

The Nonprofit Mission Statement as Genre:  
Speech Acts, Social Facts, and Ecologies

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ABSTRACT

In this case study, the author explores the nonprofit mission statement as a genre, its place within a genre ecology, and its communication through various genres. Theorizing the mission statement as a controlling and stabilizing force in a genre ecology, the author notes the potential of the mission statement to enact the genre function—the authority a genre has even in the absence of its author. Noting the limitations of current genre ecology modeling (GEM), the author maps the genres, documents, and activities of a small community foundation using a revised form of GEM that more purposefully includes speech genres to map relationships; in this case study, the speech genres revealed how the mission statement is mediated through genres and activities. Further, observations and interviews revealed ideological conflicts of the organization's key stakeholders that resulted in clashes between key stakeholder values and the language of the nonprofit's mission (and other genres). Additionally, ideological consensus resulted in the addition of new organizational activities and genres—even though these activities are not in line with the language of the mission statement as written. Eventually, these activities become “social facts”—ideas that the key stakeholders believe are in line with the mission when they are, in fact, in conflict with it. If these social facts are not re-aligned with the mission statement, new activities and genres are created and mediated by speech genres, potentially moving the organization further away from its purpose and goals. The author ultimately suggests a cycle of genre and activity production that will realign the social facts and the mission statement and encourage organizational leaders to return to the mission statement and change the language to reflect the organization's new reality.

# The Nonprofit Mission Statement as Genre: Speech Acts, Social Facts, and Ecologies

Tana M. Schiewer

## GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

In this case study, the author explores how the nonprofit mission statement controls (or fails to control) a nonprofit organization's production of activities and documents. Using a process called "genre ecology modeling" to map the genres, documents, and activities of a small community foundation, the author illustrates the relationship between the mission statement, the activities of the organization, and the various documents created to communicate the mission to external audiences. The author finds that in the organization being studied, ideological conflicts of the organization's key stakeholders resulted in clashes between key stakeholder values and the language of the nonprofit's mission. Additionally, ideological consensus resulted in the addition of new organizational activities as well as communications to support those activities—even though these activities are not in line with the language of the mission statement as written. Eventually, organizational leaders began to regard these activities as "social facts"—socially-accepted concepts of what the organization does that the key stakeholders believe are in line with the mission when they are, in fact, in conflict with it. If these social facts are not re-aligned with the mission statement, organizational leaders develop new activities and communications to support the socially-accepted view the organization's purpose, as opposed to the stated mission; this pattern can potentially move the organization further away from its stated purpose and goals. The author suggests a process that will help organizational leaders engage in regular mission realignment to avoid mission drift and ensure that the language of the mission statement reflects the organization's new reality.

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## Chapter One—Introduction

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### **Background: The Nonprofit Mission Statement “Problem”**

Prior to entering graduate school, I spent 10 years working in nonprofit management. I started as a data systems manager, spent some time as an annual fund manager, and eventually worked my way up to executive director. In all these roles (but particularly as executive director), I was expected to understand and communicate the organization’s mission in a variety of circumstances: fulfillment of governmental reporting requirements, guidance for daily operations, direction for strategic planning, and communication to potential volunteers and donors regarding why the organization exists. Like most nonprofit leaders, I spent a large percentage of my time and effort on communicating the mission to potential volunteers and donors, hoping to get them to support my organization’s mission through the donation of time, money, or in-kind gifts. This recurring situation created many challenges for determining how I should communicate the mission through not only speech but also the various written genres my colleagues and I created and used. Because I was appealing to a wide variety of audiences for support, I was challenged to present the mission in many differing, yet still compelling, ways.

Communicating the mission is certainly an ongoing challenge and struggle for nonprofit leaders. In my nonprofit management days, I would continually hear my counterparts at other nonprofit organizations (NPOs) complain about difficulties with communicating their mission—and getting others to support it. During my graduate career, I continued to volunteer for and advise nonprofits, and I found that these complaints persisted. As I pursued consulting and research opportunities, I created a workshop for nonprofit leaders titled “Compelling Messages

for Nonprofits.”<sup>1</sup> My primary goal with the workshop was to help these nonprofit leaders take their (already existing) mission statements and put them into words that their target audiences would not only understand but rally behind; however, over half of the participants in these workshops lamented, “I don’t know where to start because, well, we don’t have a really good mission statement.” This comment echoed my own experiences as well as the complaints of my colleagues during my nonprofit days: *What makes a good mission statement? How do we know if our mission statement is effective? What if we’re not actually creating programs that address our mission? How do we explain our mission to different audiences?*

It’s not surprising that mission is such a focus for those in the nonprofit sector. In addition to directing strategy and vision, mission statements also fulfill reporting requirements, establish a scope of activity, inspire volunteer and donor involvement, and encourage employee commitment to a cause. Perhaps most importantly, the ever-present search for funding is always caught up with the mission statement, as most (if not all) grant applications require a disclosure of the mission statement as well as how the nonprofit’s mission fits with the goals of the funder. Clearly, the mission statement serves many functions, and its centrality to an organization’s activities warrants further investigation.

This dissertation investigates the nonprofit mission statement within the context of genre theory. In this introductory chapter, I present my beginning theories and how they relate to genre studies. Then, I introduce my research questions and discuss how I used genre ecology modeling to frame my study and prepare my data for analysis. Next, I discuss some of my findings,

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the support of Virginia Tech English Department’s Center for the Study of Rhetoric in Society and two local community foundations as well as a grant from VT Engage (Virginia Tech’s student engagement program), I provided not just one but four separate workshops. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge these organizations here.

previewing many of the conclusions I detail in the following chapters. Finally, I provide an overview of the remaining chapters.

### **The Mission Statement as Genre: A Case Study**

The importance of an organization's mission to its communications and activities led me to think about the mission statement as a genre (a discussion I detail more clearly in chapters two and four<sup>2</sup>). Miller (1984) defines genres as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurring situations” (159), a definition that launched genre studies into the current period where scholars study both the text and context to fully understand how genres work. Devitt (2003) argues that “genre both encourages standardization and enables variation and that, similarly, genre both constrains and enables individual creativity” (4). As I argue in chapter four, mission statements certainly contain a mix of standardization and variation that have profound effects on the activities of an organization. The wording of the mission statement can constrain activities or, as I describe in chapter five, create distance between mission and activity when the wording does not hold its ideological or controlling effect.

Therefore, I begin this study by theorizing the mission statement as a regulating/controlling genre (Schryer and Spoel) that is simultaneously the common object that works to “produce a stable representation of a shifting reality” (Winsor 4). This places a lot of power in the mission statement; however, I argue that its power can either be reified or changed by its uptake in the genre ecology. Devitt argues that the continued use of genres can reaffirm the values and identity encapsulated in that genre; the converse of this concept would suggest that if genres are *not* continually used, those values and identities may be weakened, which could lead to varying interpretations of the mission. As organizational leaders (with their various

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<sup>2</sup> In my literature review in chapter two, I discuss how mission statements are important to genre theory. In chapter four, I provide a history of the mission statement as well as an argument for why it qualifies as a genre.

perspectives) work to create, distribute, and edit these various genres, it is possible that they hold differing interpretations of the mission and that those varying interpretations, in turn, lead to conflicting articulations of the mission. If these organizational leaders fail to accurately portray the mission of an organization, they could either fail to gain the community support they desperately need, or they could bring together supporters with conflicting conceptions of the organization's goals and strategies. Either situation could make achieving the organization's mission exponentially more difficult.

To determine how nonprofit leaders develop, communicate, and understand the mission, I formulated the following research questions:

- 1. How do key stakeholders in a nonprofit organization create, understand, and use genres to impart the organization's mission?*
- 2. Does the articulation of the mission change among genres, and if so, how and why?*
- 3. How do outside audiences understand the mission as represented through these genres?*

To answer these questions, I designed a case study centered on one nonprofit organization—a community foundation (CF) in southwest Virginia. I collected various artifacts and genres,<sup>3</sup> observed meetings, and conducted interviews to gather enough data to answer my research questions, and I used genre ecology modeling as a beginning step to determine if the mission statement is continually being engaged by organizational leaders. I offer more detailed information about the research site and my methods in chapter three.

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<sup>3</sup> The primary genres I use in this study include the mission statement, annual report, newsletter, website homepage, and case statement. I discuss my collection of related artifacts in chapter three. I include an extended conversation on the mission statement as genre in chapter four.

## Speech Acts, Social Facts, and Ecologies

After collecting my data and with my research questions in mind, I started by mapping the genre ecology of the CF. Spinuzzi and Zachry define a genre ecology as “an interrelated group of genres (artifact types and the interpretive habits that have developed around them) used to jointly mediate the activities that allow people to accomplish complex objectives” (172). To illustrate the relationships between these activities and artifacts, they use a process they call genre ecology modeling (GEM). In scholarship on genre ecology models to date, one activity is located at the center of the ecology and all genres are mediated through that activity; I believe this offers a limited view of the relationships between genres and activities.

I started by mapping the genre ecology of the CF in the same manner as previous GEMs; however, I placed the mission statement at the center. Spinuzzi, Zachry, and Hart-Davidson argue that genre ecologies are ruled by decentralization, contingency, and relative stability; meaning is distributed throughout a relatively stable ecology that is always open to change. Because I theorized the mission statement as the regulating/controlling genre that’s also a “stable representation of a shifting reality,” I felt the mission statement was the perfect central hub.<sup>4</sup> I then mapped only the written genres and artifacts of the CF, demonstrating the decentralization and distribution of the mission statement through these genres. However, modeling just the written genres of the organization left some artifacts unconnected to the rest of the ecology; I couldn’t connect them to the mission statement or any of the other genres. In other words, I couldn’t make the genre ecology of the organization make sense.

I found my solution in speech genres. In chapter four, I argue that the addition of speech genres to genre ecology models better illustrates the relationships between genres and activities. In the case of the CF, the addition of speech genres (e.g. donor solicitation meetings, board

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<sup>4</sup> The maps of my genre ecology models can be found in chapter four.

meetings, etc.) connected the previously unconnected genres to the mission statement as well as the rest of the ecology. What this changed ecology map revealed is a disconnect between the language of the mission statement and the internalized ideologies of organizational leaders. Employees and key stakeholders bring with them a variety of roles, ideologies, and even other discourse communities that come to bear on their communications; without regular interaction with the mission statement as written, these ideologies and other factors can affect how they are interpreting the mission. When speaking with others, it would be easy for them to change the mission's meaning to something that is more in line with their personal preferences—a result of their lack of engagement with the mission statement.

This disconnect between the mission statement and organizational leaders' ideologies seems to be bound up in conflict, which to an extent is true. There are several areas of the activities and mission that cause disagreement between the CF's key stakeholders; in particular, they conflict over short-term vs. long-term solutions and decision-making power over funds.<sup>5</sup> These conflicts suggest that these organizational leaders are not regularly interacting with the mission statement, as some of the “answers” to these conflicts are in the language of the mission statement. For example, the language of the mission statement clearly states that donors have power over the funds they donate to the organization; however, there is disagreement among the key stakeholders over whether that should be the case. These conversations did not focus on whether the wording of the mission statement was effective, accurate, or helpful; these conversations simply focused on differing opinions of how things should be. While the former conversation could be fruitful and lead to helpful changes in the mission statement, the latter led to unresolved conflict that then translated to mixed messages from the organization.

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<sup>5</sup> I explain these conflicts in detail in chapter five.

These conflicts were the first clue that the mission statement may not be the “controlling genre” I originally theorized it to be. However, areas of consensus caused similar problems; in fact, it was consensus that created the “unconnected” genres that didn’t fit into my first model of the genre ecology. An area of service the CF provides—supportive services for nonprofits—is not reflected in the language of the mission statement; however, my observations and interviews revealed that the key stakeholders agreed those services should be a priority. What this resulted in was the belief that supportive services for nonprofits is part of the mission being taken as a *social fact*, which Bazerman defines as “those things people believe to be true, and therefore bear on how they define a situation” (312). According to Bazerman, once people believe something to be true, they then *act* in accordance with that perceived truth. With this idea of social services for nonprofits accepted as a social fact, the key stakeholders of the CF eventually created several activities and genres to support this interpretation of their mission, creating a rift between the mission statement as written and the mission statement as communicated through other genres. And what the GEM reveals is that speech genres are necessary to mediate the relationship between these social facts and the mission statement as long as the language of the mission statement remains unchanged.

What I ultimately conclude in this study is that the mission statement could be a nonprofit organization’s “stable representation of a shifting reality” as long as it is continually engaged. When new challenges are presented in a community, and the nonprofit organization responds to those challenges with new products or services, a new cycle of genre and activity production is born. It bypasses the rewording of the mission statement and continues on a cycle until the mission statement can be realigned to reflect the current reality. And that is the larger point: nonprofit leaders should not be afraid to realign the mission statement when necessary. If new

activities and genres are within the capabilities and desires of organizational leaders, they should consider whether the values reflected in those activities and genres should also be reflected in the mission statement. In chapter six, I describe a cycle of mission production that takes note of potential changes and offers a way for nonprofit leaders to realign their mission language with their values. The mission statement is a dynamic genre, and leaders should consider treating it as such. Engaging it and changing it regularly can help retain its genre-function power and keep it as the “stable representation of a shifting reality.”

## **Chapter Overview**

This dissertation follows a standard format that includes a literature review, methods chapter, analytic chapters, and a conclusion.

In chapter two, I review the relevant literature in studies of nonprofit organizations and place my study in rhetorical genre studies and professional and technical communication. I review genre theory and genre ecology frameworks and discuss the genre-function of the mission statement.

In chapter three, I discuss the methods I used to collect and analyze data as well as my theoretical foundations for these methods. I describe the research site, detail my methodology, and catalog the artifacts I collected.

In chapter four, I analyze the mission statement as a genre and discuss its placement within a genre ecology. I map the genre ecology of the community foundation I studied and explain how using the genre ecology model helps me to understand how the genres work together and are related to the mission statement. I expand on the genre ecology model (GEM) framework put forth by Spinuzzi, Zachry, and Jones, noting how speech genres can (a) affect

how the GEM is put together and (b) reveal previously hidden relationships between activities and genres.

In chapter five, I analyze the responses of the key stakeholders of the community foundation to find sources of conflict and consensus in what the organization's purpose is. I discuss the mission statement as a site of contested ideology, and I suggest that nonprofit leaders view the mission statement as a more flexible and dynamic genre. I also demonstrate the value in moving from a linear to a cyclical model of mission statement production.

In chapter six, I discuss how audiences outside of the key stakeholders of the community foundation react to the genres presented as well as how they understand the mission of the foundation as communicated through those genres. I note points of agreement between the key stakeholders' responses and the audience responses, ultimately concluding that though the values and ideologies currently held by the key stakeholders of the community foundation differ from the mission statement, audiences outside the community foundation read those values and ideologies and not those of the mission statement. I also discuss form, noting that discussions on form in genre studies have been lacking and that paying attention to form can (a) reveal interesting aspects of analysis not found if form is ignored and (b) allow genre scholars to have a fuller and more complete discussion of genre.

In chapter seven, I summarize my findings and, noting the limitations of a case study, suggest ways in which my findings might affect our understanding of genres, genre ecologies, the mission statement, and nonprofit communication. I summarize the impact of speech genres on genre ecologies, explore models of genre production, and contend with the implications of some audiences privileging form over function. I also describe the limitations of my research and make suggestions for further study.

Before delving into my methods and analysis, I first turn to a review of the relevant literature and explain the theoretical framework I use throughout my analysis and discussion of my case study.

## Chapter Two—Literature Review

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### Introduction

The nonprofit industry certainly seems worthy of investigation. In 2013, 1.41 million nonprofit organizations (NPOs) generated revenue—mostly through donations, sponsorships, and allowable sales—totaling \$2.26 trillion, a 47% increase since 2010. Over the past ten years, employment in nonprofit organizations grew by 17%, while corporate (for-profit) employment decreased 6%.<sup>6</sup> The proliferation of nonprofit organizations, increases in revenue, and job growth indicate that the nonprofit sector is strong and getting stronger, making it more and more likely that college graduates will work for a nonprofit at some time in their career.

Indeed, nonprofit organizations have been studied at length both inside and outside the university. Many organizations serving the nonprofit sector—including influential entities such as the Foundation Center and the National Council of Nonprofits—have worked on helping nonprofit organizations with their many aspects of governance, including issues of sustainability, board management, and fundraising. The issue of mission and vision, however, permeates all these conversations. Indeed, nonprofit strategists and advisory councils continually emphasize the importance of mission statements, noting that they “establish the long-term direction that guides every aspect of an organization’s daily operations” (“Establishing”). Multiple books, articles, and other guides are dedicated to topics on mission development and communication, including branding the nonprofit starting with the mission (Durham; Kylander and Stone), involving board members in mission approaches and changes (Grace, et al.), and developing mission statements more strategically (Sheehan; Downey).

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<sup>6</sup> Most recent available data from the 2015 Nonprofit Sector in Brief, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/nonprofit-sector-brief-2015-public-charities-giving-and-volunteering>.

In academic contexts, researchers in multiple fields—rhetoric and writing, communication, public policy, and sociology, to name a few—focus on nonprofit communication, management, and governance. However, smaller nonprofit organizations as a whole and the mission statement in particular remain largely unstudied. With nonprofit organizations developing a stronger presence and employing more of our students from writing courses, it seems that a study of the types of genres used in nonprofit organizations would be beneficial to scholars within rhetoric and writing studies.

In this literature review, I review nonprofit studies within the university in general and within rhetoric and writing/professional and technical communication in particular. I locate my study in Rhetorical Genre Studies, noting the social implications of that location. Then, I discuss genre ecology theory as a framework for my methods and approach to this study. Finally, I discuss the mission statement's role as a carrier of ideology (its genre function) within a discourse community.

### **Studies of Nonprofits in Academia**

At the university level, the field of “Nonprofit Management” or “Nonprofit Governance” gathers scholars from schools of business, public policy, political science, economics, and often even social work or sociology. As Grace Budrys (2013) notes in her series of case studies on nonprofits, this “hodge-podge” field of study results in a relatively small number of scholars focusing on “nonprofit organizations specifically, as opposed to organizations in general” (39). The number of researchers focusing on specific phenomena in nonprofits is smaller still. Though Debra C. Minkoff and Walter W. Powell note that in nonprofit management, “mission looms large . . . because an organization's goals provide workers and donors with the satisfaction that their values are being put into action” (591), the number of researchers focusing on mission

statements is an even smaller subset within that small group studying nonprofits in general. When looking at the mission statement, scholars have primarily studied it as a measure for some other factor like employee satisfaction or financial performance. William A. Brown and Carlton F. Yoshioka's 2003 study revealed that a "salient" mission statement often works to attract workers and improve performance but may not be enough to combat the low pay typically associated with nonprofit jobs. Robert McDonald (2007) confirms the power of effective mission statements by noting that more specific, focused mission statements result in innovation in NPOs that leads to the accomplishment of the organization's goals. Gary Kirk and Shabnam Beth Nolan (2010) note that "the mission statement may be one of the most significant devices used by nonprofits" (476), tying the quality of an NPO's mission statement directly to its financial performance. Clearly, the mission statement is viewed as a necessary and important document that keeps a nonprofit organization on task and communicates the organization's goals to potential donors and volunteers.

However, this perceived necessity can sometimes result in the creation of a mission statement as a perfunctory gesture. In their study of institutions of higher education, Morpew and Hartley (2006) note that "it would seem that not having a mission statement begs the very legitimacy of a college or university" (456), as higher education accreditation agencies *require* a mission statement for colleges and universities. This requirement, they contend, makes for many mission statements that are lacking in specificity and direction. Indeed, Davies (1986) argues that mission statements are often too generalized and therefore ineffective. And even when an organization's mission statement is specific, NPOs are still often subject to "mission drift" or "mission creep"—the phenomenon where a nonprofit organization extends its activities beyond

the scope of its stated mission. When made too general or too narrow, the mission statement can create a lack of direction or constrain an organization's activities.

In addition to considering the nonprofit mission statement largely in relation to other organizational performance measures, studies of nonprofit mission statements in the interdisciplinary field of nonprofit governance typically focus on larger organizations and government entities. McDonald (2007) and Bart (2007) each focus on hospitals, while Minkoff and Powell's study concentrates on colleges and universities; in both cases, the NPOs in question are quite large and arguably very different than smaller nonprofits. Kirk and Nolan's and Brown and Yoshioka's studies presumably included some smaller organizations, though they are included as part of a larger set of data, and neither set of researchers specifically notes how many of their organizations qualify as "smaller." Even collections of mission statements such as that provided by Graham and Havlick (1994) tend to focus on nonprofit organizations with a national emphasis. This leaves a large gap in the investigation of smaller nonprofits as a whole.

### **Research on Nonprofits in Genre Studies**

In the field of rhetoric and writing studies in general and professional and technical communication (PTC) in particular, nonprofit organizations remain vastly under-studied in comparison to corporate environments, often gaining attention primarily through the lens of service-learning or as general sites for civic engagement. As I reviewed recent literature in PTC, I found the focus to be largely on corporate or consumer genres such as annual reports (Ladroo; Jones et al.), résumés (Radazoo), and video game reviews (Thominet); additionally, some scholars focused on genres in larger nonprofits such as hospitals and universities, including analyses of genre such as medical records (Schryer and Spoel; Popham), the victim-impact report (Propen and Schuster), and crowdfunding appeals (Mehlenbacher). Studies of writing practices

within nonprofit organizations—in particular, the genres created through those practices—often focus on governmental agencies and/or texts (Bazerman, 1994; Jamieson; Proppen and Schuster; Spinuzzi, 2003) or large national NPOs (Jones, 2012; Rude). Additionally, many genre theorists turn their focus to academic contexts (Bazerman, 1997, 2004; Bhatia; Bremner; Devitt, 2007; Freedman; Kain and Wardle; Swales; Tardy; Yates and Orlikowski, 2002), which are often located in nonprofit colleges and universities.

In my research, I found only one essay in rhetoric and writing studies—Robert McEachern’s (1998) study on the meeting minutes of a small nonprofit theatre—that focused on the role of genre in smaller nonprofit organizations. Regarding the mission statement in particular, only one study (Swales and Rogers) focused on the mission statement as a genre; however, they focused their research on two large corporations. In general, scholars have largely ignored the writing practices of nonprofit organizations whose activities cover a smaller geographic region and/or would be considered smaller by a variety of standards (staff size, scope, budget).

This lack of research on smaller organizations leaves a large gap in our understanding of how texts work in organizational contexts. Many larger nonprofits tend to model themselves after corporations, leading to the importation of corporate genres and/or use of corporate language in documents. Though one might argue that the goals of nonprofit organizations and corporations are essentially the same—trying to convince a consumer to either buy a product/service or “buy” some goodwill by donating time or money to a cause—the underlying *aims* are fundamentally different. The types of rhetorical moves one would make to try to convince someone to spend money on something tangible are different from those one would

make to attempt to convince someone to part with their time or money out of the goodness of their heart (or perhaps a sense of civic duty).<sup>7</sup>

The fundamental difference between nonprofit and corporate aims combined with the gap in studies of small nongovernmental, nonacademic nonprofits makes these organizations interesting sites of investigation—particularly when considering how these leaders use the mission statement for their various purposes. Nonprofit leaders’ efforts at communicating the mission involve issues of audience, ideology, and need (a desired action they want the reader to take). Studying how they negotiate these strategies while grappling with how to use or adapt existing genres would contribute more knowledge to our understanding of genres and how people encounter them in real-world contexts. This makes genre theory a very useful tool in studying nonprofit writing.

### **Genre Theory: Text, Context, and Social Action**

Though genre theory takes on a variety of permutations, I am primarily situating this study in what Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff (2010) refer to as “Rhetorical Genre Studies” (RGS). Bawarshi and Reiff describe the current state of RGS as focused on “how genres enable their users to carry out situated symbolic actions rhetorically and linguistically, and in so doing, to perform social actions and relations, enact social roles, and frame social realities” (59). Indeed, current genre theory is planted firmly in the realm of the social. More than 30 years ago, Carolyn Miller’s pivotal essay “Genre as Social Action” built on the work of Campbell and Jamieson (1978), Burke (1966), and Bitzer (1968) and launched genre theory into a period of

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<sup>7</sup> An effort to sell an item with no philanthropic value would rely on selling the potential buyer on the item’s ability to enhance that person’s life (e.g. through saving them money or time, creating comfort or safety, or improving their image). In this instance, there is an exchange of goods. Donations to causes, however, often come with no tangible benefit; therefore, nonprofit leaders must “sell” potential donors on the idea that it is a good idea to part with their money for the greater good of their community.

considering the contexts within which texts are produced. Miller argued that for a definition of genre to be rhetorically sound, it “must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (151). Following her lead, scholars have explored the many social actions invited by genres, focusing particularly on how social contexts shape and are shaped by texts. For example, Charles Bazerman’s 1988 historical study of the experimental report in science examines the historical and developmental nature of genre, arguing that genres form and change over time, stating that writing “is a social action; texts help organize social activities and social structure” (10). For genres to involve regularly repeating features, he argues, it is also necessary for the communities producing and consuming these genres to engage in regularly repeating practices.

Many scholars built on Bazerman’s recognition of the need to study the communities within which genres are produced. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1993) emphasize the importance of recognizing the social embeddedness of genre by acknowledging that “all acts of communication build on prior texts and text elements” (492), but also noting that genre knowledge is “best conceptualized as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities” (477). Amy Devitt (1993) argues that genre depends on “the intertextuality of discourse” (576). Scholars have thoroughly established that genres both create and rely on a variety of textual and social influences. In fact, genre theory has developed to the point where the influence of the context and the text are considered almost equal. To investigate this concept more fully, scholars in the last two decades or so have begun to examine how multiple genres work together in particular social contexts and what that means for social action, community cohesion, and issues of ideology, identity, and epistemology.

## **Genre Sets, Genre Systems, and Genre Ecologies**

For the most part, genre scholars agree that there are social contexts within which there are regularized practices. Swales (1990) includes perhaps the most exhaustive discussion of the contexts themselves, which he calls “discourse communities.” Though the exact nature of what constitutes a discourse community is debated by many scholars (e.g. Gee, Harris, and others), Swales’s definition represents the theoretical assumption most genre scholars apply to researching communities. He offers several characteristics but mostly notes that discourse communities include a group of people who share common goals and use a variety of communicative strategies to achieve them. As Devitt notes, Swales’s definition “has provided a way of defining relevant groups of language users, and the establishment of community through discourse has proven useful for genre theorists” (*Writing Genres*, 37). Certainly the people involved in the inner workings of a nonprofit organization would qualify as this definition of discourse community.

Scholars also have developed many theories about how genres work together within these social contexts. Devitt proposed genre sets (1991), Bazerman proposed genre systems (1994), and Orlikowski and Yates (1994) proposed genre repertoires. These theories recognize that multiple genres work together in a social context to accomplish a particular (or many) social action(s). While the genre set (or repertoire) represents the work of “one side of a multiple person interaction” (Bazerman, “Systems of Genres” 98), the genre system represents the totality of all of the separate genre sets. Bazerman emphasizes that such a system is “comprised of the several genre sets of people working together in an organized way, plus the patterned relations in the production, flow, and use of these documents” (“Speech Acts” 318). His examples of a genre system include the U.S. patent system (“Systems of Genre”) and a college classroom in which a

teacher provides a syllabus, lesson plans, and assignments, and in return the students respond with note taking, papers, and email queries (“Speech Acts”). These texts flow in recognizable patterns and sequences, one responding to another. Bazerman also intertwines his idea of genre systems with activity systems and speech acts, noting that an understanding of genre in terms of sets and systems can help people “diagnose and redesign communicative activity systems—to determine whether a particular set of documents used at certain moments is redundant or misleading, whether new documents need to be added, or whether some details of a genre might be modified” (311). Such a view offers a pathway to understanding how genres work together to help create the social action of any organization or discourse community and suggests that changes can be made.

In considering the interaction between people and texts, Bazerman was not the first (or only) scholar to incorporate activity theory. David Russell (1997) studies how certain genres work to both reflect and reify the expectations within a culture, providing stability to a given activity system. Kain and Wardle (2005) suggest that introducing activity theory into the classroom will facilitate genre learning. Dorothy Winsor (1999) makes the most direct connection between genre and activity theory: she argues that genre theory alone is inadequate to understand workplace patterns and states that understanding genres as part of an activity system “has the potential to help us stop thinking of context as a container in which text is subsequently produced” (201). Instead, texts and social contexts form an ongoing relationship in which influence flows both ways. She further argues that the participants in an activity system are usually acting upon a “common object.” She suggests that, in a system in which the people and the activity are constantly changing, texts help to produce and coordinate this activity “because they produce a stable representation of a shifting reality” (2007, 4). In the busy atmosphere of a

nonprofit organization attempting to serve clients, advocate for change, and raise money to support their services, it is quite possible that the mission statement serves as that stable representation.

