

**‘It Takes Money to Buy Whiskey’:
Local Energy Systems and Civic Participation**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we explore motivations for political participation within a community-based energy initiative, Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs). Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, we examine what types of selective incentives citizens receive for working within CERTs, and which incentives are likely to prove most powerful over the long term. We surveyed members of the various regional teams one year into the program and then again two years later, asking about motivations for participation, recruitment, technical knowledge of energy issues, and measures of success within CERTs. We also asked citizens about the perceived impact of the organization, which, along with measures of success, is a crucial but difficult element to assess. Our analysis also includes six focus groups, one in each region, involving the most active of the CERTs members. Driving across the state to conduct focus groups allowed for an additional dimension to be considered, that is, the connection between meeting attendance, geography, and a sense of ownership within CERTs. The great geographical distances involved in getting citizens together for face-to-face meetings in certain regions are a genuine concern and potential irony for members of community-based energy initiatives.

Introduction

Associationalism has always been a cherished element in American political culture. As idealized by Almond and Verba, for instance, “the citizen, unlike the subject, is an active participant in the political input process—the process by which political decisions are made” (1963, 161). Lukensmeyer and Brigham (2002) likewise argue that a “healthy democracy depends on the ability of citizens to affect the public policies that deeply influence their lives.” On the other hand, despite the underlying cultural ethic that understands participation to be a necessary feature of a viable liberal democracy, the ‘average citizen’ has never been a reliable nor generally active participant in civic affairs (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002).

However one evaluates American political culture, two critical issues present themselves in any consideration of the associational habit. The first is the question of recruitment, that is how are people brought into an environment that demands they give up increasingly sparse “free time.” The second issue is the problem of incentives or those things that may or may not be offered to individuals so as to insure their continued participation.

This paper addresses both of these questions through a detailed analysis of a voluntary, community-based program called the Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs). The project is a collaborative involving the Minnesota Department of Commerce, the University of Minnesota’s Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships program, Rural Minnesota Energy Task Force, the Metro County Energy Task Force, and the Minnesota Project, a nongovernmental organization that works on agricultural issues. CERTs teams have been created for six regions in the state, with each team bringing

together people from various cities and counties, farmers and other landowners, industry, utilities, colleges, universities, and local governments. The outcome of the project is a strategic vision and a renewable energy and conservation plan for each region, reflecting a mix of energy sources, including biomass, wind, solar, and hydrogen. The plan is intended to lay the groundwork for funding and implementing renewable energy projects that meet regional needs.

Bringing People into the Fold: Recruitment Strategies and Processes

The means by which individuals become engaged in a community activity such as CERTs is an important question for both organizers and political theorists. Organizers cannot simply expect people to show up at the door no matter how worthy the cause and theorists cannot rely upon assumptions regarding the virtues of a democratically-oriented and participative public. An important contribution to untangling the difficult question of how individuals end up as engaged citizens is supplied by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's Citizen Participation Project (1995). While this project was primarily concerned with political activities such as voting, campaign work, and other familiar activities, the project was also concerned with quasi-political "community activities" such as "running the PTA fund drive or managing the church soup kitchen" (1995, 141). Community energy projects such as CERTs reside comfortably within this notion of politics.

Verba, et al. point to another reason to consider community energy activities as political in character, namely, the transformational process whereby non-political acts lay the foundation for explicitly political acts at some point in the future. They explicitly acknowledge that the distance between the two is often very small and that a major theme

of their work is the “embeddedness of political activities in non-political institutions of civil society” (1995, 40). This point is also made up by Skocpol (2003), who argues that civic organizations often times serve as a valuable training ground for democratic citizenship, offering members the opportunity to experience democratic debate and the rules by which this debate is to take place in a somewhat egalitarian environment.

