Involving psychologists in public policy in Puerto Rico: Processes and Results

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Resumen
Por muchos años la psicología en Puerto Rico se consideraba una ciencia positivista de intervenciones a nivel individual con una postura neutral hacia asuntos socio-políticos. Sin embargo, en años recientes los psicólogos/as en la Isla se han involucrado más en política pública. Inicialmente este fue el resultado del trabajo de algunos pioneros/as. Algunos esfuerzos sistemáticos han sido apoyados por investigaciones desde el Área Social-Comunitaria de la Universidad de Puerto Rico y por la Asociación de Psicología de P.R (APPR). Las investigaciones demostraron que la mayoría de los psicólogos/as que no participan en política pública, no lo hacen por: a) falta de tiempo, b) falta de adiestramiento y c) actitudes negativas hacia el proceso político partidista. Ejemplos de la práctica surgen de esfuerzos individuales, organizaciones sin fines de lucro, de la APPR, desde entidades gubernamentales y desde la práctica privada. Son escasas las publicaciones sobre política pública. Los estudios también revelaron que casi no hay cursos sobre el tema en los programas graduados ni énfasis en las competencias requeridas para estas tareas en el currículo. En este artículo a) proveeremos información sobre los esfuerzos para aumentar la participación en política pública de nuestros/as colegas, b) presentaremos ejemplos de investigaciones y proyectos realizados en Puerto Rico y c) discutiremos el adiestramiento disponible y cómo debe modificarse para facilitar el trabajo en política pública.

Abstract
For many years, psychology in Puerto Rico was considered an individual-level positivistic science with a neutral stance towards socio-political issues. However, during recent years psychologists on the Island have become more involved in policy issues. Initially this was the result of the pioneering work of some individuals. More recently, systematic efforts have been supported by research within the social-community psychology program at the University of Puerto Rico and by the Puerto Rico Psychology Association (PRPA). Results of these studies showed that most psychologists who did not participate in policy work had one of the following reasons: a) lack of time, b) lack of training, and/or c) negative attitudes toward party politics. However, there are examples of work in public policy as a result of individual efforts, from NGOs, the PRPA, governmental agencies, and private practitioners. Regarding training, research demonstrated that there are hardly any courses on the subject in graduate programs, nor emphasis on the competencies required for the task in the available curriculum. There are also few publications about psychologists and public policy. This article will: a) provide information about the efforts that have led to increased participation of psychologists in policy work, b) present examples of research and projects carried out in Puerto Rico, and c) discuss the training available and how it should be modified to facilitate involvement in public policy.
Community psychology is committed to the pursuit of social change and social justice (Serrano-García, Carvallo, & Walters, 2009). It pursues these goals through diverse and interlocking levels of intervention which include the individual, group, community, organizational, and policy levels. Although the emphasis on policy is relatively recent, it has gained great momentum as one of the areas of disciplinary growth in the United States (Maton, 2013; Phillips, 2000).

In Puerto Rico, psychology was considered an individual-level positivistic science, which should hold a neutral stance towards social and political issues. Although some still think this way, much has changed including an increasing interest in policy. For many years there were isolated efforts to work at this level. These efforts have increased and have been spurred mainly by social-community and clinical-community psychologists. Thus, the purpose of this article is to: a) provide information on efforts that have led to increased participation of psychologists in policy work, b) present examples of research and projects at this level of intervention carried out in Puerto Rico, and c) discuss training in public policy (PP). Special emphasis will be placed on the roles community psychologists have played in this transformation.

The article has various sections including a) a description of efforts undertaken in Puerto Rico to foster participation of psychologists at the policy level, b) a description of the research about PP processes and issues, c) examples of practice and specific efforts of the Committee of Psychology and Public Policy (CPPP) of the Puerto Rico Psychology Association (PRPA), d) training devoted to policy in graduate programs on the Island, and e) recommendations for future development.

The descriptions and analysis presented considers a PP process encompassing six phases: a) identification of the problem to be solved; b) analysis of its dimensions and complexities; c) formulation of a policy proposal; d) approval of the proposal at the executive, legislative, or judicial branch; e) implementation of the approved plan; and f) evaluation (Dinitto & Dye, 1987). This process can emanate from government entities (top-down) or from the citizenry, either individually or collectively (bottom-up; Dobelstein, 1997).

