competing with the for-profit sector for funding and must develop new strategies to ensure sustainability and financial independence. Shaw and Carter (2007) noted that social entrepreneurs are adept at leveraging existing resources that include people, buildings, and equipment to create solutions that satisfy unmet social needs.

The research from Shaw and Carter (2007), Jones and Donmoyer (2015), Tan and Yoo (2015), and Yusuf and Sloan (2015) expands Schumpeter's (1934) SET and provides a functional definition of social entrepreneurism. Based on existing literature, social entrepreneurism was an appropriate choice to explore strategies that create social value, new opportunities, and the engagement in continuous innovation and adaptation necessary to create social connectedness and financial independence to support sustainability for longer than 5 years.

Operational Definitions

Business excellence model: A framework that is applied in an organization to help focus actions and thoughts in a more structured and systemic manner, facilitating increased performance (Gomez, Martinez, & Lorente, 2017).

Sustainable organization: An organization with leadership capable of delivering social value through social programs, adapting to stakeholder needs, and making improvements to organizational strategies to ensure organizational survival (Moldavanova & Goerdel, 2018).

Social capital: A measurement of involvement between an organization and external people, groups, and communities (Engbers, Thompson, & Slaper, 2017).

Social entrepreneurship theory (SET): Entrepreneurial activity with an embedded social purpose (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006).

NPO sustainability: The ability of an NPO to sustain itself over an extended period, preserving its ability to ensure continued operations (Jensen, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Because a researcher defines the research, collection, and analysis of the data before documenting the findings of the study, a researcher should provide the underlying assumptions and limitations that support the analytical rigor and applicability of the research (Höijer, 2008).

Assumptions are beliefs or conclusions about an idea or theory before having enough knowledge about the idea or theory (Hart, 2018). Four key assumptions are relevant to this research study. First is the assumption that clarity and accuracy of the interviews and data collected through discourse with the leaders of the NPO will be accurate and complete. Second, analysis of the data will not be limited to the interviews themselves but will follow the structure of the Baldrige Excellence Framework, which provides a systems approach for examination and identification of improvement. Third, there was an assumption of trustworthiness in the research findings. Fourth, my perspective did not assume a neutral position and remained focused on the business problem.

Limitations refer to potential weaknesses of a study. A researcher attempts to retain objectivity by eliminating personal attachment and avoiding potential problems created by methodological weaknesses (Diesing, 2017). There are four limitations in this study. The first limitation was my limited expertise in qualitative case study research. The second limitation was that data collected are from a single organization, from a sample limited to three leaders within the partner organization. Third, the findings of this research may not apply to other NPO. Fourth, it was necessary to establish trust with the leaders within the NPO to collect the confidential information required for the research study (Levitt et al., 2017).

Delimitations are an essential consideration to scope and aspects of research (Hasanzadeh, Broberg, & Kytta, 2017). Delimitations define borders or scope of research to provide additional clarity. The delimitations of this research include that the population for this single-case study consisted of leaders in a single NPO located in the southwestern U.S. and that only strategies aligned with the social connectedness and financial independence supporting the NPO's sustainability were within the scope of this research.

Significance of the Study

The research findings may provide value to other NPO leaders through the discovery of new or additional strategies to build long-term social connectedness and financial independence in the future. For example, Han and McKelvey (2016) argued that while social entrepreneurs have specific goals they wish to achieve, their organizations are generally underdiversified and unable to plan a path through the chaos generated by the need to make money and do social good concurrently.

Contribution to Business Practice

The inputs to practice are diversification strategies that enable social connectedness and financial independence, often called The NPO leaders have engaged with schools to provide social programs social capital wealth. that involve the schools, parents, and community. The success of the NPO programs within schools builds social capital (Ferrara, 2015) and increased financial support through successful programs. Having programs available for more families increases awareness and social connectedness for the NPO. Because most leaders of small NPOs are unsuccessful at making enough money to keep their organizations prosperous (Han & McKelvey, 2016), NPO leaders may achieve financial viability for longer than 5 years through the review, implementation, or adaptation of case study's results.

Implications for Social Change

The effects of positive social change from this study may include new and improved NPO practices. Using these practices may enhance social connectedness, allow NPO to continue their support of the community, and generate additional sources of funding needed to ensure financial stability to support citizens and communities. Specifically, the findings of this study may allow NPO leaders to resolve their sustainability challenges beyond the 5-year window of concern to achieve their missions.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore the strategies NPO leaders use to support sustainability for longer than 5 years. Organizational sustainability is a significant challenge for NPOs, as is social connectedness (Moldavanova & Goerdel, 2018). NPO leaders should prioritize social connectedness and sustainability as they plan the continuity and success of their organization and its programs. Leaders of successful NPOs define and deliver effective management practices, financial strategies, and social connectedness with the communities served by the organization's programs (Moldavanova & Goerdel, 2018).

Social connectedness is an essential consideration for NPO leaders. Published research includes feedback that adolescents lack knowledge of themselves and struggle to establish or form a sense of identity, and they may feel lost as a result (Ja & Jose, 2017). While beyond the direct focus of this research, there is support in the literature for relationships between resources available and locational affluence (Dias, Geard, Campbell, Warr, & McVernon, 2017). I did not find much literature focused on social connectedness in the context of NPOs, but considerable research has focused on the programs delivered at reduced or no charge in communities where affluence is also an issue. Current literature about social connectedness is lacking, despite multiple literature references that proposed social connectedness may contribute to the reduction of lostness and community belonging over time (Dias et al., 2017; Ja & Jose, 2017).

In this qualitative single-case research study, I used the Walden University Library, Google Scholar, GuideStar, and Crossref as primary search resources. Secondary search resources provided varying results. However, the Science Direct website was a useful resource for details about several social theories, including *social capital, social innovation, social entrepreneurship*. I used citation-chaining where research articles included references aligned with a specific area of literature in this research. I logged search phrases, the number of items found for each search, saved the location of related articles downloaded, and thoughtful comments on each search phrase and its efficacy. Examples of search categories included *NPO performance, social innovation, the theory* *of creative destruction, Schumpeter, social capital and wealth, social entrepreneurship, alignment in research, literature review methodology, literature review importance, qualitative rigor, Baldrige excellence framework, quality management, sustainability, financial sustainability, social sustainability,* and *positive social change.*

Search results were primarily peer-reviewed journal articles. I attempted to limit references to peer-reviewed sources only and tried to filter search results to identify research published in 2016 or later. For each report from a periodical, I validated the peer-reviewed status by checking Ulrich's Global Serials Directory for the peer-reviewed indicator. Additionally, I used Ulrich's link and the name of the journal to confirm the peer-review status, article's inclusion in the journal, and to validate the correct volume and issue number for APA alignment.

Table 1

Literature Review Source Content

Literature review content	Total #	# 2015–2019	% 2015–2019	% Peer-reviewed
Books (seminal works)	2	0	0	0
Books (nonseminal)	8	4	50	0
Peer-reviewed articles	129	113	87	100
Nonpeer-reviewed articles	10	8	80	0
Website articles	4	3	75	0
Encyclopedia articles	1	1	100	0
Dictionary references	3	3	100	0
Blog posts	1	1	100	0
Reports (government)	1	0	0	100
Walden reference articles	1	1	100	0
Total	160	134	84	71

Application to the Applied Business Problem

I used both the purpose statement and research question to help define the focus and scope of this literature review. The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies NPO leaders use to create social connectedness and financial independence to support sustainability for longer than 5 years.

NPO Organization Overview

The global number of NPOs has increased at an unprecedented rate, as has the scope and importance of what these NPOs do (Mirabella, Hvenmark, & Larsson, 2015). The U.S. government has acknowledged the importance of NPOs, and the Office of Social Innovation is in the official list of White House websites (Perry, 2009).

Research related to NPOs began in the 1970s and has increased since scholarly associations and graduate programs with degreed faculty (Bushouse, 2017) have focused on NPOs to broaden the base of NPO knowledge. While leaders of NPOs usually focus on a clearly defined purpose, often called the mission, the range of designs varies widely across NPOs. This single-case study research was designed to explore how one NPO's leadership can ensure the continuous delivery of successful programs in their community.

Leaders of NPOs face ongoing challenges to ensure adequate financial support for their programs because the sustainability of CBPs relies on NPOs' ability to deliver programs (Ceptureanu et al., 2018). Similar programs may exist in the same service area and serve the same or similar beneficiaries. Leaders of NPOs must prioritize the organization's activities by making decisions that develop and sustain the NPO's competitive advantage (Derrick-Mills, 2015). Availability of funding for a region or segment can be disruptive and may impact sustainability among NPOs with similar objectives and focus (Woronkowicz & Nicholson, 2017). NPO leaders could choose to increase the durability of their organization by increasing their organization's social connectedness and financial independence through entrepreneurial activities.

Social Entrepreneurship Theory

One published definition of social entrepreneurship is the process of creating value through exploration and exploitation of opportunities that result in delivery of social needs or can be used to create social change in new ways (Davison, 2019). While SET is not a new theory and originated with Schumpeter in 1934, it is used more frequently in academic research than before.

I chose Schumpeter's SET as the conceptual framework for this research. Schumpeter (1934, 1942) created and subsequently expanded his definition of SET to describe how organizational leaders make decisions that facilitate the development of sustainable competitive advantage. Schumpeter argued that entrepreneurs are the primary creators of economic growth and explained that social entrepreneurs drive social change in the NPO sector through crucial variables: (a) adopting a mission to create social value; (b) pursuing new opportunities to serve the defined purpose, (c) innovating, adapting, and learning; and (d) demonstrating accountability to the beneficiaries of the NPO.

In this literature review, I present a thorough analysis and synthesis of the literature regarding SET and will submit supporting and contrasting theories in the context of SET, including relevance to the research study purpose.

Research theory definition. Schumpeter (1934) proposed SET based on his earlier argument that entrepreneurs create innovation despite direct competition and, in doing so, create growth. Lack of additional research about the use of entrepreneurial theories by NPOs coincided with Schumpeter's (1934) proposal for SET. Schumpeter's (1934) work also included a suggestion that entrepreneurial ventures themselves could become the roots of academic discovery. In *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy,* Schumpeter (1942) advanced his original proposal, which connected large organizations with market influence and power to the accelerated growth of innovation. The increased level of change virtually destroyed the previous market model as an organization's influence and power shifted to the newer model delivered through its innovation (Nicholas, 2003). The term *social entrepreneurship* is frequently found in literature commonly associated with work performed by the community, volunteers, general public, and even private organizations working to achieve social objectives (Shaw & Carter, 2007). Natsvlishvili (2018) noted that social entrepreneurship leverages the best practices in for-profit and NPO activities, targeted at needs partially defined by governments and (for-profit) businesses.

Existing research of SET. The body of research on SET continues to expand. A significant amount of existing SET research includes a second element linked to the social entrepreneurship element itself, often describing the functional objective within an organization that receives the benefit. Examples of these objectives were captured through searches of existing literature, and include organizational performance, new business models, social mission, and organizational sustainability. Likewise, social entrepreneurism is studied locally and at a global level. Yale, Stanford, the University of California, Berkeley all have programs which include the study of social entrepreneurism, and Harvard itself has published more than 500 case studies and books on social entrepreneurism since 1993 (Jones & Donmoyer, 2015).

Foundation of SET. A key element of entrepreneurship is wealth. The concept of wealth includes economic or financial benefits for organizations or individuals directly. Social wealth includes economic or fiscal benefits generated by entrepreneurs who have current awareness of a social problem (İrengün & Arıkboğa, 2015). Material wealth can be leveraged to deliver improvements in program quality and reach for the benefit of the NPO programs within communities and society (Zahra & Wright, 2015). NPO leaders should consider the balance between economic and financial and social wealth. Leaders should also propose and agree with a consistent definition of what financial wealth and social wealth means (Zahra & Wright, 2015). Further, NPO leaders must drive the creation of the necessary wealth to cultivate organizational stability while demonstrating leadership in the delivery of social programs which benefit their communities (Zahra & Wright, 2015). Finally, it is essential to understand that social entrepreneurship allows NPO leaders to address social needs not addressed by for-profit organizations (Sahasranamam & Nandakumar, 2018).

Economic success can be an essential contributor to organizational stability. In commercial and non-commercial business segments where there is competition for limited or scarce resources, new concepts for products, services, and programs may create a competitive advantage for an organization, and competition, in general, creates higher value for customers (Matusik, 2016). From an NPO LT perspective entrepreneurial activities may provide unique ways to meet the needs of their customers, allow them to differentiate their programs and organization from other NPO programs, and inject their personal experience, expertise, and passion for their NPO programs to benefit the community(s) served. Entrepreneurs often look at need from a local or community level (Matusik, 2016). This perspective enables the NPO leaders' ability to assess need at a local level and to create solutions developed for those local conditions.

Further, successful use of entrepreneurial actions may provide new opportunities for those served, and economic or employment growth within the communities served by the NPO organization(s). While research into the use of SET by NPOs was traditionally isolated from the research of SET used in commercial, for-profit organizations, current changes in consumer preference and behavior are creating questions about the isolation between for-profit and NPO research of SET (Apadula & Predmore, 2019). Academic research of SET may also result in new, codified knowledge about the use of entrepreneurship within NPOs (Matusik, 2016).

General applicability to NPOs. Previous research includes within definition of SET the use of income or returns from social entrepreneurial actions by an organization to deliver social goals, not as monetization of the organization's activities to create a funding source to benefit a group who faces social problems (Leadbeater, 1997). Existing research of SET includes analysis of the mechanisms used to create unique solutions to local issues, and methods used to build regional collaboration to support social change

(Heinze, Banaszak-Holl, & Babiak, 2016). Ongoing research has expanded the depth, rigor, and of knowledge of entrepreneurship.

Research publications include identification of characteristics for socially entrepreneurial NPOs, including the attributes demonstrating proactiveness, willingness to take risks, and challenging status quo. Each of the attributes is an indicator that may have usefulness to understanding the impact and sustainability of the NPO and its programs (Andersson & Self, 2014). Existing research includes multiple definitions of social entrepreneurship including the implementation of visionary or innovative actions, ability to identify opportunities which address a social need, become a change agent, and having the vision and willingness to create and implement a plan that makes a difference (Chell, Spence, Perrini, & Harris, 2016). Researchers use these definitions to define the leaders of the NPOs, rather than the structure and operational agenda definitions for the NPO.

NPO leaders' use of entrepreneurial activities may not result in social wealth creation. However, the creation of social wealth through the discovery and creation of new solutions through SET may offer significant potential for economic impact through the NPO leaders' social programs (Alvarez & Barney, 2014). Some published research highlights the ingenuity of social entrepreneurs who utilize successful techniques borrowed from for-profit business strategies to solve social problems, and in doing so achieve results in specific programs which are less prescriptive and more efficient than legacy programs (PR Newswire, 2014). While engagement in entrepreneurial activities may not result in financial or economic wealth creation, research on SET by Tülüce and

Yurtkur (2015) identified a positive correlation between sustained competitive advantage and economic sustainability of NPOs whose defined strategies include entrepreneurial activities. Additionally, leveraging market-based solutions that often already exist (Tkacz, 2016) may allow NPO leaders to deliver a solution which reduces the financial dependency relationship between an NPO and private or government funding for social programs.

Application of entrepreneurship theory use in for-profit and NPO organizations. While entrepreneurial activities are not new (Alvarez & Barney, 2014; Austin et al., 2006; Natsvlishvili, 2018; Schumpeter, 1934) there are similarities and differences between the entrepreneurial process in for-profit and NPOs. Corporate entrepreneurship (CE) is a phrase often associated with for-profit organizations in published research. Social entrepreneurship (SE) is a more recent field of study, regularly associated with NPOs. A clear definition of corporate entrepreneurship in for-profit business and social entrepreneurship in NPO business would augment readers' clarity on the differences between the two models.

A key definition of corporate entrepreneurship (CE) is a set of strategies that facilitate an organization's ability to compete effectively in its market while addressing competitive and innovative challenges to its business model (Kuratko, 2017). Some research included the description of an association between for-profit businesses and CE. The for-profit nature of publicly traded corporations requires additional focus on profitability. Montoya, Martins, and Ceballos (2017) defined CE as the process used by individuals or groups of individuals to build, renew, and innovate an organization. It may be possible to link CE to higher organizational performance than competitors deliver by understanding how organizational resources, including assets, capabilities, regulatory processes, information, and knowledge, can be most effectively used. (Mac & Evangelista, 2016).

A current definition of a social enterprise (SE) is organizations that create social values to provide solutions to social problems through the creativity of a typical entrepreneurial process (Chen et al., 2019). This current SE definition defines alignment between SE and NPOs. Chen et al. (2019) pointed out that a customer is both a member of the social enterprise's (NPO) audience, but also a customer of the NPO, because there may be other providers of similar programs and services. NPOs may look at their customer base as foundational contributors to the reputation, brand, and efficacy of the NPO itself.

A recurring element of entrepreneurship is wealth. Entrepreneurship research includes the term wealth, used to describe each of the descriptions as appropriate to the context of the study. As applied to this research, I accepted the definition of wealth to include economic or financial benefits, assets, and use of assets for the organization(s) or individual(s) within the organizations. Existing research contains references to social wealth, including economic or financial benefits generated by entrepreneurs who have previously become aware of a social problem (İrengün & Arıkboğa, 2015). Improvements in program quality and reach may be a result of social wealth use, amplifying the benefit of the NPO programs within communities and society (Zahra & Wright, 2015).

Social entrepreneurship application in academia. The focus and research on SE continue to expand within both practice and academia (Han and McKelvey, 2016). Organizations that practice SE, such as NPOs, often create goals focused on the success and delivery of social transformation, social value, social responsibility, social needs, social change, and social rates of return (Han & McKelvey, 2016). Andersson and Self (2014) noted a specific affinity to social entrepreneurship within a group of 67 students in a Master of Public Administration (MPA) program. NPO strategies, including concepts related to social entrepreneurship, were considered more effective than other programs where the strategy was the same but lacked the words *social entrepreneurship* in the description. Andersson and Self (2014) concluded that additional research of social entrepreneurship, particularly in the context of NPOs, should be conducted. Coursework and programs promoting social entrepreneurship as a specific academic focus are becoming more visible. The growth in coursework and programs may be the result of a recognizable demand for trained individuals, adept at solving social problems (Kummitha & Majumdar, 2015). Some institutions, such as Walden University, have embraced the need for additional research on social change and created doctoral capstone programs explicitly focused on social entrepreneurship through direct student and NPO engagements. To summarize, SET appears to be an appropriate basis for an examination of the set of innovative activities that occur within and across NPOs to create social value for the public good.

Competing Theories

Social entrepreneurship theory was not the only theory available for consideration for this research. Other theories appeared to have some relevance to the purpose of this research. The methods used to explore strategies used by NPO leaders to create social connectedness and financial independence to support sustainability for longer than 5 years should focus on social sustainability, financial success, mission and values, and stakeholder prioritization. Candidates for competing theories included corporate entrepreneurship, financial sustainability, social innovation, organizational sustainability, social capital, and stakeholder theory.

It is also worth mention that structure of the consulting capstone program includes the use of the Baldrige Excellence Framework, which is a leading example of total quality-management (TQM) performance excellence tool (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). TQM has attracted the attention of researchers since the early 1970s and includes contributions from quality leaders, research results, and specific evaluation models, including the Baldrige Excellence Framework (Pimentel & Major, 2016). TQM is frequently used to increase product or service quality and process efficiency, through quantification of current operational models, which is subsequently used to create and measure ongoing results of a continuous improvement process. The Baldrige Excellence Framework is a performance system that includes six categories used to measure organizational excellence (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017).

The Baldrige Excellence Framework is not, however, a conceptual framework that can be used to focus the research study itself. Some researchers might consider the use of a TQM tool appropriate to study an NPO's applied business problem. However, the use of TQM tools themselves should be integrated into the organizational operations by the NPO leaders to provide service quality measurements and customer satisfaction (Pimentel & Major, 2016). In this research study I will use the Baldrige Excellence Framework to complete an assessment of the partner NPO's performance excellence scoring, which will augment the value of the research findings, conclusion(s), and recommendation(s). I share several competing strategies and explain why I did not choose them as the conceptual framework for this research.

Corporate entrepreneurship theory. Corporate entrepreneurship (CE) is a component of the social entrepreneurial theory. Published research for CE itself is available independently of research where CE is a component of SET. CE continues to be a subject of analysis due to the competitive value and advantage received by companies that have implemented CE (Montoya et al., 2017). An essential characteristic of CE comes from the ascribed contribution of CE to macroeconomic dynamics within a nation-based view of corporate growth, employment, innovation, and competition (Montoya et al., 2017). Research studies on CE continue to be published, examining topics such as productivity, innovation, and global competitiveness balanced with a contrasting view of entrepreneurial orientation (Baggen, Lans, Biemans, Kampen & Mulder, 2016; Montoya et al., 2017). The European Union (EU) included adult learning methods to promote entrepreneurship among employees in the Europe 2020 strategy publication. The intent appears to be to foster innovation and creativity, specifically within small and medium business organizations (Baggen et al., 2016).

Current research on CE specifically included principal indicators relevant to for-profit businesses (Baggen, et al., 2016; Montoya, et al., 2017). Further, research on CE consistently focused on innovation and enhancement of organizational capabilities that were intended to create new opportunities and competitive advantage to primarily benefit the organization and its investors. The lack of research material focused on NPOs precluded CE from use as the research theory. Additionally, there does not appear to be a body of knowledge within CE that is applicable to research on social connectedness and financial sustainability, which are the key components of the business problem.

Financial sustainability theory. Financial sustainability (FS) is one of two critical elements within the problem definition for this research study. Financial sustainability may be a significant problem for many NPOs, particularly organizations dependent on funding from government agencies (Rottkamp & Bahazhevska, 2016). Many successful NPO leaders in the United States include *revenue diversity* and *targeted fundraising* in their operational strategies (Aschari-Lincoln & Jäger, 2016). NPO growth may be the result of successful marketing of the NPO's services, measured by an increase in clients' use of the NPO programs. The leaders of the partner NPO have already incorporated some logo-product sales into their sustainability programs, with mixed results initially.