Yet, while community activities, including energy projects of the sort represented by CERTs, may lead to explicitly political activities, they remain distinguishable by their recruitment channels. That is, while most forms of political activity can be motivated by secondary connections or impersonal communications, potential participants for community activities are especially motivated by an act of neighborliness, i.e., being asked by someone you know personally (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 141). Indeed, only protest is more dependent upon personal solicitations and this by the narrowest of margins (68 to 67 percent).

The framework developed Verba, Schlozman, and Brady served as the foundation for our inquiries into the recruitment strategies employed by the CERTs organizers. The analysis was conducted in three stages, beginning with a May 2005 survey of CERTs participants who attended regional meetings. Members of the CERTs teams were individually surveyed using an instrument that encompassed a variety of issues, including motivations for participation, recruitment, stakeholders involved in the organization, and knowledge of participants. This was followed by a January 2007 online survey of CERTs participants. Although comparisons are made among these surveys, it should be noted that the populations surveyed differ in potentially significant ways. While the 2005 evaluation surveyed those in attendance at various regional CERTs meetings (n = 59

respondents), the online survey was e-mailed to all those identified by CERTs staff as having a prior or on-going relationship with a CERTs team and whose contact information was maintained on an electronic distribution list (n = 117 respondents).¹ The third phase of the research design consisted of focus groups with CERTs team members from each of the six regions (Central, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and West Central) that were conducted by the co-authors between December 2006 and June 2007.

A number of recruitment strategies were developed in the start-up stages of the project. According to project organizers, participants were recruited “via letters of invitation, email meeting notices, on-going press releases, announcements by the Sierra Club in their newsletters, on the CERTs website and via word-of-mouth. Individuals who attended and signed in at meetings were added to the CERT mailing list and/or listserv” (Pawlich, personal correspondence 2008). Another important element in the overall recruitment strategy was the use of prior energy-related activities. For instance, “one of the sponsoring entities, the Regional Partnerships, had helped organize a 2001 conference entitled, ‘Sharing the Load’ that focused on distributed energy issues. When CERTs began we issued paper invitations to that list of conference participants in addition to electronic (email) invitations to those people for whom we had email addresses.”

¹ CERTs participants ranged in age from 30 to 91 years. While a few respondents were in their mid-20’s and a few in their 70’s, including one self-identified “geezer”, most are in-between these extremes. CERTs is also a male-dominated project. In 2005, out of 59 respondents, only 9, or 15 percent, were women while in 2007 there were 34 women (30 percent) and 81 men (70 percent). The focus groups exhibited a similar gender difference, with more men than women participating in those discussions.

Finally, CERTs staff identified organizations composed of people with high “participation potential,” that is, those individuals who not only have the resources to participate but who are also likely to say “yes” (Brady, Schlozman and Verba 1999). For instance, a number of “pre-launch” meetings we held. According to the staff (Pawlich, personal correspondence 2008):

We gathered key energy stakeholders who were already working on energy projects to solicit their advice in recruiting people. We developed a list of potential participants, including local utilities, and an agenda that would get folks “up-to-speed” on renewable energy technologies and potential and began recruiting targeted individuals with those tools. In the Northwest we worked hard to recruit utility representatives at the outset because we sensed the greatest resistance to alternative energy technologies.

The results of all these recruitment efforts largely support the conclusions of Verba et al. Thus, nearly 60 percent of the 2005 survey respondents cited a specific organization or individual in answer to a question about how they became aware of CERTs, demonstrating the importance of recruitment through established networks or personal connections. A minority of participants were recruited through their place of employment while three respondents read about the organization’s development in the local newspaper and decided to join the efforts.

When asked why they joined CERTs, more than half of the respondents cited an interest in renewable energy and sustainability. More than 60 percent of CERTs participants report that their participation is “work-related,” a factor which seems highly significant in terms of sustaining participation and which again supports the claims of Verba et al. that people often cite non-political reasons for engaging in political activity, including in order to “take advantage of recreational opportunities or ... to advance their careers” (1995, 42).