### ***Genre Ecologies***

When studying workplace contexts, the theories of genre sets, genre repertoires, and genre systems certainly have their merits. However, it is Clay Spinuzzi and Mark Zachry's (2000) development of the idea of the "genre ecology" that seems to hold the most promise for studying genres in smaller nonprofit organizations. As many scholars had previously noted, Spinuzzi and Zachry acknowledge the dynamic and sometimes "messy" nature of genres, stating that this unstable nature of genre calls for a "more robust, ecological perspective . . . that accounts for the dynamism and interconnectedness of genres" (173). They define "genre ecology" as "an interrelated group of genres (artifact types and the interpretive habits that have developed around them) used to jointly mediate the activities that allow people to accomplish complex objectives" (172). Though they don't discuss activity theory directly in this particular article, Spinuzzi combines the concept of genre ecologies with activity theory in his discussion of how software developers ("Compound Mediation") and Department of Transportation workers (*Tracing Genres*) use textual artifacts to mediate activities. He notes that mediating tools "co-evolve: changes in one lead to changes in others" ("Compound Mediation," 100). Eventually, activity theory appears to have become a given part of the genre ecology concept; the genre ecology offers a way to understand how genres work together in dynamic ways to shape activities within a discourse community.

The appeal of the term "ecology" lies not only in Spinuzzi and Zachry's explanation of how they've used the concept to understand genres at work, but also in the metaphor inherent in

the word “ecology.” As opposed to the idea of sets or systems, the metaphor of ecology implies a living, breathing system that is open to change. This works well with the idea that though genres offer a sense of stability and recurrence, they are always simply “stabilized-for-now or stabilized-enough” (Schryer 204). Though there have been various approaches to the concepts surrounding groups of genres and how they interact, most definitions include an aspect of flexibility or change. Genre scholars recognize that though genres include a certain level of constancy and repetition, they are always—at least to a certain degree—in flux.

Certainly, this state of flux is common in nonprofit organizations, as frequent turnover of staff and volunteers combined with limited terms of board members lead to new and differing interpretations of the mission statement. Though she didn’t study mission statements in particular, Natasha Jones (2012) applied the concept of genre ecologies to her study of the local (disbursed) offices of a large national nonprofit organization using a method called “genre ecology modeling.” In this dissertation (directed by Zachry), Jones notes that genre ecology modeling is especially useful in helping her answer one of her research questions: “In a networked, activist organization, what genres are participants likely to use in order to communicate, collaborate, and coordinate in attempts to achieve socially-motivated goals and how do these genres affect local communicative practice” (82). Jones found that using this framework helped her to better understand the activity of a nonprofit that was “networked and distributed in nature” (2), particularly the process of visualizing the genres in use (using diagrams). One drawback, however, is that Jones doesn’t elaborate *how*, specifically, the genre ecology diagrams are useful; this is an explanation that is lacking in Spinuzzi’s work as well. Though this could point to a deficiency in the theory that makes it untenable for use, it could also be seen as an entry point for further exploration. Though the concept of the genre ecology has

been discussed at length by Spinuzzi and Zachry, and picked up by Jones, it appears to be a relatively un(der)explored concept; at the very least, there is ample room for development. Further, the concept has largely been applied in relation to software systems and geographically-separated, technologically-mediated work. Jones paved the way for introducing the genre ecology model to analyzing nonprofit organizations; however, it might be informative to explore the concept of genre ecologies in a smaller organization that relies less heavily on computer systems to accomplish its goals.<sup>8</sup> Through such an exploration, the constraints and affordances of genre ecologies could be fleshed out more clearly. This type of study also opens the possibility of further developing a genre ecology framework specifically for studying genre in nonprofit organizations.

### *Nonprofit Genre Ecologies*

Spinuzzi and Zachry (2000) state that a genre ecology is made flexible because it is ruled by contingency, decentralization, and stability. To explore these aspects of a genre ecology, they offer a series of questions, a sampling of which I offer here:

- *What official and unofficial genres do workers currently use to mediate their work?*
- *How might those resources potentially help them to mediate work?*
- *What ecological niches remain unfilled in the ecology?*
- *How stable is the genre ecology? That is, how long have its relationships endured and across what percentage of users? (177, italics mine)*

These questions are aimed at understanding how genres are operating in real-world contexts.

Spinuzzi and Zachry have provided a starting point: a framework within which to establish an

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to insinuate that smaller nonprofits do not use computer systems to accomplish a broad range of communication; the fact is that they do. However, in a smaller office, there is a larger likelihood of in-person conversations that might change how these genres are being used. Further, Spinuzzi and Zachry focused specifically on technology, and Jones focused on a nonprofit organization that was spread across the country; my case study involves a smaller NPO with one office and a decreased need for computer-mediated practices.

exploration of genres in action. In relation to a project focused on the nonprofit mission statement, I would add my own questions that focus on the idea that though genres work together in a system or ecology, there may also be a hierarchical nature to them. As Catherine Schryer and Philippa Spoel (2005) have noted, some genres “regulate or control other genres” (250). At the beginning of my study, my working hypothesis was that the mission statement is—or is meant to be—one of those “controlling” genres. To investigate this hypothesis and learn more about how the mission statement works in nonprofit contexts, I decided that it was necessary to use the qualitative methodology put forth thus far by researchers using the genre ecology approach (and most other social-context-related approaches). The shortcomings of mere textual analysis are quite clear: they lack context. In their study of corporate mission statements, Swales and Rogers note that their findings are incomplete because they were not permitted to interview employees; therefore, they were relegated to textual analysis. They argue that “a useful understanding of the role of genre in institutional and community affairs requires more sociocognitive input than the texts themselves provide” (237). In other words, to properly understand a genre’s function within a given social context, it is necessary to gather information on both the texts and the people using them. This would entail collecting not only textual artifacts for analysis but also conducting observations of those texts in use (and/or being produced) as well as interviews with the people using/producing them. Direct discussion with employees, board members, and volunteers can offer insight into the various ideologies, identities, and social paradigms at work, and how they might be affecting/be affected by the nonprofit genre ecology (and the mission statement in particular). As I will explain more thoroughly in chapter three, this is the approach I have taken in this study.

## **The Mission Statement: Ideology, Identity, and The Genre Function**

These various ways of understanding how genres work together in communities are enhanced by work focusing on how genres encapsulate and perpetuate ideology, identity, and cultural values. Most genre scholars agree that genres “embody and also shape the strategies and values of communities” (Rude, “Report,” 202). But as Paré (2002) notes, this embodiment can cause conflict, making genres sites of an institution’s ideological struggles. Many scholars have attributed these struggles to the influence of the identities and ideologies of the people using them. In any one community, there are many individuals who are switching between identities and social groups (Devitt), or importing knowledge from one discipline to another (Journet, Popham). However, because we are working in systems (or ecologies) of genre, the influence goes both ways. For example, Schryer and Spoel (2005) suggest that the genres at work in health care systems not only contribute to the professional identity formation of medical students and midwives but also work to reify certain social structures and expectations already in place. Schryer (1993) also learned that the genre of the record-keeping system for veterinary patients was affecting how instructors at the college created exams. These studies suggest a textual power that could be taking place regardless if the actors in that system are aware of that change or even, as Schryer observes, privileging the “values of certain groups within the speech community and not others” (230). These various claims regarding identity reveal that genres may represent more than just one discourse community’s values, as the various roles that people play come to bear on textual practices.

Further, the textual power of genre may work to reinforce these values regardless of the authors’ presence or intent. To address this textual power, Bawarshi (2000) introduces what he calls the “genre function”—a sense of authority conferred upon a text. He bases his idea of genre

function on Foucault's concept of the "author-function" of a text, in which "the author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" (Foucault 347). Bawarshi argues that genres function ideologically and rhetorically, functionally and epistemologically, and they help us "negotiate our way through discursive reality as producers and consumers of texts" (349). This view of genre recognizes the power a text can hold on its own, which then reinforces the idea that genres can be sites of contestation; after all, a genre can continue to help perpetuate a particular ideology or set of cultural values even in the absence of its author.

Devitt simultaneously expands and pushes back on this idea when she argues that "once genres are established that . . . reflect the group's values, epistemology, and power relationships, the existence and *continued* use of those genres reaffirm those very values, epistemology, and power relationships" (*Writing Genres*, 60, emphasis mine). Devitt argues that the continued use of these genres helps to continually reinforce their impact; however, she does not state that their continued force is *reliant* on that continual use. This is an area where study of nonprofit mission could contribute greatly to genre theory. To have continuing force, the nonprofit mission needs to be continually engaged—either through the singular genre of the mission statement or through various genres working together to construct and reinforce a particular mission. If these documents are reinforcing differing versions of that mission, this presents a problem: the impact of the mission could be diffused. If one document—say, for example, the mission statement—presents the mission in its most agreed-upon form, greater distance from that statement could reduce its impact. In other words, the "values, epistemology, and power relationships" being reaffirmed could be different depending on the genre being engaged.

Ultimately, the mission statement is used to describe the NPO's purpose to various constituencies, simultaneously acting as a source of inspiration and a reminder of accountability; however, its usefulness and power depend on how the actors within a discourse community engage with it. It is this complex intersection of activity and genre that I explore in the following chapters.

## Chapter Three—Research Site and Methods

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### Introduction

As I noted in chapter two, Swales defines a discourse community as a group of people with common goals and a variety of communicative strategies, and discourse communities are recognized as social contexts with regularized practices that provide a good site for genre study. Because my questions ask not only what different instantiations of genres are communicating but also how their messages are developed and understood by multiple audiences, studying one nonprofit organization provides the best method for finding answers to these questions. With a primary interest in how mission statements reflect and reify the ideologies of organizational leaders and curiosity about how the mission statement might work in a nonprofit genre ecology, I refined my research questions to the following three:

1. *How do key stakeholders in a nonprofit organization create, understand, and use genres to impart the organization's mission?*
2. *Does the articulation of the mission change among genres, and if so, how and why?*
3. *How do outside audiences understand the mission as represented through these genres?*

These questions require a study of both the text and context.

I designed the study as a case study, focusing on one organization: a community foundation in southwest Virginia. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) define a case as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (28). For the purposes of this study, I focused on the phenomenon of the mission statement and its place within the bounded context of one organization. I employed a mix of observations, interviews, and artifact collection and analysis—what Yin calls “converging lines of inquiry”—in an effort to achieve triangulation (120). Further discussion of the research site and my methods follows.

## Research Site

For this study, I observed the community foundation (CF) over a period of five months. Like most community foundations, CF is “dedicated to improving the lives of people in a defined geographic area [by bringing together] the financial resources of individuals, families, and businesses to support effective nonprofits in their communities” (“Community Foundations”). Their stated mission is to “enrich our community by providing professional management services to donors for their charitable causes, awarding visionary grants and scholarships, and nurturing collaborations in our community.” Like most community foundations, CF is a local resource for donors and nonprofit organizations, serving over 1,000 organizations in southwest Virginia. The foundation helps donors connect with organizations that align with their giving interests and provides a grant proposal process for NPOs to request support from these donor-advised funds (and general foundation funds). In addition, CF provides free trainings and other resources for NPOs, including workshops, monthly informational gatherings, volunteer recognition events, and an annual community-wide 24-hour giving day.

I chose this organization for these research questions considering two major variables: (1) the time and geographical constraints of the dissertation period and (2) the launch of a major fundraising campaign at the CF that coincided with that timing. This fundraising campaign—aimed at raising \$800,000 in two years—provided an interesting site for exploration because of the internal preparations of the staff and board. Focusing on CF during this time provided a rich amount of material of work with, including nonprofit genres represented through a variety of print and electronic media. In addition, launching a new fundraising campaign requires discussion not only about how to express the organization’s mission but also how to get potential donors to invest in it. During my observations, the staff and board engaged in increased

conversations (including a board retreat) regarding CF's goals and values, and the staff worked on the case statement for the new fundraising campaign. These additional conversations and genres provided excellent data for my research.

### **Artifact Collection**

As I stated in chapter two, rhetorical genre studies is firmly planted in the realm of the social. While some genre scholars analyze the generic features of a particular document, most prefer to discuss what genres *do*—what social actions genres encourage—or, as in the case of genre ecologies, how genres and activities work together to create meaning or facilitate communication. In the bulk of these studies, scholars use the words document, text, and genre seemingly interchangeably,<sup>9</sup> which can cause some confusion in readers. For example, in Spinuzzi and Zachry's 2000 article detailing their studies in computer-mediated environments, Spinuzzi and Zachry state that genre ecologies require “recognizing that human interactions with complex technologies are inevitably mediated by dynamic and unpredictable clusters of communication *artifacts* and activities” (170-171, emphasis mine). Though they label the interplay of activities and texts a “genre ecology,” they merely refer to the texts they collect as “artifacts”; throughout the rest of the article, they refer to “documents” and “genres” interchangeably. It seems clear, then, that an analysis of a genre ecology requires studying all documents involved in the activities of an organization—not just documents that can also be categorized as genres. For that reason, I collected all documents that seemed relevant to my project—not just the ones I thought would qualify as genres.

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<sup>9</sup> This is quite common in genre studies; in fact, most scholars use “document,” “text,” and “genre” somewhat interchangeably (see Devitt, Bazerman, Bawarshi, and others). The reason is, I believe, simple: though scholars would not claim that every genre is a document and/or every document is a genre, in most cases, the genres being studied are also texts and documents.

To limit my corpus, I asked the CF for samples of documents from within the previous year that could be considered “mission-related”; these include but are not limited to: the mission statement, annual report, case statement, marketing materials, fundraising materials, and any reports sent to key stakeholders (meeting minutes, monthly reports, committee reports, etc). The reason for this selection is the closeness of these documents to the concept of “mission.” Though there are many other documents in a nonprofit organization—including bylaws, employee manuals, budget reports, etc.—these “promotional materials” are documents that are used to express the mission of the organization to others in order to get them to participate in activities dedicated to that mission.

I used these artifacts to map the genre ecology of the organization; however, for my in-depth study of how these documents and genres are created, understood, and used to impart the organization’s mission, I further limited the corpus to artifacts that would be categorized as “promotional materials.” In my interviews, I focused on the annual report, the newsletter, the front page of the website, and the Community Fund case statement—all artifacts I consider to be genres. I selected these particular genres with the guidance of the executive director; after all, at the beginning of my project I was unaware of which genres were used most often to create “buy-in.” Though many more genres were used in the cycle of achieving the CF’s goals, those other genres were not typically used as an entry point for people unfamiliar with the organization.

To complete the corpus, I also collected screen shots of the CF website (once per month for four months) as well as tweets during their 24-hour giving day. In addition, I asked employees and board members throughout my study if there were genres they felt were important to consider. In the end, I collected 9 written documents, 32 website screen shots, and 78 tweets. Details on these artifacts are provided in chapter four.

## **Participants**

As is typical for nonprofit organizations, there are fewer employees at the CF compared to for-profit businesses with the same revenue, and leadership is diffused among a large number of volunteers with varying roles. The CF leadership consists of four staff members, 20 board members, 19 “community advisors” (who provide guidance on grant distribution), and 12 members of the Council of Former Directors, who provide general guidance for the organization. To answer research question one, I defined “key stakeholders” as employees, board members, community advisors, and former directors, as these represent all levels of leadership within the organization. Because the staff is so small, I interviewed all four staff members. To gather interviews from the rest of the organizational leadership, I originally intended to randomly select a representative cross-section of these leadership groups; I hoped to interview approximately 1/5 of each group: four board members, three or four community advisors, and two or three members of the Council of Former Directors, with the total representing an even distribution among levels of engagement. However, none of the community advisors or former directors were available for interview. Recruitment of board members led to ten positive responses; therefore, I decided to simply interview them all in order to keep to my original goal of 10 interviews.

In addition to interviewing key stakeholders, I observed regular meetings during which important mission-related conversations were held. The CF staff has a weekly meeting every Monday morning, and the board meets monthly. To gain insight into how the staff and board were working on developing documents and discussing mission-related activities, I observed three staff meetings and three board meetings.

To answer research question three, I originally defined “outside audiences” as the constituents served by the CF: nonprofit leaders and current and potential donors.<sup>10</sup> However, as I will describe in chapter six, it became clear after interviews began that (a) with the exception of “potential donors,” I had neglected to include “the community” as an audience, and (b) nonprofit leaders and current donors have a very different view of the CF than anyone who is not already engaged with the organization. This realization led me to split the idea of “outside audiences” into two categories: those already involved with the organization in some capacity outside of a key stakeholder role (donors and nonprofit leaders) and community members who may or may not be interested in participating in CF. I decided to modify the name of donors and NPO leaders to “inside audiences” and reserve the phrase “outside audiences” to describe those who had no affiliation with the CF. To find interview participants from the category of “inside audiences,” the executive director of the organization sent an invitation to donors and nonprofit leaders, and I interviewed every respondent (there were five). For “outside audiences,” I created fliers and posted them on community boards in the area (library, coffee shops, restaurants), offering a small gift card for participation. Five people responded for those interviews as well.<sup>11</sup>

Because the participants in this organization wish to remain anonymous, I used a very simple coding system: “E” for employees, “B” for board members, “A” for inside audiences and “O” for outside audiences. With the exception of the employees, I numbered each participant in the order in which I interviewed them (1-10 for board members, 1-5 for inside audiences, and 1-5 for outside audiences). For employees, I numbered them in relative hierarchy of

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<sup>10</sup> Those familiar with nonprofit organizations might wonder why “volunteers” are not on that list, as in many smaller nonprofit organizations they often outnumber the staff. The reason is simple: I could find no evidence of volunteers for the CF who didn’t already fall under another category.

<sup>11</sup> Conducting snowball recruiting with employees, board members, donors, or nonprofit leaders could have resulted in a higher participation rate of outside audience members; however, there was a high likelihood that such recruiting would have led to friends and acquaintances who already had some knowledge of their referrer’s relationship to the CF or some pre-existing ideas of how the CF functions. I avoided this possibility by recruiting from broader public spaces and ensuring that participants had not heard of the foundation before our interview.

position/longevity with the organization: E1 is the executive director, E2 is the office manager, E3 is the director of community programs, and E4 is the program coordinator. At the time of my study, E1 and E2 had been with the CF for several years whereas E3 and E4 had been with the organization for less than a year each.

The following table details the participants I interviewed as well as their role in the organization. For reference, there are five committees board members can serve on: Distribution (grants), Scholarship, Investment, Executive, and Board Development.

*Table 1. Participants in interviews and observations.*

<b>Participant ID</b>	<b>Title/Role/Committee</b>
E1	Executive Director
E2	Office Manager
E3	Director of Community Programs
E4	Program Coordinator
B1	Distribution
B2	Investment, Executive
B3	Distribution
B4	Scholarship
B5	Board Development
B6	Executive
B7	Distribution, Investment
B8	Board Development
B9	Distribution
B10	Distribution

A1	Nonprofit leader and donor
A2	Nonprofit leader
A3	Nonprofit leader and donor
A4	Nonprofit leader and donor
A5	Nonprofit leader
O1-5	Area residents; no role at foundation

An additional note about participants: in my chapters discussing and analyzing interviews and meetings, I use the pronoun “they” in singular form to refer to each participant<sup>12</sup>. I do this not only to continue to introduce more gender-neutral language into my writing but also to further protect the anonymity of my study participants.

### **Coding and Analysis**

To create transcripts from the meetings and interviews, I employed a two-step transcription process for my interviews and observations. As Pamela Takayoshi writes, “If we believe that transcriptions are the first analytical step in a research project, producing the first written form of the data, then it makes sense that even at this early stage in the research process, we build in measures of accountability and reliability” (15). To create this measure of accountability and reliability, I first listened to the recordings to find relevant portions for transcription; for example, I did not transcribe extended conversations about financial management that had no relevance to my study of mission. Second, I paid a transcription service to provide a typed transcript of my recordings. Then, I listened to the recording while coding in

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<sup>12</sup> At the time of this writing, it seems as though the majority of scholars are either advocating for or have come to terms with “they” as singular pronoun. In early 2016, the American Dialect Society announced that they had voted the singular “they” as the 2015 Word of the Year. (<http://www.americandialect.org/woty>)

order to ensure accuracy of the transcript (and made adjustments where necessary). This three-step process of careful listening and transcription led to a more accurate set of data to work with. In addition, multiple passes at the same transcripts allowed me to immerse myself in the data more fully.

After gathering all of the artifacts and transcribing the recordings, I analyzed the data using what Barton (2002) calls “inductive discourse analysis,” which allows for the uncovering of a text’s “rich features—linguistic features that point to the relation between a text and its context.” In Barton’s definition, rich features “have both linguistic integrity (i.e., they can be defined, categorized, coded, and counted) and contextual value (i.e., they can be connected to matters of meaning and significance)” (23). Applying this type of analysis and employing a variety of coding processes outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), I created codes for the data. I started off with deductive coding—a list of codes I developed prior to the fieldwork that hypothesized the themes I might be coding for. Because I wasn’t quite sure what values and ideologies might be expressed by the key stakeholders, my list was rather simple: I coded for emphasis on each part of the mission statement. Once I started coding, I used the inductive process to develop codes that allowed me to be, as Miles, Huberman and Saldaña state, “open to what the site has to say rather than determined to force-fit the data into preexisting codes” (81). As is common in first-cycle coding, this process left me with excess codes, including information that was outside of the scope of my research (e.g. attribute coding, which was unnecessary, and evaluative codes, which required too much potentially biased judgment on my part). Partway through my analysis, I narrowed my coding down to the following:

- Values coding—I coded for attitudes, beliefs, and values, noting that all three can be referred to collectively as “values.”

- In-vivo coding—In-vivo coding allowed me to take note of certain themes and phrases that arose from my observations and interviews, capturing common language used by key stakeholders of the CF as well as metaphors and colloquialisms that revealed further information about the participants’ values.
- Audience—In the artifacts, I coded for which audience was targeted. In interviews, I coded for which audience the interviewee felt was being targeted.
- Issue—I took note of which issues of the organization were brought up and when, noting the number of times. This indicates emphasis and allowed me to determine which issues are being privileged by the organization’s key stakeholders and then, by default, which aspect of the mission they are focusing on.
- Mission—I coded the artifacts for inclusion of the full mission statement, parts of the mission statement, or language that indicated which part of the mission statement they were focusing on.

After first-cycle coding, I looked for similar codes as well as patterns and themes among them. For example, many participants would use the word “Band-Aid” to discuss short-term projects over long-term, while others would talk about “long-term impact” or “short-term solutions.” I collected these codes into a category called “short-term vs. long-term” and created other categories for similar coding situations.

In addition to my own process of coding, I employed two coders<sup>13</sup> to do a check of my process. Because I did not employ them throughout my entire coding and analysis process, I cannot and will not claim any degree of “inter-rater reliability”; rather, I employed these coders to do a “spot-check” for me to mitigate the results of “lone-wolf” coding. My hope was that by

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<sup>13</sup> These coders were current and former graduate students also in Virginia Tech’s PhD program for rhetoric and writing.

providing them with my mostly-completed and edited list of themes and codes plus some basic background of my study, I could have them attempt to apply those codes to samples of the artifacts and interviews to see if they were seeing the same patterns I was and to help me refine my codes. I provided them with a random 10% sampling of transcripts and artifacts, which they coded according to my list (see Appendix A).

These coders were enormously helpful in revealing redundancies and shortcomings in my coding list as well as portions of my interviews I had left un-coded. For example, I had one code for “does not value short-term solutions” and another for “values long-term solutions.” Though you could argue there is nuance there, for the purposes of my study it was more valuable to merge the two codes.

They also coded sections of interviews in ways I found to be unexpected. For example, I have a code for “does not strictly adhere to the mission statement” (I labeled this “MISS4”). My intent for this code was to find instances where an activity of the CF might not seem to fit in one of the three listed activities in the mission statement. However, both coders, in a majority of instances, coded any community issues or areas of focus as MISS4. For example, in A3’s interview, my interviewee says “it seems that the Community Foundation had a large focus on poverty issues in the area.” The CF’s mission statement doesn’t list the particular issues (e.g. poverty, childhood education, etc.) that they focus on; it is a more detailed conversation of the mission and activities of the CF that will allow them to determine that focus. Because the CF’s mission is meant broadly to help donors and nonprofits in the community, the exact issues being addressed would require a separate conversation and would not be listed as part of the mission statement. However, my coders’ attention to these details helped me realize that issues coding

wasn't helpful to my study. I ultimately ended up leaving issues coding out of my analysis because it got into finer details that didn't help to address my genre questions.

Most interestingly, one of my coders suggested I *add* a code focused on how interview respondents were talking about the formatting of the documents I was asking them about. This was a consistent problem in my interviews: I continued to ask questions about mission, audience, focus, and activities, and I would first have to get through several responses regarding the format of the materials. What I had seen as a nuisance my coder saw as an opportunity: if so many interview subjects are commenting on this, perhaps it is an item of significance? It was this suggestion that led to my inclusion of an extended conversation on form<sup>14</sup>, which I address in chapter six.

Finally, these coders found instances of mission adherence, power struggles, and values in my interviews that I had somehow missed. They also confirmed many of my codes and reflected back to me some observations I had already made. By having these coders review a sampling of my documents, I not only improved my coding list and analysis but also confirmed that much of my analysis to date was on the right track.

## **Findings**

Through these coding and analysis processes, I found patterns that helped to explain how the mission is distributed among written genres and understood by various audiences. What I hadn't considered at the time of research design (but became apparent during interviews and analysis) is the influence of speech acts on a genre ecology. In chapter four, I discuss the placement of the mission statement in a nonprofit genre ecology and go into more detail about the role spoken genres play in the genre ecology of the CF, focusing on how the mission

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<sup>14</sup> This is not to indicate that form and format are one and the same; instead, format is merely one aspect of form. As I discuss in chapter six, it is important to understand how the audience is approaching the document in order to fully address the impact and message of the genre in question.

statement is mediated by these genres. In chapter five, I discuss how the struggles of the organization at this juncture (20-year anniversary, increased availability of funds) have made the mission statement a site of contested ideology, and what that means for the “genre function.” In chapter six, I discuss how inside and outside audiences receive and understand the mission through the various genres of the CF, and how the presence or absence of spoken mediation affects those understandings. In chapter seven, I summarize my findings and, noting the limitations of a case study, suggest ways in which my findings might affect our understanding of genres, the mission statement, and nonprofit communication.

## Chapter Four—Guiding Force or Mission Adrift? Speech Acts, Social Facts, and Genre Ecologies

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### Introduction

To examine the role of the mission statement in the community foundation (CF), I posed the following research questions:

- 1. How do key stakeholders in a nonprofit organization create, understand, and use genres to impart the organization's mission?*
- 2. Does the articulation of the mission change among genres, and if so, how and why?*
- 3. How do outside audiences understand the mission as represented through these genres?*

For this chapter, I am starting with research question two to set a “baseline” of understanding the mission in its various iterations before asking key stakeholders and target audiences to interpret those iterations (or discuss their participation in the creation of them). First, I will argue for the nonprofit mission statement as a genre. Then, I will discuss the genre ecology framework I used to organize the genres and other documents in place at the CF and analyze how they are engaged. Finally, I will offer thoughts on how to expand the genre ecology framework to include speech genres and how that inclusion helps to better illustrate the relationship between texts and activities in a genre ecology.

### The Nonprofit Mission Statement: A Brief History

Because of the persuasive nature of the mission statement, its wording and usage become an important focus for nonprofit leaders. The mission statement remains a genre that is fraught with uncertainty—both of purpose and of construction. Though it is often viewed as the genre that is at the top of the hierarchy of documents and action in a nonprofit organization—the

statement leaders will refer to when determining the organization's scope of activities—it is sometimes ignored in the process of daily communication creation. I suspect that confusion over the purpose and use of the mission statement exists because this genre is expected to simultaneously serve a number of divergent functions including fulfillment of governmental reporting requirements, guidance for daily operations, direction for strategic planning, and communication to potential volunteers and donors regarding why the organization exists. In addition, there is often pressure to make the mission statement broad but specific, short but detailed, and descriptive yet succinct. All of these aspects of mission statement development and usage make this genre—and its place within a genre ecology—a very intriguing site of study.

Before I discuss the mission statement's place within a genre ecology, I wish to establish that the mission statement is, indeed, a genre (as I have already claimed), and quickly discuss how it came to be.

### *Overview*

The mission statement is arguably one of the first and most important documents a nonprofit organization will produce. Many nonprofit organizations grow organically, starting at what is commonly called a “grassroots” level. Though at this level a shared mission is often inherently understood by its founders, the process of legalization and legitimization requires a formal declaration of purpose. This formal declaration of purpose—the mission statement—is one of the required documents for obtaining a 501(c)(3) designation with the IRS—the designation that allows an organization to declare itself to be a legitimate nonprofit organization (NPO). This process includes IRS Form 1023, which requires quite a bit of documentation from the organization, including organizational bylaws and articles of incorporation. Though this form does not ask for the mission statement by name, the form repeatedly refers to the organization's

“purpose” when asking for documentation. Specifically, in Part III of the form, the IRS notes that section 501(c)(3) of the tax law “requires that your organizing document state your exempt purpose(s)” and asks the NPO representative to “describe specifically where your organizing document meets this requirement,” asking for the exact location (in their articles or bylaws) of this “purpose clause.” Arguably, to comply with this requirement, the founding directors of a NPO would need to determine the organization’s mission before filing the paperwork; at the very least, these requirements may force the conversation. As Mike Markel (2008) notes, “the requirement to report can force writers to decide existential issues of identity and mission” (3). Filing the 501(c)3 paperwork might force the organization’s first conversation that requires the directors to make value judgments, set goals, and seriously consider what it is they are setting out to do.

