An Investigation of Support for Community Bands:

A Sample Final Draft Assignment Response for

ENGL 135 at DeVry University in San Antonio

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From sixth grade through my second year as an undergraduate, I was a bandsman, and I loved playing saxophone—especially the baritone sax—for quite some time. I had to put my horn aside, though, in favor of other pursuits, and I left it alone for years until the summer of 2018. At that time, one of the non-profit organizations in my hometown put out a call for musicians to join a new community jazz band. I answered the call, asking if the group had need for a baritone sax, and the band's founders—a non-profit music teacher and the local high school band director—told me they did. The ensemble accepted me, and I have been happy to sit in rehearsals and perform once again in the months since.

I am not the only person to value such ensembles as I am now in. Indeed, they have given rise to an independent journal—the *International Journal of Community Music*—and no few other studies. While it may be the case that the definition of community music is somewhat nebulous and tenuous (Veblen, 2008), it is certain that community music—including community bands—supports the formation of community identities (Ibarra, 2017), even amid strain on those communities (Hebert, 2008). Additionally, as community bands endure, they begin to help bridge generational divides (Caslor, 2013), offering not only an in-the-moment sense of community and belonging, but one that produces a sense of continuity of community. Too, the ongoing outlet for musicianship allows for refinement and enhancement of local schools' music programs (Mantie, 2009), as well as for the community musicians themselves (Augustin, 2010), making possible a cycle of continuous improvement and a potentially ever-growing point of community pride.

With the benefits they offer, community bands can be among the most worthwhile endeavors; they help found and maintain communities, and they can serve to bring others into those communities across years. It makes sense, then, that they should be supported from the communities that they serve and from which they derive their players. The presence of musicians in such bands is the most obvious and intimate form of support, and players can be expected to provide their own instruments and accoutrements, certainly. But for things like rehearsal and performance space, as well as chairs, stands, and charts to play, more is required, moving beyond what passing a hat around a bandstand can reasonably expect to bring in. Being local and often tenuous, however, a community band in need of support cannot always or often go to larger, national organizations, particularly as it gets started. Instead, soliciting small-scale grants from local non-profit agencies and individual donors, as well as support from local governmental agencies, is likely to offer the best chance of support for community bands.

There are other means of securing support for community bands, to be sure. For example, Mantie (2009) motions toward an idea of using current school music programs as the source of support for community band programs. There is some sense to the idea, admittedly. For one, schools and their programs are already in place; they are known quantities in their communities, and they already enjoy support from the public tax base. They also tend to have facilities and equipment in place—rehearsal space, chairs, music stands, and even pieces of music to play— that go unused for large swaths of time. Putting those to work when they would otherwise be idle suggests itself as a good use of resources.

There is also already precedent for non-profit community groups and others to use school facilities when classes are not in session. In Stillwater, Oklahoma, to offer one example, several the public schools rent space to local churches for Sunday services. For a more civic example,

many of the polling places in New York City are public schools. If Mantie (2009) is correct in noting that community bands are already strongly associated with local school music programs—and my own community band is such an ensemble, founded in part by the local high school band director; I doubt it is the only such band—then it would be a relatively small step to take to set community bands up as extensions of and community outreach for the local schools' music programs.

Such methods for securing community band support have problems, however. Supporting community bands from school music programs would strain the already-often-strained resources available to those programs. Schools perennially report having budget shortfalls, and so-called peripheral programs such as music programs are among the first to have their funds cut when budget problems must be addressed. Adding to their duties while not affording them enough funding to perform their regular and expected work seems counterproductive. Additionally, support for the school programs already comes from the kinds of sources that could be asked for direct donation to community bands; eliminating a pass-through step would promote greater efficiency with the funds and materials provided, suggesting that another means of support than yoking community bands to local schools is desirable.

Further, local school divisions are not necessarily contiguous with the communities that community bands would emerge from and serve. My own ensemble brings in people from the local school district, yes, but also from at least three neighboring districts—and my ensemble is in a relatively rural area with few surrounding communities. The problem would be more overt in more urban areas, where more schools and school districts cluster more closely together. And it is possible that inter-school rivalries would emerge within the contexts of yoked-to-schools community bands, resulting in people who would otherwise work well together being separated

by geographical distinctions not of their own making—or necessarily sensible, given the way some divisions are made. Some other means of support suggests itself as needed, therefore.

Far more tenable is the idea of soliciting grants and donations from local non-profits, government agencies, and individual donors. Hebert (2008) offered one example of the success of such measures. His article's focus is a community-based band in Auckland, one with a history spanning decades and that enjoys broad popular support. Its funding, by report, comes from "various philanthropic organizations and community trusts" (Hebert, 2008, p. 184). The band is not affiliated with a single other organization, but rather serves its community at large. More, social circumstances had imperiled its continued operation (Hebert, 2008, 170); it was from robust community support that the band was able to continue, offering a compelling example of the value of local support for local community bands.