Analysis of the focus group discussions sheds additional light on recruitment patterns across the various regions. While some focus group participants recalled being recruited into CERTs by a particular individual, such as a school board member, boss, or university professor, many more participants had an understandably vague recollection of how they were initially recruited into the organization. For most participants, however, their recruitment was linked to another organization in which they were involved:

Who started begging...? There were a couple of initiatives that a number of us were working on anyway and this CERTs thing came along, and to me it looked like a good opportunity to further the partnerships that were started on some other projects, and I think it's worked very well in furthering more partnerships beyond what we're currently doing in the northeast...

I had been involved with ReNEW Northfield.² When we heard about the first CERTs meeting, Bruce Anderson, who founded that group, and I came to Owatonna. We found it very interesting, meeting other folks who were doing interesting things...and this whole southeast Minnesota area is someplace that I've been drawn to in terms of these renewable resources, too...So just coming from a similar smaller group in Northfield, and then coming out to a regional group and finding other regions connected up into the statewide CERTs, realizing how well this is as a forum, and that you can learn different things that are going on...

I actually don't remember how it started or how we got invited to the first meeting, but we jumped right in at the beginning, and but I think what's unique about CERTs and I'm glad we went because we've gone ever since and so has everyone else. I mean this model has been followed in the past where you try to get a bunch of expertise together around a particular issue and lots of time it just falls apart. People just quit coming but with CERTS it hasn't. I think it's gained strength...

According to focus group participants, CERTs was perceived as offering opportunities for fostering partnerships with other initiatives, as well as a time and place for the sharing of information and expertise about a wide range of energy issues.

² Discussion of this organization can be found in Hoffman and High-Pippert 2005.

Obviously, participants who have remained involved with CERTs found these opportunities to be productive and worthwhile.

The ability of CERTs to simultaneously encourage broad-based citizen participation and expertise was appreciated by focus group participants, as articulated by a member in the West Central region:

One of the things that's really important is that it is largely citizen-based. Anybody can join the effort without necessarily needing to be invited. It convenes a large amount of expertise. I think I was exceptionally impressed at the St. Cloud annual meeting this year, seeing 400-500 people, all sharing an immense amount of expertise in particular areas. And then over time, getting to know all these people face-to-face and knowing where to go in order to collaborate on projects.

This theme emerged in the online survey as well, when analyzing the open-ended responses to questions about respondents' rationales for viewing CERTs as successful in their particular region and in the state. Responses included "Citizens from the entire state have the opportunity to become involved or informed rather than just a pocket group" and "The meetings are open to anyone interested and doesn't 'hand-pick' people, therefore, getting lots of ideas and empowering more citizens to take action."

The idea of empowering even more citizens to take action was also prevalent in the focus group discussions. Thus, many participants emphasized the need for another round of recruitment into the organization. When discussing the perceived successes of CERTs within their region, many of the focus group participants stressed that although they would define CERTs as successful, there is much more work to be done, and many more citizens who need to become involved:

There were five people from Lake City that came to the original meeting and I'm the only one that's been active in it. The other people were business leaders, community leaders, and interested, but don't have time

to do anything else. With this organization's success over the last couple of years, it's time to go out and try to re-recruit. Because there's a lot of stuff, a lot of public relations, public information activities that we could do, if we had more people, more resources.

It would be an ideal time right now as alternative energy is a sexy topic...Any group has a tendency to wear itself out over time, especially if it is all-volunteer. So it would be good to bring in new ideas and talent.

The big problem I have with CERTs right now, is that we have a lot of people... who know what's going on with renewables and conservation and all that, but a lot of people we aren't touching, and a lot of people that if we could get to could snowball the thing...and how do we get to those people. I'd be happy to go to a meeting with 200 other people. That would be fun. I mean, I wouldn't have a problem with that. But the most we've had is 30 or 40 in this region. So I think that that is my big issue right now, trying to figure how do we get past where we are. I think there are a lot of people who are very, very interested in it, but they don't know how to access it.