Through this federal reporting process, the mission statement becomes one of the founding genres of any nonprofit organization, one that is integral to the other activities in its formation and management. Leading business magazines like *Entrepreneur*<sup>15</sup> and *Forbes*<sup>16</sup> have called attention to the importance of mission statements, and leading nonprofit resources like The Foundation Center, Nonprofit Hub, and Idealist provide guides to nonprofit leaders for how to create them. Most books focused on nonprofit management dedicate at least a few paragraphs—if not entire chapters—to mission statement development, emphasizing its importance in communicating with potential donors and volunteers. But the mission statement hasn’t always existed in its current form. So how did it come to not only exist but take such a critical role in

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<sup>15</sup> *Entrepreneur* magazine has produced nearly 50 articles on mission statements in the last six years with many more articles touching on the mission statement in smaller ways. Most focused on how to write an effective statement and the importance of the statement to corporate culture. For some examples, see Cohn, Kappel, and Gunelius.

<sup>16</sup> A search of *Forbes* produced approximately 20 articles in the past five years focused on mission with many more mentioning mission statements within the articles. As with *Entrepreneur*, several articles focused on how to create good mission statements; however, *Forbes* also included some articles on the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of corporate mission statements. See Solomon and Weinreich.

nonprofit governance?

### *History*

Kevin C. Robbins (2010) traces the history of philanthropy back to ancient Jewish tradition and Greek philosophy, noting that charity was considered either a moral or civic imperative; further, he notes that in charitable enterprises, some sort of implied statement of purpose was understood but not required in writing. Though charitable giving and civic service have changed throughout the ages, philanthropy in the United States largely avoided any sort of government oversight until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hall (2010) notes that through a variety of court cases in the 18<sup>th</sup> century brought on by public distrust in organizations claiming to be charitable, the government declared that to be eligible for tax exemption, an organization would have to, among other things, “advance a charitable purpose” (37). These definitions were further refined throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century as corporations lobbied for changes that would permit larger corporate contributions to charity, and as we entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century, philanthropy started to increase significantly, with the number of tax-exempt entities doubling between 1939 and 1950 (53). Over time, the large influx of nonprofit organizations claiming tax exemption, combined with continued suspicion of larger charitable organizations (many associated with rich family names like Rockefeller), created “murky issues of charitable intent and altruistic motivation” (55). To address these issues, the government increased regulations, including enacting the Internal Revenue code of 1954 that defined 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 organizations as well as the documents required for filing for tax-exempt status—including a statement of purpose. Eventually, that statement of purpose moved beyond mere filing or reporting requirements, becoming a staple of nonprofit organizational development and providing a reference point for donors and volunteers inquiring about the goals and purposes of these organizations.

Scholars studying nonprofit organizations note that the importance of the mission statement appeared to soar in the 1970s and 1980s, reaching exceptional heights in the 1990s, when, for example, “fully 80% of all colleges and universities were making major revisions in their mission statements” (Morphew and Hartley 456). For both for-profit and nonprofit entities, the mission statement became supremely important during that time and has remained so ever since. Stone (1996) calls it a “key component of an effective strategic planning process” (36) while McDonald (2007) takes it a step further to note that strong mission statements result in not just effective strategic planning but also innovation. Morphew and Hartley (2006) argue that “a clear mission helps organizational members distinguish between activities that conform to institutional imperatives and those that do not” while also providing a sense of purpose for employees (457). While Davies (1986) argues that mission statements are over-generalized and ineffective, more scholars (Yoshioka, 2003; Kirk and Nolan, 2010; McDonald, 2007; Minkoff and Powell, 2010) argue that mission is of the utmost importance to a nonprofit organization—an essential tool for guiding its success. Nonprofit leaders use the mission statement not only for strategic planning but also on marketing materials, fundraising appeals, and websites, often with the aim of recruiting more people (and money) to their cause.

### **Mission Statement as Genre**

Most genre scholars agree on a definition of genre that considers both form and function for, as Devitt (2004) put it, “treating genre as form requires dividing form from content, with genre as the form into which content is put” (5). Still, some formal features of certain genres are easily recognizable and lead to the labeling of a text as a particular genre; for example, we recognize an obituary for its conventions of describing a person in terms of a brief summary of life accomplishments, the date (and perhaps cause) of death, and a list of surviving relatives.

However, we can also recognize that over time, the formal features of a genre can change, be inconsistent, or eventually bear only a slight resemblance to its usually recognizable form. Using the obituary as an example again, we would still label a text as an obituary if the writer chose to flout the genre conventions and refuse to list surviving relatives, a date of death, or life accomplishments. If the text still accomplished the social action of announcing a death and providing basic biographical information on the deceased<sup>17</sup>, we would still recognize that text as an obituary. This is because, as Devitt argues, “genres are associated with but not defined by textual form . . . the fact that genre is reflected in formal features does not mean that genre *is* those formal features” (11). This is an important distinction for my argument for the mission statement as a genre, since the form of mission statements can vary greatly. Still, there are some consistent features.

### ***Form and Content***

Among those who study nonprofits, there is some disagreement about the ideal form of the mission statement. Recent trends in mission statement creation indicate an interest in brevity, even though in some situations that brevity results in something that is not a mission statement at all. For example, Top Nonprofits conducted a survey<sup>18</sup> of 100 mission statements and produced a list of the 50 “most compelling” statements; however, the first statement on the list (“TED: Spreading Ideas”) fits the definition and style of a tagline, not a mission statement. Many more on the list blur the line between tagline and mission statement; the statements average 15.3 words each. This, many experts argue, is not enough space in which to express the point of a mission statement.

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<sup>17</sup> I believe both of these pieces are necessary to qualify something as an obituary. Though my purpose here isn’t to get into a debate about the obituary as a genre, I would assert that a notice of death *not* accompanied by any biographical information would simply be a death announcement.

<sup>18</sup> <https://topnonprofits.com/examples/nonprofit-mission-statements/>

A nonprofit mission statement usually defines (often in broad terms) *what* the organization is doing with some statements including a *why* and/or a *how*. Most nonprofit experts will advise nonprofit leaders to, at the very least, answer the *what* question, while others specify that a mission statement should include a target population or cause, a specific action, and a desired result. Durham (2010) states that “a strong mission answers the basic question of what the organization exists to do and provides a basis for judging the success of the organization and its key programs” (45). But even with that goal in mind, mission statements are generally expected to be brief. Because mission statements are most often just a sentence or two, additional detailed information for nonprofits is spelled out in other documents—the vision statement, for example, or a document dedicated to describing how they accomplish their goals. So, a mission statement must be somewhat brief but also descriptive.

In terms of sentence construction, there are some conventions that are quite common with mission statements. Many will use the phrase “XYZ’s mission is to...” and then complete the idea from there; some will simply start with the “to,” leaving out the self-identification portion. Of the list of 50 mission statements curated by Top Nonprofits, 38 (76%) of them included the prepositional phrase.<sup>19</sup> Also somewhat common in mission statements is the listing of three goals, target populations, or activities; this is particularly common in smaller nonprofits, though some larger nonprofit organizations also follow this convention. For example, the New York Public Library’s mission is “to inspire lifelong learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen our communities.”<sup>20</sup> The CF’s mission takes a similar form:

*The mission of the [CF] is to enrich our community by providing professional management services to donors for their charitable causes, awarding visionary grants and scholarships, and nurturing collaborations in our community.*

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<sup>19</sup> This number is even more compelling when you consider that of the remaining 12 statements, four better fit the form and function of a tag line.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nypl.org/help/about-nypl/mission>

Because I was not present for the formation of the foundation and its ensuing conversations regarding the mission, I cannot speak to whether the founding board members purposefully attempted to construct their mission statement in the three-part form. However, I am curious if there was an effort to list three “hows” to complement the overall goal of “enriching” the community. Devitt (2003) argues that “genre both encourages standardization and enables variation and that, similarly, genre both constrains and enables individual activity” (4). I would argue that the standard of three can either constrain a nonprofit’s activities or make nonprofit leaders attempt to expand them. Having been a participant in many mission discussions, I can attest that there is something comforting about a list of three that makes people attempt to shrink or expand their activities to fit that form of wording. In addition, it is important to note that the CF’s list of three is composed of *how(s)*—an inclusion that, as I noted above, is not common to all mission statements. As Durham noted, the mission statement is often used as a measure for judging the success of an organization; listing the *how(s)* adds another layer of accountability that can either help a nonprofit stay on task or lead to mission drift<sup>21</sup> (or at least the perception of it). Minkoff and Powell (2010) argue that “mission motivates activity and also limits the menu of options” (592). If that is the case, then listing the *how(s)* in a mission statement can be quite restrictive; the “menu of options” is, indeed, limited. I would argue that for the CF, the listing of these *particular* activities has become a source of disagreement among key stakeholders in the organization—a topic to which I will return in chapter five.

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<sup>21</sup> “Mission drift” is a phrase used to describe what happens when an organization’s activities and mission statement do not align. As Minkoff and Powell put it, “‘Mission drift’ and ‘mission creep’ are [phrases] that reflect the process through which organizational goals can be deflected or sacrificed in the interests of organizational survival, or as the result of a loss of focus” (592).

## ***Function***

Though many scholars and experts disagree on the exact form a mission statement should take, most agree on its purpose: to guide the activities of an organization. As Kopaneva (2015) notes in her study of employee ownership of mission and vision in 22 organizations, a mission statement is “a perfect example of an authoritative text through which an organization constitutes itself as an agent. . . .The purpose of mission and vision is to unite organizational members, provide them with shared systems of meaning, and guide their actions”<sup>22</sup> (6). This view is supported by Bawarshi’s idea of the genre function. By considering the function of each genre, Bawarshi illustrates how genres are democratizing, constitutive (and reconstitutive), and interpretive, noting that “social action as well as identity construction are thus partly genre-mediated and genre-constituted” (343). Genres act to provide understanding to the actors in a situation and continually enact those situations. Such a view, Bawarshi argues, can help scholars see “how all texts, writers, and readers are constituted by the genres within which they function” (358).

As an example of the genre function, Bawarshi offers the Patient Medical History Form (PMHF) that most patients (in the Western world) fill out at doctor’s offices. Bawarshi argues that the PMHF reveals a lot about the values and beliefs of Western society; specifically, this genre “reflects how our culture and science separate the mind from the body in treating disease” (353). In the PMHF, the genre function serves to allow patients and doctors to “assume certain situational roles” and “genre-constituted identities” in which patients are defined by their physical ailments (354). Before a patient and doctor even meet face-to-face, the genre function of the PMHF creates the social conditions of their interaction. The text imparts ideology.

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<sup>22</sup> Even Kopaneva likes the rule of three.

Picking up this idea of the genre function, we can see that mission statements are “carriers of culture, ethos, and ideology” (Swales and Rogers 226) and are “regarded simultaneously as both a source and reflection of an organization’s shared values, commitment, and culture” (Bart 683). Once written, the mission statement becomes a visible, symbolic representation of ideas that otherwise might only exist in the minds of those working to achieve them. This is the primary “social action” the mission statement is working to enact—to serve as a reminder of what those involved with the organization in one way or another are attempting to achieve and to invite others to take part in that action. Devitt (2004) argues that a genre “reflects, constructs, and reinforces the values, epistemology, and power relationships of the group from which it developed and for which it functions” (64). If this is true of most genres, then it is even more so for the mission statement, a genre which, to a certain degree, is created for that exact purpose.

### ***The Mission and Genres of the CF***

To begin to find an answer to my research question—*Does the articulation of the mission change among genres, and if so, how and why?*—I cataloged the artifacts I collected in terms of how they address the mission. The full mission of the CF is “to enrich our community by providing professional management services to donors for their charitable causes, awarding visionary grants and scholarships, and nurturing collaborations in our community”; for the purposes of brevity, I will refer to the three parts of the mission as “donor services,” “grants and scholarships,” and “nurturing collaborations.” As I mentioned in my description of the research site, I limited my corpus to promotional materials and the CF’s website; in other words, I did not analyze internal documents such as payroll forms or employee reviews. I analyzed the language of each genre used by the CF to see which of the three parts of the mission it focused on; in

addition, I considered the social action intended to be accomplished by the genre. For example, a document meant to encourage donors to invest with the foundation might include references to the grants and scholarships the CF provides; however, the primary purpose of the document is to encourage investment and establish credibility in the CF's ability to manage funds (this would be categorized as "donor services").

There were, however, some genres that seem explicitly aimed at a holistic view of the CF; for these, I added a fourth category for "all"—those genres that seemed to address the mission as a whole. One might argue that part of the mission is "to enrich our community," which is a rather large umbrella under which many activities and genres can fall; however, since the CF included that "by" phrase with three specific *hows*, they have specified the activities they would undertake and therefore chosen the stick by which they must be measured. For the purposes of categorizing something as "all," it had to include some language and/or purpose that reflected all three aspects of the mission. Finally, in addition to those four categories, there were some instances where the language was either unclear or described CF services or activities that did not strictly adhere to the mission statement. I left these separate in the beginning—in a sort of non-category category—but as I will explain later in this chapter, the use of genre ecology modeling helped me to place them within the ecology of the CF, if not within its mission. In the chart below, I have them listed them simply under a question mark.

The full wording of the CF mission statement appears in five genres: the Annual Report, the newsletter, the "Our Mission" web page, the Giving Day<sup>23</sup> homepage, and the "Promoting Giving Day" page. It is paraphrased throughout other documents and web pages, usually in line with the purpose of the document (e.g. a paraphrase focusing on "professional management

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<sup>23</sup> Many of the names of the documents, webpages, activities, and initiatives of the CF—as well as the names of other local nonprofits mentioned throughout—have been changed to protect the anonymity of the CF.

services” in documents meant to provide investment information for current donors). I have cataloged the genres in a chart below, including a listing of all genres according to the five categories outlined above. NB: inclusion of the full mission statement on a document did not earn that genre a place in the “all” category; in the case of the Giving Day pages, the mission statement was listed in a separate box on some portion of the page, not engaged by any other surrounding text. Its function seemed to be informative about the CF but not performative in any way.

Table 2. Artifacts and corresponding genres of the CF.

<b>Professional Management Services</b>	
<i>Included artifacts and corresponding genres:</i>	
Addendum Bequest (PDF)	Dental Fund (web page)
American Funds (web page)	Our Advisors (web page)
Donor Relations (web page)	Planned Giving (web page and brochure)
Donor Stories (web page)	Starting a Fund (web page)
Giving (web page)	Types of Funds (web page)
Immediate Impact (web page)	YP Gives (web page)
Investment Policy (web page and PDF)	
<i>Sample language:</i>	
“The [CF] is the arm of support for many local charitable organizations, programs and students that are in need of immediate funding. Your outright gift of cash, securities, or other liquid assets will allow you to make an impact right away, supporting your favorite charitable causes.” (Planned Giving Brochure)	
<b>Grants and Scholarships</b>	
<i>Included artifacts and corresponding genres:</i>	
Areas of Interest (web page)	New Online Application – Grants (web page)
Community Impact Grant Program (web page)	Online Scholarship Guide (web page)
Community Impact Statement (web page & PDF)	Recent Grants (web page)
Grantee Stories (web page)	Responsive Grant Program (web page)
Grants (web page)	Winners List (web page)
Grants and Scholarships Home Page (web page)	
<i>Sample language:</i>	
“The [CF] has recently revised our semi-annual grant program in order to provide better opportunities for area non-profits.” (Responsive Grant Program)	
<b>Nurturing Collaborations</b>	
<i>Included artifacts and corresponding genres:</i>	
Aging in Place Workshops (web page)	Preserving Our Community (web page)
Community Partnerships (web page)	Early Childhood (web page)
Livability Initiative (web page)	

<i>Sample language:</i>	
“In August 2013, the [CF] cosponsored a workshop where 75 participants shared their insights on design features for lifespan friendly housing in town, suburban and rural parts of our region, enabling residents to remain in their homes and communities as they age.” (Aging in Place)	
<b>All</b>	
<i>Included artifacts and corresponding genres:</i>	
Annual Report (PDF and printed document)	News (web page)
Board Packet (PDF and printed document)	Newsletter (web page and printed document)
Events (web page)	Leading Lights (web page)
Getting Involved (web page)	Our Mission (web page)
<i>Sample language:</i>	
“The [CF] relies on over 1000 volunteers, donors and friends to meet our mission and expand the capacity of the nonprofit community to meet evolving needs. Our staff would be happy to talk with you about specific ways to get involved.” (Getting Involved)	
?	
Community Fund (web page and PDF)	Promoting Giving Day (web page)
Giving Day web page (external and on CF site)	Tweets

Categorizing the artifacts by mission allowed me to see the other ways in which the mission was worded, as exemplified in the chart above. However, my chart left me with a literal question mark: (how) do these other genres fit in with the CF’s mission? If there are genres that don’t seem to fit in the mission, does that mean the mission statement has lost its authoritative power? To begin to answer this question and work toward my other research questions, I needed to consider how these genres work together.

While preparing for this study, I theorized the mission statement as a regulating/controlling genre (Schryer and Spoel) that is simultaneously the common object that works to “produce a stable representation of a shifting reality” (Winsor 4), even if it is just “stabilized for now” (Schryer 204). As one of the founding genres of an organization and the statement that exists to express purpose, the mission statement certainly can be considered an authoritative text that holds a certain level of textual power over the others. However, I also posited that though this genre can indeed, as Bawarshi states, continue to communicate the ideology and values of the organization even in the absence of a person, its power can be either

reified or changed by its uptake in the genre ecology. As Devitt (2004) notes, a genre needs to be continually used and engaged in order to reaffirm the values and ideologies present within it. Therefore, if members of the organization are somewhat changing the mission when they engage it—either by privileging one aspect over another, stretching definitions, or inserting new ideas—the textual power of the mission statement will be reduced. To examine the relationship of the mission statement to other genres at the CF and explore the uptake or rejection of particular ideologies and values, I now turn to the theory of genre ecologies and genre ecology modeling.

### **Genre Ecologies**

The theory of genre ecologies offers a robust framework for analyzing and understanding not only the mission statement but also the other genres in a nonprofit organization. In Spinuzzi and Zachry's 2000 article introducing the idea, they note the affordances of using a genre ecologies framework to examine communication in organizations:

Genres are not static forms; they are dynamic, organic, and messy. To account for variations across instantiations of a given genre, a more robust, ecological perspective is required, one that accounts for the dynamism and interconnectedness of genres. In particular, we argue, the genre ecology framework must account for how official and unofficial documentation genres are animated by and connected through contingency; how the documentation's functionality is consequently decentralized, distributed across the ecology; and how ecologies of genres achieve relative stability despite their contingent, decentralized nature. (173)

The genre ecology framework is especially effective in examining nonprofit organizations since the mission statement is a genre that is “distributed across the ecology”: language in various

genres recalls the mission statement, activities (presumably) adhere to it, and in theory, everything should be in service to the mission. In addition, one could view many genres within the ecology as instantiations of the mission; the values and ideologies represented by the mission statement manifest themselves in language elsewhere throughout the ecology. The idea of contingency is present as well: NPOs are always dynamic in nature, as they are constantly experiencing changes brought about by unexpected needs in the community, changes in funding availability, and the turnover of key stakeholders.

It was also in this article that Spinuzzi and Zachry first proposed the idea of genre ecology models/modeling as a tool to examine genre ecologies. At the time, they called it a

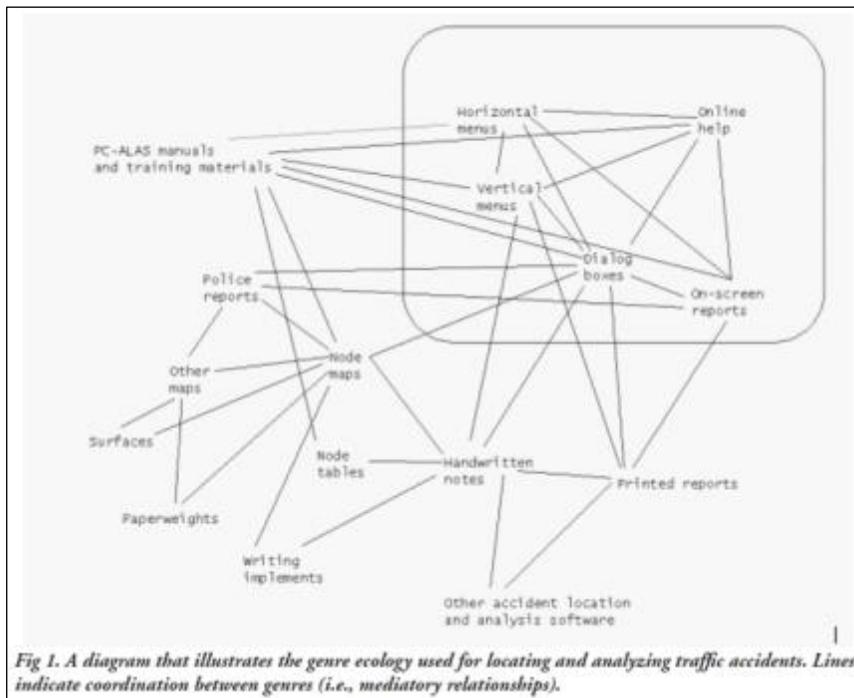


Fig 1. A diagram that illustrates the genre ecology used for locating and analyzing traffic accidents. Lines indicate coordination between genres (i.e., mediatory relationships).

Fig 1. First diagram of a genre ecology from Spinuzzi and Zachry (2000).

“genre ecology diagram”

and illustrated its use in two projects: Spinuzzi’s study of traffic officers and Zachry’s study of engineers at a production facility. Along with other tools, they argued, a genre ecology diagram “can help designers to lay out relationships, analyze the interplay among

genres, and identify which genres are central or peripheral to the use of the technology” (177).

The genre ecology diagram originally included in this perspective (see figure 1) was solely comprised of genres (also known as “node maps”) and tools (e.g. paperweights to hold the maps

down); it did not include any events or speech genres. Though the creation of the map was informed by observations, those individual acts were not represented on the map as genres in their own right.

In their 2006 article extending their original work, Spinuzzi, Hart-Davidson, and Zachry filled in that missing piece. They included a “scripted telephone conversation” as the heart of the

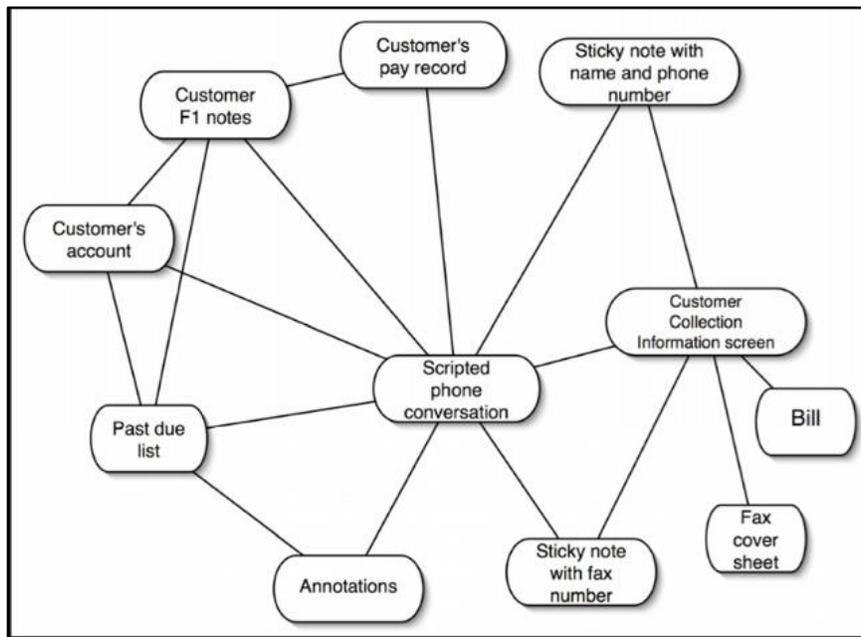


Fig 2. Genre ecology model from Spinuzzi, Hart-Davidson, and Zachry (2006).

genre ecology model (GEM) for a telecommunications worker, noting that the genre ecology model (see figure 2) maps the mediational relationships between genres and activities, allowing researchers to see “how texts mediate activity, since texts can be brought

into play at any point and can intermediate in an assemblage” (45). The GEM can demonstrate the interplay of text and activity. Jones (2016) furthers the genre ecology model in her article on an international social justice organization, including weekly team meetings as the central hub of interaction (what she calls a “coordinating genre”) for all genres (see figure 3). Genre ecology modeling, she argues, “helps us to see how genres interrelate, how [they] mediate one another, options for alterations and work-arounds, and which genres are most common and often used in a network. This type of visualization emphasizes the rhetorical and the practical implications of

tools in use within a network” (310). By modeling the genres in an organization and exploring how they relate to one another, researchers can learn more about the texts than with mere textual analysis.

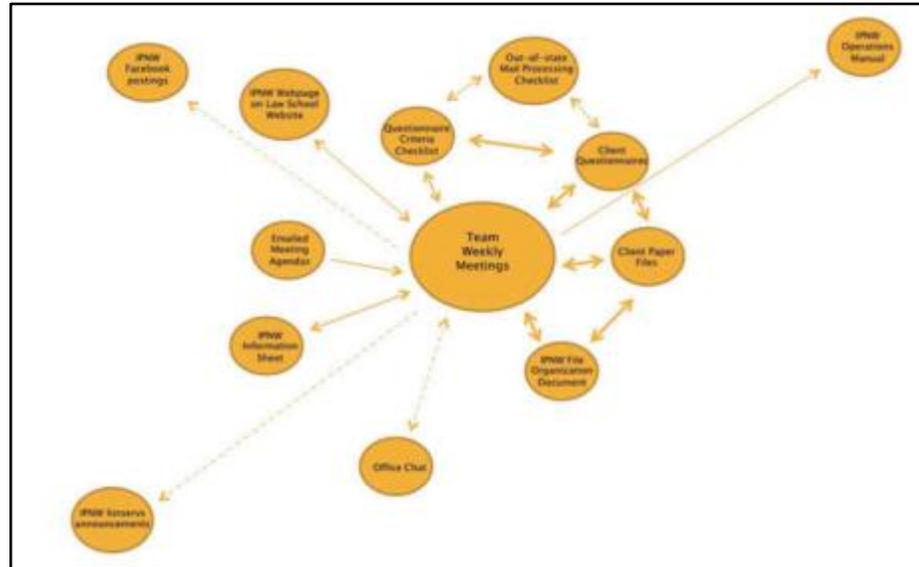


Fig 3. Genre ecology model by Jones (2016).

In each of these examples of genre ecology modeling, however, the written (or digital) genres were centered around one meeting or interaction—or, at least, that is what their model represents. I propose a form of genre ecology modeling that will further integrate these interactions and address the effects of speech genres on genre ecologies.

### ***Speech Genres***

Mikhail Bakhtin (1979) first explored the idea of speech genres around the same time linguists John Searle and J.L. Austin were developing their theories of speech acts. In his essay “The Problem of Speech Genres,” Bakhtin argues that “speech genres are much more changeable, flexible, and plastic than language forms are” (80). Speech genres allow for more improvisation in the moment as well as interactions with written genres in ways that can affect their meaning. As Devitt (2014) argues, “being part of society enables individuals to change society, and hence to change genres” (579); every genre was developed within some sort of discourse community and reflects that community’s conventions, and every interaction with a

genre can potentially change it. Devitt summarizes the cyclical nature of genre by describing it as a dynamic response to and construction of recurring situation, one that changes historically and in different social groups, that adapts and grows as the social context changes. . . .both the product and the process that creates it. Genre is what Bakhtin calls ‘the whole utterance’ (“Problems” 80), a unity and a unifier. (580)

What Devitt makes clear in this statement is that written genres cannot simply be mapped on paper and expected to keep their meanings unchanged; they must be considered within the context of the social group that formed them. This consideration and understanding includes the ways in which the members of that group *talk* about the genres.

### ***Genre Ecology Model of the CF***

When analyzing the mission statement and its placement with the CF’s genre ecology, I first mapped out the relationships between the genres and documents as well as how the mission is represented across those genres and documents. Using the chart depicted in Table 1 (located in chapter three), I created a visual representation of this ecology. I located the mission statement as the central hub, or “coordinating genre,” as Jones would say. Because I hypothesized the mission statement to be the central genre that mediates all other genres, and because a nonprofit is generally organized around its purpose (or mission), I extended the mission statement’s three components (plus the category of “all”) to be representations of that mediation, coordinating the genres around those categories. The resulting map is displayed in figure 4 on the next page.



Fig 4. My initial GEM of the CF.