For further justification, Winton and Evans (2016) remarked on ways in which community organizations can work to their own advantage. Their work treated a series of case studies and suggests one effective means community organizations have for gathering support is conducting their own research and presenting it to policymakers such as local governments. Though they only treated three individual cases, they laid out a useful guideline that seems broadly applicable. A community organization will do well to look at the research that has been done in line with its immediate purpose, make the overall results accessible to a non-expert audience, and work to promote the research of others in presenting it to local policymakers. The last component is key; the local must be the focus. That is, support for community bands should be solicited from the communities out of which they emerge.

In addition, Mcleod et al. (2016) have noted that even in a field so far removed from community music as environmental conservation, removal from local conditions has a decidedly

unhelpful effect. That is, while the expertise of those far away from those places being served can be valuable and the support of outside agencies is helpful, not having local input and support effectively dooms any efforts to assist in addressing even the largest problems. Conversely, explicitly involving the local public in addressing local issues makes the address of those issues work far better than trying to impose a from-outside view of how things ought to be. Since the local is necessary in addressing larger issues that attract regional, national, and international support and attention, it follows that local support is likely to be vital in those smaller-scale matters that, while important to those engaging in them and the communities of which they are pare, do not attract wider attention. Most community bands are of such sort, so it seems fitting that soliciting local support would be the best means of securing support for community bands.