Knowing how to access interested citizens is a recruitment issue, and "pulling in more people" and "getting those people to the meetings" came up under multiple lines of inquiry within the focus groups. Many participants seemed to share the view of one CERTs member from the West Central region: "I think once people get to a meeting, I think they'll be back." How to get citizens to their first meeting was considered the problem, and according to survey respondents, increased public awareness of CERTs could be the key. When asked about the future direction of CERTs, open-ended responses included the following mentions of the need for increased public visibility:

Press on in all areas, with an emphasis on more public awareness. I know many people don't know who CERTs is or what they do.

They are unknown in our area by most citizens and even those who are active in energy issues.

More public awareness, including local success stories.

Keep getting the word out.

Try to secure a higher profile in communities.

A few respondents were more specific about the types of people who should be recruited and the manner in which they might or might not be recruited. In the words of two survey respondents, “It should probably try to pull in people who haven’t yet participated. Perhaps it needs to make personal contact with prospects in economic development, engineering, banking, education, etc.” and “The ‘regular folks’ are basically totally unaware of CERTs’ existence...the press releases tend to sound like university noise. ‘Come to a meeting’ is not a very interesting idea to farmers.” The importance of personal contact emerges once again, as does the idea of people having differing motivations for political activity, which will be further discussed in the next section.

Participation and the Community Connection

If recruitment into community activities is borne out of an infrastructure of personal contacts and neighborly relations, our research demonstrates that sustaining participation can also be nurtured by an equally deep commitment to community values. The latter has been specifically addressed by Funk, whose research found that a “societal interest value orientation” is “significantly related to a greater likelihood of working on community problems” (1998, 604), though the association between such values and the commitment of time is somewhat weaker. Funk nonetheless concluded that “a value commitment placing societal needs over personal needs influences participation in community affairs” (1998, 608).

In part, Funk's work is a response to the hegemony of the rational choice model that has largely characterized the participation literature in recent years. As Funk points out, however, there is no necessary choice between the two, since what drives participation is not either altruism or calculating self-interest, but "a mix of desires to benefit the self and others" (1998, 604). Our framework for interpreting motivations for participation in community-based energy therefore draws upon both of these motivational possibilities.

According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, there are four kinds of motivations for political activity. Three of the four motivations are *selective benefits*, that is, benefits that citizens could accrue only if they actually participated in the activity. The first such benefit of a selective nature is *material benefits*, such as jobs, career advancement, or help with a personal problem. This benefit of participation is more tangible than the other two selective benefits of *social gratification* and *civic gratification*. With social gratification, a citizen receives the enjoyment of working with others, and the excitement of politics as a reward for participation. Civic gratification, or feeling a sense of duty or fulfilling a desire to contribute to the welfare of one's community, which might be construed as Funk's "societal interest value orientation", is another example of a benefit related to the act of participation itself. The final motivation identified by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) is the *desire to influence policy outcomes*, described as feelings of gratification that come from the implementation of desired policies.

There is no doubt that the CERTs project has developed a highly devoted cadre of participants. Thus, most of the 2007 survey respondents have been involved in CERTs for three years (35 percent), followed by two years (28 percent), and then one year (18

percent); fewer than one in five have been involved for less than one year (19 percent). An important factor that might help explain such high levels of sustained participation is a shared set of priorities among members. Our survey asked a series of questions concerning the importance of priorities that participants bring into the project. These priorities are based upon various motives identified in the political participation literature and range from very personal priorities, such as financial gain, to very altruistic motives, such as building strong communities.