NPO leaders should focus on implementing financial strategies designed to reduce their organizations' dependency on grants and subsidies while building economic sustainability for their organizations. However, the fundraising and marketing activities associated with financial strategies often require additional human resources. These fundraising and marketing focused resources are not actively involved in the delivery of the NPO programs, which may create tension between the actions needed to execute on the NPO's social mission and the financial requirements necessary to operate the NPO (Aschari-Lincoln & Jäger, 2016).

Through multiple search queries made to discover published research focused on financial sustainability as a theory, relatively little research appears to exist. Financial sustainability strategies are considered an essential operational element for NPOs, contributing directly to the ongoing operational health and longevity of an NPO itself, but are not the reason the NPO(s) were created, despite the use of financial performance as an internal metric (Álvarez-González, García-Rodríguez, Rey-García, & Sanzo-Perez, 2017). However, there is a body of research focused on successful strategies for FS. Based on the research results, FS does not seem to be a viable theory for this research.

Social identity theory is complementary, rather than competitive to SET, extending researchers' ability to understand multiple identity within individual identities. Specifically, a good understanding of multiple identities within an individual themselves can be a useful construct for studying the actual entrepreneurial behavior of key NPO leaders (Pan, Gruber, & Binder, 2019). Pan et al. (2019) proposed that while entrepreneurial behavior itself may align with economic rationality and maximization of utility, the addition of identity may provide more explanation of why some entrepreneurs engage in certain activities. Possibly, the activities themselves are consistent with and represent the entrepreneurs' view of their own identity and focus (Pan et al., 2019).

Culture is an essential element of social identity. The United States is home to a significant number of immigrants, resulting in increased societal diversity. Exposure to and interaction with different cultures may result in better understandings and integration across cultures (Kim et al., 2015). The partner NPO serves disadvantaged children in communities where cultural groupings are affected by income and access to programs. While the programs offered by the NPO leaders are not focused on specific cultures, some programs are designed specifically to help the children develop a success plan for school and beyond. Social identity development is a component of the NPO programs, but it is not in the critical path of the NPO leaders' specific business problem.

Social innovation theory (SIT). Successful community programs often measure NPOs' value. Many NPO leaders must find or create alternatives to reduced or canceled funding resources. Governments have shifted away from social services and welfare focused programs, causing communities and NPOs to become the de facto replacement for social programs (Shier & Handy, 2016). The decrease in available resources remains outside the NPOs' influence, creating a need for NPOs to produce and implement innovative strategies that can deliver the necessary resources (Berzin, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Gaitan-Rossi, 2015). SIT includes the theory that ideas may involve potential strategies needed to positively affect an aspect of life, that a group (or groups) of people have the option to choose, and can facilitate social change (Shier & Handy, 2016).

The role of a NPO within SIT appears to align primarily on advocacy through a change of public opinion, rather than actions or creation of programs which might provide alternatives to the shift in existing services and offerings. Ito's (2017) research documented the social innovation requirement for financing. Further, Ito's analysis identified investor interest in social initiatives but lacked linkage between NPOs' social focus and strategies, and similar investor interest. SIT has achieved wide popularity and recognized as a potential mechanism for solving or addressing social problems (Taylor, Torugsa, & Arundel, 2018).

Despite the progress of research on SIT, some researchers acknowledge there is additional research required to fully establish SIT as a theory (Mouaert, Hamdouch, MacCallum, & Mehmood, 2013; Taylor et al., 2018). Existing research on SIT appears to focus on adaptation and promotion of NPO strategies and programs, rather than identification of social need and translation into program structure and execution objectives (Ito, 2017). Despite the discovery of references connecting innovation activities with successful entrepreneurial activities (Surie, 2017), the reference findings appeared insufficient to advocate SIT as the research theory for this case study.

Social capital theory (SCT). The application of social capital theory appeared to begin with a definition of social capital. Some existing literature has described SCT as a function delivered by multiple entities that agree on one or more social structures. These entities themselves facilitate actions delivered by actors within the defined structures (Coleman, 1988). Other researchers have published similar definitions, generally describing SCT as the *norms and networks* used to facilitate some collective action

(Harrison, Montgomery & Jeanty, 2019; Woolcock, 2001). The use of SCT has been associated with research of economics, sociology, political science, and other disciplines since Coleman's original research proposal (Engbers et al., 2017).

Comparisons of SCT and global talent management exist. Global talent management includes filters defining specific characteristics of individuals, which can be utilized to match individuals more closely to the needs of a given function. Leaders of NPOs should focus on ensuring that individuals leading their programs are talented and committed to the delivery of the NPO programs (Crane & Hartwell, 2019). While the social capital created by specific individuals is a crucial ingredient in a successful NPO program, successful implementation of SCT may not ensure the success of NPO programs delivered by the organization.

García-Villaverde, Rodrigo-Alarcón, Parra-Requena, and Ruiz-Ortega (2018) proposed that SCT is a guide, useful to an NPO for collection of knowledge, information, and other resources to drive management decisions. Additionally, García-Villaverde et al. (2018) saw the role of SCT as a moderator between entrepreneurial orientation and technological dynamism. Leaders of NPOs must assess the environment their organizations operate within, to make decisions which guide their organizations' operations and success. García-Villaverde et al. (2018) appeared to propose that SCT documented a moderating factor between the entrepreneurship necessary to define and successfully deliver the defined NPO goals, and the necessity of leveraging the technical tools needed to assess the current progress of the NPO.

Finally, social capital theory has two independent meanings. The first is social capital at an individual level, describing the family or individual as the beneficiary of social actions (Herrero & Hughes, 2019). The second is social capital at the community level, where more substantial groups, rather than individuals, benefit from the social capital activities (Herrero & Hughes, 2019). While SCT appears applicable to the study of operational success, the research of SCT found did not include an explanation of the necessary strategies that leaders of an NPO might use to create social connectedness and financial sustainability. Accordingly, I rejected SCT as the framework for this research.

Stakeholder theory (ST). Stakeholder theory appeared to be relevant for research of NPOs. Published research includes details of ST applicability to a range of business factors: business ethics, corporate social responsibility, strategic management, corporate governance, and finance (Miles, 2017). Through iterative searches of the literature for ST, it became clear there were numerous non-correlated stakeholders mentioned in the research about NPOs (Miles, 2017; Nguyen & Jepsen, 2015; Wellens & Jegers, 2014). Some published ST research documented the use of ST in the study of NPOs individually to examine the effectiveness of governance within the NPOs (Wellens & Jegers, 2014). One research article contained the results of an investigation regarding the role of stakeholders within NPO sports clubs. The authors shared the observation that some NPO sports clubs may have challenges in several areas, including financial support, infrastructure management, and lack of mature networks and relationships between stakeholders within and outside the organizations (Miragaia, Brito, & Ferreira, 2016). The conclusion shared by Miragaia et al. (2016) included the recommendation that NPO sports clubs should improve their organizational capacity and define a realistic strategic plan for the organization. The commonality between SET and ST, as explained in Miragaia et al.'s (2016) research, may be summarized as an imperative need to define and execute critical strategies that positively affect an organization's sustainability.

My research results included articles that identified ST as a base for the study of corporate social responsibility (CSR). More specifically, Galant (2017) proposed that ST is considered by many to be the framework used for CSR itself. Other research includes the conclusion that there are many different stakeholder values mentioned in stakeholder theory research. The values may align with the business type itself, e.g., government versus public companies, but the focus of ST is the value created by the organization (van der Linden & Freeman, 2017). Conceptually, NPOs drive value through their programs, even if they do not provide a return on investment to their investors. To effectively use ST as the conceptual framework it appeared, I would need to focus on NPO value, rather than the sustainability and social connectedness stated in the business problem. I decided to refine the literature search, associating ST with NPO sustainability.

Changing the search parameters to include ST and sustainability significantly reduced the total number of results. A search of the Walden University library for stakeholder theory sustainability returned a total of six resulting articles. None of the six items in the search results included information on NPOs. Most of the items found in the search included information only focused on the study of for-profit businesses. One of the six studies focused on the government. The scarcity of research on ST, which included NPOs, combined with the multitude of definitions for the term stakeholder (Miles, 2017;

Nguyen & Jepsen, 2015; Wellens & Jegers, 2014), supported the rationale to exclude ST as the guiding theory for this research.

Organizational Sustainability

Organizational sustainability (OS) is not unique to NPOs. Existing research includes studies about OS on both NPO and for-profit organizations. Organizations that created and used a sustainability-focused structure frequently saw increased sustainability and performance at the employee and organizational levels (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015). At the definitional level, OS specifies a need to manage opportunities and threats in a way that integrates the economic, environmental, and social spheres (Munck & Tomiotto, 2019). Synthesizing Munck and Tomiotto's (2019) definition, leaders across organizations need to comprehend their businesses, to ensure they offer the right mix of products and services to their target market(s) and customer(s). The current literature includes a concern regarding OS. In one example, Galpin et al. (2015) identified a gap in the literature regarding the level of assessment and maturity of organizational factors that can be used to build a sustainability-centric culture.

In the context of this research study, sustainability is a description of the NPO leaders' ability to ensure the ongoing financial viability of the NPO and its programs. Some literature about OS associates sustainability of an organization with the ability of the organization, as an entity, to explain how the organizational value systems, decision-making, and organization structure is both sustainable and aligned with the organizational objectives themselves (Munck & Tomiotto, 2019). Organizational sustainability has a broader focus than the financial sustainability component of this research study's problem statement and is intended to help an organization develop a balance between social, economic, and environmental objectives, and formulate strategic decisions that support sustainable operations for the organization (Munck & Tomiotto, 2019).

Connecting the OS to the value delivered by NPO programs may not be apparent. There could be increased support for NPO programs if the potential beneficiaries and donors recognized the purpose and benefit(s) of the NPO programs. Leaders of NPOs should have a publicly shareable Mission Statement (MS) To increase awareness of programs and benefits, the MS should include the guiding principles and raison d'être behind the NPO. A properly constructed mission statement can identify the reason the NPO exists (the mission), the defined NPO goals and scope (vision), and the position or beliefs associated with the NPO (value). Further, the MS may be leveraged by the NPO leaders to outline the NPO program and products offered, and the justification or motivation for the existence of the NPO and its plans for targeted beneficiaries of NPO programs.

Because of the impact on products, processes, and systems within an NPO, OS should align with the strategic framework of the NPO (Watson, Wilson, & Macdonald, 2018). NPO leaders may not always successfully fulfill the needs and expectations of recipients and beneficiaries of their programs. When NPO programs fail to deliver programs and products relevant for the participants, the NPO sustainability may be negatively affected. If an NPO is not sustainable, the programs offered through the NPO will cease, regardless of the existing programs' successes or social value created. It will not matter whether it is the financial sustainability defined in the problem statement or the inability of the organization to formulate strategies which support sustainable operations throughout the organization. Organizational sustainability is only one dimension of the two components of the business problem. Without a specific linkage to social connectedness, organizational sustainability did not appear appropriate as the conceptual theory for this research study.

Characteristics of NPO sustainability. The term NPO is often used to describe the primary purpose of the organization: to work for the community. NPO leaders do not build strategies that prioritize the benefit of the stakeholders through a return based on shareholder investment (Gazzola, Ratti, & Amelio, 2017). Instead, NPO leaders must leverage strategies that allow the NPO programs to be adequately funded and provide economic sustainability for the NPO. Researchers interested in understanding organizational sustainability have focused on corporate survival strategies, and strategies that support financial independence (Moldavanova & Goerdel, 2018). Sustainability indicators include social and economic sustainability, in addition to environmental stability, facility management organization, and facility characteristics (Yuan, Li, Wang, & Skibniewski, 2019). More recently, scholars have focused their research on social connectedness on understanding what role social connectedness may have in organizational sustainability.

NPO sustainability is directly linked to the community(s) served by the NPO programs (Ceptureanu et al., 2018). If NPO leaders cannot ensure the sustainability of their organization, the community is negatively affected by the decrease or cancellation of programs. Managing for sustainability is a foundational activity in any organization.

For NPO leaders, managing for sustainability includes a definition of strategies that create and deliver value through entrepreneurial approaches (Schaltegger, Hansen, & Lüdeke-Freund, 2016). The communications of sustainability data are relatively new for NPOs. Few NPO websites include specific content on sustainability websites, though corporations and universities often quantify their sustainability claims (Ott, Wang, & Bortree, 2016). Researchers, including Ott et al. (2016) have concluded that further research is required to understand what organizations are sharing about sustainability, mainly through media accessible to key stakeholders and beneficiaries of an organizations' sustainability strategies. Despite the criticality of organizational sustainability, many NPO leaders struggle to implement successful strategies to remain viable, and some leaders are unable to continue their NPO programs and operations. One research study found that the researchers could not reach approximately 20% of NPOs in the same geographic area as the NPO partner for this research study, and an additional 15% of previously surveyed NPOs in the same area had been shut down (Lee, 2017).

Social connectedness

Social connectedness is essential to this research study and is a component of the business problem definition. Social connectedness is also considered a fundamental human need and is a direct product of one's social network (O'Rourke & Sidani, 2017). Social connectedness literature has included different descriptions of social connectedness. Interpersonal connections can result from social connectedness. In an NPO, social contact, networking, and support are all elements of social connectedness, but also necessary factors for NPO programs that are designed to benefit the beneficiaries in the communities served by the NPO. Results of multiple research studies indicated that connectedness and belonging contribute to a sense of purpose or meaning in life (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2015).

Additionally, involving adolescents in community service has resulted in increased social competencies and skills, while building a sense of connectedness and attachment to their community (Kim, Heo, Lee, Suh, & Kim, 2015; Yates & Youniss, 1996). The NPO leaders hire resources enrolled in arts and music to provide leadership for the programs offered. Hiring arts and music-focused program leaders increase affinity for program leaders within the programs' population. The students in programs now have access to instructors with current skills in arts and music.

Psychological and social characteristics influence the quality of relationships formed by young people in a given environment (Henderson, Baker, Goings, & Gordon-Littréan, 2017). Community spaces are often accessible to young people who may live in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, and provide a focus, allowing young people to access various resources while developing skills and relationships (Henderson et al., 2017). The geographic location of the NPO itself may be a factor in the formation of social connectedness, particularly in the United States, where young people may learn more about activism as well as civic engagement (Bailey, Cao, Kuchler, Stroebel, & Wong, 2018).

Program Sources

While funding is a fundamental requirement for organizations to operate, not all NPO leaders seek and utilize the same sources of funding. Government funding for social programs is commonly sought out and used to support NPO organizations (Huntley, 2017; Lu, 2015). Government agencies have also chosen to outsource some programs, chiefly, when the government cannot deliver programs or programs outside the provision of the government itself (Lu, 2015).

When government outsourcing has occurred, and NPO leaders have won some funding, the leaders utilize the government-provided funding to take ownership of the program delivery and establish the NPO connectedness to the community(s) within the scope of the government program. When an NPO program is not on behalf of a government or other entity, the NPO leaders must establish their social connectedness to the program beneficiaries and fund the programs with the NPO program budget. The NPO leaders must have or must create and execute strategies which provide the necessary funding to deliver the NPO's programs successfully, or risk termination of the program(s) entirely.

In addition to the donation and government-supported funding, NPO leaders have adopted traditional business-oriented goals, including some concepts of commercialization. Commercialization is a term used to define the increased reliance by NPO leaders on revenue generated through sales of products and services (Maier, Meyer, & Steinbereithner, 2016). Some NPO leaders identified and adopted alternate funding sources to support their organizations. These funding sources include conversion of donations to revenue through thrift stores and accepting vehicles which are subsequently sold (Huntley, 2017). Proceeds from the sale of merchandise are then added to the operating budget for the NPO and used to invest in the NPOs programs.

Fundraising itself continues to increase in complexity year over year as government funding requirements change, and the number of registered NPOs continues to grow, outpacing the growth in the number of voluntary donors (Hommerová & Severová, 2019). Fundraising is an activity that NPO leaders may use to generate funding, which can be used to support an NPO cause. Within this research study, the term fundraising was explicitly used to describe how to identify sources and obtain the financial resources needed to support defined NPO programs. The term fundraising also describes a method of managing relationships with the donors who align with the NPO's goals and programs (Hommerová & Severová, 2019). NPO leaders should define funding strategies that align with their organization's goals and programs, ensuring NPO sustainability beyond the current year.

NPO organization funding strategies. Funding is an essential requirement for NPOs. Without adequate funding, NPO leaders may not be able to ensure continuity of the programs and consequently fail to achieve the defined mission of the NPO (Reilly, 2016). The number of NPOs continues to grow, and California itself has 276,975 registered NPO 501(c)(3) organizations registered as of April 2019 (California Registered Nonprofits, 2019). Ongoing growth in the number of NPOs does not correlate with the funding available from governments and charities (Reilly, 2016). NPO leaders must re-examine existing funding strategies, and update or develop new funding strategies that enable them to fulfill their social mission, continue to deliver programs that create positive social change and to ensure continuity over an extended period.

Conducting additional research afforded a more profound understanding of the financial characteristics of the NPO sector that this NPO research partner operates within. Government programs and initiatives may include a definition of funding resources. While funding may be available for programs and initiatives which meet predefined criteria, the available funding may be insufficient to support the programs and services. One 2018 study included the statement that less than half of NPO organizations reported annual revenue above $250,000 (Marsh & McLennan Companies, 2018). NPO leaders may look for innovative alternatives to government-provided funding, allowing them to sustain or expand their programs and support their communities directly. However, the NPO organizations with less than $250,000 in annual revenue also had a small staff, little property, few assets, and operated locally to service small geography through their role as employers and supporters of the community (Marsh & McLennan Companies, 2018). NPO leaders may choose to leverage alternative sources of funding to augment financial support for their programs and mission. Crowdfunding, one-way communication, social networking, and corporate sponsorships can be leveraged to provide additional financial support for NPO programs (Souder, 2016).

NPO financial reporting. The operation of an NPO includes responsibility for stewardship and accountability for the NPO activities (Souder, 2016). Leaders of NPOs are responsible for the management of NPO assets, staff and beneficiaries, and facilities under the purview of the NPO. Additionally, the NPO leaders are directly accountable to NPO clients, staff, members of the board, donors, sponsors, and volunteers (Souder, 2016).

NPO leaders are required to provide some standard reports to support their status as a NPO, as mandated by government tax laws beginning in 1993 with the publication Financial Statements of Not-for-Profit Organizations (Copley & Manktelow, 2018). Within the United States, researchers have endeavored to develop standard reporting indicators useful to NPOs who deliver similar programs (Becker, 2015). Implementation of a good reporting model may help NPO leaders provide essential information which enables donors and beneficiaries to determine key program results, student performance, and make a value assessment on their investment. Use of performance measurement enables specific measurements to be defined, tracked, and used to adjust and improve the effectiveness of NPO programs (Shardlow & Brown, 2015).

NPO program information sharing and communications. Clarity of communication should be top of mind for NPO leaders, who should remain aware of the impact communications may have for NPO success. Sharing specific information may potentially create competitive advantage(s) for an NPO. Several mandatory NPO communications exist, including annual reports, mission statements, social media channels, public relations management, and organizational report cards (Souder, 2016). Sharing of these reports may inform potential NPO supporters about programs offered by an NPO. These reports provide additional details that describe program value.

Information sharing may also help NPO leaders understand and manage a variety of business risks. Business risks include operating deficits, poor cash flow, awareness of financial health, changes in regulatory or governmental requirements, and the inability to maintain or expand existing programs (Rottkamp & Bahazhevska, 2016). In these examples, regular review by a financial partner may provide sufficient governance. NPO leaders should find the information provided by their business partner(s) valuable. In one example, the California Association of Nonprofits makes resources and support available to NPOs on subjects including budget issues, NPO policies issues at a federal, state and local government level, and NPO tools and resources for fundraising, ethics and accountability, financial leadership, and a variety of other topics (National Council of Nonprofits, n.d.). GuideStar is a specialized source of data about NPOs and has provided a variety of data about NPOs since its inception in 1994.

Volunteer and staff management. Staff and volunteers are both critical resources to an NPO. NPO leaders rely on their team and their volunteers to deliver the NPO programs and in doing so, must establish trust with their staff and volunteers to deliver positive results (Daigneault & Boden, 2018). Also, the board of an NPO may have both staff and volunteers. Paid staff and volunteers have similarities because each must have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the organization to work effectively within the organization (Kramer & Danielson, 2017).

Within published research on NPO volunteer time, I found results indicating 25% of adults in the United States volunteer time on an annual basis, delivering value equal to that of nine million full-time employees and a $239-million impact (Korngold, Voudouris, & Griffiths, 2006; Kramer & Danielson, 2017). Further, turnover for volunteers ranges between 20 to- 40%, in contrast to a 3 to -4% turnover rate for staff. Given the value volunteers contribute to NPO success, NPO leaders must ensure the right level of investment in both staff and volunteers.

Operational Excellence

OE is an outcome of organizational practices based on four dimensions: (a) culture, (b) continuous process improvement, (c) organizational alignment, and (d) results (Rusev & Salonitis, 2016). NPO leaders could use the OE dimensions previously defined to measure their organization's capacity for change through review and evolution of an operational model (Carvalho, Sampaio, Rebentisch, & Saraiva, 2017). Jaeger, Matyas, and Sihn (2014) hypothesized that the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) requested a change in terminology from quality and TQM to excellence. The change was made to refocus academics and experts on the study of quality-related research rather than the creation of terminology (Jaeger et al., 2014).

Leadership characteristics. Leaders should have a core set of competencies, commitment, and the necessary character traits suited to the organization(s) they lead (Seijts, Crossan, & Carleton, 2016). Character traits include integrity, responsibility, forgiveness, and compassion. Some research has documented over four times the return on assets for CEO leaders who score highly on the necessary character traits (Seijts et al., 2016). Leaders also directly influence organizational culture and behavior.