While creating this model, I realized that some genres didn't strictly fit with the mission statement; I couldn't figure out where to place them in the model. However, it was evident to me through my interviews and observations that even if I didn't consider these genres to be related

to the mission, the key stakeholders of the CF did. So, how do they relate? Bazerman's application of speech acts to genre systems is helpful here. Bazerman (2004) writes:

Each successful text creates for its readers a social fact. The social facts consist of meaningful social actions being accomplished through language, or speech acts. These acts are carried out in patterned, typical and therefore intelligible textual forms or genres, which are related to other texts and genres that occur in related circumstances. Together the text types fit together as genre sets within genre systems, which are part of systems of human activity. (310)

Rather than simply looking at textual genres and activities, Bazerman considers how speech acts influence and are influenced by the texts in a genre system.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, one could apply the concept of speech acts to the *written* texts within a nonprofit genre; for example, the locutionary<sup>25</sup> act of a list of grants funded and organizations supported by the CF might be to simply celebrate the awarding of those grants and alert the community to which organizations were successful with their proposals. Meanwhile, the illocutionary act could be to inspire community members to give more money to the foundation so they can continue to support those programs. The perlocutionary effect, then, would depend on whether that audience chooses to act on that call. And though that sort of analysis is informative, I am more concerned with the actual spoken genres used within a nonprofit genre ecology. Though I only *observed* two spoken genres

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<sup>24</sup> Though I find Bazerman's concept of speech acts, genres, and activity *systems* to be particularly compelling, I lean toward the concept of a genre ecology because it seems less rigid than the idea of a "system." A system implies an order that is likely sequential whereas an ecology leaves more room for the idea that the relationship of genres in an organization may always be in flux.

<sup>25</sup>In speech act theory, the locutionary act is what is actually said, the illocutionary act is an implied meaning the speaker hopes the audience will hear, and the perlocutionary act is the action the speaker hopes the hearer will take.

within my study of the CF—meetings and interviews—participants told me in interviews of other speech acts<sup>26</sup> they use to gain participation with and support for the organization.

Though the only spoken genres I observed/participated in during my research were interviews and meetings (staff and board), I did learn of three important spoken genres during my interviews with the key stakeholders of the CF: (1) informational meetings for nonprofit organizations, (2) gift solicitation visits, and (3) committee meetings (in particular, discussions on which grants and scholarships to award). While discussing which genres they use and why, respondents noted that these were the most common speaking situations during which they would use a formal genre (e.g. the annual report). Returning to the idea of speech acts, one could look at these spoken genres of the CF (and, I would argue, the interviews and meetings as well) and discern that the illocutionary act for each spoken genre is to reinforce or change the mission statement. In theory, one perlocutionary effect of such an interaction would be that the mission statement would actually be rewritten and changed to reflect the values of the speaker. This result is not uncommon in nonprofit organizations; the ideas expressed verbally eventually move so far away from the textual representation of the mission that the key stakeholders in the organization change the mission to reflect those values. More likely, however, two other perlocutionary effects will take place: (1) the hearer's pre-existing understanding of the mission is reinforced, or (2) the hearer's understanding of the mission is permanently altered moving forward; in either case, any future interactions with or about the CF are viewed through that lens—this view of the CF's mission becomes a social fact.

Adding speech genres to my genre ecology model resulted in connections I hadn't noticed before; determining where they fit into the model forced me to consider their impact on

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<sup>26</sup> Because I consider the primary acts of speech I list in this ecology to be speech genres—as they have distinctive patterns of speech and inspire specific social actions—I often refer to them as such. However, they are also speech *acts*. Therefore, I use both terms interchangeably throughout this study.

the genres I already had placed. As I demonstrate in figure 5, the placement of the speech genres did not alter the placement of the other genres; it simply provided mediation for them.

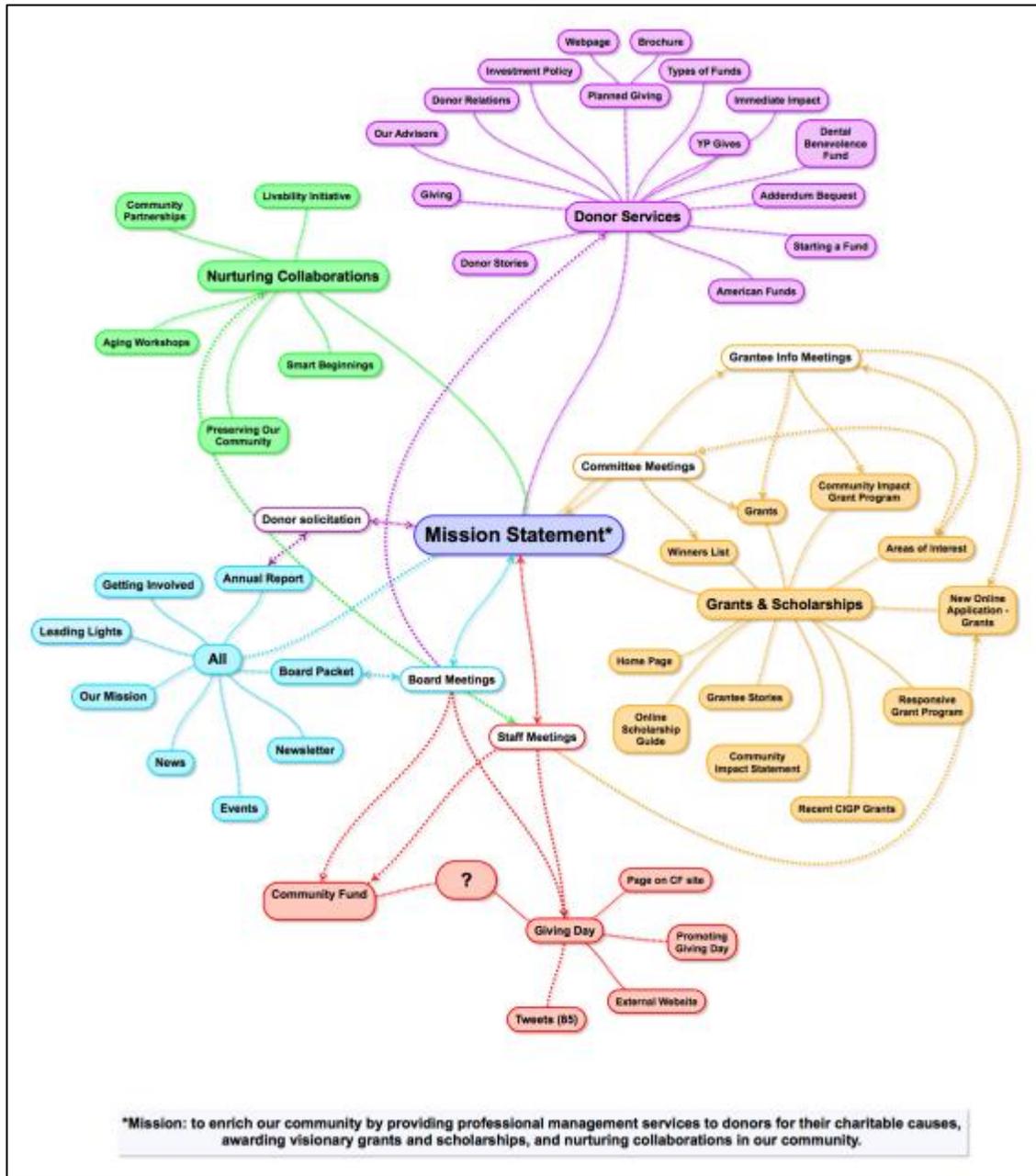


Fig 5. GEM of the CF incorporating speech genres.

Therefore, conversations about the mission statement, discussions about which grants are available and how to qualify for them, deliberations over which grant and scholarship awards will best achieve the mission, and solicitation visits with donors all affect the mission in some

way. Because the “inside audiences” I interviewed each brought their own experience to their interpretations of what the CF does and how it does it (a concept I will discuss in more detail in chapter six), it is possible that their understanding of the mission had been affected greatly by the speech acts they encountered through leaders of the organization. And, generally speaking, those speech acts had a greater impact than the written documents.

Adding these speech genres to my original genre ecology model allowed me to pull in those “question mark” genres that were floating without a missional home. For example, *The Community Fund* is the case statement the CF has been working on for their new fundraising campaign; it is also the genre that resulted in the most confusion among my interviewees. While it does address parts of the mission within the document, its primary purpose is unclear. For example: *The Community Fund* focuses on three key words: connect, inspire, and empower. “Connect” seems most directly applicable to the “nurturing collaborations” aspect of the mission; however, the language of “inspire” and “empower” is broad and unclear:

**Inspire** innovative solutions that address the root causes of our community’s most pressing needs. We believe [our community] can harness its creativity and entrepreneurship to address the complex challenges we face. Together, we can push boundaries and engage in creative problem solving that has a lasting, positive impact on our community.

**Empower** nonprofit organizations to become leaders in overcoming community challenges of all kinds. We believe that, with financial resources and leadership training, the staff and volunteers of our region’s charitable organizations have the experience and passion needed to put good ideas into action.

Though “inspire” might also be connected to nurturing collaborations, the language seems to indicate a more active role for the community foundation, which until this point was primarily a facilitator for other organizations either through making connections or providing funds. The “empower” section touches on a conflict between the mission of the CF and its activities: capacity building for nonprofits. From my view, providing trainings for nonprofit organizations

falls outside of the stated mission; however, some participants argued for it as part of “nurturing collaborations.” I disagree with that categorization; after all, you can build the capacity of individual nonprofits and never have them work together. Therefore, because its primary function appears to be outside the bounds of their mission, I placed *The Community Fund* in the “questionable” category.

The other genres in the “questionable” category fall under the umbrella of Giving Day, a 24-hour donation-gathering effort that is set up for nonprofits by the community foundation. The foundation facilitates an online giving portal that connects to participating NPOs in the area. Each nonprofit creates a page, promotes the event, and encourages donors to increase their giving for a special giving day. (In addition, the nonprofits are able to take advantage of an online giving platform at a discounted rate thanks to the CF’s participation in the Giving Day platform.) But setting up the Giving Day platform and investing time in helping nonprofits to raise money falls outside of the scope of “awarding visionary grants and scholarships,” the aspect of the mission most closely tied to this activity. The purpose of a community foundation is to manage donors’ money, take a percentage for that management, and direct grant and scholarship funds to organizations and individuals. While taking an active role in fundraising is commendable, it is questionable as to whether it falls within the CF’s stated mission.

### ***Speech Genres and Genre Ecology Modeling***

These questionable genres were not connected to the genre ecology until I introduced speech genres into the model. Though the spoken genres don’t seem to include explicit conversation about the mission as written—just the mission as understood by that individual or individuals—they clearly mediate the meaning of the mission statement in relation to these activities. The period of time I observed the CF coincided with their development of *The*

*Community Fund* and their “ramp up” to Giving Day; therefore, they were common topics of discussion at the meetings. Though there was no specific debate about how they related to their mission, both *The Community Fund* and Giving Day were integrated seamlessly into meetings, sandwiched between obviously mission-related discussions like grant distribution and donor fund management. Among the participants, there seemed to be an implicit understanding that both were a part of what the CF should be doing. This suggests that the values and ideologies of the key stakeholders of the CF have shifted over time, but the mission statement has not—a topic to which I will return in chapter five.

This model also illustrates how spoken genres can mediate the meaning of textual genres whose relation to the mission are *not* disputed. For example, when asked which genre best exemplified the mission of the CF, 60% of board members chose the annual report. As one board member put it, “When people are going to be recruiting board members and community advisers, we usually give them the annual report because it does have a little bit of everything” (B10, interview). Others noted that they take the annual report with them on donor solicitations. In these instances, even if the potential donor or board member is flipping through the annual report, they are interpreting the document through its presentation by the current board member; they will trust their verbal interpretation of the printed words. In this way, a spoken genre can alter the meaning of a written text.

These altered meanings—what could eventually be established as “social facts”—are easier to understand using genre ecology modeling. By more intentionally including speech genres in the model, we can more accurately illustrate the relationships between the spoken and written genres and understand how genres mediate and shape one another. The most compelling affordance of using GEM with the genre ecology of a nonprofit organization is that it further

illustrates how the mission statement appears in its various iterations, including not seeming to appear at all. This can reveal underlying disagreements with key stakeholders regarding what the mission is and what it should be—a topic to which I now turn.

## Chapter Five—Conflict and Consensus: The Mission Statement as a Site of Contested Ideology

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### Introduction

As I have stated before, the mission statement is intended to be an instantiation of the values and ideologies of the leaders of a nonprofit organization. Though in the case of the CF it does appear that verbal interactions (particularly the speech genres I outlined in the GEM) supersede the understanding of the mission, the mission statement was, at one time, meant to be the written representation of what this group hoped to achieve (and how to achieve it). Beyond reporting requirements, the intention of having the written statement is to ensure that those leading the organization—in the present and in the future—will adhere to the vision and values expressed in that genre.

I originally theorized that the mission statement would be a controlling genre—a stable representation of the organization’s purposes. However, as I demonstrated in chapter four, rather than the mission statement mediating the speech genres at work, the speech genres serve to mediate the mission statement. Moreover, the understandings of the mission statement created through these speech genres supersede the textual power of the written genres—even to the point where some genres don’t make sense as part of the GEM (and overall mission of the organization) without the speech genres as mediating factors.

The result is confusion surrounding which values the CF should be focused on as well as which activities they should be conducting. Interestingly, as I will discuss later in this chapter, another result of the privileging of speech genres over written genres is that there is a shared cultural understanding of the importance of an activity the CF is conducting that is *not* reflected in the mission.

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the points of conflict and consensus resulting from how the key stakeholders of the CF understand the mission and communicate the purpose and activities of the CF. My primary goal in this chapter is to answer my first research question: “*How do key stakeholders in a nonprofit organization create, use, and understand genres to impart the organization’s mission?*” To answer this question, I first examine the cycle of genre production and usage within the CF, taking note of how genres are used to communicate the mission. I then focus on four primary points of conflict and consensus, noting how difficulty making value judgments contributes to confusion and conflict over not only the mission of the organization but also the wording of its other genres. I analyze and discuss the differences in what the text of the mission statement seems to be communicating versus how the key stakeholders are *interpreting* the mission statement and using genres to encourage certain behaviors and actions from others. In addition, I discuss one instance of consensus among key stakeholders that represents a break from the mission statement and suggest this consensus creates social facts that affect interpretation of the mission. Finally, I suggest a way forward for reducing these conflicts and changing the cycle of genre production to allow for more fluidity between the mission statement and the current values and ideology of the organization.

### **Cycle of Genre Production and Usage**

Before discussing the differences in values and ideology prevalent among the key stakeholders of the CF, it is first necessary to understand the cycle of genre creation and usage at the community foundation.

At the time of my observation of the CF, documents were generally created by the staff with some input and refinement coming from the board members. As demonstrated in my genre ecology model in chapter four, the genres are created to fulfill one of the stated goals of the

mission statement (donor services, grants and scholarships, and nurturing collaborations); therefore, genres that are similar in social purpose tend to show up in the same general vicinity on the map.

Because my study is focused on how the mission statement is communicated through these genres, I limited my corpus to those genres deemed to be specifically mission-focused and eliminated genres like employment forms. Reviewing these documents gave me greater insight into the organization and painted a picture of their overall activities and values. Mapping them in a genre ecology model (GEM) helped me to visualize how these genres related to the mission, how they related to each other, and how the mission was represented through, influenced, or was influenced by other genres.

Though I reviewed each of the genres displayed in the GEM, I chose four to focus on for my interviews: the annual report, the newsletter, the Community Fund, and the front page of the website.<sup>27</sup> The reason for focusing on these particular genres was simple: E1 had determined them to be the genres most often used by staff and board members to communicate with the public and recruit potential donors. The annual report, newsletter, and website were created by the executive director, further refined by staff, and approved by the board. They were also created before I began this study, meaning that I was unable to observe the creation process for those genres. The only genre that was in the process of being created during my study was the Community Fund (which I will discuss later).

As stated in chapter four, I also was not present for the creation of the mission statement; it was, in fact, created at the founding of the organization twenty years ago and revised

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<sup>27</sup> For the sake of time and to keep the corpus manageable, it was necessary to simply choose one page of the website rather than the entire site. Because the front page of the website is meant to draw people in to read more (acting as the front line of mission communication), it is very general and includes information about all aspects of the foundation. Therefore, I focused on that page, as privileging any other page of the website would skew the results toward whichever part of the mission that page was focusing on.

approximately one to two years prior to my period of observation.<sup>28</sup> Though many leaders who participated in the revision of the mission statement were likely still around during my observation, they will soon move on. In addition, several board members were relatively new to the organization. It is important to note that frequent turnover of key stakeholders is quite common in nonprofit organizations; not only are nonprofit leaders constantly changing jobs and burning out, but board members usually have a term limit of no more than three years, resulting in a continuous change in leadership. In theory, this amplifies the importance of the mission statement: it provides a steady guide for new leaders as to what the organization should be doing. However, my observations suggest that, at least for the CF, oral tradition is stronger than written tradition.

### *Perlocutionary effect*

In many organizations, new board members are recruited through networking with four primary sources: current volunteers, current donors, current staff, and current board members. These stakeholders help connect the organization to new people to carry on the mission. In these circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that the person doing the recruiting is having a conversation with the potential board member about what the organization's goals are and what their responsibilities will be. Even if the written materials are shared with the prospect, they are interpreted through the lens of the person talking. It is reasonable to state that in many cases, verbal understanding will supersede the written document.

This, of course, affects the perlocutionary effect of the genre. According to Jones (2016), genres “help to encourage certain behaviors and actions in response to a situation in which there is a goal and desired outcome” (301). I would add that while a genre can encourage certain

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<sup>28</sup> It is quite common for mission conversations to take place infrequently; often, decades can pass before a mission statement is revisited. I believe this lack of conversation contributes to the creation of conflict, an idea I discuss toward the end of this chapter.

behaviors, any speech act accompanying it would affect someone's interpretation of what the genre is encouraging. This becomes complicated by various interpretations of the mission. For example, while a key stakeholder may be hoping that a genre will encourage a prospect to give, their interpretation of what the prospects are giving to/for may vary. And, of course, if the genre itself is rather broad, it can be used for a variety of purposes; a good example of this multi-purpose function is the annual report.

In the corporate world, the annual report is used to inform stockholders of the completed activities, financial reports, and general performance of the business the previous year. It is, largely, an accountability document. In the nonprofit world, the annual report serves a similar function. Like a corporate annual report, it provides information about activities and financial performance; however, the difference here is the representation of a *social* return on investment, rather than a solely financial one. Certainly in the case of the CF the donors want to ensure that their donated dollars are earning interest and being distributed properly; however, another purpose of the annual report is to demonstrate that the organization is having a wider impact on the community—that contributing to the foundation and allowing it to do its work is worth more than directly contributing to those nonprofit organizations and cutting the CF out of the picture. This worth is demonstrated not only through financial documents but through listings of grant recipients and what they did with the funds, listings of scholarship recipients and which schools they will be attending, and visual representations of all the people being helped through the foundation's work in the community. In addition, nonprofit organizations can look at the annual report to see what kinds of support the CF offers to similar organizations, which funds cover the activities and services they provide, and perhaps even which other nonprofit organizations could be potential collaborators for a project.

This broad spectrum of purpose and representation in the annual report is what allows it to be used in a multitude of ways. The CF's annual report includes five major sections: letter from the CEO, listing of key leadership, grants and scholarships distributed (recipients and amounts), financial reports, and names of donors (plus plenty of pictures, of course). A key stakeholder might use this document to demonstrate to a potential donor that their money will be handled well or to inform a nonprofit leader of grant opportunities. One board member mentioned that he uses the report to answer a question he believes the prospect wants to know the answer to but isn't asking: "are these my people?" (B4, interview). The annual report's donor list shows potential donors that by giving to the CF, they are participating in something well-supported by their peers; in other words, it's a party they likely want to join.

Because of these varying outcomes possible from just one document, perlocutionary effect becomes a very important part of the question: what behaviors and actions are these genres encouraging, and how does the key stakeholder's use of them affect the recipient's understanding of what those behaviors and actions will accomplish? For the CF, the answer is: it depends on who you ask and when you ask them.

### **Conflict and Consensus**

My observations of the CF revealed four primary sources of mission-related conflict:

1. Short-term vs. long-term solutions
2. Decision-making power over funds
3. The purpose of the Community Fund
4. Supportive services for nonprofits

The sources of conflict for each of these issues varied. The conflicts over short-term versus long-term solutions and donor services came out of diverging values and ideologies among the key

stakeholders as well as differences between the language used in various genres versus the way the staff and board saw things. The Community Fund is an odd site for both conflict and consensus; while there is some confusion over the purpose of the fund, everyone is happy with what they believe the fund is set up to do. The topic of the CF's relationships with area nonprofit organizations created *consensus* among the key stakeholders; however, it conflicted with the mission itself.

Several of these conflicts represent some differences in values and ideology, but they are also rooted in indecision. In discussions on these topics, choosing between competing values was not simply one stakeholder vs. another—it was often a case of competing values within one individual. Beginning with this level of indecision complicated discussions about the organization's values and activities, a task made even more difficult by the foundation's increased capability to distribute funds.

### ***Difficulties Making Value Judgments***

At the time of my observations of the CF, they were in the midst of celebrating their 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary—a significant milestone, to be sure. Though it is worthy of celebration, according to E1 it is also a time in the life cycle of a foundation where it is natural to go through a period of transition and questioning. In addition to this transitional period, the community foundation also had more money to manage than at any time in the past. They had reached a tipping point of sorts, and the presence of more money led to more discussions (and disagreements) on how to distribute it.

Approximately one month after I started observing the foundation, the board and staff held a retreat to talk through the questions that naturally arise during this transitional period and the fact that, as E1 put it, “We really need some guidance on where to go next.” Though I was

not granted access to observe the retreat, several staff and board members shared these discussions with me, a quick recap of the meeting was included in the board packet for the early March meeting, and the staff and board members further discussed the retreat while reviewing the notes at that meeting.

In our interview shortly after the meeting, E1 noted that the board members “really had difficulty choosing the value set, like, making a value judgment. They really had trouble also articulating why it is we do what we do.” E1 stated that while the board would uphold something as a value—for example, valuing “the community” and “services to nonprofits”—they had great difficulty prioritizing those values over one another. In other words, the board members didn’t want to have to choose.

This was a feeling echoed by many others as well. During the March board meeting, the board members and staff held an extended conversation about the retreat, with many board members mentioning the “desire to do it all” that seemed prevalent. One board member remarked that “we’re trying to do everything, in a way” while another pondered the usefulness of the retreat because “we kinda ended up saying, ‘we want do this AND we want to do *this*’”—indicating that they viewed their values as a *both/and* rather than an *either/or*.

Additionally, B1 (who was not present at that meeting) noted in an interview that they felt that the board was “sort of all over the place.” B1 also said that the “one thing” the foundation is known for doesn’t exist, because “we kind of do all kinds of stuff.” The staff lamented lack of direction from the board as well. When contemplating the mission, E4 listed several of the activities of the CF and then asked, “So, I would just say, in terms of the mission, where’s the focus, you know?”

#### 4. Board Retreat

- Feedback from the Executive Committee: The retreat reflected the need for the Board to begin to consciously look at values judgements. The guided questions helped focus direction the staff wanted us to head even though we went to the center. These were hard questions. It wasn't clear what we were trying to do. It was too pie in the sky. The Board needs more direction from Staff about a framework rather than Board trying to create the framework. It was good to think through the consequences and benefits of choices and about competing priorities - neither choice was bad, but one might be better than the other given all of the information. The retreat was a good opportunity to get to know new Board members.
- Feedback from Staff: The board is moving from hands-on to values-centered now that there is a larger staff to do the meat of the work. There is a need for broad level thinking from the Board about the CF's values. The Staff can then work through specifics/change programs/etc. based on those values.

Fig 6. Recap of retreat in board packet for March meeting. Underlining mine.

Further complications arose from disagreement on who should be the originators of these values. The board packet for the March 2, 2015 meeting included a recap of the board retreat from the perspective of the participants; this can be seen in figure 6. As is evident from the underlined sections, the board and staff disagree about who should take the lead on making value judgments. The executive committee stated that they need “more direction from Staff about a framework” while the staff asked for “broad level thinking from the Board about the CF’s values.” With no clear answer as to which group should be calling the shots, value judgments were difficult to make—particularly in the area of short-term vs. long-term solutions.

#### ***Band-Aids and Backpacks: Short-term vs. Long-term Solutions***

While key stakeholders could generally agree on *which* problems they wanted to address as an organization, they had great difficulty determining whether they should address community problems through short-term or long-term solutions. This was one of the areas where staff members stated that they had difficulty getting the board members to commit to one over the other, as the board members see the value in setting up a long-term solution that may eliminate or significantly reduce a problem but also want to help people in the short-term. Of course, the pursuit of both options is limited by time and money.

**Unresolved Tensions:**

Important to affect as many organizations as we can and still offer 'Band-Aid' grants, but we need to balance small and large to tackle broader issues and increase impact.

Larger grants imply that CF would need to make some value judgments. Should we be making value judgments for our community? Don't we already make value judgments?

Smaller grants are reactive, larger grants can be more proactive. Proactive grant making may incur more administrative burden, to be in touch with the community and its priority needs (data, etc.). When we are proactive, non-profits will follow the money and try to accomplish what is asked for.

*Fig 7. Additional notes on board retreat from early March board packet.*

The notes from the January board retreat (see figure 7) indicate that this conflict has not yet been resolved. They list the tension between short-term and long-term solutions—as well as making value judgments—as “unresolved tension.” In addition, these notes highlight a term that had been consistently used as shorthand to describe short-term solutions: “Band-Aids.”

*Band-Aids: The Argument against Short-term Solutions*

For some, the term “Band-Aid” had come to be used as shorthand to mean a temporary solution that doesn't actually fix anything. E2 shared their frustration with “Band-Aid mentality” when discussing the CF's origins. During our interview, they noted that the CF started off making small \$500 grants to organizations—certainly not enough to make a meaningful impact on long-term solutions. After noting that \$500 short-term grants were good for that time, E2 stated

That was fine but that was not impactful. When that executive director retired, I talked to E1 for a long time about what a community foundation in my mind meant. That meant that we would have a difference in poverty. It's not that, "I'm so glad you gave us \$500 so that we could put some dang-gone eggs into that food pantry, but 2 weeks later we're all damn starving again." Why can't we use our dollars to actually make a difference? Why can't we teach people how to get

together, and together they can do something on the foundation to fund this? Why can't we just use it to get at the root? We don't need to be a Band-Aid organization anymore. We can attract more dollars and more donors by not being a Band-Aid organization, but we have a Band-Aid board.

E2 brings up an example that was frequently referred to among other stakeholders: the food security problem. The struggle is that people are hungry now, so they want to feed them; however, at the same time, investing the money in a long-term solution could lead to fewer hungry people in the future. In E2's view, the board was too focused on the short-term—the Band-Aid—over the long-term.

The way E2 uses the term “Band-Aid” certainly indicates a negative tone; I would argue they are intending “Band-Aid” to be derogatory. (This would be consistent with the idea of “putting a Band-Aid on a bullet wound”; it's not going to accomplish much, if anything, and it doesn't solve the problem.) However, even when the term “Band-Aid” wasn't used, other key stakeholders expressed frustration with short-term solutions using similarly derogatory language. In their interview, B1 expressed frustration with the “Band-Aid” grants:

We have a good reputation, but we have a few hundred bucks for like *many, many, many little nonprofits*. And then we get a few thousand, and then ten thousand—whatever to others. But you don't solve problems that way. So I think this more focused approach is the way to go. And you can—if you're smart and have good leadership—you can leverage whatever resources you have. I think we only have, what, 7 million bucks in the bank, and that's not a big spin off to solve problems. If you narrow things down, you can sometimes really make a

difference. *Instead of 57 little nonprofits*, all of them need money, but you're not really solving anything. (emphasis mine)

Here, B1 combined a desire for long-term solutions with an assessment that the CF also needed to make value judgments and focus their grant distributions. And though B1 didn't use the term "Band-Aid," they did mention "many, many, many little nonprofits" and "57 little nonprofits— phrases that indicate their estimation of their impact. The overall point of these stakeholders is: what are we accomplishing, anyway?

This disdain for short-term solutions is complemented by a high value on long-term solutions. Another board member, B7, argued solely for long-term solutions, praising the CF for being the only organization in the community focused on long-term solutions:

I don't know of any other organizations that really focus on endowment to the extent that the Community Foundation does. I mean that's really the, you know— United Way for instance covers a wide range of organizations and so on, but it's this year and that's it. Where the Community Foundation is very, very long-term. And that's one of the most attractive features of it from my point of view—it's really building long-term charitable giving. It really has a long-term point. And that's not to criticize anything else. That's the role of the Community Foundation—is to have that long-term.

In fact, to B7, "long-term solutions" is the entire point of the CF. As they see it, the United Way and other organizations are here to take care of short-term needs; the purpose of the CF, therefore, is to think ahead. Why focus on short-term needs when other organizations are already fulfilling that role?