As shown in Table 1, there are some interesting variations as well as some striking findings. First, the essential connection to community was clearly demonstrated. Participants were virtually unanimous in their high ranking of a whole series of community-oriented priorities. In two cases, development of strong communities and security of energy supply, 100 percent of respondents identified those as very important or somewhat important priorities. There was also a great deal of consensus concerning the importance of constructing community-owned energy technology, clean energy technology, energy projects owned by local individuals, and small-scale energy technology. Local employment was also a shared priority, as well as having an opportunity for community participation over nature of energy system and making society identify all costs of energy production. In terms of policy-driven priorities, the importance of reducing threats caused by global climate change and changing public policy was also a shared priority. Independence from the energy grid was considered of lower importance. Personal involvement in community affairs, demonstrating civic gratifications for political participation, was considered of high importance. Conversely, two factors of central importance to the rational choice model, i.e., lower electricity costs

and the opportunity to reap financial gain, were ranked much lower in the hierarchy of motivational factors.

Table 1 about here

A similar set of factors come into play in regards to *sustaining* participation in the project. Thus, when asked an open-ended question about why they have remained involved with CERTs, respondents again emphasized community-related factors, i.e., that they enjoy working with like-minded people, networking, making contacts, and creating friendships. As one respondent wrote, “CERTs allows people to feel like they are not acting or working alone on issues, but are actually a part of a large, and more powerful, group of people.” As demonstrated by the following comments, for many participants, CERTs is considered to be an organization that can “make a difference” in the lives of their communities.

CERTs supports the good intentions of the civic-minded.

I have grandchildren. I want them to have a world that they can live in without excessive global warming and the resultant wars over dwindling natural resources.

The government hasn't done anything to fix the energy problems, so it's up to the people to try to find solutions.

CERTs is a great example of what can happen when the 'grass roots' take action.

Of course, it could be that the perception of shared priorities is as important as the actual priority positions. When asked whether others shared their priorities, 66 percent of CERTs survey respondents answered affirmatively, 20 percent answered negatively, and the rest with uncertainty. Determining the extent to which CERTs team members hold similar or dissimilar views of these priorities will likely be critical in determining the

success or failure of the project. That is, if participants sense that others fail to share in their views the possibility for exit is significantly increased. Given the diversity of interests represented in the teams, dealing with what is likely to be an equally wide-ranging set of priorities will no doubt be one of the primary challenges facing the program's administrators.

Thus, in terms of sustaining the involvement of CERTs participants, the organization connects a variety of motivations for political activity. All four of these benefit types -- material benefits (work-related participation), social gratification (high levels of attendance at quarterly meetings), civic gratification (regional approach allows for contribution to community), and desire to influence (energy) policy outcomes, were clearly evident in the participants' responses.

A critical question for sustaining participation in any community-based effort is whether or not participants consider the project or organization to be a success. In this regard, CERTs does extremely well: some 88 percent of respondents (93) consider CERTs to have been a success in their region while 12 percent (13) do not. Interestingly, more respondents consider CERTs to be more of a success in the state than in their region. Ninety-five percent (96) of respondents answer affirmatively when asked about the success of CERTs in Minnesota, while only 5 percent (5) do not. Of course, clear majorities of respondents consider the organization to be successful in both venues, with very low numbers of respondents not viewing CERTs as successful in either their region or the state.

The survey also asked about specific reasons why respondents would consider CERTs to be successful or unsuccessful in their region and the state. Reasons for

successful ratings ranged from “increased awareness on issues” to “projects that would have either not happened or been slow to develop have been completed as a result of CERTs contacts and networking.” Reasons for unsuccessful ratings included “Building networks and increasing awareness hasn’t yet translated into increased public awareness” and “Small steps may be a distraction wrapped in unrealistic hopefulness, and anything else done gives false hope and displaces more meaningful efforts.”

“Buying Whiskey”: The Future of Participation

The high level of sustained participation in CERTs is, of course, no guarantee of future success. In this next section of the paper, we discuss several challenges that organizers must deal with in thinking about their future. The first concern centers around the issue of next steps, that is, should CERTs continue to be a talk shop or should it, quite literally, break new ground by building some wind turbines? The second challenge concerns the practical realities of the Minnesota landscape, namely, the great physical distances that characterize the rural parts of the state. The final challenge revolves around the meaning and substance of participation itself.