NPO leaders have an increasingly complex job resulting from changes in NPO funding models, changes in government involvement in the NPO sector, new tools, and means of engaging with customers and collecting feedback. The prevalence of the Internet and social networks can influence programs, political landscapes, and even funding support (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The use of the Internet and social networks, within a quality framework, may help NPO leaders establish positive organizational effectiveness for the NPO stakeholders (Willems, Jegers, & Faulk, 2015).

Applicability of excellence frameworks. NPO leaders may desire that their organizations become successful and continue to grow. The NPO leaders may also be concerned about organizational performance and progress toward the defined success goal(s). NPO leaders should consider using an excellence framework, which can provide NPO leaders with a solid base for organizational assessment utilizing a recognized and well-established model. Three quality models are widely accepted. The EFQM model is used widely in Europe. The Japanese Deming Price and the Baldrige Excellence Framework models are common within the United States (Jaeger et al., 2014). The research study by Jaeger et al. (2014) was designed to explore an applicable business problem, and to utilize the Baldrige Excellence Framework (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017) to document and assess the partner non-profit organization.

Excellence frameworks include a core set of foundation items, intended to create a competitive advantage called quality. Organizations whose products or services are not of satisfactory quality may receive complaints and may also experience a decline in market position. The underlying construct of OE is to achieve improved performance through better planning and management of people and processes (Oakland, 2014). Mission, vision, and values are core elements of an organization's culture and image. The concept and mission are directional, while the benefits provide a means to measure the organization's success and conduct (Thompson & Blazey, 2017).

Baldrige Excellence Framework. The Baldrige Excellence Framework is used within many organizations in the United States and worldwide. A select number of organizations that have used the Baldrige framework were awarded the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award on behalf of the President of the United States (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). The purpose of the Baldrige framework for NPO businesses is to help a charitable organization answer three questions essential to the operation of an NPO: Is your business doing as well as it should? How do you know? What and how should your organization change? (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). The Baldrige framework purpose statement aligns with the purpose of this research study, which is to investigate strategies that enable social connectedness and sustainability longer than 5 years.

Successful establishment of the Baldrige excellence framework provided impetus to create the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act. The Act became law in August of 1987. The Act resulted in the creation of a Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) in 1988 (Foster, Johnson, Nelson, & Batalden, 2007). The NPO leaders will participate in this research and provide details for seven critical areas of organizational management and performance. These areas are (a) leadership; (b) strategy; (c) customers; (d) measurement, analysis, and knowledge management; (e) workforce; (f) operations; and (g) results (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017).

Transition

Section 1 included a description of the foundation of the study. Within the description I included: background of the problem; problem statement; purpose statement; nature of the study; research question; interview questions, conceptual framework; operational definitions; assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; significance of the study, and a thorough review of the professional and academic literature related to this study.

Section 2 contains a detailed description of the project for this study, including a thorough analysis of the research purpose, the role of the researcher, participants, research methods and design, population and sampling, ethical research considerations, data collection and analysis techniques, reliability of the data, and a section summary. I also included explanations for the measures I used to protect each participant as a research subject and to explain how data were stored and retained for this research study.

Section 2: The Project

Section 1 contained the foundational information for this study. I presented specific information to explain the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, liabilities, significance of the study, and a review of the professional and academic literature relevant to this research study. I used the problem statement and research question as the focus for the literature review, specifically social connectedness and sustainability for NPOs. The literature review focused on six areas: (a) definition of an NPO, (b) history of SET and its application to NPOs, (c) an explanation of theories competing with SET, (d) organizational sustainability, (e) social connectedness, (f) and operational excellence.

In Section 2 of this research study, I restate the purpose of the study and add an explanation of my role as the researcher, participant information, research method and design, population, and sampling. Additionally, I discuss research ethics, data collection methods, techniques, data analysis, and the validity and reliability of the survey construct itself.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore strategies NPO leaders use to create social connectedness and financial independence to support sustainability for longer than 5 years. The target population for this study was the LT of the NPO LCM (a pseudonym used in this research). The LT includes three executives and board members of the NPO LCM. The NPO's headquarters are in the southwestern

United States. The LT has previous experience in developing successful NPO sustainability strategies. The implication for positive social change is that findings from this research may help NPO leaders and their executive teams acquire new knowledge that may enable them to implement a social connectedness and financial independence framework to support the sustainability of the organization and its programs. Also, the results of this study have the potential to create and drive advocacy, to extend an organizations' reach through new and expanded CBPs, benefiting community citizens.

Role of the Researcher

The primary function of a researcher is to pursue knowledge without bias and to share research findings openly (Antes, English, Baldwin, & DuBois, 2018). For this single-case study, I served as the instrument for data collection during interviews with the client organization's participants. My professional career includes the delivery of business solutions to NPOs. I have successfully migrated legacy paper-based systems of record to computer-based systems. The migrations enabled the use of data analysis, reporting, and information for the benefit of various business needs. Further, I was able to facilitate the use of modern computer technologies to reduce manual processes and increase the efficiencies of existing programs within NPOs.

Previously, I created and managed a management consulting practice that rapidly expanded its business scope and size based on positive customer feedback and referrals. This experience, combined with more than 10 years of involvement in design and sales of accounting software and income tax preparation, should provide valuable knowledge to my NPO partner organization through the process of this doctoral study. Finally, I am familiar and comfortable with partner and customer discussions, particularly those discussions of a strategic and business nature. My nonresearcher role is for-profit product definition and management, which provides specific skills that contribute to business continuity and program success. Before this capstone study, I had no previous exposure or relationship with the participants and partner organization for this study.

Ethics is a critical aspect of research and alignment with the Belmont Report protocol (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects, 1978) is required for Walden University. Institutions often require student adherence to specific ethical conduct in research. A primary goal of mandatory behavior in research is to provide protections for research subjects at a community level regardless of an institution's ability to protect study participants (Cragoe, 2019). Individual researchers hold primary accountability for ethics, and I aligned with the principles and recommendations of the Belmont Report in my research.

Walden University's consulting capstone leadership engaged in a DBA research agreement with my NPO partner before my assignment to my NPO partner. I committed to maintaining a professional and ethical relationship with my partner organization and all employees of the NPO. I adhered to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements throughout the research study. Walden University requires DBA students to obtain IRB approval before engagement with the research study partner. I received IRB approval number 04-02-18-0748095 for research with my NPO partner.

Qualitative interviews are an effective process to collect rich data about social experiences (Miller, 2017). Qualitative research studies that focus on human behavior within specific contexts require researchers to comprehend their bias regarding the study focus. Understanding existing bias helps prevent the introduction of researcher bias and avoids influencing the subjects of the research with the researcher's opinion(s) (Karagiozis, 2018). As scholars, we can approach research in a systemic manner that allows us to deliver specific products or data (Karani et al., 2017) without bias. To reduce researcher preference, I conducted research with appropriate techniques and questioned myself about the research results. Also, I validated the interview transcriptions to confirm the captured data with the participants. The interview validation steps were included to provide additional accuracy and enable the participants to provide feedback (Saunders et al., 2015). Proper interview techniques enhanced my research abilities and helped minimize any impact from personal bias.

The problem statement for my partner NPO suggested a need for a business-centric view rather than a program-centric view for the leaders of the business. With a background in management consulting and previous involvement with NPOs, I have experience in working with many levels in NPOs. My previous experience with NPOs affords me knowledge of operational methods, financial planning, and strategy creation. I used this knowledge to validate and check interview themes and for member checking. I also engaged with the LCM LT to determine the strategies that have worked for the NPO leaders in the past (Newton, 2017). Based on discussions with the NPO leaders, I have familiarity and a good understanding of the leaders' organizational mission, vision, and programs in place to deliver against the objectives set by the NPO leaders.

Interviews are a standard method used to collect information about a topic. The rationale for an interview protocol is to have a defined and replicable plan to discover the information required (Van de Wiel, 2017). In the role of the researcher, I am interested in collecting high-quality data and focusing on the interviews in the context of the research. Adequate preparation for interviews and the creation of an interview protocol allows a researcher to interact effectively with interview subjects, often resulting in higher quality data. Key elements of the interview include an interview guide, questions prepared and shared before the interview, an effective coding scheme for interview analysis, and a clear communication plan shared with interview participants (Van de Wiel, 2017).

Participants

The participants of this research study consisted of executive leaders and board members working for a single NPO, previously identified as LCM. These participants have leadership and functional experience and are actively involved in their respective areas of responsibility. Each participant received an e-mailed consent form indicating the voluntary nature of this study and the risks and benefits of participation. Participants also received a privacy notification, a reminder they have the right to contact the Walden University representative if desired, and the Walden University IRB approval number. We proceeded with the recorded interviews only after my receipt of an “I consent” reply in an e-mail.

The participants for this study were the LT of an NPO. The NPO mission states that the programs are delivered to get kids off the street and help them develop a multiyear plan for educational and social success, using music and arts as the primary focus. Walden University's consulting capstone program provided prescreening of the NPO before introducing the NPO leader (chief executive officer [CEO]) to me through an e-mail. I immediately reached out to the CEO for an initial introduction and discussion. We reviewed the organizational structure of the NPO, the structure of the research and interaction, and availability of others within the NPO for research, and we agreed to a regular meeting cadence to begin the study.

The NPO headquarters are in the southwestern U.S. The Baldrige Excellence Framework was not familiar to the NPO leaders and their board. LCM is a small organization, and there are few executive leaders. I chose to focus on the senior leader (CEO) and critical board members for this research. This LT has previous or current experience in developing NPO connectedness and sustainability strategies. In the role of researcher, my interactions and interviews with the NPO partners captured data that are accurate, credible, confirmable, authentic, and sound (FitzPatrick, 2019). The NPO leaders agreed with the problem statement and partnered with me throughout this research to identify and test solutions that may resolve their social connectedness and sustainability longer than 5 years. Additionally, our student-professional relationship with the NPO's leaders has developed as we continue working together. The CEO prioritized our regular discussions over other NPO activities and was eager to support this research and see the final document.

Research Method

The choice of a research method depends on the characteristics and goals of the research (Pomeroy, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). Quantitative analysis occurs through a systemic review of data and research methods from the context of one or more hypotheses (Pomeroy, 2018). Qualitative research happens through direct interactions with participants. Direct communications facilitate the collection of productive feedback. I collected the feedback, transcribed the discussions, and coded and analyzed the interview content. I then organized the results with the use of a conceptual framework (Leichty, 2018). Qualitative and quantitative research methods contain at least one research question. The research question for this study required participation from senior leaders of the partner NPO to identify the strategies used to ensure the sustainability of the NPO programs. Qualitative research was conducted with sample participants to explore sustainability strategies more deeply. Last, mixed-methods research is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods within a single research project. However, no quantitative components existed for this research, and I did not use mixed-methods research for this study.

I chose a qualitative single-case design for my research. Qualitative research enabled me to interview critical individuals at my partner NPO and to develop a deep understanding of the strategies used by NPO leaders to further social connectedness and financial independence. A deeper understanding of the NPO strategies allowed me to understand nuanced information regarding the interview questions, facilitating answers for the how and why of the studied phenomenon.

I chose to reject quantitative methods for this research. Participants of quantitative research studies must choose from a predefined answer set for each interview question (Lewis & Thornhill, 2015; Pomeroy, 2018; Saunders et al., 2015). Additionally, quantitative methods are insufficient for capturing data that describes the opinions and attitudes of participants (Saunders et al., 2015). In addition to rejecting a quantitative methods approach, I also chose not to use mixed-methods research due to the complexity of the study and analysis.

Mixed methods research requires qualitative and quantitative research methods and multiple data sources and types. The data sources must be integrated and triangulated to obtain the greatest value. Mixed-methods research is more complex but can be used to mitigate weaknesses contained in each of the quantitative and qualitative data types (Johnson, 2018; Lyman & Keyes, 2019; Thiele, Pope, Singleton, & Stanistreet, 2018).

Research Design

Research designs considered for this study include (a) action research, (b) grounded theory, (c) case study(s), and (5) phenomenological designs. I chose a single-case study design for this research, after a review and elimination of three other considerations. After investigating action research, grounded theory, and phenomenological designs, it appears grounded theory would necessitate data collection to create a theory based on the data. Action research has little support outside the education sector, and phenomenological research would focus on the NPO leaders' experiences instead of the social connectedness and sustainability identified as the problem statement (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018; Mohajan, 2018; Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018).

Having eliminated three research designs, I chose the revelatory case study design for this research. Yin's (2018) revelatory case study design appeared appropriate for this research. I was able to work directly with NPO LT, who have direct visibility of the detailed strategies, plans, employees, and current business results. The NPO LT provided data not generally available to researchers. Access to the NPO's full policies, programs, and key senior leaders enabled me to study the organization and research strategies that support the NPO's social connectedness and financial independence.

Open-ended questions enable a researcher to explore concepts within a research population. While open-ended questions are both useful and popular in certain fields of research, including health research, social sciences, and marketing, the questions often result in responses with a wide variety of details and nuances (Tran, Porcher, Tran, & Ravaud, 2017). There is a relationship between sample size and data saturation. A large sample size may provide enough data to satisfy data saturation. With a small sample, it may be necessary to be more diligent and utilize the interview protocol, member checking, and triangulation to achieve data saturation. I coded the data from the participants of this research and analyzed the coding to determine data saturation. The NPO leaders chosen for this research were expected to have the necessary knowledge and familiarity with the NPO operations to provide the data required to address the research question. There is no exact number of participants that will determine data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I selected the CEO and two additional leaders to explore the strategies used by NPO leaders to ensure social connectedness and sustainability of the NPO. I believe a requisite level of data saturation will have occurred when new themes are no longer exposed as the interview responses are coded and reviewed. Mathematical modeling proposed by Tran et al. (2017) did not appear to make sense in this case due to the qualitative design of the study. Semistructured interviews are used to create a detailed summary of results explained in regular terms (Roberts, Dowell, & Nie, 2019) rather than quantified within a defined model, particularly where there is no defined model to categorize the data (Sovacool, Axsen, & Sorrell, 2018). Further, mathematical modeling limits the range of responses available to the study participants and may result in a loss of data integrity and value (Naidu & Prose, 2018).

Population and Sampling

I chose a single-case study design for this research. I had a privileged level of access to a NPO's detailed strategies, plans, and senior leaders not generally available to researchers. Using revelatory case study design, I was able to examine strategies that support the creation of social connectedness and financial sustainability through purposive sampling of the targeted population. Qualitative research is a labor-intensive process that uses purposive sampling, also termed detailed inquiry, with a relatively small population, to build a detailed sample of data (Serra, Psarra, & O'Brien, 2018). The use of purposive sampling, even with a small participant population with in-depth knowledge of the strategies and plans for the NPO, justified the small number of participants.

The targeted population for this study included three executives and board members who are members of the LT for a NPO located in the southwestern United States of America. These leaders are involved in the formation and execution of the strategies within the NPO and are familiar with the research question. Participants' knowledge and experience was an asset in collecting a rich dataset. A rich dataset was necessary to analyze the research question. The NPO partner organization population included only a small number of leaders, which created the primary constraint on participant population size. However, the small sample size was less important than the information available within the sample population itself, where a small sample may have sufficiently relevant information (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016).

Published research includes discussion about a lack of precision in the use of key concepts, which may result in misalignment across multiple contributors. Additionally, qualitative research is dependent on the effective use of four methodologies: an (exclusive) focus on thematic analysis; imprecise and diverse use of qualitative interviews; reliance on only two logics of inquiry (induction and deduction); and failure to recognize the importance of differences in ontological assumptions (Blaikie, 2018). One approach to establishing trust in the research is to ensure the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of data within the qualitative research activities (Forero et al., 2018).

Data saturation was used to provide assurances that research conclusions reflect adequate data collection and analysis. Fusch and Ness (2015) correctly identified the four critical aspects of data saturation as (a) no new information, (b) no new themes, (c) no new coding, and (d) an ability to replicate the results. The Baldrige Excellence Framework includes structured questions for interview use, which enable a researcher to collect the appropriate data and analyze the data with data saturation as the primary criteria. The DBA Consulting Capstone manual contains a sample 40-week interview agenda. This agenda was used to structure the interview discussions and questions in a consistent manner, to increase the quality of the data collected. The use of numerous interviews within research is a technique that may help the researcher achieve data saturation for the research themes themselves (Nascimento et al., 2018).

The criteria for selection of participants and interview settings are established partially through the consulting capstone program itself. The partner NPO and Walden University executed an agreement that established the partnership itself. The participants also agreed to the interview process, and I provided a plan, which identified the interview protocol and topics. I worked with the participants to determine appropriate times for the interviews, which I conducted by telephone. Each conversation was semi-structured, and I set the expectation that meetings require between 30 and 60 minutes to collect the required information and have a more in-depth discussion on specific questions.

Ethical Research

I adhered to the ethics and research standards identified within the Walden University IRB. Walden University utilizes the IRB review as a process tool to ensure participants' rights, and fair treatment remains prioritized above the research. The consulting capstone program includes an accelerated IRB review because there is a pre-existing relationship between Walden University and the partner NPO. My IRB approval number for this research study is 04-02-18-0748095.

Ethics is a critical element of qualitative research, resulting from the researchers' direct interactions with study participants. Research participants may want to understand the worth of the study, who benefits from the research, what the specific roles of the researcher and participant is, who is accountable for elements of the data (Roth & von Unger, 2018). Disclosure to the research subjects is called informed consent and is intended to describe the research engagement. Informed consent is a mechanism that enables the researcher to describe key attributes of the research engagement itself. Informed consent attributes include (a) interview procedures, (b) voluntary participation, (c) benefits and risks of participation in the research, (d) participant and interview privacy, (e) data sharing and retention policies, and (f) contact information for Walden University's participant rights representative. Nusbaum, Douglas, Damus, Paasche-Orlow, and Estrella-Luna (2018) identified documented limitations in the informed consent process, primarily identification of risks and benefits for the research participants and training of research staff in the practices of informed consent.

Walden University has clarified and integrated informed consent into the consulting capstone program, to the benefit of research participants, students, and faculty. I provided all research participants with informed consent communication before any engagement over the terms of this doctoral study research. Additionally, I advised the participants this research will not cause them harm. I advised all participants they had the right to opt-out initially or at a future time if they wished to participate no longer.

Other than the Walden University and NPO contractual agreement, there was no obligation for the research participants to participate in the research interviews, thematic review, or member checking if they did not wish to participate. Any research participant could withdraw from the study, and they received a reminder of this option within the informed consent communication. Moreover, Walden utilizes the Walden University IRB as a resource for the participating organizations, providing a well-known process to reinforce the integrity and value of the research itself.

In some cases, compensating research participants has indicated that participation may increase (Blödt, Witt, & Holmberg, 2016). However, research community findings include controversy about compensation, with a concern that the compensation may affect the participants' responses and decisions (Blödt et al., 2016) and potentially jeopardize the research conclusions as a result. Participants in my research study received no compensation for their participation beyond the value of the research findings themselves. The purpose of a DBA doctoral study is to identify and research an actual business problem, which enables the doctoral candidate to demonstrate familiarity with the topic and demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct academic research. Additionally, the research findings may measurably benefit the NPO.

The primary method of interaction between myself as the researcher and the identified leaders of my partner NPO was through prearranged telephone interviews. I recorded all conversations, and each participant was able to choose not to participate in the conversations if they preferred. I created and shared a meeting invitation for each interview session, including time and duration. I reminded participants of their right to review and request changes or updates to interview material, their right to withdraw from the study, and a reminder that the interview is recorded to assist in the transcription of the interview responses. It is important to remember the participants in the research represent a perspective and point of view regarding the NPO programs and operations, rather than an individualistic view of the research questions and details (Höijer, 2008). Moreover, the participants' story and knowledge are the focus of the researcher's interviews and researchers seek out knowledgeable individuals to capture a rich understanding of the research topic.

Ethical protection of research participants is defined by institutional review boards (IRBs), which serve a regulatory purpose for research with human subjects (ACH Media, 2018). The IRB oversight may be complemented by research ethics consultation services as well, providing research on ethics issues, assisting IRBs with informed consent and risk–benefit analyses, and mediation of researchers' conflicts (ACH Media, 2018). Saunders et al. (2016) identified the importance of ensuring participant confidentiality throughout the research process. Ensuring the privacy of research data are a fundamental requirement of this research study. To ensure confidentiality, I began by protecting and backing up interviews and research data. I removed private and personally identifiable information from all data and documents included in the doctoral study. Further, I protected all data files through a combination of encryption, replication, and backup for 5 years as required by Walden University (Walden University, 2016).

The e-mail containing data related to the research is limited to access by myself, while all e-mail attachments, including interview recordings, transcriptions, and information shared with or from the participants have been archived into a folder structure by term. Further, the Microsoft OneDrive program will automatically replicate the stored data on Internet storage, restricted to only my access. To further ensure availability of the protected data for 5 years, I managed a backup of all data files to a personal cloud storage device on my home network, limited to my access and use only. I also created an offline copy of the data files on an external, encrypted hard drive and update an additional password-protected external hard drive monthly. I also travel for work, and while traveling, I use a personal laptop, which is also configured to synchronize with the Microsoft OneDrive file archive only accessible to me.

Data Collection Instruments

As identified by Yin (2018), researchers act as the primary data collection instrument when conducting qualitative research and are responsible for the collection and validation of the data. I used the semistructured interview method with each of the research participants. Phenomenological interviews were not appropriate for this study because I focused on a specific business problem rather than an examination of the NPO over time. Focus groups were also eliminated from the research since the goal was to gather detailed information from the LT members and use the gathered information to inform the research about solutions to the business problem itself (social connectedness and sustainability longer than 5 years). To understand NPO financial data related to financial sustainability within the context of this research, some collection and analysis of NPO documentation was necessary. NPOs are required to file publicly available financial statements, which were useful in this research to identify critical areas of discussion with the participants.