Further argument comes from the information provided by community bands themselves. An admittedly small sample of 22 such organizations in the Dallas / Ft. Worth and San Antonio, Texas, areas (found from the first page of results from a Google search for "community band" and setting aside *Wikipedia* entries and duplicate results) noted several broad classes of support for community bands: corporate sponsorships and advertising, foundation support, local government support, affiliate club support (e.g. local branches of Lions Clubs), churches, local schools, and individuals. (See Figure 1, below.) Notably, most reported receiving support in the form of rehearsal space, with 11 of the school-supported bands, two of the church-supported, and two of the government-supported bands noting such support. One band also reported formal endorsement by its municipality as the official city band. It is clear, then, that there is abundant support available for community bands, and from sources including local governments.
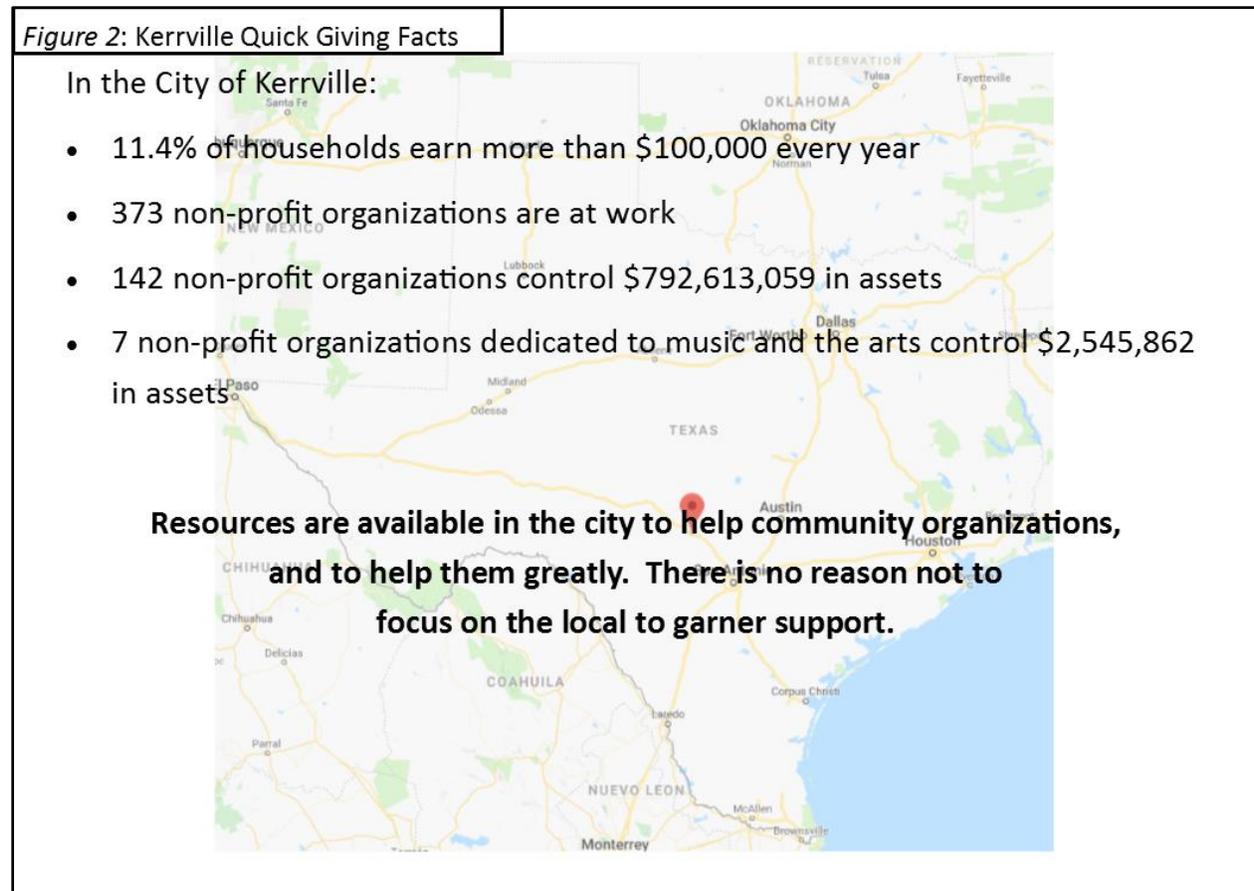
Figure 1: Sources for Community Band Support
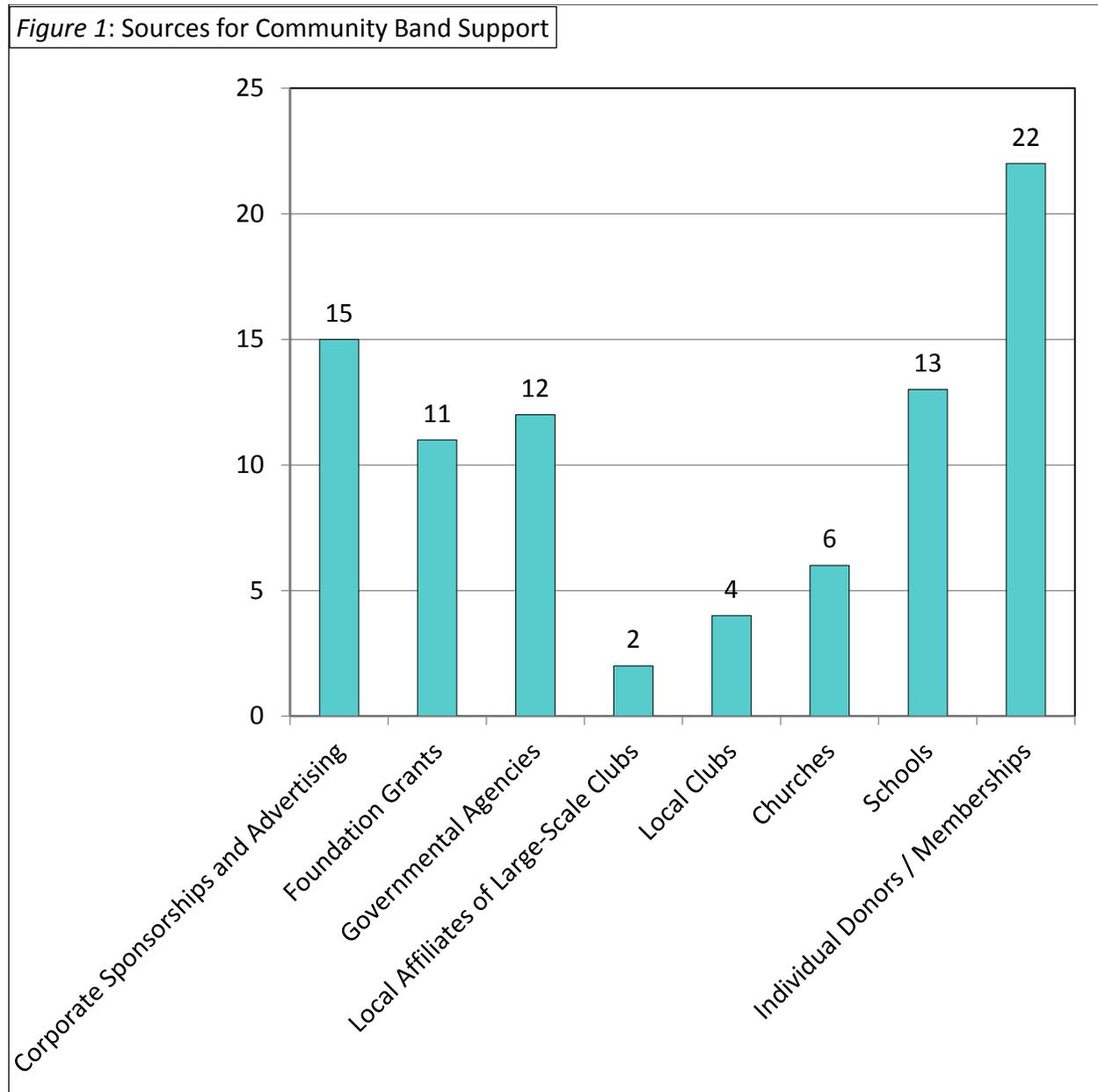
Figure 1: The figure shows the number of the bands reviewed reporting support from various sources. Information derives from Allen Community Band (2018), Arlington Community Band (2018), Carrollton Wind Symphony (2018), Denton Community Band (2010), Frisco Community Band (2017), Helotes Area Community Band (2018), Hill Country Community Band (2018), Irving Symphonic Band (2018), Lone Star Wind Orchestra (2018), Mansfield Wind Symphony (2018), McKinney Community Band (2018), Mesquite Community Band (2018), Metropolitan Winds (2018), Montrose Community Band (2018), New Horizons Band