**Description of Efforts to Foster Participation of Psychologists in Public Policy Modeling:**

**Individual Efforts**

Although most psychologists in Puerto Rico do not have policy training, there are several individuals who have immersed themselves in this arena. These precursors began their work before policy was conceptualized as a task for psychologists. Some examples of early pioneers as well as current exponents are presented in Table 1 (Boulón-Díaz, 2007; Moreno-Velázquez, Justel-Cabrera & Massanet-Rosario, 2007; Roca de Torres, 2007). These individuals serve as role models and provide evidence of psychologists' competence for key roles within government. Their contributions paved the way for other psychologists who want to assume policy as a possible area of intervention.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Name &amp; Specialty</strong></th>
<th><strong>Dates</strong></th>
<th><strong>Roles</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Efraín Sánchez Hidalgo, Educational psychologist</td>
<td>1940-60</td>
<td>Secretary of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milagros Guzmán, Industrial Psychologist</td>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Director, Central Office of Human Resources, Government of Puerto Rico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel Cirino, Industrial Psychology</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>First President of the Professional Board of Psychologists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celia Cintrón, Clinical/community psychologist</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Implementation of community mental health center law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caly Rodríguez, Industrial/Public Health</td>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Secretary of the Family Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nydia Ortiz Pons, Clinical Psychologist</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Administrator for the Mental Health Services and Against Addiction Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvador Santiago, Clinical Psychologist</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Administrator for the Mental Health Services and Against Addiction Administration ( now a Cabinet position)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Marizaída Sánchez, Clinical-Community Psychologist</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Member, Governor's Commission on Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ángel W. Colón, Social-Community Psychologist</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>U.S. Senate Staffer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Pioneers and Recent Exponents of Public Policy Efforts in Puerto Rico**

**Organizational Efforts: The Puerto Rico Psychology Association**

Psychology’s public policy efforts have been greatly advanced by the Puerto Rico Psychological Association (PRPA). The PRPA was established in 1954 and from the outset was involved in public policy processes, particularly guild issues. For the first 30 years, it advocated for laws to establish professional regulations and licensing at the Puertorrican legislature. These efforts succeeded in 1983 (Boulón-Díaz, 2006). Although this initial involvement emphasized professional interests, it set the stage for the
development of a professional identity that included a role in policy establishment and transformation.

The 1980s was a decade of growth related to policy involvement for the PRPA. At this time the Association began providing expert testimony to the legislature on issues related to mental health, violence prevention, death penalty, psychologically healthy workplace strategies, psychologists in the schools, and LGBT rights and health, among others (APPR, 2014). The manner in which the PRPA managed legislative petitions for expert testimony was by identifying members that possessed expertise in specific areas. These members then provided written and sometimes oral testimony representing the organization. This process still solidifies the PRPA’s sociopolitical role and provides important experiences for members in the policy process.

The use of the media has been central to the PRPA’s involvement in public policy. Since the 1990s there has been a growing presence of the Association in media outlets through newspaper interviews and columns about key social and political issues as well as radio and TV interviews. The Association has also organized press conferences to present specific projects or to establish its position regarding specific social topics or government initiatives. The PRPA’s growth in this area has been outstanding as PRPA’s contributions are included in weekly media reports by various outlets (For examples see Ayala, 2015; Rodríguez, 2015; N.A., 2015).

The growth in media contributions has been accompanied by a steady expansion in the PRPA’s social media presence. The Association now owns accounts on both Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/ASPPR?fref=ts) and Twitter (https://twitter.com/appr_pr) and an active web page (www.asppr.pr). Although the majority of the posts in social media are related to promoting the PRPA’s activities, it also provides media coverage of policy related efforts. This wide visibility has served to continue validating the role of psychology in public policy.

The increasing involvement of the PRPA in public policy presented the need for the Association to rethink its internal structure to respond to policy issues more effectively. Hence, in 2007 the PRPA created a Standing Committee on Psychology and Public Policy (CPPP) with the goal of streamlining its policy efforts and generating educational reform recommendations to train psychologists for this role. After its creation, the CPPP has been responsible for dozens of expert testimonies, the creation of a public policy course syllabus, and two important initiatives, which we describe in the Practice section: Proposals without Colors and a Clean Electoral Campaign. Unfortunately, in recent years, the CPPP has had setbacks related to the availability of psychologists ready to coordinate its work. This has resulted in a regression toward old styles of policy analysis, centered around the Association’s President. Hence, the PRPA needs to reevaluate its policy priorities and internal structure, which is sustained mostly by volunteers.