The last item on the survey was an open-ended question concerning the future direction of CERTs. Among those who answered the question, there was a recurring theme of continuing the work that is being done now, as in “We still have a lot to learn about energy. Let’s stay on the same path until we know it all.” Other themes included working with and building on the work of other groups, connecting more with people interested in similar technologies rather than those living in the same regions, getting more people involved, and getting more skilled staff, “...since there is only so much

volunteers can do, and they are reaching the point where nothing more will be able to be done.” Another theme was incorporating a broader focus on other ways to solve the energy problem, such as exploring the interconnection of energy with other sustainable issues, such as agriculture and transportation. More demonstration projects and more assistance with finding and securing funding was also suggested, as in “...CERTs should work more on implementing clean energy and less on pulling together various officials and just talking about it.” This desire for more of a project-oriented approach was reflected in focus group discussions as well, as this exchange in the Southeast region illustrates:

Personally, I'm an individual who loves to kick the tires of a project. So from that standpoint I would like to see us somehow have something that I can go out and kick the tires...I'd love to see us have a school district that all of a sudden gets this wild hair that they're going to put panels on the entire complex and generate 80 percent of their electricity within the school. The building right here in which we are sitting would be an ideal opportunity for that, and it just drives me nuts that they don't pursue something like that. Whether it's that or whether it's a community that decides to heat its swimming pool with a solar collector, or whatever...

I think boards or committees go through stages, phases, and hopefully logical ones, and that if you look at CERTs, the logical thing was to analyze and map out our resources, and disseminate the information of what we've done in the past. But I want to agree with you, Barry. Now that we've done those things, what is the next thing, and I agree with the kick the tires issues.

As CERTs moves forward as an organization, there is potential for increased tension between members who emphasize the networking and information-sharing aspects of CERTs and members who would like more emphasis on CERTs-identified demonstration projects. When discussing the potential difficulties with sustaining membership in an organization such as CERTs, most focus group participants mentioned

the difficulties associated with attending meetings, either because of employment situations or “having so many irons in the fire.” However, a few focus group participants acknowledged this tension between “talk” and “action.”

I know of one individual who was very active initially and has dropped off. I asked him about it, and he said basically...I have other things I need to do than come up with policies and things like that. He was more project-oriented.

Attempts to contact and interview former CERTs participants about their “exit” (Hirschman, 1970) from the organization are still in progress, but one e-mail correspondence with a former CERTs member clearly demonstrates how this tension can lead to difficulties:

I have not been involved with CERTs for about a year as I don't think your group is serving the renewable cause in Minnesota. When I did attend CERTs meetings I expressed that a continuous barrage of meetings and pizza parties was not accomplishing any forward motion as far as demonstrating to the public what renewable energy at the residential or commercial level means...The old expression ‘talk is cheap but it takes money to buy whiskey’ applies to renewable energy. There are very few people in the state who have not heard about global warming or ethanol or biodiesel or wind electric generators or solar or recycling. Your group seems to be trying to reinvent the wheel by talking and talking and talking. Move on to applying funds to install and demonstrate renewable energy technologies...

A second potentially significant difficulty for sustaining participation in CERTs concerns the more pragmatic issue of the great geographical distances involved in getting people together for face-to-face meetings in certain regions, particularly in the western portions of the state. This was a recurring theme across many of the focus groups, as the interplay of meeting attendance and geography was expressed in various terms, including gasoline prices, carbon footprints, and trees planted in order to offset travel to meetings.

The connection between meeting attendance, geography, and a sense of ownership was expressed by a focus group participant from the Central region, in two separate quotes:

To me it just seems very distant, because I'm driving an hour and a half to a meeting. If there was a way to have a conference call I would love to hear about it, because I am hugely against carbon, and to get in the car and drive this far...