Within this conflict, the *benefit* of long-term solutions is not debated by any board members; all the board members and employees recognize the value of long-term solutions. Instead, they merely argue about the balance between the two. While some argue that the community foundation should be solely focused on long-term solutions, others see value in funding both short-term and long-term solutions. In the midst of these arguments, the benefits of the short-term solutions are often used as evidence for the need for the CF to continue funding.

*Backpacks: The Argument for Short-term Solutions*

While some key stakeholders see short-term solutions as “Band-Aids,” others see them as filling an essential need in the community. Consider this excerpt from the board meeting on March 2, 2015:

*Board Member 1:* I’d just like to—one comment I kind of got from it was that I think there’s a general sense that we’re putting Band-Aids on things. And there’s—I think we would generally like to start addressing the core reasons why some of these issues are existing rather than continuing to put Band-Aids on the problems.

*Board Member 2:* I was ready to do both. But the Band-Aids are still needed, at least until the whole system would evolve. Because it’s expected. So for now, we’ve got to be both since the terms are reactive and proactive.

At this point in the meeting, they are discussing the retreat (at which they were trying to determine values and set priorities). One board member’s comment—that there was a “general sense that we’re putting Band-Aids on things”—indicates that there are other board members in agreement that short-term solutions should not be the focus of the foundation. The second board member’s comment demonstrates again the difficulties board members were having in making value judgments by stating a preference for focusing on both short-term (“reactive”) and long-term (“proactive”) solutions. In a way, that board member reframes the term “Band-Aid” in a

positive light by noting that “Band-Aid” solutions are still needed and are the positive flip-side of the long-term solution coin.

In addition, key stakeholders tended to use another term to focus on the positive side of short-term solutions: “backpacks.” This short-hand refers to the “backpack” programs that feed hungry children by sending food home with them on the weekends. In the community served by the CF, there was one backpack program that was particularly popular and well-supported. Over time, the term “backpack” came to be used by key stakeholders, nonprofit leaders, and even some community members as short-hand for a solid program that does good work. During my interviews, five board members and two staff members referred to the backpack programs, and the programs were brought up at two of the board meetings as well.

B4’s comments on backpack programs highlights this use of the short-hand; in addition, they take the argument past the mere “backpacks demonstrate effective programs” idea: B4 argues that short-term solutions are actually mission-centric, pointing out more short-term solutions that are very valuable to the community. In their view,

. . . the best communication is through what people see occurring because of the work of the Foundation, what they see occurring in their communities. . . . Like for instance, through scholarships for students, or through supporting the grants, whether it's supporting backpack programs, or soup kitchens, or clothing closets, or any time there is anything that benefits a community, or a segment of a community, and the Community Foundation's name is tagged to that, **then that communicates the mission.** (emphasis mine)

Here, B4 notes the value of providing for immediate needs and connects these short-term solutions directly to the mission. I assert that B4 sees these activities as connected to the mission

since the overall goal of the CF is to improve the quality of life in their community. And, of course, there is an argument to be made for that. However, this view may be in conflict with the mission statement and the subsequent genres created from it.

### *Mission-centered Conflict*

The materials produced by the CF include some references to both short- and long-term solutions. Information on grants includes references to previous winners whose projects are obviously short-term (e.g. filling the coffers of a food pantry or offering temporary scholarships for camps), and the amounts of the majority of the grants offered—\$500 to \$2,000—would suggest short-term solutions. Though supporting students with scholarships *could* be viewed as a long-term investment in education, I would argue that scholarships fall under “short-term” solutions as well, as they only help one student for a portion of their tuition for one semester. A possibility for both short-term *and* long-term exists in some of the language the CF uses, as in the “Types of Funds” document that states “many nonprofit organizations establish a designated fund with us in order to grow assets to meet both *current and future needs*” (emphasis mine), or in the Community Impact statement, which uses both “investing in long-term solutions” and “alleviating suffering now” as headings.

However, the very structure of the various funds at the CF indicates long-term support for the community because the monies are invested and grow; the goal of most funds is to set up an endowment that will allow for giving in perpetuity. In addition, the bulk of the language used in most CF materials focuses on long-term solutions. Documents regarding investment policies and donor services all include language that says the CF is interested in long-term “returns” or “impact” (e.g. the Investment Policy, Immediate Impact statement, Planned Giving brochure). *The Community Fund* case statement notes that the CF is interested in investing in solutions that

get to the “root” of the community’s needs; the word “root” indicates a more long-term solution—attacking the cause of an ongoing problem (the root) rather than simply handling the symptoms above ground (say, the leaves of a weed). In addition, that same document indicates that supporting the *Community Fund* will enable the CF “to have a long-term, positive impact on our community by investing our time and funding on helping these charities work together.”

Though short-term solutions are mentioned in a few CF documents, the bulk of them focus on long-term, which makes sense given that the mission statement states that one of the CF’s activities is “awarding *visionary* grants and scholarships” (emphasis mine). The word “visionary”<sup>29</sup> suggests a look to the future, which would indicate a long-term solution. One of the purposes of a community foundation is to establish long-term support for quality of life in a community, so including the word “visionary” in the mission statement could be a deliberate choice to indicate the long-term values held by the organizational leaders. E2 pointed out the apparent discrepancy between the word “visionary” and the activities of the CF, stating that “Awarding visionary grants is a work in process. Historically, you can’t call \$500 to a food bank visionary. That’s not visionary.” Indeed, the grant-giving activities of the CF do not, in whole, focus on what one might consider “visionary” grants.

The conflict with the short-term vs. long-term solutions combined with the use of the word “visionary” in the mission statement leads me to believe that at this point in the cycle of the CF, the key stakeholders are not relying on the mission statement for guidance. As Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) state, “genre conventions signal a discourse community’s norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology” (497). Genre conventions include word choice, and

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<sup>29</sup> The Cambridge dictionary defines *visionary* as “with the ability to imagine how a country, society, industry, etc. will develop in the future,” the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as “having or marked by foresight and imagination,” and the Oxford dictionary defines “visionary” as “thinking about or planning the future with imagination or wisdom.”

in the case of the CF's mission statement, "visionary" was approved as part of the language of the latest iteration of the statement. Therefore, it would make sense that the word would signal an ideological bent toward long-term solutions. If the key stakeholders are disagreeing about this ideological view, then that brings their engagement with the mission statement into question.

A similar issue became apparent in discussions regarding donor services and who has power over the funds that come into the CF. After discussing conflicts regarding decision-making power over funds, I will return to the discussion of mission-statement engagement, using both short-term vs. long-term solutions and decision-making power over funds as examples of this point of the cycle of genre production.

### ***Decision-making Power over Funds***

The key activity that categorizes an organization as a community foundation is the management of donor funds. As opposed to raising money directly for operations dedicated to a particular cause, a community foundation invests money from donors and, in theory, distributes that money according to the donors' wishes. Among the key stakeholders of the CF, there is a certain amount of disagreement regarding how much power should rest in the hands of the donors. The primary question is whether the donors should get to dictate exactly who the funds are distributed to or whether they should trust the foundation to make those decisions for them.

In interviews, the staff has indicated a frustration with donors seemingly wanting power and treating them "like a bank"; however, the language on their donor relations page seems to indicate that they are willingly giving donors that power:

"Effective communication with you as a donor is critical to ensuring that ***your charitable interests are met*** while also providing you with insight on current and evolving community needs relevant to ***your fund's purpose.***" ("Donor Relations" page of website)

“You can establish a charitable fund quickly and easily. Our staff will guide you through the process step-by-step, working with you to *meet your interests* without the complexities associated with establishing your own, private foundation.” (Annual Report)

“Visit our Donors page to learn more about starting an endowed fund to *meet your particular charitable interests* or making an unrestricted gift to support the general operations of the Community Foundation” (“Getting Involved” page of website)

Though the last quote does offer the opportunity to make an unrestricted gift, it is the only place where an option other than donor control over the funds is mentioned. The phrase used in these documents meant to discuss/promote donor services—“*your fund’s purpose*,” “*your charitable interests*”—seem to indicate that the donors are in charge.

However, that is not how some key stakeholders see it. B6 noted that the foundation had been having conversations for over a year regarding how much discretion the board has to determine where funds are distributed:

“I still think the thing we compete with is, like I said a year or so ago, we have record activity for establishing funds. That's both, I think both in number of funds and in dollars put in them. And *I think we'll always compete with somebody that has an idea of where they want funds to go*... And they're not as interested in, probably, and we've discussed this, I think we had some discussion around it at our last meeting if you were there last week around the amount of influence donors have on their funds, *we'd like to have more leeway*.” (B6, interview, emphasis mine)

This quote from B6 illustrates a desire to have more power over the funds than has traditionally been given to the board.

The staff's opinion on donor control of resources was even stronger, as illustrated from an excerpt of the transcript of my interview with E1 (see Figure 8). During this conversation, E1 expresses frustration with the idea that donors may treat the CF as a “bank” rather than entrusting

**E1:** [42:23] We want to present our role as understanding what our community needs, pulling the right people together to get it done, and, "You should give to us because you know that we're a good organization that's capable of doing that." Rather than, "You should give to us because our whole point is to do whatever the heck you want."  
**Tana:** [laughs] [42:45]  
**E1:** [42:46] That's not really...I know donors want to hear that, but at the end of the day then why wouldn't they give just directly to an organization? There's a reason they give to a foundation and its long-term impact not just "I want to give..."  
**Tana:** [43:02] Funneling funds.  
**E1:** [43:03] Yeah. "I want to funnel funds." I'm sure some people think of us that way, but we're not a bank. I think that's a lesson that came out of the board retreat too is that our board needs to wrestle with that understanding is that it's not a donor's money anymore. That's always the biggest thing that we come across. [43:27] It's a misunderstanding amongst our board, I would say, about whose money it is. It's our money but it's not...  
**Tana:** [laughs] [43:34]  
**E1:** [43:34] It's horrible...  
**Tana:** [43:37] But legally.  
**E1:** [43:39] Legally, it's not. Legally it is our money. We pledge to do what the donor asks and we're absolutely doing that, but we're not a bank. They don't get to make decisions about investments and...that's...No. We get to decide those things because we've been entrusted to do that.  
[43:58] Our role is to be a leader and use their money in the best way possible within the confines that they said not constantly say, "We're not going to move off this spot until our donors tell us it's OK." That's not how power's set up.

*Fig 8. Excerpt from interview with E1.*

the organization to steward their funds—though E1 also expresses a commitment to honoring their desires (“We pledge to do what the donor asks and we’re absolutely doing that” and “Our role is to be a leader and use their money in the best way possible within the confines that they said...”). This suggests that behind the scenes, there have been some power struggles related to how the CF distributes the funds made available by the donors.

E4 explains the struggle the most succinctly, noting that the confusion and conflict starts with IRS definitions and regulations regarding donor-advised funds. E4 explains that donor-advised funds became very popular in the 1990s and soon flooded foundations:

Congress has been looking at donor-advised funds forever. So here's the deal: so basically, you give money to your donor-advised fund. You write out a fund agreement that basically says, "I'm giving this money to the Foundation. This is the Foundation's money. But I'm going to specify some causes I would like it go to." . . . Now, that's the part that sticky with the IRS because, basically what they're saying is you can't have your cake and eat it too. You can't donate money saying, "Oh, it's not my money, so don't tax me" but then also go decide how it's used on a year-to-year basis.

As E4 explains, part of the conflict here is rooted in "you can't have your cake and eat it too" legalities: the IRS code prohibits donors from directing money once it has been given to a nonprofit organization (including community foundations). So, the CF is not *legally obligated* to do what the donor wants; in fact, simply acting as a "funnel" for donor funds is against the law. However, the CF also has an incentive to keep donors happy so they can continue to distribute funds in accordance with their mission, and since donors are a part of the community they are serving, it's reasonable to assume that their input is valued.

The legalities of donor-advised funds combined with the language of the CF's donor-related materials creates a recipe for conflict; although most donors realize the legalities, they still may be swayed by CF language that they have more control than they legally do. But I would argue that another part of the conflict comes from not only the language used on donor-related materials but also in the mission statement itself. The mission states that the CF will

“enrich our community by providing professional management services to donors for *their charitable causes*” (emphasis mine). The phrase “their charitable causes,” referring to donors, suggests giving power to the donors; the service the CF provides is simply “professional management,” which brings to mind basic investment. In addition, as I pointed out earlier, their language regarding donor services on many documents (donor services, the annual fund, etc.) also suggests that donors have a good deal of control over the money they donate. The language in their mission and all the supporting documents leaves a viable case open for the donors having power.

### ***Conflict and the Cycle of Genre Production***

Both conflicts (short-term vs. long-term solutions and decision-making power over funds) seem to arise from internal ideologies clashing with the language of the official genres of the CF, and they represent a disconnect between what the mission states and what the staff and some board members believe. The mission statement and the bulk of the materials dedicated to donor services point to the donors as having control of the funds, while the feeling amongst key stakeholders is split. Similarly, the mission statement and the bulk of the materials dedicated to short-term vs. long-term solutions favor long-term, while the key stakeholders remain in disagreement about just how many short-term solutions to invest in. Even the portions of the CF genre ecology that point to a small focus on short-term solutions appear to be a result of the actions taken by the key stakeholders; the listing of grants focusing on immediate needs happens only after the key stakeholders have chosen them.

These conflicts not only represent a rift between daily activities and the mission statement (and other genres) but also indicate that the key stakeholders might not regularly interact with the mission statement for guidance. In all my interviews, very few key stakeholders

framed current activities, values, or genres in terms of the CF's mission (unless asked directly), and in my observations of meetings, the mission statement was not mentioned at all. Devitt (2004) argues that "once genres are established that . . . reflect the group's values, epistemology, and power relationships, the existence and *continued* use of those genres reaffirm those very values, epistemology, and power relationships" (60, emphasis mine). I posited in chapter two that while Devitt argues that the *continued* use of these genres helps to continually reinforce their impact, she does not state that their continued force is *reliant* on that continual use. The interesting thing in the case of these two subjects (short-term vs. long-term solutions and decision-making power over funds) is that the mission appears to primarily have continued impact on the *genres* of the CF (and therefore the first impressions outside audiences might have), but internal discussions involve conflicts over the values and power relationships communicated by the mission statement.

If, as Devitt (1993) posits, "genre is both the product and the process that creates it," these conflicts also suggest a potential disruption in the cycle of genre production of the community foundation. At the time of my observation, a mission discussion was fairly recent, and it is possible that a large number of these genres had been created or edited since. So, genres very well may have been produced closely in line with the mission statement. However, as conversations questioned those values and power relationships, the distance between key stakeholders beliefs and the language of genres widened. As long as these discussions are not aligned with the CF mission and genres, this conflict will not be resolved and will likely become more pronounced over time. As I discuss at the end of this chapter, a change in the view of genre production could help avoid a heightening of conflicts that could cause more serious problems for the CF.

### *The Community Fund*

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that three of the four artifacts I focused on during the study had been created by E1 prior to my period of observation. During my study, I did observe one genre in production: *The Community Fund*. Because it was still in development, it was not used by the staff or board members in their interactions with other people. And it was, like the other genres, created by the staff; in this case, it was primarily being developed by E4 with feedback from the rest of the staff and the board members.

*The Community Fund* is, in essence, a case for support. Nonprofits use a case for support as a static document to convince a potential donor to donate to that particular organization. In theory, a case for support presents the most *compelling* reasons for donors to give; it is usually used by nonprofits who rely on some level of support from individuals and businesses in their community. However, community foundations typically have a different type of case for support. They are focused on getting donors to invest with the foundation and, as just discussed, those donors have some power over where the funds are directed. Community foundations focus not on their own activities but on the results gained by granting the money to other nonprofits to accomplish goals they share with the foundation.

The source of confusion here is that *The Community Fund* is aimed at raising unrestricted funds for the CF; however, it also lists very specific areas of focus that the money will presumably support. This nebulous fund usage places *The Community Fund* in a nebulous spot in the genre ecology. If aimed at raising unrestricted funds, it could be viewed more as a necessary product of fundraising—a prospect I haven't discussed since a community foundation operates so differently than a "regular" nonprofit organization. In the case of a general fundraising document, I would group *The Community Fund* under the "all" area of the mission, as raising

money is necessary to accomplish their goals. However, if *The Community Fund* is listing specific areas of support, then those areas should be measured according to the goals of the organization. And considering that the CF states that it is focused on directing donor money where the donors want it to go, this seems like a conflict.

It is unclear how the CF intends to distribute money to cover these options. Will the funds cover overhead so CF staff can participate in collaborative activities? If so, then that places *The Community Fund* under “collaboration.” Will they have more freedom to distribute these funds to nonprofits without the direction of the donors? That makes things a bit muddier.

Though its placement in the genre ecology of the CF is a source of conflict for my analysis, it is interesting to note that the key stakeholders largely agree on the usefulness of the *Community Fund* case statement. However, there is some confusion among the key stakeholders as to what exactly *The Community Fund* is for. Several board members note that its purpose is to raise funds for administrative purposes; one (B7) even pointed out that the fund used to be called the “general administrative fund.” Others thought its purpose was to raise more money to give to nonprofit organizations, giving the CF direct power over the funds. B3 thought it was wonderful to have more discretion in distributing funds, while B6 referred to the fund as a “kitty” for the CF.

Regardless of what they thought *The Community Fund* was for, all the board members and staff members held a positive view of the fund (and case statement). Every staff and board member I interviewed felt that *The Community Fund* represented the organization well and fit well within the parameters of the mission statement. Only one board member, B6, recognized that *The Community Fund* would be a hard sell to the public (even though she liked the document overall), stating that she simply didn’t think it would have “an impact on the donors’

minds.” As I will discuss in chapter six, she was right: this particular document represented a significant miscommunication between key stakeholders and the public.

### ***Supportive Services for Nonprofits: Giving Day and Capacity Building***

Though they had conflicts and confusion in other areas, the key stakeholders of the CF had a great deal of consensus surrounding the concept of supportive services for nonprofits. During my interviews, observations, and subsequent analysis, discussions of services for nonprofits were taken for granted; however, my analysis of the activities that fall under this umbrella left me with the literal question mark I mentioned in chapter four: how do these activities relate to the mission?

During my study, the CF was preparing for Giving Day, so it was a common topic for discussion. As I mentioned in chapter four, Giving Day is a 24-hour giving day sponsored by the foundation on behalf of area nonprofits. The CF sponsors the day by providing an online giving platform through which these nonprofits can raise money; in addition, they provide some incentives to the nonprofits by securing grants and sponsorships from area businesses that will be awarded to the nonprofit for reaching certain achievements—for example, having the most people at an event or raising the most money that day. Though the foundation also has an entry on their page to raise money for The Community Fund, there is no other financial benefit to hosting the giving day; they do not keep a percentage of any funds raised, and they do not charge the nonprofits for participating. One benefit they do receive, however, is that they get increased publicity and gain the trust and admiration of area nonprofits.

As I noted in chapter four, I could not find a way to argue Giving Day as part of the mission. For many of the key stakeholders, Giving Day fell under the category of “building nonprofit capacity”—something they all feel is rather necessary; however, “building nonprofit

capacity” is not part of the mission. In addition to Giving Day, the board and staff see two major activities as falling under the umbrella of “building nonprofit capacity”:

- (1) Consultations provided for area nonprofits by the executive director of the foundation. At the time of my observations, the CF did not have any written documents describing these consultations, and they were not advertised on the website; however, E1 had already helped several nonprofits with strategic planning and other capacity-building activities and seemed to indicate that such activities would continue.
- (2) First Fridays. Though these are listed on the events page of the website, there were no distinct genres related to this event, which is why they don’t appear on the GEM. These Thursday mornings meetings are provided by the CF and bring in speakers to address different struggles nonprofits are facing (e.g. social media management, board recruitment, etc.).

With a stated mission to “enrich our community by providing professional management services to donors for their charitable causes, awarding vision grants and scholarships, and nurturing collaborations in our community,” these activities don’t quite seem to fit anywhere. For most stakeholders, their importance was simply assumed; when these items were brought up in meetings, board members simply nodded along or provided feedback with no questions as to how these activities relate to the mission. In all my observations and interviews, I could find only one person who made an overt argument for these activities fitting in the mission: E3. When we were first discussing the mission, I asked E3 if those three components were accurate to what the foundation was/should be doing. They responded, “yeah, I think these are the right things and I think we’re trying to build nonprofit capacity, which is the professional management services.”

Later in the same interview E3 also argued that “I see bringing nonprofits together to learn and become more skilled as potentially a collaboration,” connecting these services to the “nurturing collaborations” part of the mission.

Try as I might, I can’t see the connection between nonprofit capacity building and professional management services. The only possible connection I can see is with the “nurturing collaborations” aspect of the mission; however, I would argue that’s only in effect when the nonprofits are brought together (as with First Fridays). The consultations are private meetings with just one nonprofit at a time, and Giving Day pits nonprofits against one another as they compete for dollars. Neither of these strike me as “collaborative” activities.

Yet, even though I couldn’t directly place Giving Day in the mission, no stakeholders objected to Giving Day discussions or activities. It held a place in the agendas of all the board meetings, and when brought up, no board members objected to its value. In fact, many contributed to finding sponsors and talking up the event to their friends and coworkers. After the event, they celebrated how much money was raised and made suggestions on how to improve the event for next year. None of these reactions indicated that they disagreed with the inclusion of Giving Day in the overall activities of the foundation.

The conclusion I have come to is that Giving Day represents shared values that are simply not (yet) reflected in the mission statement. The staff and board members’ dedication to this project (as of this writing, it has been running for four years) combined with the unanimous view of Giving Day as a necessary part of foundation activities demonstrates that regardless of what their mission statement says, Giving Day is something they value. I would argue this acceptance of Giving Day is a result of solidified “social facts” bearing on CF activities. As I explained in chapter four, Bazerman (2004) stated that “social facts are those things people

believe to be true, and therefore bear on how they define a situation. People then act as though these facts were true” (“Speech Acts,” 312). Regardless of whether Giving Day fits into the mission, the various interactions at staff and board meetings solidified Giving Day as a priority. Again, this is an example of speech genres being privileged over the mission statement genre; through various interactions over time, the necessity of hosting Giving Day came to be regarded as a “social fact” among the key stakeholders of the CF. So, as time goes on, they continue to act as if that social fact is true. And in the case of the CF, the social facts seemed to be considered heavily in the production of other genres, as there are several CF genres that support Giving Day and other services for nonprofits.

But to this outside observer, it looks like the foundation is not doing what it intended to do. But does that matter? And what does this mean for the foundation’s mission? Many nonprofit experts would refer to this as a classic case of mission drift (something that is viewed negatively in the nonprofit world); however, I propose that “mission drift” is a potential misnomer of something larger at work—something explained by the dynamic nature of the genre ecology.

### **Conclusion: Social Context, Contingency, and a Cyclical Model of Mission Development**

Devitt (2004) argues that groups of people develop genres that reflect their values and ideology, but that those genres “must always remain connected to people and not be disembodied” (50). This viewpoint, of course, lends itself well to the concept of the genre ecology, since the ecology maps the genres and activities together. But more specifically, Devitt argues that writers and readers construct the social context surrounding genres, and “people’s actions and discourse delineate what is relevant and not, what constitutes the situation” (19). Within the context of the CF, the interactions between staff, board members, and even outside audiences are larger indicators of what is relevant to the foundation and the community than the

written pieces (e.g. the focus on Giving Day indicates that it is relevant). They are building the situation through their activities and speech genres, and the written genres need to remain connected to these situations.

This thought process blends well with the concept of contingency—a necessary characteristic of genre ecologies according to Spinuzzi and Zachry (2000). They argue that a genre ecology is dependent on three primary characteristics: decentralization, contingency, and relative stability. I would argue that even though the connection between mission and genre in some places is questionable, the genre ecology of the CF is relatively stable. In addition, the mission statement is decentralized and spread throughout the ecology; it is through coordination of all the genres that one can gain the full picture of what the foundation is setting out to accomplish. But I believe it is the concept of *contingency* that has the most to offer for theorizing and understanding the genre ecology of the CF.

Spinuzzi and Zachry define contingency as

uncertainty, the conditional dependence on the fulfillment of conditions. That is, contingency involves the complex, opportunistic, sometimes risky coordinations among genres that are made by people who are trying to accomplish certain things. Contingency involves making connections that were not planned by the system's designers; it entails opening a closed-system documentation set by coordinating it in unpredictable ways with materials at hand. (173)

In the examples Spinuzzi and Zachry describe in this study as well as their 2006 publication with Hart-Davidson, contingency played out in the *addition* of new, unofficial genres to adapt to changing situations; in the case of the CF, I would argue for the *altering* of an official genre to adapt to changing situations. Though certain connections and situations were not developed by

the foundation’s original “designers,” the foundation needs to remain willing to “open” their documentation. They should consider the mission statement a more “open” genre that is subject to change.

Even though I was already convinced that the theoretical framing of genre ecology modeling was right for studying nonprofits (and this case in particular), I realized I had still been viewing the cycle of genre production in a nonprofit organization in a rather *linear* way—particularly for the mission statement: first the mission is formed, then all genres are created to support that mission in some way, then all people encountering these genres understand and share the mission as it is written. But there are two problems with this model: (1) because we are talking about genre ecologies, we cannot simply discuss a cycle of *genre* production but must include activity in the formulation and (2) the linear model (see figure 9) reveals a rather static view of the mission statement as genre, and one of the characteristics of genre ecologies is their dynamic nature. Genres and activities need to have room to change.



Fig 9. Linear model of mission creation and execution (genre production).

Spinuzzi et al. (2006) argue that “any given action is a contingent choice made in response to situational constraints” (45). The situational constraints of the CF vary widely, from their place in the “life cycle” of foundations to their sudden influx of funds to their responses to (and arguments about) the challenges their community is facing. Values are conflicting not only because of the natural tendencies of human beings to bring their own values to any organization but also because there are three distinct parts of the mission that could be viewed as in competition with one another. Other conflicts occur because as new problems arise in their

community, the key stakeholders of the CF are tasked with figuring out how to respond. And if there is a clear need they have the capacity to fill, should the mission statement keep them from addressing that need?

Some would argue: yes. Some nonprofit leaders believe that if the activities are outside of the scope of the nonprofit, they have no business adding them to their offerings. But Devitt (2004) claims that “this relationship between genre and situation, as constructed by readers and writers, listeners and speakers, is not unidirectional but must be reciprocal” (21). The key here is the word “reciprocal”; if the situation calls for a response that is outside of the scope of the mission but within the capabilities and values of the organizational leaders, then perhaps the mission should change. This moves the cycle of mission production and implementation from a linear model to a cyclical one, as demonstrated in figure 10. While the linear model demonstrates

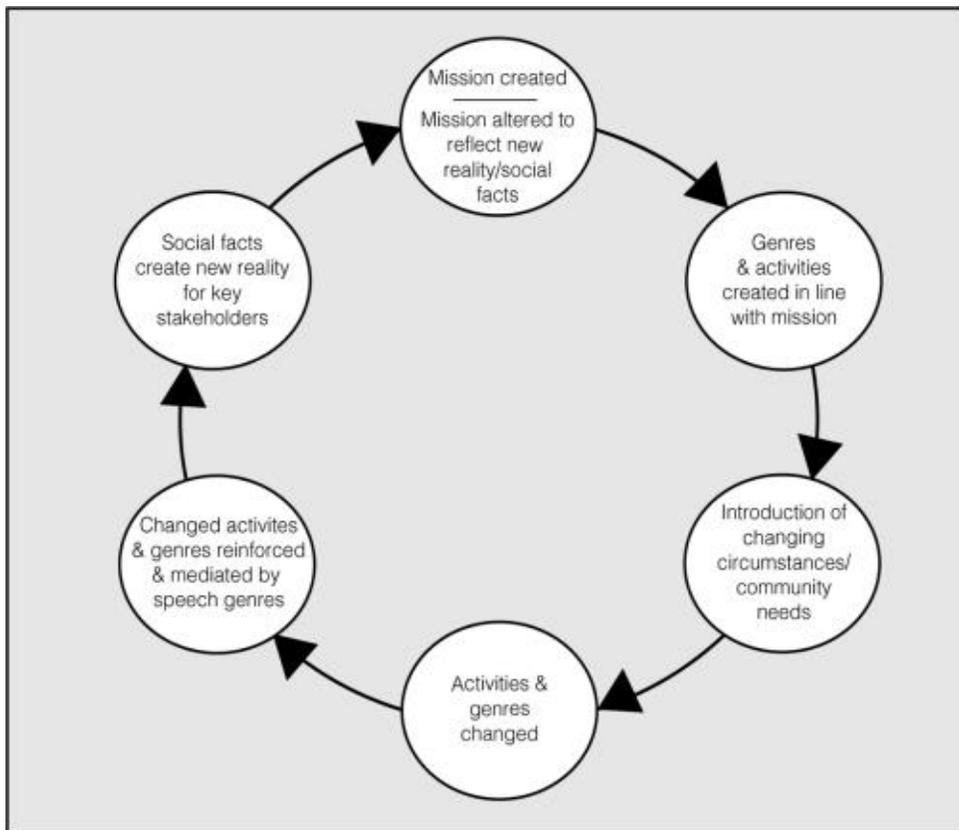


Fig 10. Cyclical model of mission creation and execution.

a simple process that is straightforward, it is also a closed system; the model begins with the mission statement and ends with it being implemented. And, as noted above, it does not consider the dynamic nature of genre ecologies and how genres and activities interact with one another. The cyclical model includes planning for changes and allows for a reciprocal relationship between genre and activity,<sup>30</sup> and this particular model takes into account an organization that responds to community needs by adding new activities. Once the mission is created, the key stakeholders develop activities and genres that reflect, support, and communicate that mission. The mission is followed until the introduction of new community needs, at which time the foundation creates new activities and genres to respond to those needs. The new reality of the CF becomes a social fact that is accepted by all key stakeholders and encourages a revisiting of the mission. My suggestion is that the CF views this cycle of mission production as an opportunity to revisit the mission after the changed activities and genres go into effect and become social facts (or, possibly, beforehand). This will keep the mission, genre, and activities all in alignment.