Another area of policy involvement for the PRPA has been its participation in public demonstrations. Some examples are its presence in manifestations against the firing of public employees, supporting students’ strike at the state university against a raise in tuition fees, and in favor of the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners. The PRPA has had great success organizing and mobilizing its members and gaining international support for its positions. With this background in mind, the authors turn to reviewing the research done in support of and about public policy.
Research

Psychologists’ Participation in Public Policy

The first study of psychologists’ participation in public policy (PP) in Puerto Rico was carried out by the first author in 1983 and was sponsored by the American Psychological Association (APA). A survey was sent to all PRPA members at the time (n = 300) and 35 psychologists responded of whom 82% reported participating in PP mainly in phases of problem identification and program evaluation. Twenty percent provided expert testimony, and 18% performed research related to PP. A fascinating result was that 60% of participants believed their colleagues did not consider PP a legitimate activity. However, 89% believed psychologists’ participation in PP should increase (Serrano-García, 1983). This shed some light on our profession’s views about the legitimacy of PP as a potential role and the disparity between personal and group views on the issue.

In order to evaluate changes over time, a follow-up study was carried out in 2004. This survey, sent to 516 PRPA members, was able to recruit a larger sample (n = 86). Results revealed that 55% reported participating in PP. The majority of those who participated engaged in problem identification (62%); the most frequent roles were providing expert testimony (32%), preparation of documentation (43%), and consulting (43% government and 38% non-governmental organizations). Most (87%) had not received formal training in public policy. Concerning the legitimacy of this role, 43% still believed their colleagues did not consider public policy work a legitimate activity. Although this shows small attitude change in their views about participation in PP – probably as a result of the efforts previously summarized – the roles that individuals assumed tended to remain constant (Serrano-García, Rosa, & García, 2005).

Policy Related Research

Most psychological research is pertinent to public policy since it is used for problem identification and analysis. However, this article focuses on research explicitly labeled as public policy research published in all issues of the two major psychology journals in Puerto Rico as well as research carried out for theses and dissertations of the Social-Community Psychology Program at the University of Puerto Rico. These journals are the focus of the review because they are the ones where psychologists on the Island publish more frequently: Science and Behavior is published by Carlos Albizu University, a private PhD granting institution, and the Puerto Rican Journal of Psychology (PRJP) is published by the PRPA. Research articles that were identified refer explicitly to one of the six phases of the public policy process. Results of the journals’ analysis are presented in Table 2.

Both journals had a low percentage of public policy articles although Science and Behavior’s percentage is more than twice that of the PRJP. In absolute numbers, the amount of articles about public policy is almost the same; in Science and Behavior the number has decreased in the last decade while in the PRJP it has increased dramatically. Articles focused on the same policy processes, and there were none related to policy approval. Varied areas of interest have been studied although drug use and addiction, mental health, and participation in public policy2 are present in both journals.
We then perused Master’s theses and dissertations of the Social-Community Psychology Program at the University of Puerto Rico. This program is the only program related to the discipline of community psychology on the Island and the authors assumed that, as such, it would have a stronger emphasis on policy issues. The authors discovered 29 theses and dissertations that referred explicitly to public policy processes; their number increased as the decades ensued. Problem and policy analysis were the most frequently studied processes and neither approval of measures nor implementation of policies were researched. Most frequently studied topics included community mental health, community development and HIV/AIDS prevention (Serrano-García, 2014; see Table 3).

The authors also examined methods most frequently used to carry out PP research both in the journals and in theses and dissertations. Identified methods included: a) content analysis of agencies’ annual reports, laws and regulations, and patients’ records; b) literature reviews of policy models; c) epidemiological analysis of census data, police data, and department of health data; d) interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires for program participants and/or program staff; e) psychological tests related to mental health or children’s cognitive development; and f) case studies. It is apparent that the most employed method was problem analysis, which is consistent with the high levels of psychologists’ participation in the problem identification phase. However, through the decades, there has been a progressive diversification of methods and topics.