Researchers may use a single interview method within a study. However, multiple interview methods are available to the researchers (Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018). The researcher is responsible for ensuring the participants are comfortable, and researchers will choose the appropriate interview methods, including e-mail, Skype, and telephone. The participants for this research have been comfortable with telephone interviews, though I hope to include an in-person visit before completing the study. Telephone and e-mail methods comprised a majority of the semistructured interviews for this research.

Researchers are also responsible for the validity and reliability of the data collected in this research through the semistructured interview format. Common challenges to validity and reliability of data include research questions that do not provoke rich responses, lack alignment to theory, or have no specific research design (Sovacool et al., 2018). It is also essential for the researcher to understand that theoretical interpretations of collected (raw) data are key to semistructured interviews (Morse, 2015). To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collected through the interview process I used member checking and transcript review as tools to review interview results. Member checking is a tool used to assess the validity of research results and conclusions (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). More completely described, member checking is a process to check the accuracy, adjust, or comment on raw data collected during the research (Brear, 2018). Member checking methods with any or all participants are valuable at virtually any point in a study. Commonly used member checking activities include validation of interview transcriptions, analysis of data, interpretation of reports or publications, and validation of conclusions reached through the research activities (Madill & Sullivan, 2018; Naidu & Prose, 2018). Member checking also demonstrates the necessary reciprocity between researchers and participants, particularly within community-based qualitative research (Naidu & Prose, 2018).

Data Collection Technique

A key resource to data collection techniques for this research was the Baldrige Excellence Framework. The framework includes a defined structure that facilitates orderly collection of data. The framework also includes rubrics that guide the researcher to structure the interview toward data collection and consistently categorize the interview results within a commonly used framework. I organized the semistructured interviews to align with the cadence and content from the Baldrige Excellence Framework. The use of semistructured interviews allowed a detailed discussion with the participants on critical areas of the NPO activities.

I provided the question set for each week ahead of the interview. Sharing interview questions enabled participants to understand the topic area and questions for each interview, allowed participants to collect data ahead of the interview as appropriate, and set an overall scope for each interview. I found that this technique also facilitated member checking and encouraged the participants to ask more about the questions and relevance of the questions to the research. The inclusion of questions ahead of time allowed the participants to be better prepared and bring detailed information to the interview sessions.

The primary advantage of the data collection technique for this research was alignment with accredited academic and quality-management protocols for research. The Baldrige Excellence Framework includes specific criteria used to measure performance excellence (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). The framework also enables the measurement of an organization’s progress and status on a consistent scale.

Further, alignment with qualitative research techniques provided additional rigor in the interviews and subsequent analysis of the NPO contributed data. As a contending thought, inexperience on the part of the researcher, lack of engagement by the NPO partner, and other factors could have created poor alignment between the research topic and results, causing a potential lack of applicability to the research itself.

For data collection consistency, I shared the semistructured interview questions ahead of each interview. Additionally, participants had the option to be as involved as they chose and were willing to be, given the potential positive value to their organization problem statement. All data will remain confidential, and conclusions or analysis from the data were shared with the partner organization to ensure alignment. Member checking, as described earlier and in the research method section, provided additional validation that the interview data were accurate to the extent possible.

Data Organization Techniques

This research was a qualitative, single-case study of a specific NPO business problem. The Baldrige Excellence Framework was used to provide specific questions concerning organizational performance and excellence and provide alignment to the Walden University consulting capstone program. Client research was utilized to facilitate interviews on the Baldrige Excellence Framework criteria, in addition to the researcher's research question and accompanying interview questions.

In the role of the researcher, I followed the outline of the Baldrige Excellence Framework and conducted participant interviews. The Baldrige Excellence Framework includes categories and questions for each category that allowed me, the researcher, to collect and analyze the data efficiently and consistently. I created a thematic analysis of each interview and conducted a pattern-recognition based creation of themes contained within the interview results (Roberts et al., 2019). The Appendix contains the interview protocol. The interview protocol is an outline that allows the researcher to consistently share the interview topic(s), ensure participant willingness and familiarity with the interview questions, and provide the ability to decline participation for each participant. Further, I use the interview protocol (Appendix) to explain the obligations, expectations, and confidentiality within this research study.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim from the interview sessions themselves, using a combination of an audio recording of the session and initial transcription through an online transcription service, complemented with member-checking. The resulting transcriptions were reviewed with the NPO participants and used for further analysis of the research question.

Multiple tools exist for the collection of qualitative data. An ecomap is one approach to qualitative data collection (Bennett & Grant, 2016). Ecomap tools generally allow researchers to collect data about participants' environments. A researcher can perform analysis after all data are collected. The value of these data collection tools is from the learnings that support a deeper understanding of the interactions within organizations, often complementary to other research from ethnographers who already focus on the field of study (Bennett & Grant, 2016). The Baldrige Excellence Framework is a total quality-management view of business excellence and provides a lens that can be used to measure organizational performance and excellence against several criteria.

I archived all data related to this research for 5 years. Transcripts of interviews and original recordings were encrypted with a digital key, rendering the data useless other than to the researcher. Backups of the research data are also maintained, and access restricted to the researcher. Further, the participating organization may request data directly from the researcher in writing.

Data Analysis

Because I am the researcher and serve as the primary instrument for this research, I conducted all interviews and analysis of results, documents, and related references. Existing concerns regarding methodological rigor and validity of research findings are common within the study of social sciences (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, & Gonzalez, 2018). One of the most common methods of seeking confirmation in qualitative research studies is the use of triangulation, using multiple methods (Abdalla et al., 2018). Reliability, validity, and generalization are methods used to find confirmation within qualitative research.

Battaglio and Hall (2018) noted that triangulation had been a standard for more than five decades within social science research. Mixed-methods research requires a more substantial investment in time and effort to provide confidence in the data discovered. Within an educational environment, methodological triangulation allows the use of multiple sources of data (e.g., individual participants in a research study) to create different perspectives on a situation, to be viewed uniquely, and combined in various ways to create a more comprehensive view of the situation. Drouin, Stewart, and Van

Gorder (2015) noted that methodological triangulation has been extensively used in clinical cases but is less common in academic research.

Through the thematic analysis from the participant interviews, I developed broad themes that describe the participant perspective of the NPO, in the context of the research question itself. I used color-coding to identify themes within interview transcripts. As a first-time researcher, I have invested time and professional experience in management consulting and NPOs and have a good base understanding of the business inputs necessary to ensure ongoing operations of a business. Further, as a previous proprietor of a management consulting organization, I have had hands-on experience in the establishment and ongoing support of a for-profit organization with paid employees.

The most significant barriers to my research were my lack of familiarity with business sustainability and familiarity with NPO operations. However, an initial discussion with the NPO CEO quickly reassured me that my previous experience with NPO organizations plus my business background would be suitable to use and establish a basis for collaboration on the research. Coding resources, such as Saldana’s 2009 codebook resource provide excellent references upon which I can build a thematic coding structure for interviews with my NPO participants (Belotto, 2018).

Reliability and Validity

Universities are institutions where information is created and shared, to provide information and knowledge to a broad audience (Duman & Inel, 2019). Students and researchers within academic institutions must be qualified, be able to conduct research and analysis, and deliver findings and conclusions that are well planned, performed, and align with well-known practices of research. I used a consistent and thorough interview structure, participant member checking, and transcript review to reinforce the reliability of my study.

I used member checking, thematic coding, and triangulation to provide confidence in the research data. Not only did I conduct acccurate coding of participant interviews, but I also validated the coding with the participants (member checking) and used triangulation to assess the data reliability (Battaglio & Hall, 2018; Drouin et al., 2015). The use of research transcripts allowed me to review the interviews and collect feedback from the participants. I was also able to make changes and redactions to ensure alignment between the interview notes, coding, and actual conclusions.

Research validity is a function or measure of the appropriateness of data or worthiness of data (Morse, 2015), rather than the trust in data (reliability). More specifically, validity is a measure of research worthiness (Morse, 2015) through the researcher's focus on what the instrument measures and the effectiveness of the instrument (Mohajan, 2017). Researchers should choose their tools for their efficacy and function within a research study. Within this research study, I used member checking to validate the details of the interviews, allowing me to minimize errors in observation or translation of interview content. Member checking is a method that allowed me to offer research participants opportunities to review, correct, or expand on captured data or research results (Brear, 2018). Having the engagement of research participants and direct validation of their inputs provides a higher level of trust in the research results.

Triangulation of the captured data is an additional means of confirming data correlation within the research topic (Battaglio & Hall, 2018).

I reviewed and compared data collected through participant interviews until I no longer found new themes. When I found no new themes and member checking revealed no additional changes, I should be confident there had been sufficient research and rigor and the conclusions or findings of this research study have a solid base. Also, member checking should have provided additional confirmation of the research findings.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 began with a restatement of the research purpose and an expanded description of the researcher's role in the data collection process. I described participants, research methods, research design, population and sampling, and ethical research. I also included the details of data collection instruments, data collection techniques, organization, and analysis of data. This information concludes section two requirements, and I will transition to Section 3, wherein I provide a reminder of the purpose of this study followed by a presentation of my research findings and their potential applicability to professional practice.

Section 3: Application for Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

Introduction

LCM was the NPO research partner for this qualitative study. The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to investigate the social connectedness and financial independence strategies that LCM leaders use to support sustainability for longer than 5 years. To explore the strategies used by the NPO's LT, I defined six specific interview questions (Appendix) to guide the interviews. Additionally, I used the systems-based view of organizational structure documented in the Baldrige Excellence Framework to investigate (a) leadership; (b) strategy; (c) customers; (d) measurement, analysis, and knowledge management; (e) workforce; (f) operations; and (g) results (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017).

Using the Baldrige Excellence Framework as a guide, I explored organizational behaviors with a standard set of tools to collect a rich collection of data about LCM's strategies and operations. During the research I concluded that multiple organizational and operational changes have contributed to LCM leaders' ability to identify, establish, and implement new practices and strategies to support organizational sustainability for longer than 5 years. Some of these changes enhanced the social connectedness and public visibility of LCM operational effectiveness, which increased the support in their programs. Other changes appeared to drive growth for the quantity and value of long-term financial partnerships, which will increase LCM's economic sustainability.

Key Factors Worksheet

Organizational Description

LCM is a small NPO based in the southwest region of the United States. LCM is a 501(c)3 public charity founded in 1998 to serve underprivileged and at-risk youth and to provide programs designed to help these youth improve their chances of achieving a positive, successful future using the skills acquired through the organization's programs. The purpose of LCM is to engage underprivileged and at-risk youth through music and arts programs. The specific mission description is to provide programs for underserved children through engagement in music and arts, reinforcing the value of an education and working with the student participants to remain in school while completing their education and creating an executable plan for their future. The initial focus for the LCM leaders was to develop and deliver the program successfully but did not include strategies for growth or longer-term social connectedness and organizational sustainability.

Organizational environment. LCM is a youth-focused service organization. LCM leaders offer its programs in conjunction with the school districts, where the schools provide physical facilities to host the curriculums. LCM activities include programs that focus on engaging youth participants in arts and music-centered activities. These programs also require the students to develop a multiyear personal development plan.

Schools may secure educational grants that provide some funding for the LCM programs. The LCM staff works directly with the school districts to facilitate the grant application and review process. Since this research study commenced, the LCM leaders have begun to develop and adopt strategies that include influencing local and state policies for youth and involvement of private industry through sponsorships and partnerships during 2017 and 2018. Also, LCM began to explore the licensing of current program models in 2019 to enable positive social change. A summary of the product, mission, workforce profile (including employees and volunteers), assets, and regulatory requirements is below.

Educational program and service offerings. The program offered by LCM leaders is an after-school art and music enrichment program that includes an annual showcase event. The after-school arts and music programs serve at-risk and underprivileged youth ages five to 19, helping them improve their chances of achieving a positive future and transforming them into active civic participants. The objective of the arts and music enrichment program is to increase students' artistic abilities while motivating them to remain in school and focus on their education and their future.

There are multiple services provided by LCM leaders to support the program. These services include (a) delivery of arts and music expertise by program staff to instruct and improve student abilities; (b) program management and reviews with LCM leaders to ensure program success; (c) individual and group tutoring and assistance with student homework, mentoring, and financial literacy; (d) individual help with arts and music improvement; and (e) product sales that support program funding. Service metrics are collected for each program group to provide validation and feedback about students' program progress and personal growth. Program leaders and LCM staff regularly review the service metrics to improve program performance.

LCM leaders also engage partners and offer specific branded products for sale to support public awareness of the organization and to provide financial support for the program. In 2019, LCM leaders expanded their key partnerships to include a major corporate partner that will support the LCM program and services with the direct promotion of prominent events through digital media methods such as text messages. Finally, LCM leaders have begun to discuss curriculum licensing with other NPOs, increasing awareness about LCM programs, and expanding the impact of positive social change from their design and work.

Products serve two purposes for LCM. The first purpose is to generate revenue to build the LCM program brand, and the second purpose is to create financial support for the program costs. These purposes both align with a need to assure ongoing sustainability for the NPO. For products, LCM leaders usually engage with high-visibility partners and receive a portion of sales for branded products. A partnership arrangement allows LCM to avoid having to produce and manage inventory, returns, cost of storage, and other product-related costs. Access to the products and purchase of the products is through the LCM website and at events. Usually, branded products increase the visibility of LCM programs. LCM also receives product donations, such as Hatchimals, an interactive toy for which LCM gets a portion of the sale as a contribution to the NPO when sold.

Mission, vision, and values. The mission of LCM is to offer high-quality enrichment programs to underprivileged and at-risk youth. The specific purpose of LCM programs is to provide underserved children an opportunity to engage in music and arts while reinforcing the need to remain in school, focus on their education, and develop and execute a plan for the future. The target participants are usually the ages of 5 years through high school graduation age.

LCM leaders do not publish a formal vision statement but do post a mission statement. However, in multiple interviews with the chairperson, who is also the founder of LCM, he explained his vision as keeping kids off the street and away from crime by leveraging their passion for arts and music. LCM programs are designed to help participants improve their chances of achieving a positive and successful future, assist with the creation of a multiyear action plan for each participant, and transform participants into active and knowledgeable civic citizens.

The core values delivered through LCM programs include:

1. Arts-based education for students at risk of dropping out of school, joining gangs, using drugs, or becoming involved in criminal activities.
2. Equal access to programs. All LCM programs are available to all enrolled students, and all at-risk and underprivileged youth have an equal opportunity to enroll in the curriculums.
3. Clear objectives for learning.
4. Consistent performance assessment against established goals.
5. Regular assessments at specific intervals used to measure and report student participation and program success.

Core competencies are also part of the organizational value assessment. Passion for the NPO’s mission is essential. When he was an at-risk youth, the chairperson faced a choice between living on the streets with no further education and the positive probability of criminal history or focusing on school and leveraging his learning. A passion for arts or music, willingness to deliver opportunities for at-risk youth and a desire to effect positive social change are examples of core competencies desired in NPOs.

Workforce profile. The LCM workforce includes the CEO and chairperson of the board, the board of directors (BOD), employees, program leaders, volunteers, and program partners. This workforce contributes to the creation and successful delivery of LCM programs. Additionally, the chairperson and BOD work together to review, define, and promote LCM programs and strategies. Finally, the program leaders, partners, and employees have primary responsibility for implementing and executing LCM programs.

The instructors are responsible for the delivery and execution of arts and music programs. Curriculum deliverables for instructors also include time and attendance, grading, creation of reports provided back to the receiving organizations, and metrics related to program delivery. Further, the instructors and LT of LCM have regular meetings to review program status and discuss any proposed changes and reported issues. The organizations and schools that benefit from the programs receive summarized program details, including attendance, student progress, and requests outside the current program definition.

The board members also support the LCM programs. For example, one board member is responsible for the financial responsibilities of LCM and leverages skills from their work in the financial services industry. The CEO/chairperson was responsible for program delivery and management. He augmented the LT in early 2019, adding one additional person dedicated to the definition and operation of the programs offered. This person's title is the program director. The board members meet monthly with the CEO and LT to discuss program staffing (Table 2) and current and proposed items.

Since the 1998 formation of the NPO, the LCM chairperson has been directly responsible for a majority of the strategic and operational aspects of the NPO programs. The chairperson's influence includes negotiations with the community partners to deliver the programs, organizational and operational strategies, reporting and fundraising, and business continuity. Before the commencement of this research study, the chairperson restructured LCM's BOD, shifting from titular board membership to a board with highly involved members who actively contribute to the strategies and operations of LCM. The chairperson created a program manager role and immediately filled the position. Having a program manager has enabled the chairperson to increase his focus on organizational sustainability through new partnerships and to expand social connectedness for LCM through engagements with state government and corporations.

Assets. LCM assets include music, art, and an annual showcase event that features the program participants. LCM leaders operate several of the programs in school locations where the school districts have engaged LCM to deliver their programs. The primary curriculum is a 21-week music and arts program offered after school in partner school facilities. While each school district is not donating dedicated single-use space or real estate to LCM, LCM does have prioritized access to functional areas in the schools dedicated to the operation of the LCM programs. Additionally, LCM has had the use of approximately 13,000 square feet of donated commercial space used for its programs and NPO business.

LCM leaders have also embraced digital assets to expand awareness of and access to LCM and its programs. Software for operations includes Google Docs and related storage, extensive use of Survey Monkey to collect and analyze data, and a significant partnership to drive LCM awareness through social media, such as Twitter and texting, at no cost to LCM. QuickBooks is used by LCM leadership for basic accounting and several enhanced features, such as time-tracking for employees, invoice and payment functions, and to manage payments to 1099 contractors. LCM has a curated website and leverages its website for several purposes, including event promotion, program information, LCM mission statement, online donations, online sales of products, and advertising of LCM itself to the public.

Regulatory requirements. LCM headquarters are in the southwest region of the United States. LCM is a 501(c)(3) public charity that provides programs based on art and music to kids 5 years and older. Recertification of the IRS Pub 78 and IRS BMF 509(a)(1) requirements are current as of August 2019. Governments define regulations applied to public charities. LCM is registered as a public charity and is required to adhere to the requirements of a charitable organization, including timely tax filings and NPO specific reporting. Regulatory requirements exist to limit the number of organizations claiming tax exemptions, to restrict the ability of a charity's leaders to misuse state support, and to provide the public a means to validate an organization's public charity status (Cordery & Deguchi, 2018).

LCM leaders deliver most programs for the underprivileged and at-risk youth at school locations. LCM leaders must ensure their curriculums are performed appropriately, in alignment with the school district policies and practices. The program leaders are trained on the applicable policies and practices and are responsible for providing programs appropriately. Further, LCM leaders conduct surveys to collect feedback about the programs and their delivery, student, and students' parental input on the program impact and value to their family after each program term. The survey information is confidential, in part due to the inclusion of minors' data. Access to program information must be restricted to ensure appropriate protection for the program participants.

Organizational relationships. LCM leaders maintain both internal and external relationships. Internal relationships are primarily for organization and governance. External connections include donors, corporate sponsors, customers, product suppliers, state and local government, and (recently) licensees of existing programs and other collaborators. LCM also entered an agreement with Walden University to participate in this research study. The CEO and board members anticipate the study completion. The CEO has expressed interest in sharing the study results. Additionally, he has indicated his desire to continue with a relationship with the researcher after the publication of the study.

Organizational structure. LCM staff includes the CEO, BOD, core personnel who manage operational aspects of the business, and employees who act as program managers (Figure 1). Also, volunteers support many of the operating needs of the NPO and are a vital factor for LCM operations.

LCM staff is responsible for the core functions of the business. Input and contributions from the BOD provide additional and often external perspective to LCM staff. LCM hires program leaders to run the curriculums and lead the art education initiatives. These program leaders are usually graduate students from programs focused on arts and music.

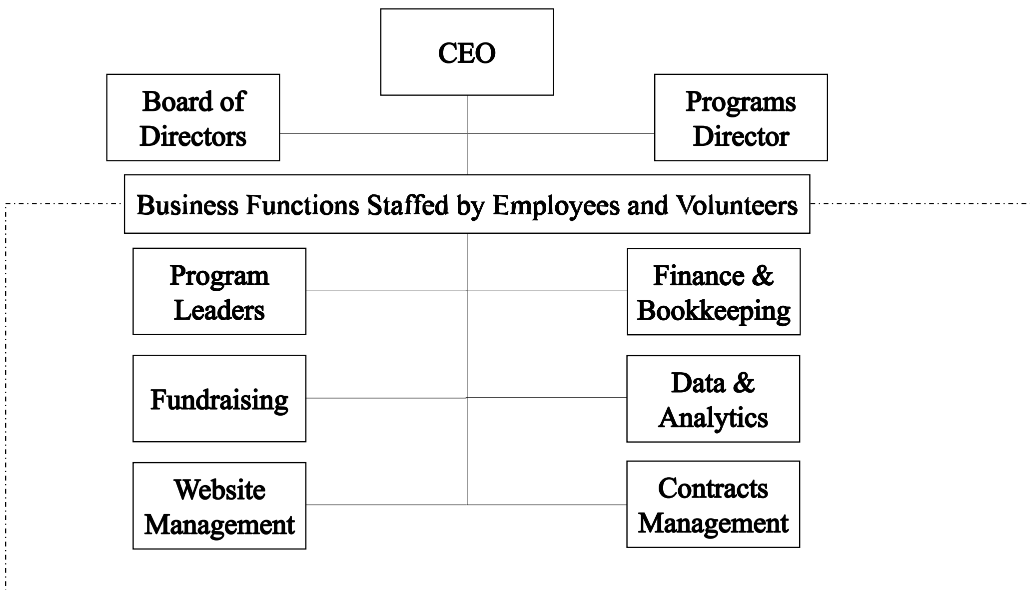

Figure 1. Organizational chart for LCM.