Further, I would argue that this cyclical process, if implemented regularly, will help mitigate the number of “unresolved tensions” present in the CF. Obviously a point of consensus will be more easily introduced into an amendment/realignment of the mission than a point of conflict; points of conflict would require much more discussion and might not be resolved. However, keeping this cycle of mission creation and execution a regular part of CF discussions will help catch those conflicts before they become too disruptive as well as keep the mission and activities more closely aligned.

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<sup>30</sup> One could argue that if a nonprofit organization returns to the mission at any time, they are by nature making it a cyclical process, making the linear model moot. However, even if that is the reality of what is occurring, it is possible that others, like me, are still *viewing* it as a linear process, which would leave the process more closed than open. In addition, the linear model only considers activity as the result of the process rather than part of it.

I argued in chapter four that if members of the organization are somewhat changing the mission when they engage it—either by privileging one aspect over another, stretching definitions, or inserting new ideas—the textual power of the mission statement will be reduced. But the textual power of the mission statement has been reduced only because the key stakeholders of the CF have seemingly viewed it as a static document rather than as part of the ongoing discourse. By continually updating the mission statement to adapt to changing situations, the genres and activities of the organization will be more closely aligned; in fact, the speech genres will only serve to reinforce the mission statement. Only when the mission statement is less rigid and more responsive to the needs of the organization will it retain its textual power.

In the next chapter, I explore how audiences outside the key stakeholders of the CF receive these presentations of the mission, genre, and activities of the CF as well as how those receptions affect this cyclical model of mission development and communication. The social facts shaped by CF key stakeholders create an opportunity for the CF to revisit the mission and bring it back in alignment with the activities and genres of the CF; however, these social facts also have greater power when there is evidence they have been accepted by other audiences (those with no inside participation in the creation of genres and activities of the CF). In my discussion of inside and outside audience responses, I discuss how these social facts introduce an alternative version of the cycle of genre production I illustrated above. In addition, I discuss a feature of genre I haven't discussed in depth to this point but was a large consideration for inside/outside audiences: form.

## Chapter Six—Speech Acts, Social Facts, and Form: Inside and Outside Audience Responses to Genre and Mission

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### Introduction

At the end of the previous chapter, I noted that the cycle of genre production and mission creation should remain open and responsive to the changing needs of a community. While knowledge of these needs could become clear through community research or surveys, it is quite probable that this knowledge comes to the CF's attention through interactions with their various audiences. In the process of normal activities, community members may point out gaps in community services or new problems to address, and those gaps and problems may be echoed by others. If the CF chooses to respond and address the felt need, they may do so in a way that seems fitting with the mission, or they may do so in a way that seems outside the confines of the existing mission statement. If the response is *outside* of the mission, the CF's audiences will (most likely) nevertheless be grateful for the adoption of activities that address their needs and eventually will perceive that those activities are part of the CF's mission. Over time, all the parties involved simply take this new view of the mission for granted. And as others engage with the CF, that new understanding takes hold with them as well.

This phenomenon allows for the “not-mission-drift” I discussed in the previous chapter. Most audiences will more readily view the communications and activities of and interactions with the organization as a representation of the mission; not all audiences will look up the mission statement and privilege those words over their personal experiences (or other communications) with the nonprofit. In some ways, we see this phenomenon borne out in how the key stakeholders create, use, and understand the genres of the CF; many of them rely more on their experiences and regular interactions with the CF to determine the organization's purpose. Further, those understandings appear to influence the cycle of document production,

meaning that communications that come out of the organization reflect the mission statement as filtered through that lens. My primary purpose for this chapter is to analyze how audiences are receiving these communications.

I've discussed how key stakeholders of the CF create, use, and understand the genres of the CF as well as how the articulation of the mission changes among the genres. To greater understand how audiences outside of the key stakeholders of the CF interpret these genres and contribute to the cycle of genre production, I focus this chapter on my third research question: *How do outside audiences understand the mission as represented through these genres?*

Before I can begin to answer these questions, I first need to quickly review who the inside and outside audiences are, and how I settled on them as important people to interview.

### ***“Inside” and “Outside” Audiences***

My initial approach to finding audiences outside of employees or board members was to ask the executive director of the CF to send an invitation to their database of approximately 1,000 people to participate in interviews. In addition to key stakeholders, this database includes donors, nonprofit leaders, and anyone else who has signed up to learn more about the CF. I asked them to send out the email, a handful of people responded, and I started interviews.

It didn't take me long to realize that I had to find another way of recruiting people to gain a fuller understanding of all the interpretations of the mission from various audiences. What I hadn't taken into consideration was that respondents to the executive director's email were mostly likely already very familiar with the organization; therefore, their understanding of the mission would be influenced by previous communications from the CF, speech genres,<sup>31</sup> and, in many cases, several years of interactions with the CF. As I mentioned in chapter four, speech

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<sup>31</sup> The speech genres I refer to here include those I used in chapter four to better explain the genres and genre ecology of the CF, including donor solicitations, grantee info sessions, and committee, staff, and board meetings.

genres are essential to fully understanding the mission in all its various articulations and in the context of the genre ecology; therefore, it is still important to understand how these respondents understood the mission. As part of the discourse community of the CF, their understandings of the mission—and contributions to possible amendments to it—are essential to painting a clear picture of how the mission is created, distributed, and understood.

However, I realized that I needed to add *another* audience to examine the perspective of someone truly outside the CF’s sphere of influence; I wanted to observe how these mission-focused documents were received by people encountering them *for the first time*. My desire to include these differences in perspective is why I expanded my recruitment efforts (as described in chapter three<sup>32</sup>) and separated my interview participants into “inside” audiences (donors and NPO leaders) and “outside” audiences (people who had never heard of the CF before).

Though my table of participants is shared in chapter three, I have replicated the inside/outside audience portion here for ease of reference:

*Table 1. Inside/outside audience participants in interviews and observations.*

<b>Participant ID</b>	<b>Identifier</b>
A1	Nonprofit leader and donor
A2	Nonprofit leader
A3	Nonprofit leader and donor
A4	Nonprofit leader and donor
A5	Nonprofit leader
O1-5	Area residents; no role at foundation

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<sup>32</sup> The process for this was simple: I posted recruitment fliers in public places and ensured each respondent had not heard of the Community Foundation before we met.

After thinking through these separations and interviewing the employees and board members of the CF, I had many questions regarding how these audiences would interpret the mission: *Would the “inside” audiences have a vastly different impression of the CF’s mission than key stakeholders of the CF? Would the “outside” audiences have a vastly different impression of the CF’s mission than the “inside” audiences, and if so, why? Will these audiences perceive the mission as written or the mission as seemingly embraced by the key stakeholders of the CF? Do the key stakeholders’ conflicts and consensus on various issues become evident through these genres?*

### ***Chapter Overview***

To answer these questions, I asked the interview subjects to examine the same genres I shared with the key stakeholders: the annual report, the Community Fund case for support, the home page of the website, and the newsletter. I asked them to tell me their overall impressions, what they felt the organization was trying to do with these documents, and what they felt the overall purpose of the organization was. After they had reviewed all the documents, I asked them if they felt there were any inconsistencies or contradictions among the documents, or if they felt they received a cohesive message.

Generally speaking, the inside and outside audience respondents felt that the genres were largely consistent with one another and painted a clear picture of the CF. Even if they felt one document was focused more on one audience than another or was more focused on one aspect of the mission over the other, they agreed there was an overarching theme that connected all the documents—though there was some disagreement about what that theme was.

Of the 10 respondents, three listed grants as the most important focus, six listed “helping nonprofits” as the most important, and one stated that “professional management services” was

the clear focus of the CF. Additionally, many of these respondents conflated “awarding grants and scholarships” with “supporting nonprofits,” basically lumping the two activities together and referring to the grants and scholarship as part of the ways in which the CF supports nonprofit organizations.

Because the inside audiences regularly interact with the CF through First Friday events, grant information meetings, and other events, I had originally anticipated the speech genres I mentioned before (such as grant information meetings and donor solicitations) as well as any other interactions would mediate the understanding of the mission and result in vastly different interpretations of the mission from outside audiences. As I detail later in this chapter, I was somewhat surprised to find that there wasn’t as much variation as I was expecting. Nine of the 10 respondents came away with very similar impressions of what the CF does. In addition, both inside and outside audience respondents tended to reflect much of the conflicts and consensus of the key stakeholders; as I detailed in chapter five, these topics included short-term vs. long-term solutions, donor services, the Community Fund, and services for nonprofits. Though short-term vs. long-term solutions didn’t come up much with these audiences, the final three were the most popular topics of discussion.

I find this to be both a surprising and unsurprising observation. On the one hand, lack of exposure to the speech genres of the CF (for outside audiences) could reasonably result in a completely different impression of the CF. On the other hand, it makes sense that if the organizational leaders are conflicted about the organization’s purpose and activities, those conflicts could possibly be reflected in the documents they use to communicate to the public. Additionally, the inside audiences are privy to some of the same speech genres of the CF as the key stakeholders (such as donor solicitations), plus additional interactions with CF key

stakeholders (such as grant information meetings) so I found it quite probable that they would hold some of the same perceptions of the mission as the key stakeholders do.

In my exploration of audience responses to the CF's representation of mission through genres, I noted many similarities and differences with key stakeholder responses. Of the four major areas of conflict and consensus among key stakeholders discussed in chapter five, the inside/outside audience respondents discussed three of them: decision-making power over donor funds, supporting nonprofits, and confusion regarding the Community Fund. While a few respondents did mention the idea that the foundation was focused on long-term solutions, there was no in-depth conversation about this idea. Also, it seems that a lot of the confusion regarding the Community Fund came from an aspect of genre I haven't yet explicitly discussed: form.

In this chapter, I discuss how the inside/outside audiences' focus on form revealed a genre feature I had to this point ignored and affected their interpretations of the genres they reviewed—in particular, the Community Fund. Then, I provide a detailed analysis and discussion of how inside and outside audiences react to the genres, activities, and mission of the CF, taking note of one point of conflict (decision-making power over funds) and one of consensus (supportive services for nonprofits). Finally, I discuss how speech genres and social facts contribute to an alternate cycle of genre production to the one I introduced in chapter five and offer a model useful not only for the CF but potentially for other nonprofits as well.

### **Considering Form: Genre Theory, Generic Features, and the Community Fund**

In the design of this study and development of my research questions, I was focused on the function of genres, how they work together to create meaning, and if that meaning translates consistently to different audiences. To an extent, I was implicitly discussing form while debating

word usage or noting particular linguistic elements of a genre; however, my only explicit discussion of form so far has been comprised of a few observations on the three-part-action form that many nonprofit mission statements take. In addition, form did not explicitly come up as a topic with the key stakeholders. Though a few of the board members and employees had mentioned some concern over word choices, font sizes, and other stylistic aspects, those observations/concerns did not dominate the conversation; they were much more interested in discussing the values, activities, and mission of the CF. The inside and outside audiences, however, spent a good part of their time discussing not only language but typography, color choices, layout, the presence or absence of photos, and other visual aspects of these documents; in fact, every single one of my inside/outside audience interviews included some discussion of the visual impact of the pieces, and I had to work hard to get them to respond to questions about ideology and function. Some observations were simple and more focused on document design, like the font size of one section of text in relation to another; in fact, discussion of font size was quite practical for certain respondents, as smaller font sizes resulted in difficulties reading the documents. Others were far more complex and resulted in pages of transcription of discussions regarding how the form impeded understanding, why certain word choices were bad decisions, and how adding certain elements would vastly improve not only the visual appeal of the document but also the communication of the CF's mission.

At first, I was getting very frustrated by what I viewed as diversions from the topic; after all, my research questions focus on the understandings of the mission, and trying to get these respondents to talk about the overall message and function of these genres felt very much like herding cats. But after a few interviews, I began to realize that what they were saying about form

may have some relevance to my analysis. These respondents were pointing out an element (form) that I and many other scholars have rather glossed over when discussing genre.

### *Form in Genre Studies*

When Carolyn Miller (1984) defined genre as “social action,” she argued that scholars had been too focused on form and should instead consider the social aspect of genre, stating that “a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (155). In order to argue for genre as social action, Miller had to separate the concept of form from genre to convince the reader that form and genre are not one and the same. In Miller’s conception, form combines with substance to create generic action—it is a key component in how readers (or listeners) understand discourse and serves as guidance for how these readers/listeners should interpret and respond to rhetorical situations.

After Miller’s essay, form has rarely been explicitly discussed in the literature. Yates and Orlikowski (2007) discuss form separately from other generic features when arguing for the power point presentation as a genre, noting that form can be constraining. Spinuzzi and Zachry (2006) gloss over the concept briefly by reviewing how recent scholarship has illustrated that “the exact form and function of future instantiations of a genre cannot be accurately predicted” (173). Most scholars implicitly discuss form through discussions of language or by briefly mentioning a genre’s “formal features.” In many scholarly studies (including work on genre ecologies), however, form is not explicitly discussed at all.

However, this lack of explicit discussion does not mean that scholars have rejected form altogether. Amy Devitt (2009) argues that though genre studies scholars may have set aside

form, they have not *rejected* it; in fact, she argues that Miller did not reject form either. Instead, Miller's focus on genre as action

places genre study solidly within rhetoric by attending to the purposes and effects of language rather than language alone. Yet genre itself still involves language, and any complete understanding of genre will need to include the language forms that serve to achieve those purposes and effects, the forms that make generic action happen. (27)

For Devitt, these forms are inclusive of “all material embodiments of genre, linguistic and textual elements that might vary from one genre to another. Most obviously, then, form includes words, sentences, organizational structure, format, layout, and other visual elements” (33). This is a concept I find to be slippery, as this is where content and form lose some distinction: when discussing the impact of word choices, is that considered content or form? Devitt argues that perhaps these distinctions are unnecessary, as they deny that the two (content and form) are fused (34). Throughout my chapters so far, I have discussed the content of the CF's genres as well as the impact of their word choices—and I have done so without any explicit discussion of form. Yet form had an impact on my analysis without me recognizing or discussing it; it fuses with the content to create the social actions and meaning I have been discussing so far.

### ***Form, Format, and Expectations***

In terms of my respondents' understandings of the genres I presented them with, form seems to have had a large influence. First, though, most of them were distracted by *format* rather than *form*, critiquing documents for being too wordy, not including enough graphics or photos, or lacking in good visual separators like bullet points. Typically, the respondent would begin the interview discussing the lackluster document design and then eventually talk about the content.

Of course, there is a practical element to these discussions, as the overall design appeal of a document could contribute to someone's desire to read it at all. But while that is a practical implication the creators of these genres may want to consider, these particular kinds of *formatting/document design* discussions do not apply to *form*. Though format can be a part of form, most of these respondents were discussing *design elements* that were not consistent to a genre rather than *format as a genre convention*, which could be key to creating expectations for the readers. For example, many donor solicitation documents that come in the physical mail are fairly obvious from their form: a thick envelope with some sort of call to action printed on the envelope that tugs at a heart string, amplifies fear, or stirs anger. These thick envelopes usually contain a long letter, some promotional materials, and a return envelope for donations. The letters include certain bolded or twice-underlined phrases meant to catch the reader's attention—document design/format that is a generic feature of this type of letter. Most readers know almost immediately from the form these items take (often without even opening the envelope) that they will be asked to make some sort of financial donation. All these visual cues set up genre expectations. Once the reader has decided to engage a text, form does a lot of work for creating a baseline of understanding for what the reader believes the document communicates as well as what social action it might be inviting.

Bazerman (2004) makes note of these formal expectations. When discussing how to make sense of a genre, Bazerman asks:

How do we make sense out of the complexity, indeterminacy, and contextual multiplicity that a text presents us with? We use genre and typifications to help us with just this sort of dilemma. As readers and writers we use whatever we have

learned through our lives about texts, text types, and situation types to get a sense of the text at hand and to attribute a dominant action for each text. (321)

I would argue that not only do genres and typifications help readers know what to expect from a text, they also provide some level of *comfort* when engaging a text. When a reader knows (or thinks they know) what something is “supposed to be,” they filter all the language through that expectation—for better or worse.<sup>33</sup> Readers use their existing genre knowledge to navigate a document, and since their first encounter is with the visual elements, those will be the first steps in establishing the document’s purpose. Authors can use these expectations to their advantage to take use formal elements to encourage the type of social action they desire.

Outside of these practical reasons, it is also necessary to discuss form because it is an essential element of genre that contributes to understanding. Though many of the audience observations I mentioned above were focused on how the presence or absence of a particular element contributes to a lack of desire to engage with the document and in some cases produces an increased affinity for a particular genre (e.g. the annual report was very popular for its liberal use of pictures), some respondents also discussed how form creates lack of clarity on the message. Where discussion of form and function really overlapped heavily and demonstrated how form can impede understanding was in regard to the Community Fund.

Considering the fusion/muddying of content and form mentioned by Devitt as well as her call to discuss form in detail, I will attempt to be more explicit in my description of how form

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<sup>33</sup> The “worse” could refer to deceptive formatting tactics used by certain marketers or others. For example: some companies that sell very expensive posters that explain certain workplace legal and safety issues send their sales pitch in an envelope that is made to look like an official communication from the state or federal government, often with a message that relays some sense of urgency. The format of the document and the deceptively worded call to action could make the recipient of that sales pitch purchase the posters because they think they are required to by law.

affects the respondents' interpretations of the message conveyed by these genres and, therefore, the social action they might take in response.

### ***Community Fund: Brand, Language, and Genre***

In chapters three and four, I discussed how *The Community Fund* presented several rhetorical challenges. The wording is somewhat vague, leaving questions regarding the basic purpose for the fund. In addition, it's unclear to many readers whether *The Community Fund* covers operating costs for the organization or is somehow distributed like other funds in the organization. At the time of my study, the document was still mostly in the phase of being created by the employees; therefore, there was a general consensus among the employees about the Fund's purpose but some confusion among the board members.

This ambiguity translated into confusion for the inside and outside audiences I interviewed. The inside audiences had a slightly better grasp of the Community Fund because they were familiar with the inspiration for it. In recent years, the CF was one of many partners funding and facilitating a "livability initiative" that was meant to explore which issues in their community were capable of being tackled and would have the greatest impact on its residents. Recent updates to the Community Fund (since this study) connect the livability initiative a bit more directly to the CF's intentions with this fund; however, the earliest version of the wording (which was the version used in this study) hinted enough at the livability initiative's influence that those "in the know" caught on. Even so, many were left wondering exactly *how* the funds would be used—a confusion largely caused by word choice. These audiences were further confused by formal features that created ambiguity as to what genre, exactly, the Community Fund was meant to be.

## *Brand*

While many inside and outside audience respondents had nice things to say about the inclusion of pictures in the annual report and a few suggestions on how visual elements might improve certain genres, the Community Fund is the only genre the respondents discuss in which they draw direct lines between visual elements and their confusion regarding the fund's purpose. Two of the respondents, O4 and A4, provided the most detailed explanations of how these elements contribute to the reader's ability to understand the message being communicated by this document.

Though O4 did not directly express that the form of the Community Fund was contributing to confusion, it was evident in their responses to my questions. After reviewing all the documents, I asked O4 what they thought the focus of the CF was. While determining an answer, O4 appeared to confuse the three elements of the mission statement with the three elements of the Community Fund. Since each uses three key words—provide, award, and nurture for the mission, and connect, inspire, and empower for the Community Fund—O4 seemed to conclude that those words and descriptions must line up somehow:

Let's see. They have the connect, inspire, and empower, and probably that's a good way to put their ways that they do it. Probably, empowering through financial stability, that's what they seem to be best at. . . the connecting is a little bit hard for me to imagine. . . . Maybe at a personal level, again, what I said, feeling like you can be connected to the money you donate but not necessarily in a community sense. I think inspiration or inspiring is awarding visionary grants. . . . Empowering would be the funding, the grants and scholarships. Connecting is

nurturing the collaborations of the community and then providing the management services for charitable—probably the inspiration part.

At various points in their response, O4 linked both “empowering” and “inspiring” to grants, and then links “connecting,” “inspiring,” and “empowering” to professional management services. The existence of these two sets of three keywords seemed to create confusion in the respondent, inspiring them to automatically connect the two and try to make sense of *The Community Fund* as some direct representation/rewording of the mission statement. After I asked O4 if they had any further observations to share, they seemed to acknowledge this confusion between the two sets of three keywords, responding, “Only thing would be in terms of branding—it is really distracting to have 2 different [brands] . . . because they have the three bullet points but the bullet points kind of change.”

It’s interesting that O4 used the word “brand” here, because that is a good word to describe how the Community Fund could appear to readers. It is the only genre that doesn’t have the same basic color scheme and style as the other genres, and it seems to have its own logo as well; in other words, the *formal features change*, which makes it stand out. Also, the bulk of the other genres of the CF stick with the three elements of the mission statements for their wording, repeating words like “awarding” and “collaborating,” and focusing on the activities most are familiar with; even genres dedicated to supportive services for nonprofits incorporate much of that language. *The Community Fund* case statement is the first instance in which there is a break from this branding.

This break created a major source of confusion for A4. After reviewing the Community Fund case statement, A4 made the following observations:

[The Community Fund] is just one of [the funds of the CF], and it's getting a lot of prominence. You know, there's a hundred and some others. Part of this has got a specific focus to it but I don't know if it's going to be confusing. It's got its own logo, it's got its own colors. If it's one of the 125, do they have their own logos and colors? How is it different? . . . So I am wondering if this isn't confusing.

Here, A4 is making an inference regarding the importance of this fund based on the formal features of the case statement genre as well as other visual elements that “brand” the Community Fund. They're asking why the Community Fund gets its own webpage, its own logo, and its own case for support while the other funds are simply listed without these additions. It is, to the best of their knowledge (and mine), the only fund of the CF that is, essentially, branded.

This is a prime example of how form can greatly influence the understanding of a genre. In this case, because the form is so different than how a fund of the CF is typically communicated (which is usually in plain text among a list of other funds), it is understandable that anyone reading the case statement for the Community Fund would wonder what, exactly, this fund is—and why it's different. A4 continues to express this confusion:

So are you trying to get me—if I'm a giver, this fund is competing with all the other funds; it's one of many. What's different here? . . . Are they getting more out of this than they do out of the other? Why are they pushing it more than the others? Does that make any sense? Would you possibly wonder why this is so special? Because this is the community foundation, and this is *The Community Fund*. So are they one and the same?

In addition to the confusion arising out of the logo, webpage, and case for support, A4 also points out the confusion shared by O4 above: *how is the Community Fund related to the CF? Are*

*these two different expressions of the same thing, or is the Community Fund simply one more of the 125 other funds?* This also could potentially create other power struggles; if the Community Fund gets this kind of “special treatment,” will donors or nonprofit leaders argue for the same treatment for the funds they’re interested in?

### *Language*

Confusion over what could be categorized as “branding elements” is not helped by the language used in *The Community Fund* document; another source of confusion for the inside/outside respondents’ understanding of *The Community Fund* was word choice. Two different interviewees called the wording “lofty,” indicating that not only was the wording vague, but it also seemed to include some rather large (and possibly unattainable or ill-defined) goals. O2 commented that *The Community Fund* was full of “buzz words” (they also complained that the mission statement is “gibberish-y” and not very engaging). O3 noted that the language was a little too “white-collar,” while O1 added a similar complaint about the use of a lot of “ten-dollar words.” Other words used to describe the language used in the Community Fund case statement were *bland, fluff, broad, “pie-in-the-sky,” vague, and ethereal.*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these observations about language-use resulted in confusion regarding the purpose of *The Community Fund*; after all, if someone views language as vague in any way, it’s understandable that they are confused about what message they are supposed to receive. Here are a few examples of expressions of confusion over the purpose for *The*

### *Community Fund:*

What are they attempting to do? They’re attempting to communicate something, but I’m not—is it a fund they’re trying to establish? Is it a fund that already exists? I don’t know what they’re attempting to do here. . . . It’s not specific, it’s not telling me what—I would want something specific. ‘We believe in effective solutions.’ Well, what are those solutions? (O1)

It kind of confuses me. It's sort of, it's like fluff. . . . I don't really understand it what it's all about. (O3)

They're just kind of buzz words. . . . For me as a curious person, I want to know effective solutions . . . I want more details. . . . Also, I need to know how I'm going to differentiate this from the explanation of any organization, because everyone wants to "connect and inspire." (O2)

Doesn't really tell me much. . . . It says in lofty language what the goals are, but how does it connect individuals? "Inspiring" doesn't really tell me much, and empowering doesn't tell me much. I think they're all worthwhile things, but I need to know: do you grant with this money? Do you—I just don't know what it is. (A1)

These respondents are noting their difficulty understanding what the Community Fund is about because of language they describe as "vague" (in various terms). They point out that the document lacks specifics and uses "buzz words" rather than detailing what the fund will actually accomplish. These were similar questions that I shared in chapter four: what do *connect*, *inspire*, and *empower* really mean? Why did the CF employees choose these three words to exemplify the purpose of the Community Fund? These questions become even more complicated when considering the Community Fund as an example of the case statement genre.

### *Genre*

The Community Fund document is a confusing piece of text that could be questionable as a genre. The use of branding elements such as a logo, different colors, and a separate webpage indicate that this fund might be special, but the vague and confused language means that no one seems to know why or what to do in response. The form is not necessarily fusing with content to create social action; in fact, most of the readers (at least, the inside/outside audience respondents) are confused as to what they're supposed think about the fund, and what, exactly, the fund *does*.

In chapter four, I placed *The Community Fund* in my "questionable" category, which positioned it outside the overall activity of the genre ecology, connected only through board and

staff meeting speech genres. If I were interacting with the CF at this point in my study, and they had decided *The Community Fund* was acceptable as is, I might encourage them to revisit it—to return to a point in the cycle of genre production that would better complete the genre and give it a more solid social action. I viewed this document as a “case statement” genre because (a) that’s what the employees told me it was and (b) the form seemed to support that notion (though, I would argue, the formatting left a little something to be desired). Like most case statements, it includes the name of the cause being highlighted, a basic explanation/appeal, catchy phrases to grab the audience’s attention (in this case, connect, inspire, empower), and a separated section with either highlights of accomplishments or goals to be achieved (in this case, particular causes they are invested in). However, simply because it matches the form of a typical case statement doesn’t mean it fits the case statement genre.

And this is the original conception of form that Miller (1984) argued against: the idea that a genre is a genre if it fits the form. Though I am arguing for more explicit discussion of form in genre studies, I also agree with Miller that if there is “no pragmatic component, no way to understand the genre as social action,” a genre claim fails. Based on feedback from interview participants, there is great confusion over what, exactly, *The Community Fund* is and what its funds will be used for; however, all respondents seemed to be clear on the social action *The Community Fund* document is inviting: donating to the fund. Because the case statement genre’s purpose is to solicit donations, that puts the purpose of *The Community Fund* in alignment with the case statement genre, avoiding the failure of the genre claim. However, I refer to Rosch’s (1973) prototype theory<sup>34</sup> to argue it’s not quite as case-statement-like as it could be. A more

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<sup>34</sup> Rosch argues that certain categories contain items that are more “prototypical” examples of that category than others are; for example, a robin is a more prototypical example of a bird than a duck, and a ball is a more prototypical example of a toy than a swing. Likewise, there are certainly many versions of genres that would be

prototypical example of a case statement would include not only a call for donations but also a clear indication as to what those funds will cover. Because *The Community Fund* creates so much confusion, I suggest that its placement in the “case statement genre” category might be closer to the outside boundary than the exemplary center.

The case of the community fund provides an inside look at the creation of a genre within an already existing genre ecology. Examining genre on this micro-level contributes greatly to our understanding of genre on a macro-level. Bazerman (1988) argues that genres “emerge and evolve through individual and communal activity” and in turn “give shape and focus to continuing activity” (315-316). I now return to the examination of that activity at a larger level as I discuss the points of conflict and consensus that were communicated by the key stakeholders through the genres to inside/outside audiences.