### Table 2: Publications Related to Public Policy (PP) Processes in Psychology Journals in Puerto Rico

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Total # of articles/# of PP articles</th>
<th>PP Articles per decades</th>
<th>Steps in policy process</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science and Behavior</td>
<td>119/19 =16%</td>
<td>1980s = 7</td>
<td>Problem definition</td>
<td>Elder’s institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1990s = 8</td>
<td>Problem and ideological analysis</td>
<td>Educational reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000s = 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Drug use and addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Health reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation/ Pilot program</td>
<td>Participation in PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican Journal of Psychology</td>
<td>251/17 = 7%</td>
<td>1980s = 1</td>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>Crime/violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-2014</td>
<td></td>
<td>1990s = 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000s = 14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Licensing of psychologists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drug use and addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3: Policy Studies in MA Theses and PhD Dissertations of the University of Puerto Rico Social-Community Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Steps in Policy Process</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980’s</td>
<td>Problem analysis</td>
<td>Civil rights; <strong>Community development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990’s</td>
<td>Problem/Policy analysis</td>
<td><strong>Community mental health</strong>; Homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formulation</td>
<td>Community development; <strong>HIV/AIDS prevention</strong>; Women’s jails; Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>mediation centers; Health and sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2014</td>
<td>Problem analysis</td>
<td>Prevention of juvenile delinquency; **HIV/AIDS prevention, Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy analysis</td>
<td>development**; Schools and diversity training,** Mental health/Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formulation</td>
<td>mental health; Policy evaluation as process; Drug use and drug addiction;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>Policy effort in NGOs; Patients’ rights; Homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental issues- water; Participation in PP; Participatory democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, policy research by psychologists is not frequent on the Island but has been increasing steadily. Most of it is unpublished or published in academic journals which are not usually a source used by legislators for their work. Studies in Puerto Rico demonstrate that legislators rely on other sources – not professional journals - for their projects (El Nuevo Día, 2013). Topics that were most frequently studied are strongly related to social/psychological issues of relevance on the Island including violence and crime, HIV/AIDS, mental health, and homelessness. More recent topics include psychologists’ participation in PP, environmental issues, and the participation of non-governmental organizations in public policy. Research leads naturally to describing some policy work that has been implemented on the Island. Specifically detailed are two PRPA projects, and other efforts by organizations and individuals.

The first examples presented are two efforts spearheaded by the PRPA: Proposals without Colors and a Clean Electoral Campaign. Proposals without Colors was the first initiative of the CPPP. It was a coordinated effort to provide public policy proposals from psychologists and psychology students to gubernatorial candidates of the 2008 electoral campaign. The initiative was announced in a press conference. Public hearings to receive policy proposals were carried out in two regions of the Island. These proposals were analyzed and streamlined by a group of experts from various disciplines in each content area: mental health, education, and violence. The resulting document was given to the four gubernatorial candidates (CPPP, 2008). Meetings with some of the candidates or with their staff were conducted and the document was presented to the country in another press conference. Finally, the CPPP evaluated how many of their proposals were incorporated into each...
party’s platform. The inclusion of proposals varied across parties. As a result of this effort, the PRPA received many communications from its members and individuals from other disciplines supporting the effort and lending legitimacy to the participation of the organization in PP processes.

During the 2012 electoral process, the PRPA implemented “Campaña Electoral de Altura” (Clean or Respectful Electoral Campaign) to promote ethical standards for the political debate during the electoral process (Pérez, Rodríguez, & Serrano-García, 2014). The campaign included a) a video spot published in social media and other outlets (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ji7XF Dvsg), b) distribution of 5,000 flyers in all major cities with the expected ethical standards, c) meetings with gubernatorial candidates and/or their staffers, d) meetings with other professional organizations to gain their support, e) evaluations of gubernatorial TV debates, and f) newspaper columns. Two editorials in the Island’s most important newspaper supported the campaign. Hence, for the past two elections the PRPA has remained an important voice in public debate.

Efforts from Non-Governmental Organizations

Community psychologists have also directed other major efforts on the Island focused on fostering models of participatory democracy. One is led by Cumbre Social (http://cumbresocialpr.org), which facilitates people’s involvement in social problem identification, policy formulation, and implementation. The organization is currently heading participatory budgeting processes in two of Puerto Rico’s major cities. Presently, there is another national initiative called Agenda Ciudadana or Citizen’s Agenda (http://agendaciudadanaaprpr.com). This organization facilitates citizen’s participation in developing policies in education, health, environment, safety and security, and economic development. During the two past electoral periods they held popular assemblies around the Island, which led to proposals for gubernatorial candidates. During the years between elections, they devoted much effort and resources to accountability of the entities that committed to furthering their proposals.