The LCM BOD meets on a monthly cadence. The BOD structure is a functional board with active contribution and involvement from each board member. Meetings include business reviews, new proposals from the CEO and NPO leaders, and ideas and topics from the board. The functional expertise of the BOD members includes arts and music, banking and finance, marketing and public relations, city planning, and research. The CEO has a strong background in arts and music that he leverages to ensure the quality and legitimacy of the programs from the industry perspective (including awards for his work).

Students, other customers, and stakeholders. The primary customers of LCM are those who receive direct benefits through the programs offered by LCM. These customers are students at risk of dropping out of school, joining gangs, using drugs, or becoming involved in criminal activities. These students have become participants in LCM programs, through the combination of risk and exposure, awareness of the curriculums offered through LCM, and repeated enrollment once the students and their families discover the agenda. Participating (i.e., funded) school districts make the students and their families aware of the LCM programs and the opportunity to participate in the structured programs offered by LCM. Enrolled students subsequently engage and receive the benefit of the music and arts programs. The students are residents where the NPO is based and operates.

The stakeholders include (a) LCM who owns program creation, delivery, and reporting; b) the school districts that host curriculums; (c) the instructors from post-secondary institutions to manage and deliver the programs; and (d) the cohort within LCM responsible for creation, hosting, and presenting showcase events that exhibit students' success. The showcase events are promoted by LCM, in conjunction with sponsors who support the LCM-led programs. Online and local advertising is essential to the event promotion. Students audition for the showcase, while LCM resources seek corporate and individual sponsorship.

Table 2

Employee Roles and Details

Role	Staffed resources (#)	Comments
Board of directors	6	Regular quarterly meetings Special meetings as required
Program staff	35	1 site liaison & 5 tutors / enrichment instructors per site 6 sites currently
Program director	1	Single owner for program operations
Website	0	Major site changes are contracted out (expense). Self-maintenance for small changes Significant site redesign at 5-year intervals
Fundraising	Varies	Staffed through volunteers willing to contribute 15 hours/month
Finance	0	Volunteer position currently, estimate 8 hours per month Looking for CPA with NPO experience
Data analytics	0	Volunteer position. Estimate 20 hours per month
Grants and contracts	0	Program staff on a per-program basis Contracts (80%) and grants (20%)

Suppliers and partners. LCM leaders require support from various third-party organizations to deliver their programs successfully. LCM relies on partners to provide program resources, program support, event sponsorship, and venue locations for critical fundraising events. Organizational funding is also vital, and the LCM leaders continue to research and meet with new organizations to increase the level of support for program funding. Grants provide a basic level of financing for LCM programs. These grants are requested and managed in association with local school districts. LCM can accurately cost the plans and provide a historical level of participation and benefit through ongoing program analytics and surveys.

LCM was awarded a partnership in 2019 to provide NPO input to regional and state-level boards regarding NPO programs for kids and students from five years of age up to graduation age. This partnership provides LCM the opportunity to become more connected to governing agencies at a state level. LCM leaders can provide actual input based on real curriculum experience to the governing agencies who administer programs on a state and regional levels.

Organizational Situation

This section of the study includes a review of the competitive environment for LCM, the strategic context that the NPO leaders operate within, and the performance improvement system used to measure and assess the NPO programs and their specific improvement needs.

Competitive environment. The competitive environment for LCM was reviewed. The descriptions of LCM leaders' competitive position, changes in competitiveness, and a summary of competitive data are included below.

Competitive position. LCM is a 501(c)(3) public charity that offers music and art enrichment programs to underprivileged and at-risk youth, at no cost to the youth or their families. LCM is a relatively small NPO, based on annual income. My search results for LCM in GuideStar included 50 potentially competing charities, based on a search for the LCM name, and limited to a 50-mile radius of LCM headquarters. Only two other charities listed in the search results serve youth specifically through music and arts (GuideStar, 2019). An expanded search for charities that offer music programs for the same geographic area resulted in a list of 67 NPOs, while a search for charities offering music and arts resulted in 23 charities' names listed.

Additional GuideStar searches for music and arts NPOs made it obvious that some large NPOs offering programs in the same area have significantly larger overall revenues than LCM. One such NPO was GCB (a pseudonym), located less than 200 miles from LCM. GCB does not offer similarly structured programs, and charges participating families to utilize the programs, where LCM leaders' programs are delivered at no direct cost to the participants. GCB does offer music and arts programs to youth; however, they are not performance and industry focused. GCB leaders offer their programs for youth development, and fun out-of-school activities, where LCM leaders provide their programs to keep youth off the street, successfully engaged with school, and actively managing their own plans.

There appear to be specific fundamental strategic differences between the target participants for GCB leaders and LCM leaders (Table 2). LCM leaders require participants to demonstrate academic participation and success for continued enrollment, but no identified requirement for GCB program participants to demonstrate educational engagement and success exists. GCB leaders reported over $8.5 million of revenue in their most recent Form 990 filing. GCB operates more broadly than LCM and receives partial funding through a membership fee from the participants of GCB programs. Families that participate in LCM programs do not pay for their participation in the LCM curriculums. LCM leaders work diligently with local government to secure grants and other funding for their programs. LCM leaders reported approximately $115 thousand of revenue on their most recent Form 990 filed (2018 fiscal year).

Despite the disparity in organizational sizes, the LCM CEO does not consider GCB a direct competitor. The LCM mission is to serve at-risk youth without requiring them to fund the program resources. The LCM leaders' programs serve at-risk youth, regardless of the family's ability to pay.

Competitiveness changes. The LCM chairperson noted that the geographic area that LCM programs serve is one of the largest counties in the state. Further, the county is growing about 50% faster than other county states, based on information from local newspapers. Despite the rapid growth, LCM leaders have not identified any significant changes to their competitive environment. There have been no new NPOs identified that offer programs comparable to those provided by LCM leaders. The available base population for LCM programs has not increased with the county population growth. The chairperson noted that increased funding would be required to offer LCM programs more widely. LCM leaders would have to confirmation funding before expanding additional program sites.

Schools and school districts are crucial partners for LCM leadership plans, and funding provided to school districts receives scrutiny to ensure the realization of the program value. LCM leadership recently analyzed their programs' cost base and realized the financing offered to programs was not covering the costs to deliver the programs. During this research, I was able to find and share multiple program costing models with the LCM LT. Awareness of these models enabled LCM leaders to determine the essential cost of their plans and the variable cost per student. Additionally, LCM leaders were able to successfully petition the schools and school districts to cover the actual costs of delivering the programs. Further, LCM leaders were able to review and optimize the base cost of each program and to reduce or eliminate redundancies that increase a program cost of delivery.

Senior LCM leaders also expanded their involvement to include education officials beyond the local scope of LCM programs. Current (2018 to 2019) and previous-year (2017 to 2018) data were summarized and utilized to show the value delivered by LCM programs within the current school districts. The LCM program model is becoming more visible, particularly outside the geographic area where LCM leaders offer their programs. The LCM LT continues to develop awareness in adjacent cities and states. There have also been inquiries from NPO leaders located outside the U.S., who are interested in the program's success at LCM and wish to explore their use of the programs.

LCM leaders have begun to increase their focus on donor and partner support for their programs. New approaches include a Random Act of Kindness (RAK) giving campaign, proactive solicitation for Sponsors, and Partners who are willing and able to assist in increasing awareness for LCM programs. The RAK approach includes the creation of a needs and wish list for program centers, utilized to explain the support needed by LCM to potential and current donors. Sponsors and partners may be able to support LCM programs through their donations of equipment or art supplies. During this research study, we discussed approaching corporations that have charitable giving plans or foundations as a method to increase funding and support for LCM programs.

Table 3

NPO Program Offerings for Music, Arts, and At-Risk Youth

Organization	Serves at-risk	School success req'd	Incl. youth (5-12)	Incl. youth (13-19)	Music	Arts	Media	Martial arts
LCM	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
OWSS	Y		Y					
IPI	Y			Y	Y	Y		
PYCO	Y			Y				
OWGF	Y					Y		
JHF			Y	Y	Y	Y		
MVC			Y	Y	Y			
BLF			Y	Y				Y
NEO				Y		Y		
MIKH				Y	Y			
ACAM				Y			Y	
OYC				Y				
MFKK					Y	Y	Y	
LIMP						Y		
LWCD						Y		
PBDT						Y		
ACMC					Y			
ELTM					Y			
LLLM					Y			
LML					Y			
LMO					Y			
OTFT								
KQE							Y	
KVI							Y	
MPCF								
SKYU							Y	

Comparative data. Only two other NPOs identified through a GuideStar search offer music and arts enrichment programs within the same geographic region as LCM. No other NPOs are serving at-risk and underprivileged youth.

Further, LCM is the only NPO within the 26 NPOs in the geographic region that included academic success at school for inclusion (Table 3). Finally, I was unable to find data to support competitors that use similar techniques for grant-writing, fund-raising, or educational augmentation or assistance.

Consequently, there is little comparative data available that LCM leaders can use to compare their LCM operations and performance to other NPOs. Finally, no NPO in the same region has indicated academic success as a requirement for program participation, based on a search of GuideStar. Based on the lack of comparative data, LCM leaders should assess their own organization's effectiveness from several perspectives. Potential data sources for assessment include LCM program survey data and year to year comparison, standard performance measurement tools, financial measures, quality indicators, and quality-management framework assessments.

Using their recently updated program cost models, LCM leaders can provide school districts comprehensive information on the efficacy and value of the programs delivered through the schools, in addition to a multi-year trend view based on program participant surveys. LCM leaders have current and historical data that they can also utilize to detect and determine changes in program outcomes, cost, and value.

Strategic context. LCM leaders wish to expand the reach and positive impact of their programs. While there are few other NPOs with similar programs and none who offer the same connections and opportunities related to arts and music, the LCM leaders believe there are different geographic areas that have no similar programs available for their constituents. LCM leaders are interested in seeing their successful programs offered within other communities. These 3rd-party organizations may become stakeholders through program licensing and may choose to expand or provide feedback to LCM regarding the program definition, structure, and goals based on their success.

Table 4

Strategic Comparison to large NPOs

Domain	Challenges	Advantages
Business strategy	Cannot compete for program participants directly with larger NPOs	Directly involved, less management structure
	Limited program capacity	Closer interaction with program participants
	Smaller asset base to leverage	Lower fixed debt
Operations	Do not have sufficient staffing	Increased organizational flexibility
	Must wholly fund all programs	Faster decision-making
Workforce	Specific skills may be difficult to find or fund	Results can be observed and realized quickly
	Limited resources available with the right program qualifications	Higher level of community support and commitment

Strategic Advantages. Strategic advantages are market benefits that positively influence the likelihood of organizational success (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). LCM leaders hold a vital position within their home geographic area, based on several factors:

- The LCM organization and curriculums are known locally and have a consistent history of success.
- LCM leaders provide detailed program information to the constituents that enable program renewal.

- The LCM curriculums are delivered by dedicated students who are actively involved in music and arts, with similar areas of interest to the program participants.
- The communities served by the LCM programs have expressed more demand for curriculums than LCM leaders can satisfy with current program resources.
- LCM leaders have successfully increased awareness of the success of their programs, beyond local educational administrators to regional boards and even state-level government education representatives.

The success factors noted above, combined with the absence of competition from other NPO and for-profit organizations that offer arts and music-based programs to serve at-risk and underprivileged youth at no cost to the beneficiaries, are indicators for the competitive advantage of LCM programs.

Strategic challenges. The most significant challenge identified by this research was the lack of resources and external partnerships needed to increase social connectedness and organizational sustainability for LCM programs. Financial resources are a significant challenge for many NPO leaders, particularly those whose curriculums are dependent on government funding (Rottkamp & Bahazhevska, 2016). LCM leaders should expand their existing efforts and continue to develop program funding sources independent of government funding and grants.

LCM leaders must continue to expand their stakeholder base. The development of a broader base of stakeholder relationships will expand the number of external partnerships available to support LCM programs and is a key element of stakeholder theory (Miragaia et al., 2016). Finally, commercialization is a vital component of success for LCM leaders. While there are some existing commercialization activities, increasing the revenue from products and services (Maier et al., 2016) and conversion of donations to revenue (Huntley, 2017) are strategies that could increase funding support for LCM programs.

Program licensing is another opportunity that has been considered by LCM leaders. Licensing of LCM programs might provide incremental revenue to LCM if the licensee organization was successful. LCM leaders may want to consider the amount of internal knowledge, training, and participation is required to support the licensee.

Without the capability to scale widely, specifically to expand the availability and benefit of LCM programs beyond the currently served communities, significant growth appears tenuous. Engaging within other communities requires engagement and resources with different skills than the program leaders and staff, usually provided within the management team. One gating factor to broad expansion is the resourcing available within the LCM LT to engage and win new sites and school districts.

The LCM chairperson indicated during the research interviews that expansion to additional school sites is possible. Each new site or school district requires approved funding before program enrollment. LCM leaders are ready to help with original grant-writing and funding requests. There is no limiting factor for program leaders and staff besides the amount of funding available to hire them.

Performance improvement system. LCM leaders have been investigating methods to improve their programs from the perspectives of scale and growth.

Performance and results analysis methods are already in use. Also, the LCM leaders review program data internally and with the leaders of the organizations that receive LCM programs. LCM leaders also collect data from the program participants and their families at the end of each program term. These data are analyzed, and the results used to introduce improvements to the programs themselves. LCM leaders share program results data with leaders of the organizations that receive the LCM programs, including a review and improvement discussion. LCM leaders review the key themes within the data findings. Subsequent program sessions may be updated to include the recommended changes.

The analysis of program data is also used within LCM to assess the efficiency and efficacy of the programs. In some cases, program viability may fall short of the value delivered within the program, and remediation or discontinuance of the application may result. In other cases, a program may no longer be directly relevant to the participant population due to a lack of interest in the format of arts and music. When the focus of the program no longer appears necessary or viable, LCM leaders may discontinue that specific program and reinvest the resources in other programs with higher interest or demand.

In trial mode, to determine how to make LCM programs available by others, LCM leaders have recently begun licensing their applications to other organizations whose leaders wish to deliver similar results through the LCM program format.

Leadership Triad: Leadership, Strategy, and Customers

The leadership triad is essential because it contains a description of how the leadership focuses on organizational strategy and customers. NPO leaders who create and deliver corporate strategies that serve program needs and contribute to increased participant success within society may be able to create a beneficial connection with communities and their environment. Moreover, NPO leaders with successful strategies establish a basis for individual excellence, results, and increased engagement with their future and communities.

Leadership

Within the next subsections, I explain how LCM leaders defined, organized, and implemented their vision and structure, and focus their programs to prepare the NPO for success.

Senior leadership. Since its establishment in 1998, the LCM organization has evolved to include the founder and chief executive officer, program directors, and a functional board of five directors. These leaders provide organizational direction, leadership, and program delivery and execution. Initially, the CEO made most of the operational decisions, drove the fundraising, created the program structure, and managed the partners who implemented LCM programs. The original board of directors was unable to deliver required operational contributions and were less effective at ensuring the success of the NPO.

Table 5

Board Structure (2019)

Position	Area of expertise	Member occupation
President	Entertainment professional	President and CEO
Fundraising	Finance	Business banking
Treasurer	Administrative assistant	Case manager
Chairperson	Business, marketing, and financial	Marketing and PR
Secretary	Child development and instruction	Teacher
Advisor	Research and development, city planning	City councilperson

The board structure (Table 5) was revised, beginning in 2017. The LCM LT goal was to have a functional board, with each member actively promoting and supporting the NPO programs and operations by leveraging their specific skills and passion. LCM recently began to implement a *board match* activity, where candidate board member skills, background, diversity, and independence align within the organizational structure, requirements, and performance of the organization's current board. Further, LCM leaders hope to use a similar approach to the creation of committees and committee leads.

Setting the vision and values. The idea for LCM came from the founder, who experienced a decision point when he was young. He had to choose from two probable futures: (1) to create a positive and productive future for his life through his love of music, or (2) continue his truant behavior. Continuing truant behavior would have resulted in disreputable activities that were likely to affect his future negatively. His vision is to be able to provide an alternative to negative social involvement and behavior by making music and arts programs available to at-risk and disadvantaged youth. By paying it forward, the at-risk and underprivileged youth might desire to remain in school, complete an education, and build a plan for their future through music and arts programs.

The critical value shared was the ability for youth to become independent, self-sufficient, and to be able to make choices and succeed with them. LCM leaders do not currently publish LCM core values on their website. However, these core values are shared directly by the LCM leaders and particularly the CEO.

Since music and arts serve as incentives for the program participants, LCM has created an annual showcase event where participants who commit may hone their presentations or performances and participate in a public showcase production held annually. The showcase events offer eligible participants the ability to show their skills in arts and music through performance and exhibition, further reinforcing the students' progress and allowing them to recognize the value they receive from their work.

Additional value comes from the CEO's accomplishments in music. Young or fledgling artists are often taken advantage of by the performing industry. The LCM programs also ensure that appropriate licenses and royalties are made available to the young artists and musicians, something that is not common practice in the industry.

Communication. The leaders of LCM communicate information about their engagement with an organization through direct contact and participation with their customers, partners, and suppliers. The customer, partner, and supplier roles align with the workforce profile. Suppliers and partners provide resources used to deliver LCM leaders programs successfully and include the schools that host the curriculums and program staff. LCM customers are those who receive the benefit from the LCM programs. Communication within the programs is vital to LCM leaders and the beneficiaries of LCM programs.

Students receive program information prior to enrollment. Student's families have an opportunity to review the program information and decide whether to apply for participation in LCM programs. Communications for the curriculums are very comprehensive and include information regarding participant attendance, activities, progress, and status that are managed and tracked by the LCM program leaders. Take-home information about LCM programs is created and may be provided to the students and families as required. After their program completion, students complete exit surveys. These exit surveys provide LCM management critical program data about performance, success, and satisfaction. The exit survey data were not available to review since they include personal information about program participants.

Additionally, the suppliers (usually the hosting schools) may be able to use report summaries based on the interview data to evaluate students' progress and to assess the efficacy and value of LCM programs to the student population. School leaders may use this interview data to quantify curriculum performance and change over time. Finally, the program data can be compared with previous program data by LCM leaders to identify new or revised trends.

Creating an environment for success. LCM leaders facilitate the success of their programs through clearly defined schedules, including a capstone event that allows the program participants to demonstrate progress and success through a performance event where each participant shares their progress with the communities that support LCM programs. The capstone event is a professional styled showcase performance with arts and music delivered by the program participants. The LCM LT uses the annual showcase production to cultivate funding for their NPO. LCM leaders also use the performance events to build sponsor awareness and partnerships for the LCM programs.

The NPO LT facilitates revenue that supports organizational objectives. Revenues are created through (a) grant applications to support program operations; (b) corporate sponsorships; (c) donations from the LCM website; (d) specific fundraising events such as the showcase performances noted earlier; and (e) products or services offered by helping individuals and organizations. LCM has also received facility space used to host program activities as a form of donation in kind.

The LCM chairperson is an award-winning member of the music industry, has toured on his own and with several high-profile artists, and is the recipient of a presidential award for his musical accomplishments. These experiences have enabled LCM to gain recognition and royalty rights for program participants who are successful and able to license their music or art. Screening of the program leaders (Figure 1) helps the LCM LT ensure their qualifications align with the individual programs they will hold responsibility for leading. LCM leaders have also been able to pay these program leaders through publicly available funding, reducing the burden on the NPO, participants, and schools hosting the programs.

Creating a focus on action. LCM leaders have created a repeatable program definition that can be readily implemented within communities through partnerships with local schools. The schools are responsible for creating awareness and enrollment of students into the LCM programs and provide the physical facilities for the programs. LCM leaders, employees, and volunteers deliver the program structure, leaders, operational leadership and supervision, and all related material for the arts and music components. LCM program participants must also create an individual 5-year plan, designed to describe their personal goals and also develop personal accountability and a higher level of engagement within the program. Each individual's 5-year plan is foundational to one of the LCM objectives: keeping children and youth off the street. Finally, LCM employees and leaders conduct surveys with all students and review the data to determine program success and to identify new ideas and areas for improvement.

Governance and societal responsibilities. The following subsections include a review of LCM governance, including accountability, transparency, and operational elements.

Governance system. Within LCM, governance begins with a six-member BOD (Table 2). The BOD includes individuals with expertise in corporate leadership, fundraising, treasurer, chairperson, secretary, and an advisor to the board (Table 5). LCM leaders have not created specific committees within the board structure. The leaders prefer a functional board where the expertise of each board member contributes to the overall operations of LCM. Formal board meetings are quarterly, and board members also contribute to the leadership and service of LCM independently of the scheduled board meetings.

There is no succession plan for the chairperson (president of the board), and LCM has not currently defined a strategy in the event the chairperson was to exit the organization. Vacancies on the board are infrequent, and the remaining board members do participate in interviews with potential board members. It is vital to LCM leaders that the management team, including the board, operate in a coordinated and supportive fashion. Moreover, all senior leaders and board members within LCM sign nondisclosure agreements with LCM that include provisions for confidentiality.

At an organizational level, LCM leaders have additional governance requirements incremental to those provided for the program recipients. As a registered NPO, LCM leaders must file financial statements annually. These financial statements are available to the public, who have a right to access this NPO information. LCM staff does not include accounting resources. However, LCM does utilize an online bookkeeping solution for daily operations, including management of incoming donations, bills, and payment of employees. LCM financials are prepared and reviewed by an external organization, which also makes the required 501(c)(3) public charity filings required by law.

While not a legal requirement, LCM leaders may also provide some specific program information to schools, city officials, mayors, and potential donors where this program information provides value or incremental understanding of the impact from LCM programs. Sharing nonrestricted information may allow external parties to understand the scope and effect of LCM leaders' plans and to estimate the value of their potential support for the LCM programs.

Performance evaluation. There is currently no system of record to determine effectiveness or compensation for the chairperson or other board members. Since the board is functional, payment is minimal, and the board members are contributing because of their passion for the programs' outcome and social benefit to the communities served. The chairperson does review the board members' qualifications, particularly the board members' relationships and influence within the city, their participation within the community, and the members' area of expertise. This information is used for development within existing board members, and as a screening tool for potential new board members.