### **Conflict and Consensus: Speech Acts, Social Facts, and the Communication of Mission**

When discussing in chapter four how speech genres play into the genre ecology of a nonprofit organization, I argued that speech genres connect certain written genres to the mission and are a vital part of a nonprofit genre ecology (whereas without those speech genres, the connection to mission is unclear). While speech genres certainly connect the organization’s mission to its activities more clearly, those genres didn’t cause significant differences between inside and outside audiences’ perceptions of the CF’s mission and activities. This is evident not only in the fact that outside audiences picked up on the conflict surrounding professional management services but also in the impression that the CF is also focused on supporting nonprofits. Since the genres in question are what the outside audiences see, they still communicate an interpretation of the mission that may or may not seem related to the mission

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placed more toward the center of a category (a prototypical example) than others, which would be located closer to the boundaries.

statement itself. So, while the speech genres work to move the mission in different directions and create a more cohesive genre ecology, they may or may not be necessary for the organization communicating its “true” mission to the public. The speech genres do, indeed, mediate the mission statement, leading to a new understanding in the key stakeholders (employees and board members); however, what was evident through my research is that, in the case of the CF, the new understanding is subsequently communicated through the genres to inside/outside audiences. Moreover, the discussions surrounding that new understanding of the mission statement are also somewhat evident in these genres.

In this section, I review one point of conflict and one point of consensus shared by the key stakeholders and picked up by inside/outside audiences: decision-making power over funds and supportive services for nonprofits. First, I analyze the feedback from these audiences, noting the parallels between their responses and key stakeholder responses. Then, I note how access to speech genres did not appear to make a difference in these responses. Finally, I discuss the social facts created by the activities and genres of the CF and how agreement among all participants (key stakeholders, inside audiences, and outside audiences) introduces a revised cycle of genre production and activity.

### ***Decision-making Power over Funds***

In chapter five, I discussed the conflict over whether the donors or the CF hold decision-making power over the donors’ money. Some key stakeholders objected to the idea that the foundation is like a “bank” that simply holds the money for the donors and then directs it as the donors please, while others felt that the donors should be able to decide where their money goes. Interestingly, this conflict was echoed in how both the inside and outside audiences discussed their impressions of professional management services for donors.

Though the inside audience respondents did not spend much time talking about donors/professional management services, they did share a few thoughts on the subject. Two respondents, A4 and A1, discuss professional management services in relation to grants and scholarships. A4 simply mentions the list of donors in passing while discussing the various funds, grants, and scholarships listed in the annual report. A1 expresses admiration for how well the CF handles professional management services, but subordinates that activity to the awarding of grants:

I have applied for funding and I'm in a giving circle. So, that's all grant-driven, but that's the point of making charitable contributions. . . . Providing professional management services to the donors—I know they get great return on investment, but I never focus on that. That's sort of the hocus-pocus alchemy that happens in order to get the grants.

By referring to professional management services as “hocus-pocus alchemy,” A1 is downplaying the importance of that particular aspect of the mission to the CF's overall activities. However, they bring up a good point: the primary purpose of these funds is to distribute grant money to various organizations for charitable purposes. If A1 is viewing professional management as a means to an end, it makes sense to gloss over the mechanics of how the money is raised and handled. And this view seems to be common; though “professional management services” is the first item listed in the CF's mission, it rarely seems to be discussed as an activity in its own right. The only time it has been brought up in interviews is either in relation to grant-making or in debate over who retains power over the money.

Only one inside audience respondent discussed professional management services a bit more thoroughly, not outright discussing decision-making power over the money, but hinting at that power dynamic in the language they use to discuss the funds:

Well, I would think [the annual report] really gives—highlights the reasons why it would be a good idea to contribute to the [CF]. It would increase the confidence of people who are considering it, and also give them ideas, because you see these examples, these funds that already exist. People can say, ‘Hey, I would like to do this kind of fund.’ . . . *I think some people would like to have their fund—the idea of having their fund listed as making certain programs possible.* (A5, interview, emphasis mine)

Here, A5 touches slightly on the idea of who “owns” the money by noting that donors might like to have their own fund and see that it makes “certain programs possible.” This suggests that, in A5’s perception, the donors hold some power over how the money is initially used to establish funds—though it is unclear who would make decisions about *distributing* the money once the fund is set up. This uncertainty reflects the conflicting ideas on the subject expressed by the CF’s key stakeholders.

The outside audience respondents seemed to pick up on more of the power struggle over money, which I suspect is partially because the inside audiences are focused on other concerns (e.g. supporting nonprofits). Most of these respondents nuanced their view of decision-making power over funds while reading different genres, suggesting that these genres may be sending mixed messages. For example, after reading the annual report, O4 felt that the CF was focused on donor choice:

I guess my understanding of the group would be that you can invest, you can give them money and then they help allocate where it goes and you can choose. . . . that's the ease, you get to choose. . . . It makes you feel like you can be connected with the money that you donate. (O4, interview)

What O4 appears to be suggesting here is that the allocation of money is a collaboration between the CF and the donor, with a definite privileging of donor choice. The mention of giving the CF money that “they help allocate” indicates action on the part of the CF, while the repetition of “you can/get to choose” combined with the idea of retaining a “connection” to the donated money drives home the idea that the donor has a say in how the money is allocated.

However, after reading the Community Fund case statement, O4 eventually concluded that “the nurturing collaboration—that doesn't seem evident through what they're showing. It's more, ‘Donate so we can make this happen.’” By the end of the interview, O4 had moved from “donors choose” to indicating the CF will take care of everything after the money is donated; in fact, they seem to think that the CF may insist on doing so. Also, by suggesting that “nurturing collaboration” is absent, O4 is viewing the concept of “nurturing collaboration” as collaboration *between donors and CF leaders* on how to distribute funds—a view of nurturing collaboration that hadn't previously been listed by any of my respondents. Typically, the CF definition of “collaboration” has been viewed—by interview subjects and this researcher—as working with nonprofits and/or helping them work together, an idea that also seems to be reflected in the CF's materials. This view of “collaboration” as between donors and the CF is an interesting one, though I would argue that because the mission statement includes the prepositional phrase “in our community” after the activity of “nurturing collaborations,” it reflects more of an outward

effort among people and groups in the community rather than simply between donors and the CF.

Other outside audience respondents leaned more toward the view that donors do not have power over their money. When asked to describe the CF's primary purpose, O3 responded that "it sounds like people donate their money to this, then this organization distributes it in various ways" and then quickly moved on to other topics. Though it is a short sentence, it seems to me to indicate the belief that the CF has control over where the funds go, as O3 separates the donor action from the organizational action. People donate; the CF distributes. It's as simple as that.

O2 held a similar view but expressed it a little more thoroughly. When looking at the annual report, O2 compared the CF to a "think tank," saying, "What it looks like to me—it's sort of like a think tank, and you pour money into [it]. Then, the tank people figure out what to do with it, and then it goes out in little spigots to different things." This statement reflects the idea that the donors give their money and then no longer have control, as someone other than the donors "figure out what to do with it." After looking at the website, O2's opinion on this method of distribution strengthened:

[The CF] connects the people with money to the organizations. This one doesn't really include the part that was in the annual report. This almost makes it seem like it directly connects. You know if I come in here and say I have \$20,000, it's like you're going to take me over to [a local nonprofit] to drop it off, you know. That's kind of what this sounds like. It's more like they need to have the think tank aspect of it that's in the [annual report]. Where it says it provides, like the business management aspect of it, deciding who to give it to. . . . I think it needs to be

clearer on the website, that there's a group of people that helps figure it out, that it's not like a bank.

O2 is a little bit unclear in their description here, as they do not specify who—the donor or the CF—is deciding which local nonprofit will receive that \$20,000. Based on O2's other descriptions of this process, however, I'm inclined to believe they were indicating that the scenario being described is: someone walks in with \$20,000, the CF employees say, "I know what we can do with that," and they walk the donor right down to the nonprofit's offices to drop it off. Their description here is a bit more direct—the money doesn't seem to actually pass through the CF in any way—but still puts the decision-making power in the CF's hands ("deciding who to give it to"). Interestingly, with no prompting this respondent also uses the phrase that some key stakeholders used to indicate that the power of decision does not rest in the donors' hands: "it's not like a bank." The use of this specific phrasing demonstrates just how much the conflict among the key stakeholders became evident through these genres.

O5 offered a slightly more nuanced view of the professional management services of the CF. When I asked what O5 thought the primary purpose of the CF was after reviewing the newsletter, they responded

It's a little bit unclear. They help community foundations and people to do their donations and stuff—and charity. I'm not totally sure how they help or where their funding comes from and stuff . . . it says they provide professional management services to donors for their charitable causes. I guess that makes sense. They just help them organize or something? I guess it's just unclear.

After reviewing the CF's website, however, O5 felt the funding model was a bit more clear—a similar reaction as O2, who also felt the website made matters more clear. When I asked O5

what the primary purpose of the CF was after O5 reviewed the website homepage, they stated that

basically they just accept donations and then decide where to allocate the funds. . . [they have] a better understanding than the individuals that donate to it. It seems to me the foundation at the end of the day makes [the decisions]. Maybe they have some surveys or something, but it seems like the donors probably aren't involved a whole lot in it.

O5 makes a strong claim by stating that the foundation makes the decisions “at the end of the day”—indicating that the proverbial buck stops with them. However, O5 left the door a bit open by stating the donors probably aren't involved “a whole lot” in the decisions rather than saying they aren't involved at all. What this description seems to indicate is that O5's impression of this process is that donors participate a little bit in the process, but the final decision is ultimately up to the CF stakeholders.

Toward the end of the interview, O5 left a little bit more room for donor involvement but still didn't identify donors as the driving force behind funding decisions. After asking O5 to review the remaining genres, I again asked them to define the primary purpose of the CF. They replied that the stakeholders of the CF “want to enrich the community, and they do that *by accepting donations from individuals who can either give donations for a specific use, or they can just give general donations and then the foundation will use them how they think is best*” (emphasis mine). O5 offers two options here: donors can specify a use for their funds, or they can give and let the CF do the work. This gives a little bit more power to the donors but still doesn't make them the ultimate decision-makers. Even within this nuanced view, the foundation remains a stronger presence for deciding how donations are allocated.

I thought that perhaps these competing views from O5 might come from a lack of cohesion among the genres; however, when I asked O5 if they considered the genres to be cohesive, they responded in the affirmative. The complication for O5 (and others in some circumstances) was that some documents described certain activities, values, or beliefs in greater detail than the others. (For example, O2 felt that the annual report provided detail that was absent in other documents but vital to understanding how the CF works.) O5's journey of understanding through reading various genres demonstrates how the details of the mission can be articulated slightly differently among genres, and how that can contribute to misunderstandings and/or confusion. Though the majority of respondents seemed unclear on who had control, the majority of them leaned more toward the CF having that control—a result I find particularly interesting, since after reviewing the entire CF corpus, I felt that the overwhelming feeling was that *donors* had control.

The various understandings of these audiences (including mine) also demonstrate how conflict among the key stakeholders can show up in the various genres of the organization. The mission statement clearly states that donors can invest for “their” charitable causes, and the vast majority of donor-focused documents (including, I would argue, the annual report) indicate that donors have control. Of course, part of the confusion could lie in the variety of funds available for investment, including ones that are donor-advised and others that give the CF power to allocate the money as they deem appropriate. But even the bulk of the annual report uses language that indicates donors can “target” particular causes, “recommend” charitable projects, “actively participate” in the grant-making process, and “establish” or “designate” funds. In my mind, this communicates that donors have more control than they are perhaps legally owed (as I describe in chapter 4).

In sum, while these audiences felt that some sort of focus on professional management services was indeed communicated by the organization, the conflict regarding *how* those professional management services should be handled also was communicated. The power struggle happening behind closed doors was communicated even in the absence of the key speech genres examined in this genre ecology (or any other interactions, for that matter). What this demonstrates to me is that the speech genres, while necessary for connecting certain genres to the entire genre ecology of the CF, are not necessary for the communication of social facts to inside/outside audiences (though, in the case of inside audiences, they certainly help). While the speech genres do indeed seem to supersede the mission statement, social facts created by the combination of speech genres and other genres have the greatest power. As I explained in chapter four, Bazerman (2004) stated that “social facts are those things people believe to be true, and therefore bear on how they define a situation. People then act as though these facts were true” (“Speech Acts,” 312). Because the key stakeholders acted as though these facts were true, those social facts were communicated to inside/outside audiences and serve as the basis for their understanding of the CF’s mission. These social facts also form the basis of a cycle of genre production that occurs when the key stakeholders fail to engage the cycle of genre production and mission alignment I describe in chapter five—a process I will discuss after first addressing the other social fact elephant in the room: supportive services for nonprofits.

### ***Supportive Services for Nonprofits***

The key stakeholder consensus that “supporting nonprofits” was an important activity of the CF was evident to both the inside and outside audiences. As I noted above, I was somewhat expecting the inside audience respondents to say that supportive services for nonprofits are a primary part of the CF’s mission, as all of them were nonprofit leaders in the area (though three

were also donors). But the outside audience respondents also felt that the CF was largely focused on supporting nonprofits. Though both audiences were in general agreement, the inside audiences did focus on nonprofit support more heavily.

When I asked A1 what they thought the primary purpose of the CF was, they responded “supporting nonprofits,” which they defined as awarding grants and “developing the leadership of nonprofits.” A2 approaches the importance of nonprofit support through the concept of audience, noting that they believe the audience for all the materials they viewed was “nonprofit agencies or partner agencies.” A5 notes that the CF’s mission is “supporting nonprofits in the area through education and through funding.” A4’s impression is along similar lines, noting that “awarding grants” is the most important aspect of the CF’s mission (and the one most emphasized in the documents I shared), and that “nurturing collaborations” is a close second. A4 also argues for some of the capacity-building events as part of “nurturing collaboration,” saying that “I don’t think people realize as much as with the [First Fridays] how much [the CF] is bringing people together and encouraging that.” I wouldn’t necessarily lump all the capacity-building activities of the CF under “nurturing collaboration,” as the collaborative part seems to take place secondarily to the capacity-building part, and Giving Day activities actually put the nonprofits in competition with one another. Though one could indeed argue that collaborations occur at the capacity-building events, nowhere does the CF state that “nurturing collaborations” is the focus for these events; it’s more like a happy byproduct.

These respondents acknowledged that their impressions of the CF’s mission were influenced heavily through their interactions with the organization. After sharing that they believe “supporting nonprofits” is the primary purpose of the CF, A1 also concluded, “I think, like anything, it just depends on the lens you’re looking through.” A2 indicated that they might

respond differently depending on if they were replying as a nonprofit leader or as someone unfamiliar with the CF—though they admitted that it was rather difficult to pretend they were unfamiliar with the CF:

It's hard because for me, if I am taking off the [nonprofit] hat, then it would be a different answer than with the [nonprofit] hat on, because with the [nonprofit] hat on, I'm always thinking about [First Fridays] things, or the [workshop] at the Y. Stuff that's going to help me with continuing-education type things or networking type things. When it's just a random person, I think random people, general public, think of it as grant-making. That's a huge part of what I think of it as too.

Even imagining themselves without the nonprofit hat on, A2 lists grants as a focus of the CF, which is, arguably, a method of supporting nonprofits. But by specifically pointing out events like First Fridays and continuing education workshops, A2 provides some concrete evidence for their claim that supporting nonprofits is a primary focus for the CF. I would argue that through these events, CF stakeholders are signaling their motives to nonprofit leaders in the area, so it would make sense that nonprofit leaders would see the CF's primary purpose as helping nonprofits (including through the awarding of grants).

However, outside audiences came away with the same impression. Even without regular interactions with the CF, outside audience respondents noted that “supporting nonprofits” was an important activity. O4 states that the community foundation is “trying to provide options for funding and, it seems, just support in general.” O3 mentioned specific programs and nonprofits supported by the CF (as noted in the annual report) but stopped short of stating that the CF was helping them in any specific way; they simply stated that the CF's goal was to “enrich the lives of those less fortunate.” O5 guessed that the CF leaders “mainly support and train charitable

organizations. I'm not sure if they do anything other than that. I'm not sure if they have any projects on their own for charity or if they only support other charities.” Their impression of the CF’s main purpose was rather simple and simply stated.

O1, however, offers a more detailed and nuanced view. Before referring to the CF as a sort-of “Kickstarter” that will “help smaller organizations get off the ground,” they offer this explanation of what they think the CF does:

My sense is, is that they want—there are people out there who want to do things to help people, and they may not have the resources to become a fundraising entity, because fundraising costs a lot of money. This is an umbrella organization that lets smaller organizations develop. Maybe someday they'll go off on their own; I don't know if that's possible. It's maybe an incubator, if you will, that helps smaller groups get off the ground and focus their time, money, and energy into developing those resources. . . . individuals, organizations that are trying to make a difference, meet local needs—they can apply to this organization for a grant, and funding, and perhaps guidance, and organizational advice, and get connected and make connections through that. With 20 years you've built up a donor base, and if you have an idea, I'm thinking you can bring it to this organization and they'll help you focus it, narrow it, flesh it out, and then advertise that to their donors.

This quote is perhaps the strongest example of the perception that the CF’s primary intended purpose is to support nonprofits. O1’s perception is not just that the CF provides some capacity-building workshops and distributes grants; in O1’s view, the CF will actually help an organization get started, even if at first it’s just a group of people with an idea. This implies much more active “supporting nonprofit” efforts than the CF is already providing—efforts that

would certainly occupy a majority of CF employees' time if implemented. This description does, however, come the closest to an outside audience member picking up on the strategic planning services occasionally offered to nonprofit organizations.

O1 also notes that the CF's purpose is "to award grants, to assist local charitable organizations to do what they need to do, or what they want to do. To help them fulfill their mission." Here, O1 mentions the mission as something that is being accomplished rather than something that is shaping action. Like others, they directly link the awarding of grants to the idea of support for nonprofits—a connection that could indicate where the outgrowth of support activities originally occurred. After years of awarding grants to organizations, it's possible that the CF eventually wanted to ensure their grants were good investments for the community; offering support services to nonprofits is a good way for the CF to monitor their progress and strengthen the organizations, making their grant investments more effective. It's a natural growth of activities, but without the historical knowledge of how that came about, it might not be entirely clear how the purpose of "supporting nonprofits" relates to the CF's mission.

#### *Connecting Nonprofit Support to Mission*

Regardless of its origins, the idea of "supporting nonprofits" is pretty well embedded in the minds of all of the respondents in my study: employees, key stakeholders, inside audiences, and outside audiences. The fact that it's not mentioned in the mission statement appears to be unimportant to the respondents; in fact, none of the key stakeholders mentioned a disconnect, and only one inside audience respondent recognized that it was missing. In their interview, A5 noted that their impressions of the CF's purpose were largely coming from their own experiences, making this note about the mission statement and CF activities:

. . . but I guess I'm just drawing on my experience. They have [First Fridays], which is the informative piece for area nonprofits or the public in general. That's how I knew about the education. *I wouldn't, I don't think I would have got that from their mission statement, necessarily . . . there's nothing really in the mission statement that if I didn't already know, that I would know that part of their support is the educational piece.*" (A5, emphasis mine)

A5 is the only respondent to specifically address the importance of nonprofit capacity building/support activities while also explicitly acknowledging that those support activities are not listed in the mission statement. This does not appear to be much of a problem for A5; the fact that the mission statement doesn't list these supporting activities does not appear to change their mind that those activities are important. Of course, A5 could be unfazed by the disconnect simply because as a nonprofit leader, they benefit from the nonprofit capacity building and support activities offered by the CF; however, considering the fear over "mission drift" in the nonprofit sector, I find A5's lack of concern over this difference between mission and activities to be a compelling argument for why nonprofit organizations should not fear "mission drift" but instead embrace the activities and adjust the mission statement accordingly. First, no other respondent seemed to notice the inconsistency between mission and activity. Second, the only respondent (A5) who *did* notice the inconsistency did not dwell on it at all, nor did they seem bothered by it. This suggests to me that any potential repercussions nonprofit leaders fear may be unfounded. While they would want to diligently avoid drifting away from the mission in any way that would be unhelpful or even detrimental<sup>35</sup> to the community, nonprofit leaders might want to

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<sup>35</sup> What I have in mind by using the word "detrimental" is a situation where a nonprofit organization might take on a project that either they are unequipped to handle or is the wrong solution for their community. This sometimes happens when nonprofit leaders "chase money" for the sole purpose of keeping the doors open to seek funds that

consider being more willing to expand scope when the activities in question are helpful to and desired by their community.

Considering the consensus of support for nonprofits, it makes sense for the CF to move forward with returning to the “mission creation/amendment” part of the cycle of genre production and change the mission to reflect this reality. In addition, it also demonstrates another cycle of genre production and activity taking place while the mission and activities remain at odds.

### ***Social Facts and the Cycle of Genre Production***

I discussed in chapters three and four how social facts develop within discourse communities based on shared beliefs, values, and activities. Bazerman (2004) argues that

each successful text creates for its readers a social fact. The social facts consist of meaningful social actions being accomplished through language, or speech acts. These acts are carried out in patterned, typical and therefore intelligible textual forms or genres, which are related to other texts and genres that occur in related circumstances. Together the text types fit together as genre sets within genre systems, which are part of systems of human activity. (310)

The mission statement was not a successful text by Bazerman’s standards, as it did not create social facts in line with its language; instead, a combination of activities and other genres of the CF created the social fact that “supporting nonprofits is a primary purpose of the CF.” In addition, one could argue that the conflict regarding decision-making power over funds also created a social fact that affected inside/outside audience understanding of the CF’s mission. Together, these social facts create an alternate view of the CF that is not in line with the mission

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cover either a specific type of approach or a particular kind of project—neither of which fit with the organization or community.

statement; they supersede the textual power of the mission statement and create the basis for a new reality.

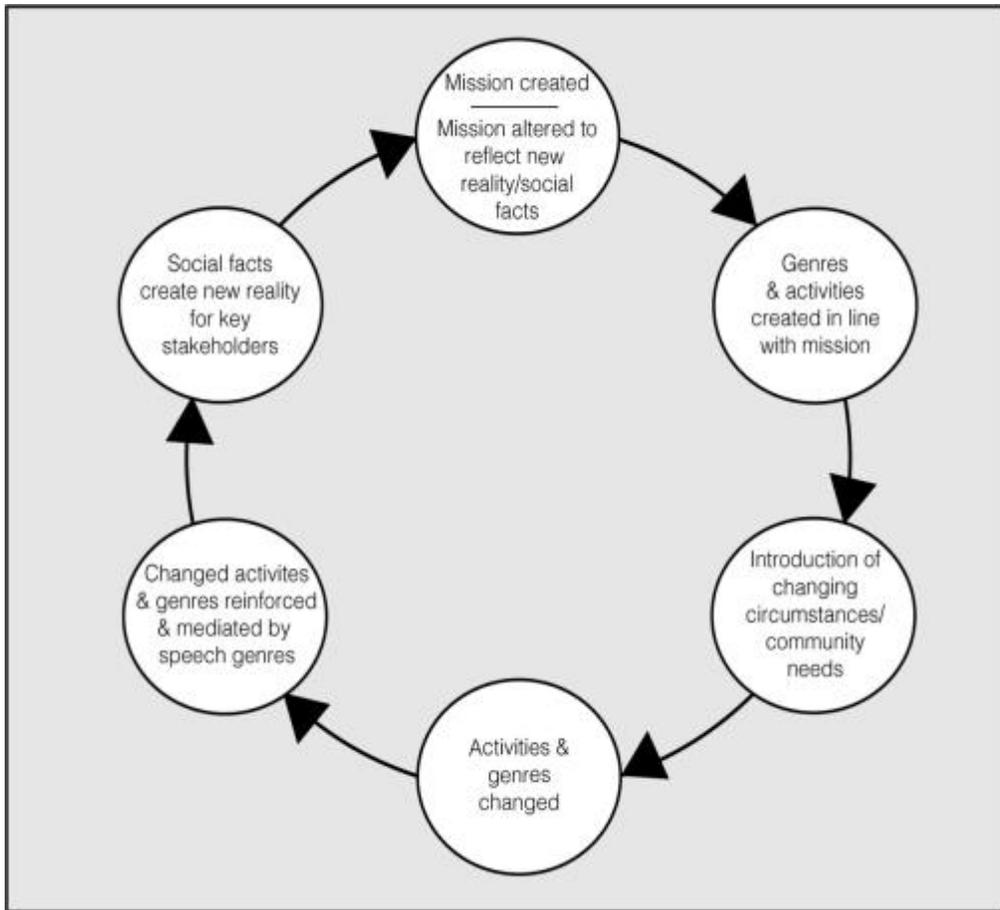


Fig 10. Cyclical model of mission creation and execution.

To illustrate this phenomenon, I offer an alternate cycle of genre production that occurs when the cycle skips the process of mission realignment. In the cycle of genre production I discussed in chapter five (see figure 10, replicated above), I demonstrated that once changing circumstances and community needs are introduced that the CF desires to include in their activities, they respond by creating new activities and genres that give the impression of a new purpose. These new activities and genres create social facts, which could then encourage a discussion about how to change the mission statement to better incorporate these social facts, activities, and genres into the overall mission of the organization.

But what if that mission conversation and realignment never happens? I posit that in this circumstance, another cycle of genre and activity production would continue until a new mission statement is created (see figure 11). In this model, the foundation simply continues to produce more genres and activities that support the social facts that have been accepted by all participants in the foundation’s genre ecology. Having reached full saturation (acceptance by key stakeholders as well as inside/outside audiences), these social facts are embedded in the organizational identity of the CF. This cycle can continue infinitely, skipping the mission realignment part of the cycle and continuing to produce more genres and activities that reinforce these social facts.

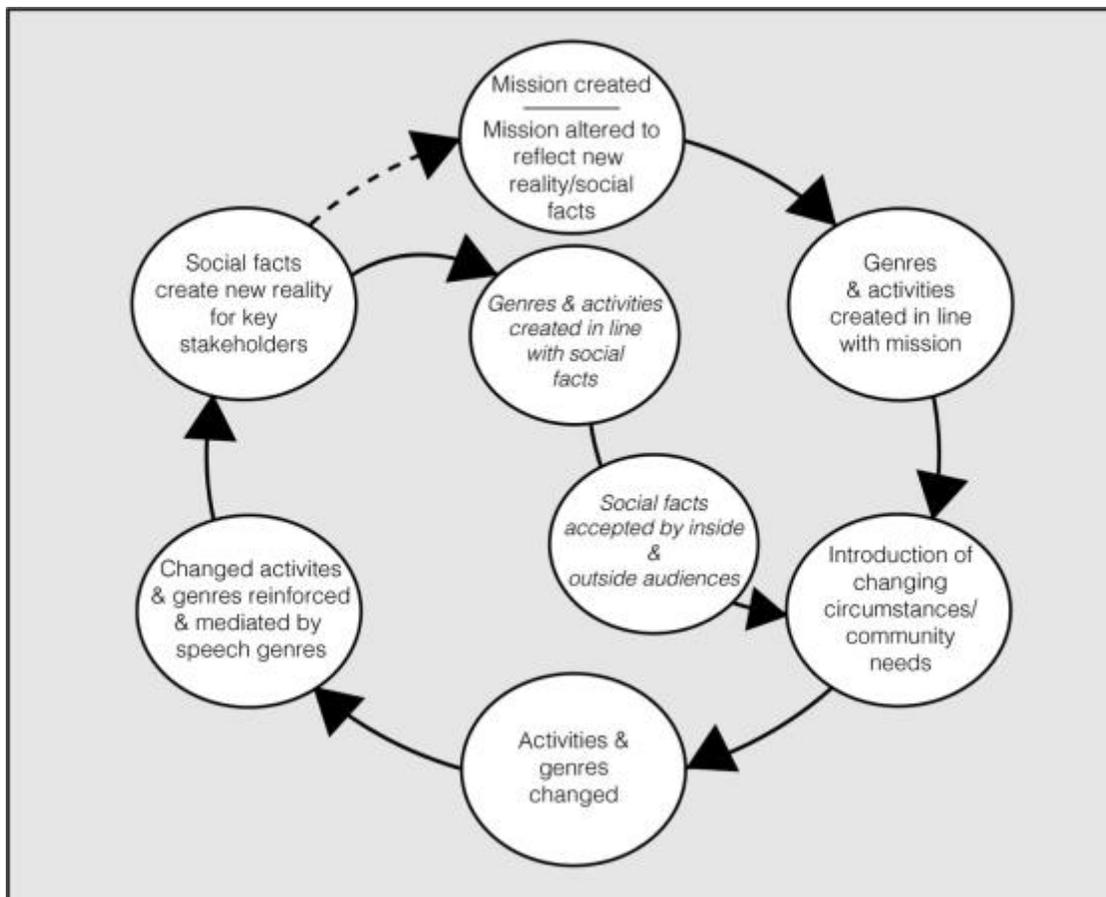


Fig 11. Cycle of genre production including alternate path for social facts.

It is at the point of an endless cycle not moving from the social facts “inner path” to the mission statement “outer path” that the possibility of “mission drift” is perhaps a more urgent reality, depending on how many new social facts have been created; however, as I stated in chapter five, this “mission drift” can be remedied by returning to a discussion about the mission statement. In genre studies terms, mission drift represents a loss of genre-function; as long as the genres and activities of the CF are not in alignment with the mission statement, the textual power of the mission statement has been reduced. If used as guidance for introducing these conversations, the cycle in figure 11 could help return the genre-function to the mission statement.