I'm all for meeting four times a year, or three times a year, because relationships are hugely important. You have to know 'Oh, there's Dan,' so that when you hear him on the phone you can put a name to a face. But to have every meeting, with all this driving...

The impact of geography goes beyond the irony of driving two hours for a meeting about community energy. Although some regions have at least a part-time regional staff person, at least one region is coordinated by the CERTs staff in the Twin Cities. This could create a distance that is more than physical, as these focus group participants from the Northeast and Central regions described:

There are dedicated people, serving locally, and I think it takes a lot of effort for someone to come from St. Paul, up to here...and it seems like the point people for this region are out of St. Paul and they do a great job at coordinating, but it's a long way away...and it's just as far going the other way.

One issue is, if I talk to CERTs, I'm calling the cities so I just...don't know who to talk to...by now maybe I should ...maybe I should look on the website and see if there's a membership list with local people...But there's really no help up here. They're all in Minneapolis...

Finally, the CERTs project is facing a challenge in *how* team members can sustain meaningful engagement. Table 2 compares 2005 survey responses to 2007 survey responses in terms of levels of participation among CERTs participants. Not surprisingly for an online survey, electronic participation accounts for the highest level of participation in 2007 (71 percent), followed by attendance at conferences (49 percent).

Importantly, however, while the *number* of people attending quarterly meetings has remained stable between 2005 and 2007, the *percentage* of total participants who participate in face-to-face meetings fell across the two time periods. Meeting attendance was also addressed in the focus groups, as some focus group participants discussed the leveling off of attendance at CERTs meetings and the need to attract more potential members to meetings. The importance of face-to-face meetings is a common theme, as the meetings allow for social gratifications to be met, and may keep members motivated to continue their involvement. Electronic participation seems to be an acceptable supplement to “real meetings,” but as other research on community-based energy initiatives shows (High-Pippert and Hoffman 2005; Hoffman and High-Pippert 2005), when e-mailing becomes the primary means of communication among an organization’s members, a “lack of connectedness” and a loss of social gratification (and therefore motivation to continue involvement) is risked.

Table 2 about here

Even with all of the potential difficulties in sustaining a community-energy organization, CERTs has been remarkably successful at bringing and keeping people in. Community is the thread that runs through the development of CERTs, from the first meeting to the fiftieth meeting, as this focus group participant from the Northeast region summarized:

I don’t exactly remember when I was asked to be part of CERTs, but...I was asked to come to one of the meetings and to share some of my experiences . . . which started about 5 years ago, just putting in renewables myself and just gaining that experience. And it seemed like once I had done that, there was a lot of interest within the community and I just felt because the path that we are on from the energy perspective, all the negatives associated with burning fossil fuels, that it was almost my

obligation to help others move in a clean energy direction. So, I think three years ago I was asked to be a part and it's just been wonderful to ...talk to so many people with such a broad depth of knowledge in the field of energy and economics. I mean it's just bringing everybody to the table to chart a new path for the area.

Conclusion

The findings presented above are of more than academic interest. In the 2007 legislative session, the Minnesota State legislature approved funding for a new Metro CERTs initiative largely on the basis of the perceived success of the so-called rural CERTs program. This new program, however, faces a number of unique hurdles and challenges, most of which stem from the program's location in the state's largest metropolitan area, the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Two overriding questions present themselves to the organizers. First, how does a new organization staffed by, at best, 1.5 FTE employees compete with the already numerous and technically proficient energy organizations that inhabit the Twin Cities? Second, how does this same understaffed office organize an 11-county metro area with 2.3 million people? In our view, the finding presented above offer some important, if necessarily partial, answers to this quandary.