Legal requirements and ethical behavior. The legal requirements identified during this research study were almost exclusively related to NPO operations and reporting, rather than requirements requested from LCM leaders of the programs offered. As a registered NPO, LCM leaders must complete and file audited financial statements annually. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form 990 required for registered NPOs are the required IRS documents submitted to the GuideStar website. Note, GuideStar (2019) is a website that contains detailed information related to NPOs, including organizational and program information, financial documents, and operational details about LCM, its governance, and partners.

Ethical behavior. Offering programs where the participants are non-adult (youth) participants could create a need for specific training or certifications. The LCM chairperson explained that there is no school-district or government requirement that is required for LCM leaders to offer their programs. Specific liability insurance for the applications is also not required. The reason liability insurance is not a requirement remains unclear. However, it may be possible that delivering the programs themselves at school-provided facilities obviates a need for additional coverage.

Program managers are required to obtain specific certifications, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Training for recognition of child abuse is another skill that LCM invests in due to the scope of program participants. However, there are few school districts or local government requirements that specifically require LCM leaders to provide these types of training. The LCM chairperson noted that working with students creates a need for minimum certifications, even where formal requirements may not be present.

The program managers are highly integrated with the programs and beneficiaries, and review program status with LCM leadership weekly. Changes or adjustments to plans can be made very quickly because of the high level of program delivery and feedback. LCM leaders regularly interact with the BOD and discuss organizational and program status routinely. Unexpected conditions or results, and recommended changes are reviewed and implemented promptly if deemed necessary.

Societal well-being. Ongoing social connectedness is a critical element of success for LCM. For LCM programs, the welfare of the program participants and their families, the program leaders and staff, and the schools hosting the plans are all critical.

The program leaders and staff must offer programs that address the music and arts areas used to incent new participants and keep existing participants involved. Further, the programs include goal-setting for the participants through the required creation of an individual 5-year action plan. Opportunities within arts and music motivate the participants who become involved in the definition and execution of their action plans. The linkage between the activities and 5-year plan enables the students to define goals and a path to achieve them through events where they hold passion.

There also appears to be an alignment between societal well-being and social connectedness through LCM programs. Social contact, network, and support are each an element of societal well-being and social connectedness. The LCM programs increase personal interaction with others within the school and in the community by design, while social connectedness includes establishing personal connections and an increase in the sense of purpose (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2015). The annual showcase is an example of social connectedness, with program participants and the communities coming together for a common purpose.

LCM leaders have observed and tracked student participants' program participation and success and observe a high return rate of participants in LCM programs. Since schools host the curriculums, the LCM chairperson hypothesizes that there may be evidence to support a lower school dropout rate as a result of the programs, particularly given the target participant audience is at-risk and underprivileged youth.

Community support. The beneficiaries targeted for LCM programs include underprivileged and at-risk youth between five years of age up to graduation age. The goal is to improve each youth's potential of having a successful and positive future. LCM leaders work with school districts that support the LCM mission. Program registration takes place within the participating schools, and the applicants are reviewed by the program leaders and LCM staff to confirm applicant information. Due to available program funding, there are a limited number of spaces within a program.

Before the 2019 to 2020 fiscal year, LCM leaders were not able to fully recover their costs to deliver the programs due to inadequate program funding per participant. As a result, LCM leaders had to fund the shortfall themselves, using available resources. However, this research study provided LCM leaders with multiple costing models. Using these costing models, LCM leaders were able to conduct a review of actual program baseline costs and results. Further, LCM leaders were able to share the exact program cost model with the participating schools and school districts. The response was positive; the schools and school districts were able to confirm the impact and value of the programs and agreed to support LCM by increasing the funding to cover the program costs fully.

Strategy

The strategy subsections include a description of the organizational methods used to develop and implement strategic objectives and action plans and identifies the methods used to review and refine strategic goals and actions.

Strategy development. Strategy development is a process that organization leaders develop strategies for their organizations. Strategy definition includes planning, considerations for innovation and strategy, definition of work systems and processes, and clarity and prioritization of strategic objectives relevant to organizational success and goals.

Strategic planning. LCM leaders use multiple strategies to execute their mission, fulfill their commitment to deliver programs, adjust program content to align with current needs, and define new strategies to expand the reach of their programs. The LCM chairperson and BOD lead the strategic planning process and provide substantial input to the decision process (Figure 3). The chairperson and BOD also engage program leaders and other staff involved with the programs, to ensure there is broad engagement across the organization.

In 2018, LCM leaders and the BOD finished a restructure that aligned BOD positions with functional areas within LCM. This action facilitated a higher level of involvement by the BOD members in LCM strategy proposal and definition and leveraged the BOD members' skills, passions, and areas of expertise. LCM leaders also engaged with a consultant to review and strengthen the overall sustainability plan, including implementation details. Replication of LCM programs is a crucial strategy, discussed, and approved by the board. LCM leaders moved forward with plan development and creation of the business and licensing model and have successfully engaged with one external partner already.

In 2019, LCM made additional changes to the strategic planning process, with the implementation of an annual off-site retreat to conduct organizational strategy and planning activities. The strategy team reviews progress toward the current plan, and actions needed if progress is lacking. Further, this team proposes and reviews new strategies, and changes to existing approaches, and is responsible for ensuring the objectives and strategic value are clear.

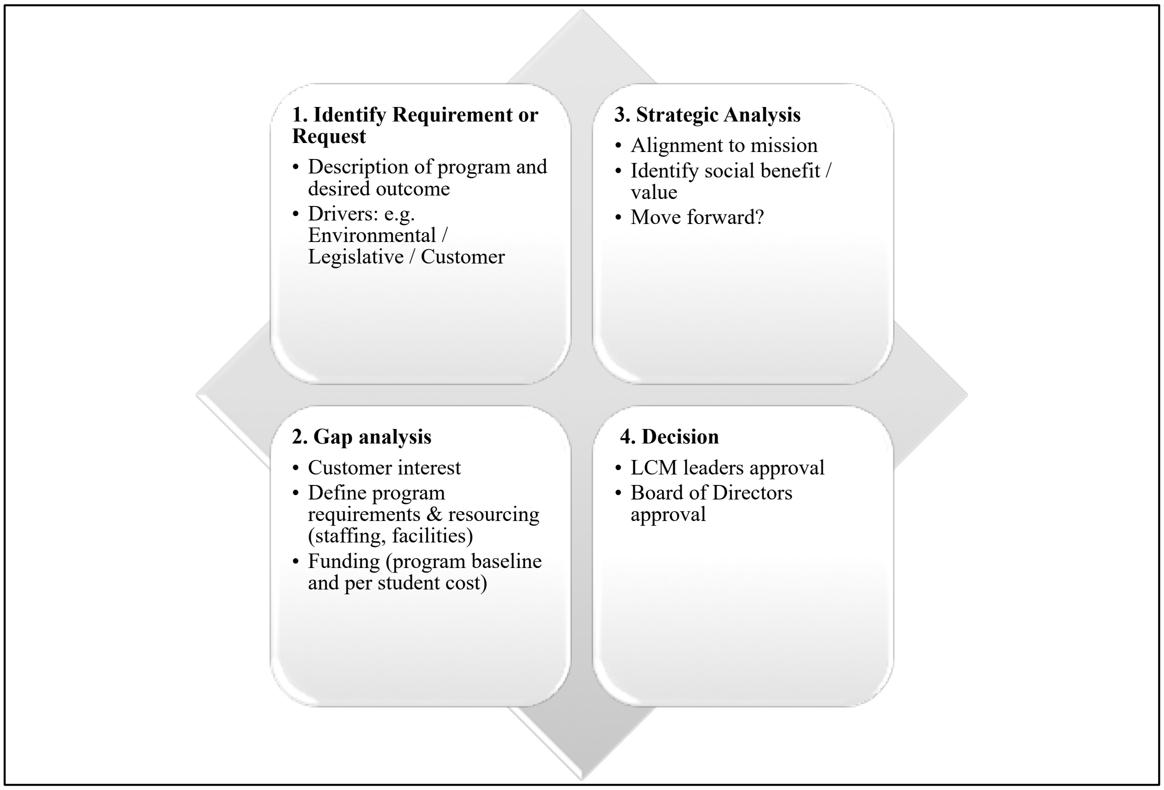

Figure 2. Illustration of LCM strategic planning process.

Innovation. To be successful at the identification of strategic opportunities, the organization must be aware of the operating environment. Once identified, an assessment of opportunities takes place to determine the value and risk. These foundational innovations are integrated into the LCM strategic planning process (Figure 3).

The annual showcase performance is an example of innovation implemented by LCM leaders. The LCM chairperson recanted that an important element of music and arts is recognition. He continued to explain that while families often provide recognition, there is a natural bias to support one’s family members and the public at large may not agree. The annual showcase event is a final project where the program participants can present the results of their progress through a medium that they are passionate about. Further, the audience for the showcase is composed of the general public, program leaders, participants' family, arts and music production experts, and even some industry professionals. Past students have received offers for their music and arts, providing valuable affirmation to the participants and confirming their progress.

Strategic considerations. The use of the Internet and service-based resources is an opportunity to reduce operations overhead for LCM. The current operating environment for LCM leverages multiple Internet-based services and solutions. These include online media for event promotion, online applications for accounting, and other business functions, which eliminates the purchase and maintenance of internal systems, online databases, and survey tools that facilitate ease of use for program participants and program leaders. These Internet-based resources and services benefit LCM by enabling LCM leaders to analyze the strategic value of online business functions against the impact of the resulting changes to the existing and planned programs' execution. On the positive side, a shift to Internet-based solutions helps limit the core staffing requirements, capital, and staff expenditures. It allows the LCM leaders to focus the organization on the execution and delivery of the programs themselves. Internet-based services have matured significantly due to the demand for product quality, cost containment, market competition, and legal requirements (Gajšek, 2019), which are increasingly adopted by LCM leadership.

At a program level, changes in existing funding models and increased competition for public funding are examples of changes in strategic requirements (Figure 3) and create the need to review and potentially change LCM leadership behavior to align with the new market methods and expectations. Applications for grant funding requires specialized knowledge and LCM staff assists with grants to the program hosts (schools) to reduce the friction of implementing programs. Helping write grant applications is a strategic benefit for LCM leaders, due to the complexity of grant applications, and maybe a differentiating factor when schools consider which programs they would like to offer.

Work systems and core competencies. External activities and expertise within the LCM LT and the program leaders who are very familiar with current music and arts programs and trends enable LCM to remain current on trends and best practices. The use of internal reviews of the environment and competition may help determine changes and desired (new) offerings, before inclusion within LCM program portfolios. The LCM LT would receive benefit from having a member with a business strategy background. The LT is aware of this potential augmentation and will determine how and when to begin the search.

A new component of LCM programs is the licensing of some curriculum plans to third parties. The licensing model allows LCM leaders to retain ownership of the program(s) structure and definition. At the same time, the third party will deliver the execution of the curriculum as defined by LCM licensing. The upside of this strategy is that LCM leaders can extend their programs through replication without having to grow the LCM workforce, and other licensed organizations can deliver LCM programs. Potential risks to this innovative approach include the possibility that the program quality is not sufficiently similar to the current offerings, the licensee(s) may not offer the same quality program and thus negatively impact the perception of LCM programs themselves, or the licensees might relicense without LCM leaders' knowledge or approval. LCM leaders considered multiple risks during their strategic planning process and have sufficient confidence in their licensee assessments and contracts for any licensing executed.

Key strategic objectives. Critical objectives for LCM leaders include the creation and assurance of ongoing funding, expansion of existing programs, and increased visibility and sponsorship for LCM programs, beyond a 5-year planning horizon. More specifically, operational funding should include committed income and support to cover the operational costs of current programs and program development and growth for the future. Measurable growth beyond California is a strategic objective and requires a tactical execution plan to be successful. Increased sponsorship, including a broader public awareness of LCM programs, specifically their social, academic, and societal contributions, is top of mind for LCM leadership and an essential element of strategic planning activities. LCM leadership is interested in acquiring expertise for strategic planning activities and must determine when to prioritize the search.

Strategic considerations. Throughout the strategic planning process, the LCM chairperson and BOD explore adjacent strategies to expand their programs’ scope and adoption, while continuing to deliver current operations with no degradation in results. The LCM chairperson has increased LCM engagement and discussions for school-based programs beyond the school district and county level, to a state-wide level. Program licensing enables the LCM leaders to copy and replicate programs beyond the state level. Learnings from these broader program deployments, provide valuable wisdom to LCM leaders and may introduce requests for enhancements through the strategic planning process. Additionally, LCM leaders developed and implemented a community collaboration in 2018, called Production Over Power (POP). POP was designed for the creation of partnerships with corporations and service providers to offer programs that can address the needs of the eligible program youth.

Prioritization of strategies is necessary, given the resource constraints within LCM. This prioritization is a vital component of the strategic analysis element of the strategic planning process. Close collaboration exists with the schools hosting LCM programs. Interactions include regular (weekly) interaction with the program leaders, showcase events featuring students' work in arts and music, and ongoing research of third-party programs that include music and arts. Interactions also provide LCM leaders with a market view of competition and program trends in music and the arts. In turn, this knowledge offers data for leadership discussions about program quality and scope, including program growth and expansion.

LCM leaders may be willing to double down on an expansion strategy for a short time to determine its success, rather than augment organizational resources to support the belief that the expansion strategy will be successful. LCM leaders prefer to review specific proof points or market data to help the plan. Program growth may be affected by demand, funding, or market change. LCM leaders use the strategic planning process to recognize and quantify opportunities and need, then have strategic discussions to determine options and next steps.

Strategy implementation. LCM leaders approved a strategy to expand their music and arts-based programs in more school locations. The approved plan addresses the 5-

year term beginning with the 2018 to 2019 school year. LCM leaders determined the necessary funding and an incremental increase per year over the 5-year timeframe to accommodate more school sites and related expenses.

Action plans and implementation. LCM leaders began to deliver their core after school programs to an initial group of schools for the 2018 to 2019 school year. An expansion strategy includes program growth of 100% in the 2019 to 2020 school year. This strategy is unbeaten so far, with more demand for the program slots than available slots for the students. LCM leaders have also planned for future growth, beginning with the addition of two to four additional school sites per year, starting with the 2020 to 2021 school year, extending through 2023, which is the current planning horizon.

Resource allocation. LCM leaders engage graduating college students in arts and music programs to lead the school-based curriculum. The financial model used to employ the graduating college students consists of an LCM employee assisted school grant application submission. Upon approval, the grant funding is then used to pay the program staff. If there is a funding gap from the grant proceeds, LCM leaders must provide the difference or alter the scope of the program itself. Due to the addition of a program baseline cost model during this research study, LCM leaders can establish program funding needs with confidence. As a result of this staffing model, enrolled students enjoy program leadership with increased *passion* and *appetite* for music and the arts. Also, programs are more successful if the leaders are aligned with the students' interests.

Expansion of LCM programs is partially gated by the funding model for these program leaders because there is a cap on the available funding for these program leaders. The funding available to LCM for program leaders and resources is based on the number of students enrolled in the programs at each facility. This funding model restricts the LCM leaders from expanding their programs beyond the participating schools. Consequently, LCM leaders would need to generate additional funding to offer other programs concurrently.

Performance model. The LCM program model includes multiple incentives to students' participation. These include a showcase program where accepted students participate in a 21-week program that includes music, art, financial literacy, tutoring, and etiquette workshops. Accepted students receive one hour of homework help in a group or individual session, depending on students' needs. Additionally, these students will receive 90 minutes of daily music and art instruction (after school). Last, each of these students participates in a year-end showcase performance for students, teachers, parents, and members of the community.

Performance projections. It is the belief of LCM leaders and supporters of the LCM programs that arts and music education positively contributes to knowledge of school-aged youth. Further, LCM leaders and supporters believe that arts and music education are related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, identified in his paper titled "A Theory of Human Motivation" (Maslow, 1943). The curriculum for this education includes music, composing and production, art and design, and performance competition (the showcase as mentioned earlier).

Table 6

Program Performance Model

Name	Description	Details
Showcase program preparation	21-week showcase preparation and education	Students receive direct assistance in music, arts, and related skills necessary to create and deliver a public performance based on their preferred area of music and art.
Homework help	Program leader led assistance with school homework	Students receive group or individual help, depending on needs. Must be in a showcase program to receive this additional assistance.
Music and arts help	Daily assistance with music and arts	Students receive direct support and assistance with their chosen area of music or arts. These students have also agreed to participate in a year-end showcase production.

LCM leaders track program performance using two methods. The first method includes the number of school sites where LCM programs are offered (Table 7). The 2018 to 2019 program year consists of historical data. The 2019 to 2020 program year and beyond performance data are an estimate based on current activities for the 2019 to 2020 program year.

Further, LCM leaders believe that school attendance and a plan including post-secondary schooling is an additional outcome of arts and music programs, and include expected metrics related to participation and post-secondary activities in their program overview.

Table 7

Program Performance - Actual and Projected

Performance measurement (school year)	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
School sites served	6	10	12-14
Total students enrolled	300	500	600-700

LCM programs include academic requirements that program participants are expected to meet as a condition of their program participation. These requirements are a factor in determining student inclusion in the LCM programs, and participating students and their responsible parent(s) will have acknowledged their commitment to the requirements. LCM program staff and leaders are involved in student activities related to the academic requirements to ensure that programs are delivered successfully, as designed.

Academic requirements are based on research by LCM leaders and analysis of previous programs' results. Measurable gaps between projected academic requirements (Table 8) and actual results are a reason for an in-depth analysis of the results to determine causal factors. An action plan for modification of the educational needs, changes to the program staffs' support of the academic requirements, or a combination of both are possible outcomes of an analysis. 2019 to 2020 school year academic requirements for the program year are in Table 8.

Table 8

2019–2020 Projection: Participants Meeting Academic Requirements

Academic requirement	2019–2020 projection
Participants' increase in school attendance over previous semester.	75%
Percentage of middle and high-school program participants who will have a multi-year educational plan for their future.	100%
Percentage of program participants with improved GPA scores.	50%
Percentage of program participants with 1,000 hours of logged community service.	100%

Customers

The following sections explain the methodology used to engage students and customers for market success, including the voice of the customer and customer relationships.

Voice of the customer. Voice of the customer (VOC) may describe the methodology used to capture feedback related to customer satisfaction or may consist of the customer feedback specifically (Morishita, 2017). There are multiple customers for LCM programs.

Current and other customers. The first customer entity is the students. Students are between the ages of five and 19, underprivileged and at-risk. These students are the program participants, or the end consumer and beneficiary of the LCM programs. The students' satisfaction and demand for LCM programs is a critical component of the VOC.

The second customer is the physical host of the offered programs. These LCM customers are the schools that provide facilities and support for the LCM programs and are expecting to see an increased focus on students' engagement, including education and plans. Satisfaction with the students' response to LCM programs and the results from LCM programs is a critical measure of program interest, support, and success.

Potential students and other customers. LCM leaders wish to expand their programs to other students through additional customers, as opportunity and funding support is available. LCM leaders have regular discussions with school representatives where the plans could be delivered. Where funding is available, and program resources can be applied, LCM leaders will engage and partner with the schools.

Determination of student and other customer satisfaction. How do LCM leaders measure the success of their programs from the perspective of their customers?

Satisfaction and engagement. The schools use various tools to communicate with students and their parents regarding LCM programs. The students' demand for LCM programs has been consistently high, as measured by the speed and participation in LCM programs. Program participant slots fill up quickly each term, and there is demand from more participants than the programs are currently able to support.

LCM leaders also measure the satisfaction and engagement of the LCM programs through the lens of positive social change, which includes the measurement of social connectedness (Bailey et al., 2018). Program leaders capture data from the participants weekly throughout each program. Program leaders' data are reviewed with LCM leaders every week, to validate students' progress, identify trends, and contribute data to overall program status indicators.

Satisfaction relative to competition. As mentioned previously in this research study, LCM has few direct competitors with similar programs. Student satisfaction data are collected directly from the end of program surveys, which are then reviewed and analyzed by LCM leaders, and shared with the program customers as a component of program wrap up and review. Further, students have the option of qualifying and competing in an annual showcase event where their curriculum progress and accomplishments shared with the public who purchase tickets to attend the show of talent. Several of the previous showcase event participants have received contract offers based on their work and performances.

Customer engagement. The following sections describe how LCM leaders engage with students and other customers by learning their needs and building functional relationships.

Program and service offerings. The NPO workforce committed to meet the needs of all students enrolled in NPO curriculums. LCM leaders have established programs that provide arts and music augmentation to students. These programs include traditional forms of art and music while ensuring that new forms of art and music are also available as they become recognized, prevalent, and are of interest to the student population. If an enrolled student is interested in a non-traditional music instrument, for example, the LCM program leader will confirm the student's commitment and desire to learn the device and engage with the LT to determine how to fulfill the request.

Student and other customer support. Students enrolled in LCM programs can work directly with the program leaders and program staff for all information and support related to LCM programs. This support applies to arts and music instruction, as well as the showcase program, homework help, academic makeup work for students struggling to meet their grade point average (GPA). The program staff and mentors work together to provide focus and assistance for the students who require it.

It is worth noting that all students complete initial benchmark assessments as part of program participation. These data determine whether students have specific needs, or a particular type of assistance to achieve their arts and music goals, in addition to on-time grade promotion and graduation. In some cases where necessary, a personalized learning plan created, and site coordinators will work directly with the teachers and the students to help the students meet the mandated educational goals.

Student and other customer segmentation. One of the intended consequences of LCM leaders is to create a new or increased knowledge and perspective for the teachers, who may not have had extensive experience or exposure to after-school programs. The investment in the students' educational needs may provide significant support to the regular instructional activities delivered by the teachers. Data collected from previous classes with LCM students support the educational benefits and progress of students who participate in the arts and music program.