What this cycle also illustrates is that new genres (and activities) are formed when social facts are cemented (though, it’s difficult to say exactly at what point this takes place, as creation of new genres could be part of the social fact formation process). These new genres get added to the genre ecology and, therefore, change the makeup of it—a phenomenon borne out in my genre ecology modeling process. While it was abundantly clear that genres related to giving day and the community fund were a part of the regular activities of the CF, I was left with that literal question mark I mention in chapter four: *where do these go? How do these genres relate to the mission?* With some nonprofits, it’s possible that newly/recently added genres or activities are unrelated to mission and also inappropriate for the nonprofit; in that case, those genres and activities should be eliminated. In the case of the CF, however, these genres and activities represent agreement among the key stakeholders, their target audiences, *and* the community; in this case, the speech genres temporarily mediate the relationship between these genres and the mission statement until a realignment of the mission can occur.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined genre at a micro-level and a macro-level. Discussing the formal features of the Community Fund revealed insights into how formal features can affect understanding of genre, while exploring the entire cycle of genre production provides insights for how the genre ecology is working as a whole. Analyzing the genres and activities of an organization at both levels provides a complete picture.

My initial omission of form and subsequent discussion thereof proves Devitt's point: form has been rather ignored in recent genre studies, and explicitly working to include it in analysis and discussion can contribute to our understanding of how genres work, how they work together, and how content and form fuse together to create meaning. Explicitly discussing formal features contributes to, as Devitt puts it, "re-fusing" form with genre. Devitt notes that form and content are fused, and I would argue that makes them inseparable; to discuss one without the other creates an incomplete study. Additionally, she argues that the forms of genre are "meaningful only within their full contexts—cultural, social, and individual" and "inter-genre-al, interacting with forms of other genres" (35). This is an important distinction for exploring a genre ecology in whole. It is the form, not just the content, that also interacts with other genres and activities to create meaning; for a study to be complete, scholars must examine all aspects of the genres that are a part of the ecology.

The Community Fund "branding" is a prime example of how an understanding of form can be key, as the branding elements caused quite a bit of confusion. As Bazerman noted, readers will call on their generic knowledge to approach a new genre and understand it; this includes a document's formal features. Even if readers don't make these formal impressions explicit in their discussions of a genre, these understandings are contributing to how audiences receive and

understand genres. By making the conversation explicit and designing research projects to incorporate questions about form, genre scholars could greatly enhance their understanding of the social contexts they are exploring and further understand why some genres are successful in creating the social action they are designed to create.

And, of course, in a genre ecology, these individual understandings are important to the overall understanding of how all the genres and activities of an organization work together to create meaning and accomplish action. The inside and outside audiences' responses in this chapter demonstrated that speech genres mediate the genres and activities of the CF when social facts supersede the textual power of the mission statement, reducing its "genre-function." However, their responses also demonstrate that these speech genres may not need to be directly engaged for an intended audience to understand how the key stakeholders are using and understanding the mission. Though I would argue that the inside audiences' impressions of the mission of the CF *more strongly* reflect nonprofit support as a value, the outside audiences ultimately gained the same impression. Because more and more participants in the CF (key stakeholders and inside audiences) were engaging with each other and discussing support for nonprofit organizations, that value came through in everything the CF communicated, even though it is not part of the mission statement and even when speech genres were not present to mediate. And as my cyclical model on page 133 demonstrates, participants in the CF community will continue to create new or altered genre and activities as they go about their daily work, recruiting new donors, talking to new nonprofit leaders, and engaging community members. As they go about creating these genres and activities, it is not likely that they will stop and refer to the mission statement; instead, what they will do is rely on the knowledge that is shared among

the other people connected to the CF—the social facts. And so the cycle will continue, further establishing “supportive services for nonprofits” as a key value and activity of the CF.

As I stated in chapter five, the key here is to regard the mission as responsive to the changing needs of the community, and that is what my cyclical model attempts to demonstrate. One genre cannot overpower the social facts created through a combination of other written genres, speech genres, and activities; as the social facts are solidified, the cycle will continue on that inner path with the danger that too many added social facts between mission conversations could, indeed, lead to mission drift. However, to avoid misunderstandings or accusations of mission drift, the CF (and, perhaps, other organizations as well) can break the cycle and return to the outer layer, which includes regular interaction with the mission statement and the willingness to change it. This cycle demonstrates just how important it is to view the mission statement as a living document that is to be constantly reviewed, interacted with, and edited rather than a sacred text that should remain untouched.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusions

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I began this study with three primary research questions in mind:

1. *How do key stakeholders in a nonprofit organization create, understand, and use genres to impart the organization's mission?*
2. *Does the articulation of the mission change among genres, and if so, how and why?*
3. *How do outside audiences understand the mission as represented through these genres?*

Though I centered each of my chapters on a research question, each of these questions served more as a “jumping-off point” rather than a simple “ask-and-answer” format. My questions led to more questions, I found ideas in my analysis I hadn't expected to find, and I contributed to a theoretical framework (genre ecologies) in a way I hadn't anticipated.

In this concluding chapter, I briefly discuss an overview of my answers to these questions. I then provide some thoughts about the limitations of this study and consider what my research can contribute to genre studies and nonprofit governance, even with those limitations in mind. To expand those limitations, I suggest some areas for further research. Finally, I offer some concluding thoughts on the topic of mission statements and my study as a whole.

### **Research Question Two**

*Does the articulation of the mission change among genres, and if so, how and why?*

I started with question two, as I wanted to begin my analysis with a discussion of the mission statement as a genre. Starting with establishing the mission statement as a genre allowed me to build my genre ecology model around the mission statement and explore how its message is communicated and/or diffused among genres. This process led me to the inclusion of speech genres and the realization that some genres being used by key stakeholders of the CF were not necessarily connected to the mission statement. In part, I continued to answer this question

throughout my chapters discussing research questions one and three in detail, as the articulation of the mission did differ among the genres and cause some areas of confusion, conflict, and consensus. Ultimately, the articulation of the mission remained fairly consistent among the genres when it came to the area of professional services for donors, communicating the belief that donors have control over how the money is distributed. In terms of grants and scholarships, there were some differences among genres as to whether the grants and scholarships were focused on short-term solutions or long-term solutions, though the size of the grants seemed to favor the short-term and the language largely favored long-term. For nurturing collaborations, the message simply wasn't as strong, and it did not cause much conflict among my respondents; I surmise that in this community, the concept of nurturing collaborations created a good deal of consensus, as most of the respondents simply mentioned it in passing. Further, unlike the topic of supportive services for nonprofits, the concept of nurturing collaborations is indeed clearly a part of the mission statement, so the consensus also didn't strike me as anything noteworthy (as it did not create conflict between genre and activities).

Ultimately, what the genre ecology model revealed is that the majority of the genres of the CF concentrate on one primary portion of the mission statement, which makes them somewhat more clear in their representation. Though there were some sources of conflict between genres on articulations of the mission—e.g. messages regarding donor services that communicate either donor control or CF control—the primary conflict on these messages came from how key stakeholders were using and communicating these messages, which brings me to research question one.

### **Research Question One**

*How do key stakeholders in a nonprofit organization create, understand, and use genres to impart the organization's mission?*

The key stakeholders use genres such as the annual report to solicit donations and promote the CF in other ways, situations I refer to as “speech acts” or “speech genres.” As I discussed in chapters three and four, the speech acts of the key stakeholders likely supersede the apparent meaning of the document, and so the genre is interpreted through the lens of whoever is presenting it. At some point in the history of the CF, someone noted that there was great need among nonprofit organizations for supportive services, and so the CF started adding strategic planning services, monthly educational meetings, and a platform and promotion for a 24-hour giving day. Though, as one respondent pointed out, “awarding visionary grants” is a way of supporting nonprofits, the concept of “supportive services for nonprofits,” such as those listed above, is not listed in the mission statement. As genres (spoken and written) and activities were created to accommodate this new social fact, key stakeholders began to both understand the mission through those genres and use those genres to continue to impart the organization’s “mission” as they saw it: supporting nonprofit through various services.

The simple answer to research question one is that the key stakeholders create, understand, and use genres to communicate social facts in addition to the mission statement. As I discuss in chapters five and six and expand on in “practical applications” below, a simple adjustment to the cycle of genre production can help keep the mission aligned with the other genres and activities in the genre ecology of the CF (or, potentially, for other nonprofits). This, in turn, affects how outside audiences perceive the mission of the organization, which brings me to research question three.

### **Research Question Three**

*How do outside audiences understand the mission as represented through these genres?*

What I found when interviewing inside and outside audiences about the CF and its mission is that the social facts of the organization were communicated in addition to the mission statement as written. In some cases, speech genres worked to reinforce those facts and mediate the relationship between genres, activities, and the mission statement; in other cases, the conflicts and consensus among key stakeholders were readily communicated even in the absence of those speech genres. What I ultimately conclude in this study is that the key stakeholders' values and ideologies as represented through the points of conflicts and consensus I discuss in chapter five are communicated to audiences outside of the internal workings of the organization. Conflicts were evident through the genres, consensus created new genres that communicated that consensus, and confusion begat confusion (with the Community Fund).

Because the key stakeholders are creating and using the genres through their various lenses of values and ideologies, the mission understood by outside audiences is the mission as seen through those lenses. This again points to the cycle of genre production and suggests that if the key stakeholders of the CF wish to present a "unified front," they should engage in regular conversations about the mission, genres, and activities of the organization; if they do so, all three can be brought into alignment and provide a full visual of their purpose.

Starting with these questions and following the data, I believe my research has provided some useful contributions to genre studies as well as practical applications for nonprofit leaders. Before discussing these further, however, I wish to first make note of the limitations of this study.

### **Limitations of This Study**

As a case study, there are obvious limitations to the conclusions I have drawn as well as the applicability of my theories and implications.

First, my conclusions are limited by the availability of data and access to participants. My access to certain meetings and activities was restricted due to privacy concerns; therefore, I was unable to observe the board retreat during which they discussed many of the topics I covered in these chapters: for example, difficulty making decisions and short-term vs. long-term solutions. Additionally, being able to observe the other speech genres I map in the ecology—donor meetings, committee meetings, and grant information sessions—could have given me greater insight into how key stakeholders were using genres to encourage certain actions and communicate the CF’s mission.

The time constraints of the dissertation period also limited my ability to observe certain meetings and reach out to audiences outside of the key stakeholders, which resulted in a small pool of subjects. I was granted access for a five-month period, and there were a limited number of meetings held during that time. At the time, I was still a graduate assistant in a teaching position, which limited my ability to observe meetings since my teaching times coincided with meeting times; in addition, some meetings were canceled due to inclement weather. Further, I had limited time to locate and interview outside audiences, which restricted the number of respondents I could draw from; fewer respondents means, of course, that my conclusions are less generalizable (though case studies are, by design, not very generalizable to begin with).

Finally, my case study is limited by scope, geography, and race. This foundation is located in a mostly rural community with a population of less than 100,000. Of those 100,000, 88% percent were white, 5% were Asian, 4% were black, and 3% were Hispanic or Latino (at the time). The bulk of the key stakeholders of the CF are white, and only one of my interviewees was *not* white (there was, however, a rather even distribution between male-presenting and

female-presenting individuals).<sup>36</sup> The dynamics within the organization might differ if there were changes to the racial makeup of those involved, if the organization operated in, say, an urban context, or if the organization was located in a different part of the country; and, of course, I studied a community foundation rather than a “typical” nonprofit organization that provides services directly to a population and does not support other exempt organizations. All these factors contribute to differences in social norms, communication styles, organizational structure, and how an NPO might respond to the pressing needs of the community—not to mention the different genres and activities and how those work together.

Because of all these factors, I cannot with great confidence generalize my conclusions based on one research site with a small set of data. I can, however, discuss how some of my conclusions might offer additional data to contribute to genre studies, especially when combined with other bodies of work dedicated to genre studies. Even with these limitations, I believe that some of my conclusions contain possibilities not only for genre studies but also for nonprofits; these offerings could be further explored in studies that contain different demographics than mine to test for their plausibility and applicability.

### **Implications for Genre Studies**

In the previous chapters, I made two primary arguments for how a stable representation of the mission statement can be achieved: I expanded the definition of a genre ecology model, and I introduced two cycles of genre production that illuminate how meaning is made in this particular nonprofit organization. In addition, I discussed how form has been largely ignored in genre studies, and I offer data to support how explicit discussion of form can help genre scholars

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<sup>36</sup> I am not a gender studies scholar and am admittedly still not very well-versed in the ins-and-outs of gender identity language; however, I am doing my best in this dissertation to use gender-fluid language, hence my use of “male-presenting” and “female-presenting.”

more fully understand audience responses to genre. As I discuss in further detail below, these are the contributions I feel I can offer the field of genre studies.

### ***Genre Ecology Modeling***

In chapter four, I argued for the nonprofit mission statement as a genre and explored its placement in a genre ecology. Using genre ecology modeling as explained by Spinuzzi, Zachry, and Jones, I demonstrated the usefulness of using GEM to better understand the genres and activities of a particular organization. In the GEMs put forth by Spinuzzi, Zachry, and Jones, one activity was centralized as a hub to which all genres were connected, which, in my opinion, did not offer a broad view of the interaction between genre and activity. I de-centralized one activity, replacing it with the mission statement, which I regard as the driving purpose for the existence of the CF. I started with mapping out the genres of the CF, and when it became apparent that some genres did not appear to fit with the mission, I quickly concluded that the genre ecology model required the inclusion of speech genres to mediate that connection. By adding multiple speech genres to the GEM, I was able to better illustrate the relationship between texts and activities in a genre ecology.

Spinuzzi et al (2000) discuss how “unofficial” genres are added to an ecology to make a tool more user-friendly. The classic example used by Spinuzzi with coauthors in this article and as sole author in his 2003 book on genre tracing is the post-it note—an addition to using maps in a transportation department that helps the user make better use of the map. Spinuzzi et al state that “ad hoc” (unofficial) genres will tend to be peripheral since they are usually brought in to “glue together” or supplement the mediation between official genres. But, as we saw in the DOT example, ad hoc genres can become surrogates for an official genre that is difficult to coordinate with other genres” (176). Though they are talking about genre more at the level of operations—

creating a genre in the moment to help with a physical activity—I think speech genres as well as the genres created in response to social facts (e.g. those genres in the CF that represent supportive services for nonprofits) can contribute to the concept of ad hoc genres. In the genre ecology model I developed for the CF, speech genres “supplement the mediation between official genres”; as I described in chapter four, these speech genres mediate between genres used heavily by the key stakeholders that seem unrelated to the mission and the mission itself. Though they state that these ad hoc genres tend to be on the periphery, there is a case to be made for their incorporation into a more central area of the genre ecology (as illustrated by my GEM in chapter four) when these genres are supported by social facts. And though for the CF, genres related to supportive services for are not “ad hoc” in the way that they are “unapproved” by the administration (key stakeholders) of the CF or “unofficial” genres of the CF, they are “ad hoc” in the way that they were created in response to user experiences rather than coming out of the mission. In a way, these genres become surrogates—or, perhaps, supplements—for the mission statement until the mission statement can be amended to reflect the current reality of the organization.

Discussing the genres of the CF in this way offers a possible expansion to genre ecology theory and genre ecology modeling, taking note of other ways that genres are created, used, added, and removed from activity systems.

### ***Cycles of Genre Production***

Spinuzzi (2000) states that mediating tools (genres) “co-evolve: changes in one lead to changes in others” (100). For this reason, a cyclical model of genre (and activity) production is necessary. In chapters four and five, I offered two different cyclical models that explained how genre and activity production was occurring at the CF. I believe these models can work in

tandem with genre ecologies to help scholars understand how genres and activities, texts and contexts work together to create meaning. By incorporating social facts (which reveal the reality of how the organization is working) and speech genres (which help mediate other genres and activities for part of the cycle), the activity of the organization is more readily visualized—even more strongly than through the genre ecology model.

What my final version of the cycle in chapter six demonstrates is that the genres and activities of an organization don't always operate ideally. Though I believe that these cyclical models can contribute greatly to theories of genre ecologies, genre systems, and all other representations of genres and activities working together, I believe these cycles have the most utility in practical applications for nonprofits, which I discuss later in this chapter.

### ***Form***

In Carolyn Miller's (1984) essay on genre as social action, she argues that scholars need to move past seeing genre simply as "form." Miller's focus on social action revived genre studies and moved scholars away from an emphasis on form and toward a consideration of what genres *do*. Miller argued that genres acquire meaning from situation and create the social context in which that situation arose; therefore, to qualify as a genre, a text must not only carry certain formal features but also must inspire a particular social action.

Since the publication of that essay, genre studies scholars have largely focused on the social contexts and actions of genre; indeed, discussions on form are somewhat lacking in current rhetorical genre studies. However, Amy Devitt (2009) argues that the shift from form to social action in genre studies was a rejection of *formalism*, not form. Form is not outright rejected, nor is it completely absent from genre discussions; it is, however, more often implicit in most genre studies rather than explicitly analyzed.

Though I began my study with no intention of discussing form explicitly, my audience responses led me to that discussion. Form had a distinct impact on my respondents' understandings of the purpose of these documents and of the CF as a whole. Had my respondents not directly discussed formal features without me asking, I believe I would have missed out on some great insights as well as an explanation for *why* audiences were reacting the way they did to the Community Fund case statement. Though word choices are often discussed in these studies, it was the discussion of formal features that appeared like branding elements that seemed to cause the greatest confusion for my respondents. I can't help but wonder what further insights I may have received had I not divorced form from content and focused only on the social. I believe it's safe to say that genre scholars are no longer prone to formalism and sufficiently focused on the social; therefore, my blunder and the perception of my respondents should illustrate to other genre scholars that discussions of form should be explicitly included in genre research.

### **Practical Applications for Nonprofits**

My personal experience and this study suggest that most organizations view the mission statement as a revered and static object; they rarely interact with it or revise it. I believe the cyclical model of mission development (genre and activity production) I illustrated in chapter six can provide a path forward for organizations. I created this cyclical view specifically with the CF in mind, though it may have application for other nonprofits or genre ecologies.

What this model suggests is that changing circumstances and community needs give rise to the potential for changed activities and objectives of an organization. If an organization responds to these needs with new genres and activities before changing the mission statement, this can cause confusion among key stakeholders and/or volunteers, donors, employees, clients,

and the public. As I've stated before, the continued use of these genres and activities create social facts for the organizational leaders and can potentially solidify these social facts with outside audiences, creating a disconnect between the mission statement and the current genres and activities of the organization. Using this model as a guide, a nonprofit organization could explore their own current genres and activities and determine where they are in the cycle (or if their particular cycle is different in some way). This might be the "light bulb" moment organizational leaders need to force a mission conversation.

Hopefully, these cycles also demonstrate the fluidity of mission statement development and encourage nonprofit leaders that mission statements do not need to remain untouched for years or even decades; in fact, changing the mission statement more frequently could be incredibly beneficial.<sup>37</sup> Ensuring that all communications are aligned (including all written and oral genres) promises more effective communication of the mission and, in theory, greater participation by volunteers, donors, and clients. For this reason, I believe this cyclical model could be incredibly helpful to nonprofit leaders—particularly those who are already in a bit of an "identity crisis." Hopefully, this model and subsequent conversations about how mission statements are created, changed, understood, and communicated can take the fear out of talks of "mission drift" and put control back in the hands of organizational leaders.

### **Areas for Further Research**

As I mentioned in my introduction, nonprofit management/governance has been studied both inside and outside the university, with a tendency to focus on issues of sustainability, board governance, and fundraising, but with issues of mission and vision continually permeating these

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<sup>37</sup> There are some legal implications to changing the mission; it needs to remain in line with the "purpose clause" originally stated in the NPO's 501(c)3 documents. However, if the purpose clause is sufficiently broad, small changes to the mission statement will not affect this documentation. If the mission statement is significantly different from the original purpose clause, the NPO can file paperwork with the IRS to indicate the change.

conversations. Indeed, nonprofit strategists and advisory councils continually emphasize the importance of organizational mission, noting that mission statements “establish the long-term direction that guides every aspect of an organization’s daily operations.”<sup>38</sup> These strategists come from the fields of public and international affairs, business communication and management, sociology, communication, and rhetoric and writing (among others). The issue of “mission” stretches across these scholarly fields, with researchers investigating hospitals, universities, and other nonprofit organizations. For the most part, this research has not covered smaller nonprofit organizations, which leaves a large gap in our understanding of how texts work in small nonprofit organizational contexts.

According to the Urban Institute, there are over 1.5 million charitable organizations registered in the United States, with 950,000 of those qualifying as “public charities.” Sixty-six percent of public charities have annual revenues of \$500,000 or less, qualifying them as “small” nonprofits. That means there are over 627,000 small organizations<sup>39</sup> available for investigation—and that doesn’t include organizations like private foundations and churches that do not also register as 501(c)3 organizations. And since these small organizational contexts are an integral part of daily life, this is an area rich with relevance and ripe for exploration. Also, considering the limitations of my study, which I noted above, studies of organizations with different demographics—whether related to race, geography, type of organization, or other factor—would offer rich layers of research to discussions about genres and activity.

In addition to this rich tapestry (which I long to see someday!) more studies of mission, genre, or rhetoric in nonprofit organizations could add another dimension to the subfield of professional writing, technical communication, and business communication. Over the past ten

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<sup>38</sup> Establishing a Nonprofit Organization.” Grantspace.org.

<sup>39</sup> For comparison, there are approximately 5,300 universities and colleges in the United States, according to the *Washington Post*, and there is no shortage of studies on genres in university contexts.

years, employment in nonprofit organizations grew by 17%, while corporate (for-profit) employment decreased 6%.<sup>40</sup> This changing employment landscape suggests that the field of professional and technical communication would be wise to incorporate research into the different styles, ideologies, and genres of the nonprofit world.

In addition, there is a lot of growth potential in the area of genre ecologies. At the time of this writing, there are only a few scholars actively studying genre ecologies, and I believe I included the totality of all genre ecology frameworks in the pages of this dissertation. Genre ecologies represent a unique intersection of genre and activity to explore how meaning is created in organizations and how genres and activities interact with one another to reaffirm, change, or question the values and ideologies of a discourse community. With a subfield of study so wide open, I invite other scholars to jump in.

## **Conclusion**

At the heart of my inquiry with mission statements, their development, their usage, and their uptake is a simple question: are the values and ideologies held by the key stakeholders of an organization evident through the mission statement, and do the audiences who engage the mission statement understand those values and ideologies? In other words, can the mission statement indeed be a carrier of ideology; can it have a genre-function that makes it textually powerful on its own?

The answer is, I believe, a qualified “yes.”

My initial concept of a mission statement was that it would fulfill the genre-function by imparting the ideologies present in the individuals who created it; in other words, the mission statement would be a “stable representation of a shifting reality” (Windsor, 4). I had assumed

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<sup>40</sup> 2010 Nonprofit Almanac, [www.nccsweb.urban.org](http://www.nccsweb.urban.org)

that the stable representation would remain constant, even if the types of activities being coordinated may change. In the case of the CF, the mission statement was a somewhat-stable representation, offering a partial view of their activities, as the mission statement did not include what almost every participant in my study noted was its most important function.

In chapter two, I posited that in order to be that stable representation and have continuing power, the nonprofit mission needs to be continually engaged—either through the singular genre of the mission statement or through various genres working together to construct and reinforce a particular mission. I argued that if different genres are communicating different conceptions of the mission, the impact of the mission could be diffused. In other words, the “values, epistemology, and power relationships” being reaffirmed could be different depending on the genre being engaged.

In my observations and interviews with the CF, I found this to be true. As I describe in chapters three, four, and five, differing messages coming through both written and spoken genres communicate a different conception of the mission than when simply read in mission statement form. This results in a rift between the mission statement as written and the mission of the organization as communicated through genre.

So, I would amend my original concept to state that a mission statement *could* be this stable representation of a shifting reality—as long as it is continually engaged. The mission statement is a holder of ideas, a representation of ideology and values. Even if those ideologies and values change over the time, the mission statement could always be the source someone can refer to for a representation of the organization’s current reality. Devitt (1993) states that genre is “a dynamic response to and construction of recurring situation, one that changes historically and in different social groups, that adapts and grows as the social context changes” (580). There is, in

my opinion, no genre more dynamic than the mission statement. If the discourse community allows it to adapt and grow, its genre-function power can remain intact.

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## Appendix A: Coding Scheme

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***Shortcut code***      ***Description***

***Theme: There is confusion as to who is "in charge"***

POWER1	Foundation should be a leader
POWER2	Donors are in charge
POWER3	CF is in charge (donors should trust fdn)
POWER4	Board should look to staff for guidance
POWER5	Staff should look to board for guidance "we are not a bank"

***Theme: Foundation struggles to make value judgments***

JUDG1	Foundation has difficulty articulating value to audience
JUDG2	Foundation leaders have difficulty making value judgments
JUDG3	Foundation is trying to do too much
JUDG4	Foundation is focused on broader community issues
JUDG5	Mission statement is broad
JUDG6	Foundation should have broad impact "desire to do it all"

***Theme: Foundation struggles between short-term and long-term solutions***

STLT1	Foundation should focus on long-term solutions
STLT2	Short-term solutions are necessary
STLT3	Both short-term and long-term solutions are needed
STLT4	Foundation too focused on short-term solutions "Band-Aids" "Backpacks"

***Theme: Foundation struggles with role to play in local nonprofits***

NPO1	Foundation should help nonprofits raise funds
NPO2	Capacity building for NPOs is part of mission
NPO3	Foundation is too focused on helping nonprofits
NPO4	Foundation should let nonprofits address area needs

***Theme: Foundation struggles with which audience/part of mission to value most***

VALU1	Donors most important
VALU2	Grants and scholarships most important

VALU3	Nurturing collaborations most important
VALU4	Providing support for nonprofits most important

### **Audience**

*Code for what audience the interviewee feels the document is addressing*

<b><i>Shortcut code</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>
AUD1	Audience - board members
AUD2	Audience - community
AUD3	Audience - current donors
AUD4	Audience - financial planners
AUD5	Audience - nonprofit leaders
AUD6	Audience - potential donors
AUD7	Audience - potential sponsors
AUD8	Audience - potential volunteers
AUD9	Audience - students

### **Mission**

*Code for which part of the mission they feel the document is addressing*

<b><i>Shortcut code</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>
MISS1	Mission - providing professional management services to donors for their charitable causes
MISS2	Mission - awarding visionary grants and scholarships
MISS3	Mission - nurturing collaborations in our community
MISS4	Mission - does not strictly adhere to the mission statement

### **Language in Mission**

<b><i>Shortcut code</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>
LANG1	Language is jargony
LANG2	Language is unclear/vague
LANG3	Language is broad
LANG4	Focus on formatting of language

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

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### Range of potential questions for Staff Members:

- How long have you worked for the CF?
- Can you provide me some examples of materials that you have used to communicate the mission of the organization to both people inside the organization (board members, community advisors, other staff members) and people outside of the organization (e.g. potential donors, volunteers)?
- Were you involved with the creation of any of these documents?
  - If so, which ones?
  - Are you satisfied with the final product? Why or why not?
  - Do you feel that the mission of the CF is well represented by these documents? Why or why not?
    - If you are not satisfied, what changes would you make to improve that representation?
  - What audience were you writing these documents for, and how are you hoping they will receive these documents?
    - What action are you hoping to encourage?

### Range of potential interview questions for Board Members and Other CF Leaders:

- How long have you been involved with the Community Foundation?
- How did you first get involved and what attracted you to the CF?
- What committees have you been a part of during your time on the Board?
  - Has your involvement with these committees shaped your understanding of the CF's mission? If so, how?
- Outside of your committee service, what other activities have you been involved with through the CF
  - How have these experiences influenced your understanding of the Foundation, if at all?
- In regard to documents created by the staff:
  - Tell me about the document. What do you think it's saying?
  - Do you feel it represents/explains the mission of the organization well? Why or why not?
    - Would you share this document with people outside the organization? Why or why not?
- Can you provide me some examples of materials that you have used to communicate the mission of the organization to people outside of the organization (e.g. potential donors, volunteers)?
  - How well do you feel these materials represent and communicate the mission of the organization?

- Would you have added anything to these documents, amended anything, or deleted any portion of them?
  - Why or why not?
  - (If yes) What changes would you have made?
- In your opinion, which individual document best represents/explains the mission of the organization? Why that particular document?

### **Interview questions for other audiences:**

I will provide documents from organization, including displays of web pages, and allow the participant time to review. (A total of 4-5 documents). For each document, I will ask:

1. Drawing from this document, what do you think is the primary purpose (mission) of the CF?
  - a. Why? Please point to specific phrases when possible.

After all the documents have been reviewed individually, I will ask about the collection of documents:

2. What kind of cohesive message do you get from these documents as a whole?
3. Which documents seems to give the strongest message? Why?
4. Did you find any contradictions between these documents, or do you think they work well together? Why?