Dallas (2018), Oak Lawn Band (2018), Plano Community Band (2018), Richardson Community

Band (2018), Rockwall Community Band (2018), Southlake Community Band (2018), Town

North Concert Band (2018), and Wylie Community Band (2018).

Only one source of support was reported uniformly among the bands reviewed, however:

individual donors and memberships. Most of the bands' webpages made some remark or another

about accepting donations from individuals, and most made a point of listing those donors who

had given and had not asked to remain anonymous. As such, while other sources of support

should be sought, the prevailing practice among community bands appears to be soliciting

money from individuals, whether in the form of donations from those outside the organization or

membership dues from those who would participate in it. Working with local agencies appears to

be next most helpful, far more so in the aggregate than other sources.

The community band of which I am part could well benefit from such work. Kerrville,

Texas, the city in which it meets, is an affluent place; indeed, it has been reported to be among

the wealthiest small towns in the United States (City of Kerrville, 2018). The United States

Census Bureau (2018) reports that the median income for the city exceeded $40,000, with only

some 16% of the population in poverty. Admittedly, nationwide median income is over $55,000,

with a poverty rate of 12%, but it must be noted that Kerrville's population skews older, with

more than a quarter of the population over 65 (as opposed to just over 10% nationwide). Older

populations tend to be on fixed and lower incomes, such as the 48.3% of Kerrville's population

that receives Social Security income. Thus, while the community's aggregate figures are lower

than average, they do not represent the giving power in the community. For instance, 11.4% of

the households in the city have incomes of $100,000 or more; they would be in position to give,

and to give quite a bit.

Figure 2: Kerrville Quick Giving Facts

In the City of Kerrville:

- 11.4% of households earn more than $100,000 every year

- 373 non-profit organizations are at work

- 142 non-profit organizations control $792,613,059 in assets

- 7 non-profit organizations dedicated to music and the arts control $2,545,862 in assets

Resources are available in the city to help community organizations, and to help them greatly. There is no reason not to focus on the local to garner support.

Figure 2: The figure shows summary economic data about Kerrville, Texas. Information derives from Google (2018), GuideStar (2018), and U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

Community giving power is more adequately represented by figures from the non-profit directory GuideStar (2018), which reports 373 non-profit organizations at work in and around the city. Of them, 142 report assets, totaling $792,613,059, ranging from $1 to $228,611,677 and averaging $5,581,782.10. Even considering that several of the organizations are schools or dedicated booster organizations leaves quite a bit of funding available from local non-profits, and it must be noted that many of the non-profits listed label themselves as arts & culture- or music-related groups that might well be inclined to offer monetary and other support to a community band such as that in which I play. Coupled with the ability of individuals and households to give

(as in Figure 2, above), it makes clear that there is ample local support available, if it can but be leveraged to advantage.

Knowing that seeking support from local individuals and agencies, rather than looking to regional, national, or international groups, is both a best practice observed among community bands and suggested as necessary in other endeavors, and knowing what I know about my locality, I mean to work in my own local community to find support for the jazz band I am happy to play with. I know, too, that other groups are likely to compete for similar resources. Fortunately, it appears to be the case that people are willing to give of their time and resources to aid community bands of several stripes, not only in exotic locales, but in places close to where I live, work, and play my horn. Given how much good a community band can do, and for how many people it can do that good, supporting such an organization surely has to read as a worthy thing for people to do, something that makes lives better now and, it is to be hoped, in years and decades to come.

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