An additional consideration is a diversity available within each of the arts and music segments. The LCM leaders do not restrict programs to only a small number of musical or arts choices. That may result in greater diversity across individual selections and expertise.

Relationship and complaint management. The relationships between LCM provided program staff, and the educators are incredibly close. All LCM staff members can resolve complaints and issues. The arts and music program leaders have weekly reviews with LCM leadership and staff, where problems and complaints can be reviewed, discussed, and resolved. Weekly reports and year-end surveys are logged, reviewed, and assessed. LCM uses standard tools to capture, anonymize, and aware that the program leaders are familiar with their abilities and preferences based on previous programs.

The ability to help students who have created something that can be licensed or sold is a unique value of the relationship between students, LCM staff, and leaders. LCM staff and leaders can help students successfully market their creations and be able to retain royalty rights, copyrights, and trademarks. It was a surprise to discover through this research that most young artists never receive the credit or value from their creations. As I explored this phenomenon, I learned how aggressively studios and other large organizations seek to minimize costs, to the detriment of the young artists.

Results Triad: Workforce, Operations, and Results

This section includes a description of the workforce environment and engagement, operations and operational effectiveness, student learning and process results and customer results.

Workforce

The following workforce subsections include a description of how LCM leaders determine their workforce capabilities and capacity, allowing them to ensure their workforce environment is contributing to the success of LCM programs. Examination of workforce capabilities investigates how the organization leaders engage, manage, and enhance workforce capabilities to deliver the full potential of their workforce to deliver against the organization’s goals.

Workforce environment. Explains how an effective, engaged, and supportive workforce environment is created within LCM.

Workforce capability. Workforce needs are assessed primarily in the context of the program requirements. The chairperson is an accomplished and accredited artist. Staff leverage his knowledge and expertise in the recruiting process. LCM leaders create a complete view of the programs and environment, including considerations from the participants' point of view. The program participant count is the primary determinant of staffing required.

Program leaders include site liaison and tutors (Table 2). The capabilities of the program leaders are vital to program success because the programs are focused primarily on involving at-risk and underprivileged youth through arts and music. To be advocates, provide inspiration to the program participants, and deliver tutoring, all program leaders must have demonstrable skills in arts and music, and the instruction.

Workforce capacity. In addition to staffing directly connected to the programs, LCM leaders must also consider the internal workforce needs for their organization. The domestic workforce is responsible for fundraising, website maintenance, accounting, and data analysis, including surveys. LCM leaders have increasingly adopted the use of Internet-based tools. One reason for the increased use of Internet-based tools is the availability of high-quality tools for regular business functions. A second reason is the prevalence of familiarity with Internet use by most available resources. Finally, financial reporting, auditing, and filing of the relevant documents for a registered NPO is much less work and more convenient when the tools and data are secured, and available online.

New workforce members. Before 2018, program leaders were locally available retired or semiretired individuals. Previous participants' survey feedback indicated there was a gap between the arts and music interests of the program participants and the arts and music focus and involvement of the program leaders. After analysis of the relevant data, the chairperson, with support of the BOD, changed the required skills profile of program leaders to prefer college graduate-level individuals engaged in active participation with contemporary arts and music-based activities. Also, the desired skills for program leaders now include an interest in teaching and leadership. Specific skill requirements still include interest and proficiency in arts and music disciplines, including new genres of music and the arts. Today, program leaders are from colleges in the same region as the schools that host the programs.

Workforce change management. Workforce needs have evolved as LCM programs have been refined and optimized. There has been a shift in workforce skills required due to the increased adoption of the Internet. The implementation and use of online tools and services enable LCM leaders to increase program capacity through the reduction of their staffing level, responsible for internal functions, and ensuring that most staff are directly focused on the successful delivery of LCM programs (Table 2). As a result of the current LCM leaders' strategy, workforce change, capability, and capacity are driven primarily by the programs' staffing requirements, and secondarily by residual needs of the organization's leaders.

Workforce climate. The use of schools to host the LCM curriculum provides environmental consistency across the applications and minimal adjustment or relearning for the overall LCM workforce.

First, the workplace is within a school, and the program recipients are youth, which creates some basic needs for the LCM workforce. Establishing the right number of program participants and leaders is foundational to the workplace design. Currently, a program instance will have a primary leader and five additional staff whose role is primarily tutoring. All LCM program members follow the workplace policies that apply to the school environment with the programs.

Second, class sizes are capped at 50 students, increasing the program manageability for the program leader and tutors. Each location adopts the same design, providing a consistent environment for LCM staff and student participants. Environmental factors are also constant, leveraging the school system for facility support. Also, the chairperson noted that the schools conduct safety drills and training, which would be used by LCM program staff were a situation to arise.

Workforce benefits and policies. Most of the program resources are graduate student level students. Based on interview discussions, most of these resources are paid as 1099 contractors, not as employees. LCM leaders utilize program funding received, based on the combination of school district funding, and any additional grants filed and approved for the programs. This funding model is similar to for-profit trends in technology companies that are often high-risk startups (Fitzgerald, 2016). These graduate students are often responsible for their health benefits, may be able to claim some employment-related expenses, and would file a 1099 form as part of their tax return. There is an incremental monetary value to the organization that originates from the use of 1099 resources. Specifically, the financial contributions that an employer generally must make and submit toward an employee's income is not present in the 1099 model.

Since healthcare is an increasingly important and costly item, we explored the healthcare benefits aspect of employment in more detail. Most of the program staff are recruited from colleges and paid as (1099) contractors directly are covered within their family healthcare programs. The combination of pre-existing coverage from family plans and the 1099 approach has enabled LCM leaders to have a higher number of program resources than the current funding model would support for paid employees. Last, the tenure of the program resources is typically one to two years.

A 2019 review of the program's baseline costs and approval from the benefitting schools and school boards to increase the program funding to cover the costs entirely provides additional stability for LCM programs and, by extension, for the LCM program leaders. The program leaders and volunteers become increasingly exposed to the public and NPO supporters through the NPO leader's programs, and specifically the annual showcase event.

Workforce engagement. Documents how the workforce is engaged to achieve a high-performance work environment.

Organizational culture. The corporate culture reflects the willingness of all LCM staff to exercise their desire and passion for arts and music. To ensure that at-risk and underprivileged youth remain in school, engage, and define a plan for future success, and become successful contributors to their community and society. The program leaders and staff encourage participation and develop students' ability to define, commit to, and be successful at their goals. Ongoing active involvement in students' daily lives demonstrates leadership and provides role-model examples that students can see.

Job satisfaction is essential to LCM leaders and is related to the performance of employees of an organization (Reetu, 2019). The program staff work directly with the program participants at the school sites and become involved because of their passion for arts and music, and involvement in education as well. As explained earlier in this research, LCM leaders shifted to graduate-level students with a passion for arts and music to create a more productive relationship between the program participants and program staff. LCM leaders believe the program participants receive higher-quality assistance from the graduate students' involvement in program leadership and their ability to contribute positively to the student participants. The graduate students may consider themselves agents of change as they work with the program participants.

Engagement and assessment drivers. The key drivers of engagement and assessment are the program leader and staff involvement with the student program participants and focus on the student's success in the program. Through this ongoing school-based involvement, NPO program staff can engage students with music and arts that are personal and interesting to the students themselves. Further, students in these programs have an opportunity to share their prowess with others in the annual showcase event.

The programs are not predetermined. Each student has an opportunity to pursue an art or music form that is personal and interesting to them. This engagement design allows each student to be unique while enabling the program staff to leverage the student's interests and passions while participating with each student directly. Program leaders work directly with the students and are members of the program staff.

The program leaders prepare weekly reports on student progress, subsequently reviewed with the LCM leadership and other team leaders. Cross-program reviews allow each team to contribute and learn from other groups and their participant base. The weekly report cadence augments the ability to assess performance and engagement in an ongoing process, rather than relying on periodic assessments that may include subjectivity.

Performance management. The weekly reviews, combined with regular meetings with the chairperson and other team leaders, allow each program team to demonstrate its success and ability to influence the students in the programs positively. Program leaders are empowered to ensure their applications are successful and the program teams

LCM raises the funding used to compensate the program leads and tutors. LCM leaders work directly with the schools to apply for and secure the curriculum funding. Due to the nature of the funding, program staff levels cannot exceed the finite amount of funding available, based on the structure of the grants. The program funding has increased with an increase in the number of school sites that offer LCM programs (Table 7). However, there is little latitude in the individual compensation available, without additional funding from different sources. LCM leadership recognizes the value and skills of the program staff and is investigating strategies that could augment incoming funding and help LCM leaders grow the programs and provide performance-based rewards for the team.

The college students who lead and tutor the programs often move on to full-time employment once their degree programs are complete. Currently, it is not easy for LCM leaders to hire them due to the current grant-based approach. However, LCM leadership is investigating methods to support the hiring of passionate and capable program staff.

Operations

The following section is focused on operations, including a description of how the organization designs, implements, improves, and innovates through the education-based programs. Operations also includes elements of operational effectiveness which are used to deliver value to students and customers, while delivering operational success.

Work processes. A description of the methods used to design and manage educational programs within the organization.

Program and process requirements. The core structure of the LCM programs and workforce processes have been defined (Table 9) by LCM leaders. Specific program requirements may vary with the nature of the arts and music component components include showcase help and tutoring, homework help, and particular arts and music training and development. Workforce processes include organizational actions, including grant and funding development, and recruitment of program leaders and tutors.

A rote-based instructional format does not create the arts and music programs. The incoming students may have interests that are unique to them, which results in customized program elements for those students. Program staff works with each student and LCM leadership to validate the unique alignment of the program for each student. The alignment description included in the program "contract" created for each student served within the LCM program definition.

Table 9

Key Workforce Processes

Process description		Responsibility	
	Frequency	Leaders	Workforce
Grant development and definition	S	√	
Program recruitment at school sites	S	√	√
Recruitment of program leads and staff from colleges/universities	S	√	
Finalize program contract with participants' families	S	√	
Homework tutoring & help	D		√
Arts & Music training and development	D		√
Program progress summary and review	W	√	√
Team recognition during meetings and reviews	AN	√	√
Promotion for showcase event	A	√	
Showcase event	A	√	√
Board of director meetings	Q	√	
Strategy and planning retreat	A	√	

Note. Frequency: A = annually, D = daily, W = weekly, Q = quarterly, AN = as needed, S = each session.

Design concepts. The programs designed by LCM leaders (Table 9) focus on arts and music enrichment to incent student participants to commit their time and efforts toward future achievements. In some cases, a program participant might request an instrument or performing arts method that is less commonly requested. In such a case, LCM program staff and leaders work with the specific student to determine what the details of the students' goals are. If a particular request is impractical, LCM program staff and leaders work with the student to find an alternative that the student is happy with, and proceeds with the revised focus.

All programs designed by LCM leaders and delivered by program staff include educational support for homework and tutoring, arts and music training and development, and inclusion in an annual showcase event that presents the students' arts and music abilities resulting from the programs through a public performance event. The homework and tutoring are more structured and aligns with each school district's academic requirements and expectations.

The design of the arts and music component of the program has greater variety, which encourages each student to invest in the specific arts or music area for their interest. With this variety, LCM leaders provide different tools and mediums that the students can utilize to achieve their defined and agreed-upon goals.

Process management and improvement. In parallel to the operational aspects of the programs, the LCM chairperson and BOD engage in specific activities to assess the day-to-day processes of the organization, identify key support processes, and improvements to benefit organizational competencies and operations.

Reviews of program status, organizational financial situation, and inputs from VOC occur regularly. A weekly summary of special program status (Table 9) is a vital component of process management, particularly intending to have LCM programs delivered in 10 separate schools during the 2019 to 2020 timeframe (Table 7). In addition to capturing student feedback, the program leaders also collect input from the school resources and parents of the program participants. All documented items requiring a response are quickly processed, any changes implemented upon approval by LCM leaders, and new feedback collected through the next weekly report and review.

LCM leadership uses the weekly program review combined data to assess overall LCM program status and progress toward the program goals (Table 6). The organization involvement facilitates the LCM leaders’ ability to identify if and where adjustments in program and staffing may be required, and where additional guidance, support, or process changes might need to occur. Further, regular reviews allow LCM leaders to monitor the progress toward the annual showcase event and the progress made against the academic development targets (Table 8). Finally, regular reviews of programs’ status allow creation and dissemination of increased program results and visibility beyond the communities and participants directly served.

In summary, LCM leaders rely on a dedicated program-centric workforce to own the implementation of LCM programs. The program workforce liaises with LCM leaders to ensure timely, effective, and high-quality management and monitoring of LCM programs across the participant base and recommends adjustments to program delivery where they are required. LCM leadership holds regular strategic meetings with the BOD and invests in time with (potential) external donors to develop additional support for LCM programs and objectives.

Operational effectiveness. Defines the methods used to effectively manage operations.

Operational cost controls. The initial cost of operations is program delivery, including resources and tools, followed by the annual showcase event. The showcase event funding is from donations from partners and attendees. The program delivery is the most critical aspect of LCM operations and receives the highest as a result. The weekly rollup from the program leads and resulting reviews with LCM leadership minimize the latency between an operational or performance need, and the ability to respond.

Donor activities and operational funding are reviewed by the leadership, which establishes an annual budget that includes program operations and a budget for operational costs. The budget also consists of the minimum funding requirements for the program performance model (Table 6) and the core operations budget. The LCM chairperson has the final responsibility to ensure appropriate operational practices and accountability and is also the point person for donor programs.

Information systems security and reliability. As summarized in Table 2, LCM roles utilize multiple information systems (IS) capabilities, including website management and delivery, accounting, general document management, and analytics. The IS resources generally store their data on the Internet cloud, eliminating the need to be in an office or specific location to be able to work with the data.

LCM leaders chose to follow the industry trend and leverage Internet-based applications and services, precisely a *cloud-first strategy*. These online services include accounting, surveys, and data analytics tools, and corporate communications tools, such as Google Docs or Microsoft Office 365. Secure, online services are attractive to organizations because they can use them without incurring the extra costs required to purchase additional hardware, storage, installation, consulting or training, information technology staff for management, and licenses. The challenge of having services available anywhere is that the use of a public Internet connection creates new questions about confidentiality and availability. Current concern about using online services and capabilities is the security and confidentiality of data, particularly data containing personal or publicly identifiable information such as social security numbers, email addresses, account numbers, etc.

One guiding principle in the choice to use Internet-based software was to use only mainstream and well-known solution providers who are already utilized by large organizations. This LCM leadership decision helped alleviate some concerns over data security. Examples of software solutions with data security currently in use include: (a) Google Docs, which provides policy setting functions that enable leadership to determine which employees have access and how corporate documents are shared or not shared; (b) QuickBooks online accounting solution that features the ability to delegate access to the solution and control the specific functions an employee of LCM can use; and (c) data survey software that includes analysis functions. LCM leaders are happy with the solutions chosen and the flexibility they provide. Finally, LCM leaders prefer to use solutions that do not require an investment in hardware, software licenses, and additional staff to manage the solutions inhouse.

Reliability, security, and cybersecurity. This study did not include a cost-savings analysis of the decision to utilize Internet-based software solutions. However, the flexibility and use of the software solutions contributed examples and confirmation that there are no internal IT functions or dedicated IT staff, within LCM. Despite the potential confusion created from the use of a negative to substantiate a point, no discussions in any interviews included mention of a security or reliability issue with the LCM leaders' choice to adopt cloud-based applications to manage their business operations.

Safety and emergency preparedness. LCM leaders currently deliver curriculums at school locations, which already have specific safety and emergency preparedness requirements. For the program sessions, there is no requirement for LCM to provide additional measures of preparedness. However, LCM leadership does ensure that the program leaders and staff have CPR training and can respond to events that might typically occur within a school setting. Further, school staff is on hand and able to assist, should an incident arise.

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

A researcher should use a suitable tool or framework to organize the collected data and conduct their analysis. For NPOs, the structure should include specific performance measures applicable to NPOs (Lee & Nowell, 2015). A key component of measuring organizational performance is the creation and implementation of a business plan (Reilly, 2016). LCM leaders reviewed their business plan in 2018 and created a 5-year business plan with specific program goals and objectives that also created a funding demand model. LCM leaders also identified that approximately 70% of the NPO funding originates from individual and corporate donations, grants, and fundraising, while the remaining 30% of funding is the result of product sales.

Measurement, analysis, and improvement of organizational performance. Organization leaders must measure and analyze corporate performance data to understand and improve their organizational performance (Baldridge Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). While LCM has only two identified competitors that focus on arts and music programs for youth (GuideStar, 2019), LCM programs are unique within their geographic area. LCM leaders measure the success of their programs through increased program demand by additional school districts, positive GPA impact for enrolled students, reduced absences by program participants, and annual growth in support of the annual arts and music showcase event produced by LCM.

Information and knowledge management. Information management may include multiple components, including statements of integrity, processes used to protect confidential information including (a) accounting data, (b) participant data, (c) program details, and more. Effective use of information management techniques and solutions may provide useful to NPO leaders. Examples of information management contributing positively to organizational success include business acumen and a total view of the organization, knowledge, and analysis of trends and ability to create reliable forecasts, conduct, or engage resources to conduct performance analysis of the organization itself (Cade, 2018).

Table 10

Organizational and Staff Qualifications

Description of qualification	Recognized skill
A 501(c)3 NPO partner that has delivered a successful showcase for the past five years and is experienced in operating an arts education program	√
Full-time staff of part-time staff and experienced, outgoing employees with a special focus on addressing at-risk youth through multifaceted arts education opportunities	√
Has demonstrated exceptional practices and specialization working with at-risk youth, ages 5 to 19	√
Has demonstrated the capacity to identify and recruit at-risk youth, ages 5 to 19 (grade levels K–12) to participate in the programs	√
Has appropriate resources, staff, and capacity to manage and deliver programs within the agreed timeline	√
Is compliant with all state, local, and district requirements, including criminal background checks for program employees, contractors, and volunteers	√
Has previously: (a) conducted the proposed program in spaces that are available for after-school use and; (b) provided appropriate accommodations and effective communication, upon request, during all stages of the annual Showcase event.	√

LCM leaders have leveraged data analytics, specifically Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) resources and capabilities, to capture program performance and participant feedback from the participants and their families. There are data from multiple years of program feedback collected, which enables LCM leadership to understand current program feedback and compare the overall program results with prior program years. The data results allow the LT to comprehend trends, current comparison to previous program years, and potentially to associate results data with program staffing and support changes to determine critical learnings.

General accounting and specific staff-related functions, including payment of the 1099 program leaders and staff, has been converted to an online application subscription. The online capabilities reduce the time and effort to pay program staff and vendors while providing additional convenience through the always-connected model of online application services. The use of online bookkeeping has also reduced the amount of time required to perform these recurring activities, which creates the opportunity to have staff and volunteers become more efficient.

General fundraising linkage and information is available on the LCM nonprofit website. Info about premium donors is listed, in addition to the inclusion of links that can be used by all donors to support the LCM programs by contributing directly. During this research study, we discussed two potential funding raising options that are available to enhance funding programs. These are corporate giving programs, where corporations identify or allow their employees to identify NPOs supported on the list of corporate-approved NPO beneficiaries. Foundation-based giving details specific organizations that support NPOs that provide some percentage of their fundraising proceeds to a designated list of NPO beneficiaries. The corporate giving programs may also result in matching funds from the corporate itself, in situations where environmental events create a need that is not satisfied by the existing funding stream. Planned giving is another funding alternative that includes charitable trusts, gift annuities, donor funds, and gifts of stocks and bonds that can be donated to NPOs to support their programs (James III, 2018). Estate executors and trust administrators may contribute to NPOs, based on the recommendations or conditions set by the original creator of the estate itself. Some volunteer organizations seek charitable and scholarship beneficiaries, allowing them increased opportunities for donations and planned giving activities (James III, 2018).

Organizational Knowledge. LCM leadership has a good understanding of the nonprofit sector for their programs. The LCM chairperson, as mentioned earlier in this research, founded the NPO because he was at-risk during his youth, and decided to remain in school, accomplish what his then-peers had chosen to abandon, and established the LCM NPO to replicate his success systemically.

While the LCM chairperson has significant knowledge within the arts and music industry itself, he and the board have less experience with NPO operations and creating sustainability and social connectedness for the organization. The NPO leaders have had measurable success, as evidenced by the growth of the programs and the post-program feedback over multiple years. LCM leaders have been very receptive to this research study and acknowledged that this study has already contributed to a better understanding of operational strategies and activities that influence the success and sustainability of the NPO while engaging more closely with communities they wish to serve.

Collection, Analysis, and Preparation of Results

Product and Process Results

LCM is a registered 501(c)(3) NPO and was initially granted the NPO status in 2004 (GuideStar, 2019). LCM leaders and staff offer art and music-based programs in partnership with school districts to support at-risk and underprivileged youth between the ages of 5 and 19 who are enrolled in school programs and committed to academic performance and excellence in addition to the arts and music programs.

The 2018 to 2019 school year plan for LCM included the delivery of arts and music programs and one to one assistance for each student, plus academic tutoring, in exchange for student commitment and participation, improved school attendance, and increase GPA results. The plan was further enhanced for the 2019 to 2020 school year and includes a commitment to volunteer hours by the program participants. Additionally, LCM programs are available in an expanding number of schools, and the increased funding for the curriculums is sufficient to cover the full cost of delivering the programs themselves.

The LCM permanent employee count is small. The CEO and board compose the core contingent. Volunteers manage additional services, including website, accounting, and other business operations functions. LCM leaders pay the program staff directly. LCM leaders rely on the program staff for delivery of the arts and music and tutoring programs delivered to the student participants. The number of schools serviced by the programs has increased from six schools in the 2018 to 2019 school year to 10 schools in the 2019 to 2020 school year, including an increase in the number of paid program staff and leaders, usually six staff and leaders per school (Table 7). Further, LCM leaders have a ratified business plan that includes incremental growth of between two and four schools in the 2020 to 2021 school year. The review and program cost baseline work within this research study enabled LCM leaders to share the minimum program funding obligations with school administrators.