The first answer is to recognize that a program such as CERTs draws people into its orbit by largely personal appeals. That is, people are recruited or are urged to join by others at the community, neighborhood, or block level. Second, people continue to participate because of benefits they perceive to be flowing back to the community; they do not sustain participation because of benefits they perceive to be flowing back directly to them. Even very visible personal benefits such as lower electric bills do not provide the same degree of motivation as do more amorphous community benefits. This is not, of

course, to say that all residents, or perhaps even a majority of residents, are motivated by these factors. What it does argue, however, is that those people likely to participate in a voluntary, community-based initiative such as Metro CERTs, *are* motivated by an appeal to the rhetoric, and hopefully the reality, of community benefit. And it is these sort of people that are of interest to the CERTs project and its organizers. In the words of a focus group participant from the Northeast region, "...everybody around the table, and we've had up to 30-35 people, I think everybody has been focused on doing good, rather than doing for the individual that happens to be around the table. And I find that to be refreshing."

The organizational "space" that Metro CERTs should inhabit, therefore, is *not* the 11-county metro area nor its 2.3 million residents. Instead, the Metro CERTs project should recognize that its organizing space is the community, the neighborhood, or even the block. Similarly, the organizers must recognize that CERTs is not likely to have great appeal to the technically proficient. Instead, their "pitch" must be directed to those seeking to create a return to their community.

A useful example in this regard is Linden Hills Power & Light (LHP&L), a community-based organization located in the lakes area of the city of Minneapolis. From its beginning, LHP&L "has been a local effort with origins in a few informal gatherings attended by a few concerned neighbors." The organization's core objective is to "engage and mobilize more and more members of our community, no matter what their ages, skills or prior levels of community participation." The organization is defined entirely by specific geographic boundaries and its work includes a variety of energy-related and waste reduction activities, including the development of a neighborhood anaerobic

digester. Participants are largely recruited by others in the community and their participation is sustained largely by the perception that what they are doing is of value to their community rather than to their personal fortunes. In other words, successful recruitment *and* sustained participation are rooted in the same resource, namely, a commitment to a place-based community.

The lesson for CERTs' organizers, indeed for any community-based project trying to operate in a complex metropolitan setting, is straightforward: the likelihood of success increases to the extent that both recruitment strategies and the construction of participation incentives are animated by a connection to and an appreciation of place. In this regard, organizers must explicitly reject the tempting notion that affinity or interest-based communities mediated by a world of placeless, and restless, electrons, should be a focus of their organizing attention.

Table 1: Priorities of CERTs Participants (2007)

(In terms of your CERTs participation, how important are the following factors to you?)

	<u>Very / Somewhat Important</u>	<u>Not Very Important</u>
Construction of clean energy technology	93 % (55)	3 % (2)
Construction of energy projects owned by local individuals	87 % (51)	10 % (6)
Construction of small-scale energy technology	88 % (52)	9 % (5)
Construction of community-owned energy technology	95 % (56)	2 % (1)
Opportunity for community participation over nature of energy system	93 % (55)	5 % (3)
Personal involvement in community affairs	90 % (53)	9 % (5)
Lower electricity costs	61 % (36)	36 % (21)
Opportunity for personal financial gain	30 % (18)	66 % (39)
Opportunity to build my own renewable energy project	52 % (31)	44 % (26)
Development of strong communities	100 % (58)	

Local employment	90 % (53)	7 % (4)
Independence from energy grid	57 % (34)	37 % (22)
Security of energy supply	100 % (56)	
Reducing threat caused by global climate change	90 % (53)	9 % (5)
Making society identify all costs of energy production	93 % (55)	5 % (3)
Changing public policy	90 % (53)	9 % (5)

Table 2: Levels of Participation Among CERTs Participants
(Question Asks: How do you participate in CERTs (mark all that apply))

	2007 <i>n</i> = 117	2005 <i>n</i> = 59
Electronic participation	71 % (83)	58 % (34)
Attend conference	49 % (57)	N/A
Attend quarterly meetings	42 % (49)	83 % (49)
Attend small group meetings	35 % (41)	54 % (32)
Other participation	16 % (19)	17 % (10)

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