The financial impact of the 2018 to 2019 school year is not yet determined but is work in progress. The LCM fiscal year begins July 1 and ends June 30. Current publicly available financial information includes the fiscal year 2017, which reported a small loss for the year. There is an in-kind contribution to LCM that is currently under review. This contribution, if included in the organizations accounting records, would shift the net gain/loss amount significantly into the gain category.

LCM leadership became engaged in increasing the influence and success after the 2017 filing. The more recent financial statements for 2019 are not yet available on the GuideStar website. LCM leadership is aware of the current status of GuideStar data and intends to have the information updated by the end of 2019.

Customer Results.

Customer satisfaction with the results delivered by the LCM programs has been very positive. Before the 2018 to 2019 school year, LCM leaders conducted a post-program survey at the end of the 21-week program session. The results data included multiple findings:

- Over 86% of respondents agreed that the LCM programs and leaders contributed to improved grades and higher completion rates of homework.
- Program participants were more self-reliant after completion of the program.
- Of 230 program participants, 89% would recommend LCM programs to friends.
- Of 230 program participants, 95% were able to maintain a GPA of 2.5 or higher.

The survey results were sufficiently compelling that LCM leaders committed to doing further research on its programs. Leaders hoped to build new evidence that the program model is useful and supports the LCM leaders' commitment to increase graduation rates and decrease dropout rates where their programs are in use. The survey results support the LCM leaders' commitment included in the revised LCM program performance model (Table 6) for the 2019 to 2020 school year.

Separately, published research includes research findings focused on the benefits of arts and music education from low-income and minority backgrounds. Brown, Benedett, and Armistead (2010) shared findings that students with two years of attendance in arts enrichment programs (music and arts) resulted in higher academic achievement and school readiness skills. A separate NPO shared critical data that included a metric that indicated students in a music arts program have a 93.9% attendance rate, compared to schools without a music arts program that average 84.9% attendance (DoSomething.org, n.d.).

Also, LCM leaders expanded program delivery from six to 10 schools for 2019 to the 2020 year, with a corresponding increase for program funding, is an indicator of customer results delivered by the program teams and program leaders, and revised strategies are giving toward program success.

Based on the actual results noted above, and on the skills summarized in Table 10, LCM leadership intends to continue expanding its programs as quickly as resources and participants, without impacting program success. Further, with the variable cost model associated with the programs offered by the schools, LCM can conceptually scale up to meet demand so long as there are program leaders and staff available with current knowledge and passion about arts and music.

A significant discovery from this research study was a vital need that the LCM leaders determine the actual program cost per school, including all fixed and variable costs. The customers (schools) for LCM programs had not been made aware of the program cost, and LCM programs were not generating sufficient funding from the schools to cover the actual program costs. LCM leadership comprehended the need to determine the program cost base and spent the time to learn that cost amount.

LCM leaders have also focused on improving donor support beyond school contributions, beginning with the 2017 to 2019 timeframe. Despite a lack of availability to Form 990 EZ filings for the 2017 to 2018 and 2018 to 2019 fiscal years, which include donations data, LCM leaders declared they had seen an increase in donor support for LCM programs resulting from the improved focus by LCM leaders. A small number of corporations have committed to support LCM programs and activities with donations of services or physical product such as Hatchimals, that can raise awareness for LCM programs or generate additional revenue (through a gift of Hatchimals) for the NPO.

LCM leadership has also adopted a program costing model that enables accurate determination of the fixed and variable costs of LCM programs. This information is combined with a proposal and shared with other interested NPOs who then can license the LCM program model in their geographic region. Initial interest has included an NPO in the United Kingdom, and various locations throughout North America per the LCM chairperson. LCM leadership feedback on the licensing model is positive, though time will be the real determiner of licensing success.

Workforce Results

Workforce performance estimates originate from learnings, processes, programs, student participants, and other sources that allow comparison of one organization with initial projections, results, and goals (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). While LCM leadership does not have a strategy that calls for specific workforce expansion, they do have a proven, functional model that identifies the staffing required to deliver existing programs to partners. The data for this operational model originated with previous program results, and program leaders, and program staff experience. A key finding from the program performance review was that the workforce cost was higher than the funding received to deliver the programs.

Independently of the financial viability of the programs previously, the program leads, and staff is supportive of the LCM programs offered in schools and committed to delivering high-quality leadership and engagement to facilitate the student participants' success and progress. The partners (schools) were also appreciative of the program value. In a review with LCM, leaders agreed to increase their program funding to cover the actual costs of program delivery.

The members of the workforce teams capture progress and results from data weekly. The results data are reviewed with LCM leadership and used to assess critical measures of workforce capacity and capability. A comparison of results to identified LCM goals and mission are also determined. The weekly reviews also enable LCM leaders and program leaders to compare results across program locations and to understand whether causality of conclusions is related to workforce, staffing levels, or sufficient focus on the predominant segment, specifically arts or music.

The workforce enjoys the opportunity to work with LCM leadership and become more aligned with LCM goals and the mission. Each of the program staff and leaders are passionate about arts and music, with current knowledge at a level more closely aligned with the program participants. The current workforce is qualified to positively influence social connectivity between LCM and the communities and schools it serves. Social connectivity strategies were one of the critical contributions identified within the specific business problem.

The affirmation of successful program results from the partners and willingness of both LCM leaders and the partners to continue is a reflection of the perceived value received from the workforce delivering LCM programs. Also, expansion of the workforce to accommodate program delivery from six schools for the 2018 to 2019 school year, to 10 schools for the 2019 to 2020 school year is an indicator of the positive impact the program teams, program leaders, and revised strategies are delivering toward program success. The workforce results should also include a non-zero or positive net income from the partner programs, which positively correlates to a need for strategies that provide organizational sustainability beyond the planning horizon of 2 to 5 years.

Leadership and Governance Results

Leadership results. The Baldrige Excellence Framework lists multiple leadership and governance methods. Leadership methods include leadership style and implementation, including structures and practices that are appropriate and functional for leadership decision making within an organization (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). LCM leaders implement their style through an enabled workforce and provide the program leaders and staff direct access to the LT through weekly reviews and regular meetings. The LT meetings with program staff and leaders facilitate useful and timely communications, allowing efficient sharing and analysis of program status, and leadership review and involvement with requested or recommended changes to program modality or details.

Frequent and regular interactions between the 35 program leaders and staff and the six members of the LT (Table 2) also promote partnership and performance. The LT uses these interactions to learn more about the programs from the program leaders and staff. Conversely, the program staff is more empowered to recommend and make decisions due to their involvement with the program leaders.

Governance results. The functional management structure used within an organization directly influences organizational results (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). Overall governance within LCM is the responsibility of the NPO senior leaders and BOD. LCM employees and volunteers have specific obligations to the schools who have executed agreements with the LCM LT. LCM volunteers (Table 2) perform vital work related to the LCM programs, including website updates, organizational accounting functions, including payables and wages to 1099 employees, and data analytics. Currently, LCM programs are being delivered effectively to the schools, including an appropriate level of operational status, feedback, and assessment of participants' progress. Further, the program guidelines include specific academic objectives in which the program leaders and staff facilitate and measure progress.

Organizational leaders, including the LCM chairperson and BOD, are also subject to governance and are accountable to internal and external stakeholders (Baldridge Performance Excellence Framework, 2017). Based on the successful 2018 to 2019 program outcome and reported results, the schools have increased their adoption of LCM leaders' programs going forward.

Internally, the combination of social connectedness and sustainability are also governance metrics. Increased revenue from the programs commencing in the fall of 2019 and subsequent years' programs positively affect internal governance.

As the program leaders and staff see the net zero or positive return from the plans, there is more reason to believe that the LT has created new, practical strategies that can sustain LCM operations over an extended timeframe.

Finally, governance includes compliance with reporting requirements and guidelines established by the school districts that offer LCM programs and federal financial reporting requirements. LCM leaders meet or exceed the guidance required to provide their plans and reports to the school districts. LCM files their financial statements as necessary, based on a July 1 to June 30 fiscal year.

Financial and Market Results

Financial results. Financial performance has not been the primary driver for LCM leaders, who are focused on ensuring the program funding itself. However, LCM leaders recognize that business results are essential to organizational sustainability, and particularly for the programs.

As the net income analysis shows (Table 12), revenue and expenses have decreased annually over the last three Form 990 EZ filings. 2014 to 2015 has the highest income of the 3 years' results. However, LCM leaders paid for the annual showcase event from contributions and grants directly in the 2014 to 2015 tax year (Figure 5). In subsequent years the showcase event has been paid directly from donations that were not received and deposited by LCM leaders. This change in showcase funding continues in the same form today.

Table 11

Net Income Summary, 2018

Fiscal year: July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018 Revenue vs. expenses	
Total revenue:	$114,985
Contributions	$25,114
Government grants	$0
Program services	$89,871
Investments	$0
Special events	$0
Sales	$0
Other revenue	$0
Total expenses	$118,359
Program services	$118,164
Administration	$195
Fundraising expenses	$0
Net gain (loss)	$(3,374)

Data for 2017 to 2018 fiscal year were unavailable at the time of this research, though the financial documents had been completed and submitted. The LCM chairperson indicated that the data should be publicly visible this quarter, ending December 31st. Since the program leader and staff model changed in the 2017 to 2018 fiscal year timeframe, there may be a significant difference in the results. Additionally, 2018 to 2019 school year included an initial revenue increase as program income was adjusted to cover an increased amount of the program cost. 2019 to 2020 fiscal year is when the full program cost recovery is expected to be realized and is not part of the data available for this research.

Market results. The program participant count has grown from 2015 to 2016 and influences the market results of the programs. The program participant count for 2018 to the 2019 school year was 300, while the forecasted student count for 2019 to the 2020 school year is 500 participants. As a more significant number of students enroll in the programs (Table 7), program revenue and expenses will grow. The significant changes are that due to the LCM leaders' ability to accurately calculate the cost of program delivery, LCM will not carry a deficit to guarantee the full program costs. Last, the ability to fully cover program costs means that LCM leaders can continue to expand the program coverage to a broader market base if the market base can support the cost recovery model itself. LCM leaders are now able to use the program costing as an element of their program model, should they wish to expand the reach of their plans by licensing the model to other organizations. This choice could also generate new income in the form of program licensing, which is attractive to the LCM leaders.

Table 12

Net Income Trend, 2014 to 2017

Year	Revenue	Expenses	Net income	YoY change (%)
2016–2017	$114,985	$118,359	$(3,374)	–85%
2015–2016	$133,835	$129,864	$3,972	25%
2014–2015	$258,704	$242,642	$16,062	N/A

Key Themes

Process strengths. The mission of LCM leaders and the rest of the organization embody the core objective of LCM leaders' programs and resources; to offer positive social choices to at-risk and underprivileged youth, and to facilitate their success at school and beyond. LCM leadership leverages graduate students to promote the courses, provide guidance, and to exhibit successful behavior which provides an example of what is possible if the program participants are fully engaged. The decision to shift to graduate students for the program staff (Table 2) also minimizes the likelihood of students' perception of a generational disconnect, which might result from a significant age gap between program staff and the participants.

Leaders support the mission statement through continued programs targeted at the at-risk participants, including self-chosen programs for the participants with expert guidance. The program staff works with the participants to identify their favorite art or music skills, and to provide academic support. Progress data and feedback are collected and reviewed weekly with LCM leadership and staff, to ensure the students' progress is on track, and to make any adjustments if growth is less than expected.

The structure of LCM programs includes specific increases in academic participation and performance. The specific academic performance of the students is not the primary objective of LCM leaders but exhibits the program staff and LCM chairperson's successful identification of a problem to be solved, and a scalable solution to the problem. Additionally, the program staff, school district board, teachers, and finally, families of the registered program participants comprise a community that is explicitly served by the LCM leaders' programs.

Process opportunities. The LT has already begun to implement and refine the processes used within LCM programs. Assessment of existing program performance has identified specific value indicators and opportunities to deliver the applications more efficiently. The plans have a defined framework that includes the number of program resources necessary to provide the program, ensure student success, and review program metrics. Weekly collection and review of program status data (Table 9) enable leaders to evaluate the current workforce engagement and program progress at any point in time. Regular capture, discussion, and feedback on processes may also reduce program participants' hesitancy to share with program leaders, and augment students' trust in the program staff and program objectives.

The highest value process opportunity appears to be increasing the donor support base for LCM programs. If successful, additional schools and participant groups can be added to the LCM program roster, creating a corresponding increase in student academic success and willingness to stay in school.

The LCM organization itself is not independent of the LT individuals today, despite the success of the program structure. Concern that the chairperson might leave the NPO was not found during the research but is worthy of consideration as part of the organizational analysis. The chairperson provides considerable leadership, direction, and recognition within the arts and music communities. There may be value in recruiting new leadership or board members with experience to complement that of the chairperson and introduce new continuity to the organization's processes, and programs, as a result.

Results strengths. The results achieved by LCM support the intent and structure of the arts and music programs offered. The number of students and schools served continues to grow (Table 7), indicating some portion of the demand for LCM programs within the communities. The number of schools offering LCM programs may double in the 2019 - 2020 school year based on the current trend, and the continued demand for LCM programs.

An outcome of LCM programs is the academic prowess of the students enrolled in LCM programs (Table 8). The increased attendance and GPA results are conditions of the LCM programs, but also help to increase motivation and engagement for the students.

Perhaps equally valuable to the students and LCM success is the showcase event structure. The showcase event fundamentally creates a capstone moment for each student in the LCM programs, allowing them to show off their skills to the public at the culmination of the program. LCM leaders fund the showcase events with contracts and sponsorships, including widely recognized brand names in arts and music. The public also supports these events within the communities that benefit from the LCM leaders' programs. Finally, some of the young artists do receive an opportunity to license their music or art, depending on quality, demand, and presence of arts and music leaders or recruiters in the audience.

Results opportunities. LCM has struggled financially in previous years, and in some cases, offered programs while motivated by passion without sufficient economic or community support. LCM financial statements reflect many trends, including little free cash and a continued need to develop additional methods or sources of funding to operate and expand the LCM programs. The board structure changed in 2017, and the former members replaced with board members with a passion for the LCM founder and chairperson's social cause. The new board has been in place for less than 2 years and appears to be effective in increasing LCM community engagement, optimizing program structure and delivery, and is actively involved in existing projects and advocacy for LCM programs. Finally, the LCM chairperson and founder can rely on the board and key staff without having to be involved in every detail of operations.

Future opportunities that should be considered by LCM leaders include (a) identification and implementation of sustainable program funding sources, (b) program expansion alternatives including licensing, (c) creation of broader public awareness of LCM programs to create additional demand, and (d) attempt to enlist vital arts and music industry resources to the LT, to expand LCM programs and number of potential participants.

Project Summary

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore the strategies used by NPO leaders to create social connectedness and financial independence to support their NPO sustainability. Approximately 40% of NPO leaders have experienced difficulty creating sufficient funding for their organizations' requirements beyond initial funding or grant (Han & McKelvey, 2016). If funding is insufficient to deliver programs, NPO leaders are likely to terminate their charitable activities and abandon the program participants.

I identified a small NPO, located in the southwestern region of the United States of America, as the target for this research. The leaders of LCM (a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the NPO) had some previous experience with NPO strategy creation. They were passionate about the programs and program recipients. My research with the LCM leaders found that the specific business problem was a lack of strategies to increase social connectedness with their communities and to ensure financial sustainability for the LCM leaders' programs for longer than 5 years.

I used the social entrepreneurship theory (Schumpeter, 1934) and the 2017 to 2018 Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2017) as my theoretical lens and template. I interviewed the business leaders within LCM to discover current practices and use the research findings to engage the LCM LT in strategies to increase social connectedness with their communities and provide financial sustainability for the social programs for longer than 5 years.

The first element of the research was to identify the organizational description and situation. I used these data to create a narrative of the leadership triad, which includes information about leadership, corporate strategy, and participant or customer attributes. The LCM leaders initially launched their programs with a great deal of passion, and a lesser amount of economic support. Participant counts for the LCM programs were limited by ongoing funding, despite demonstrable program success and quantifiable increases in school performance and participation. LCM leaders were willing to give to make the programs successful but lacked the support to grow funding and separate program operations from building support for the programs. Lack of sufficient resources was the result of engaging the same leaders and employees in every aspect of operations. LCM leaders realized that organizational behavior had to change but was unsure what to change and where to start.

Once the leadership triad research was complete, I reviewed the results triad. I examined workforce and operations details, plus measurement and analysis of results, and knowledge management. The study of workforce and operations discovered that LCM leaders had identified the need to separate fundraising and community engagement from program delivery. However, further work was required to create a functional baseline funding model. The revised model of workforce and operations appears to be successful so far. LCM leaders have been able to define a standardized and repeatable funding model for the programs, reinvigorate their program delivery by hiring near-graduation level students with passion and experience in arts and music, and building an ongoing feedback path into the program delivery process itself. The 2019 to 2020 program year may result in twice the number of students completing the LCM leaders' programs than the previous 2018 to 2019 plans. An increased program population also provides a higher number of candidates to the annual showcase event, where students' prowess and accomplishments are presented in a professionally staged performance event.

The LCM leaders have learned to prioritize and create strategies that focus on the most critical aspects of their NPO mission: to provide underserved youth the opportunity to engage in arts and music programs, while increasing their level of participation, attendance, and success at school where the programs are delivered. From this research study, LCM leaders have learned how to determine the fixed and variable costs to provide a program. Further, the LCM leaders were able to engage with the hosting schools, share the cost models, and obtain the necessary incremental funding to cover the programs' costs, plus school districts' commitment to program expansion over the next few years.

Finally, LCM leaders can focus on the execution of strategies to make the NPO successful, rather than participate in the programs daily. With that freedom, LCM leaders are now able to engage within and outside the communities to build support and funding for the LCM programs. LCM leaders have also been able to have discussions with significant corporations regarding the support of arts and music programs, with corresponding increased scholarly growth and engagement at the school level.

Contributions and Recommendations

Results from this study may be used to understand how NPO leaders should look at their organizations, and to conduct a critical self-assessment. The learnings by the LCM leaders have equipped them with skills and knowledge that can be used to recognize, analyze, and identify or create solutions to increase the success of their organizations' programs.

Social connectedness describes how the NPO engages with the community to build trust and create support for the organization (Bailey et al., 2018). The inclusion of social connectedness in the problem statement created additional discussion since the topic could be considered a study of its own. My assertion remains that this study identifies a direct association between the NPO and the community from the perspective of engagement that cannot be isolated from the funding, and organizational sustainability of the NPO itself. Based on the research findings, there is an evident symbiosis between social connectedness and corporate sustainability within LCM. Other researchers may wish to consider whether the research problem requires investigation of a single factor or multiple factors that may have linkage to each other.

Two near-term recommendations should be reviewed and implemented as quickly as practical. First, the creation of a program replication plan is recommended and potentially registered as a model. The research included the creation of a program model that consists of a costing and resource component. LCM leaders may wish to use this model for further expansion through a program licensing model. Second, an organizational continuity plan should also be created and approved by the BOD. There are a sufficiently large number of students participating in LCM programs, approximately 350 to 500 students in the 2019 to 2020 school year, that program continuity is essential to the participants and the schools who also benefit from the improved students' performance.

Finally, I would recommend that organizational leaders, including LCM leadership, periodically review their programs, using total quality-management (TQM) tools. The use of a TQM tool such as the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework provides a well-tested framework useful to organizational leaders to collect and assess organizational behavior even by the leadership itself.

The results of this research study may provide insight and value for many smaller NPOs. NPOs rely on support within the community, and this research identifies a method to offer programs to the community that generates long-term benefits and promotes positive social change. Finally, this research may help other researchers and NPO leaders who are interested in creating or improving strategies that increase or extend their organizations' sustainability.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol, Research Questions, and Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

1. Introduce myself as the researcher, explain the research summary, and thank participant(s) for their participation in study
2. Refresh the study topic and re-read research question
3. Explain to each of the participants their rights of participation.
    a. Include confidentiality assurance
    b. Remind them that they have the choice and ability to remove themselves from the study at any time.
    c. Also, remind participants of their right to review, change, correct, and redact data related to their participation
4. Explain the current interview process and timing
5. Refresh the topic summary for the current interview
6. Inform participants that I will take notes and record the audio for this interview. Additionally, I will use a transcription service to convert the audio to text, and remind participants that this has been our practice throughout the research
7. Ensure that the participant is willing to participate and still consents accordingly
8. Confirm participant's permission to record the interview
9. Conduct interview – approximately 60 minutes
    a. Ask the predetermined interview questions, shared before the meeting
    b. Conduct deeper discussion where questions appear to have additional details and/or exploration

c. Ask the participant(s) if they have additional questions on the current discussion questions

10. Confirm next meeting and high-level topics
11. Thank participant(s) for their time and contributions

Post Interview Protocol

1. Transcribe the interview and provide transcript to participant(s), via email. Approximately 4-10 days post interview.
2. Provide participant(s) with clarification questions within four business days of the interview.
3. Within five days, thank participant(s) for their time, confirm the next meeting and high-level discussion topic(s), and ask if they have specific topics or clarifying questions for the next meeting.
4. Remind participants that they are welcome to update/enhance their responses as they review and see a need.
5. Confirm participant availability ahead of each meeting.

Research Questions

What social connectedness and financial independence strategies do NPO leaders use to support sustainability for longer than 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to increase your organization’s social connectedness and financial independence?

2. What methods did you find worked well to increase your organization's social connectedness and financial independence?
3. How do you determine the effectiveness of the strategies you use in delivering the desired outcomes?
4. What were the key barriers to implementing your organization's strategies for social connectedness and financial independence?
5. How did your organization address the key barriers to implementing its strategies for social connectedness and financial independence?
6. What else can you share with me about your organization's strategies for social connectedness and financial independence?