Efforts through Private Practice

Other community psychologists engage in problem definition, policy analysis, strategic planning, and program evaluation within their private consulting firms. One such firm is Énfasis. Community and social psychologists, as well as economists and planners, carry out research, organizational, and program evaluations; provide information to policy makers; perform economic analysis; develop strategic planning; and provide training (http://www.enfasispr.com). On the other hand COATTI, Inc. – which includes community, clinical and organizational psychologists in its staff – provides technical support, performs research, facilitates program development and strategic planning, provides training, and engages in program evaluation (http://coattipr.com).

Governmental Programs

Community psychologists have also been active in creating and running governmental programs. The Conflict Mediation Centers of the Judicial Branch are one example (http://www.ramajudicial.pr/negmed/Centros_Mediacion/index.htm). These were created in 1983 and started with just one Center in San Juan. Since then, they have flourished as a non-judicial alternative to solving civil disputes in 14 centers across the Island. A similar effort was initiated in 1976 to create the Centers for Prevention of Domestic Violence, providing services to women and their children who are victims of domestic violence as well as to offer preventive services related to the issue (http://www.salud.gov.pr/Dept-de-Salud/Pages/Unidades-Operacionales/Secretaria-Auxiliar-de-Salud-Familiar-y-Servicios-Integrados/Centro-de-Ayuda-a-Victimas-de-Violacion.aspx). These
also began with one center and now have five around the Island, where various community psychologists work.

Over all, many psychologists are now active in PP processes. Community psychologists have played a leading role and many gain their livelihood in these endeavors. Most efforts are spearheaded from within non-governmental organizations, fostering bottom-up public policies. As with research, the PRPA has had a vital role in promoting and legitimizing these efforts among all specialties.

Training

If community psychologists want to increase the participation of psychologists in public policy, it is essential that students receive training related to these processes. Serrano-García and colleagues (2005) carried out a research project in 2004 to find out what, if any, preparation graduate students in psychology were receiving related to PP. This study had a qualitative component where psychology program curriculums were analyzed to identify public policy related courses and program directors were interviewed to gather their impressions about the importance of this content area. The authors identified only one graduate elective course offered at the Social-Community Psychology Program at the University of Puerto Rico. When program directors were interviewed they stated that public policy should be taught in undergraduate and graduate programs but that it would be hard to integrate them in their curriculums as it is not a priority for accreditation (Serrano-García, et al, 2005).

A follow-up of this study was carried out in 2014 (Serrano-García, 2014). Only five of 20 graduate programs currently offer courses related to PP. Some of the topics include labor relations, administration of mental health programs, and expert testimony in the courts. The UPR program still offers an elective course in which few students enroll. Program directors noted that students take courses outside of psychology, but hardly ever related to PP. Although the program directors stated in 2004 that there should be more training in PP, there has been no increase in course offerings or other experiences in the ten years between these studies.

Efforts by PRPA

As with previous areas, the PRPA has also contributed to training. Once the CPPP was created it set out to develop a model syllabus for a Psychology and Public Policy course. This syllabus could be used by undergraduate and graduate programs to develop their own or to include the course in their offerings. The syllabus was presented to program directors and has been made available through the PRPA. Recently, the syllabus was first used to teach an undergraduate level course at University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus. Twenty-four students were enrolled in the course and gave excellent end-of-semester evaluations. They also presented about their experiences in a Political Science conference. A modified version of the syllabus will also be used to teach a course at the graduate level for clinical psychology students at the Ponce School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

The CPPP also offered various continuing education courses to develop specific skills psychologists need to engage in public policy. These included Media Relations and Effective Communication, How to influence Public Policy, and Stages of the Public Policy Process. Two members of the CPPP also wrote a column for the PRPA bulletin including a step-by-step guide about how to organize a press conference (Figueroa & Lugo, 2008).

Another strategy established by the CPPP was developing a practicum site for Social Community Psychology students who wanted to acquire experience in public policy. This hands-on experience allowed students to engage in various tasks including a) the development of a resource directory of psychologists who wished to contribute to PRPA’s policy initiatives, b) aiding in
organizing press conferences, c) assisting in the preparation of press releases, d) creating fact sheets on various topics and e) identifying psychologists for the analysis of key legislation.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Public policy participation, research, interventions, and training are all necessary if psychologists want to contribute to the goals of community psychology and to improve the world in which we live. These interventions should be guided by psychological expertise and values and should be supported by research from all specialties. They should not be seen as the exclusive purview of community psychologists.

In Puerto Rico, psychologists have been increasingly augmenting their participation at this level of intervention. Main forces leading to this increase have been a) the social-community graduate program and its graduates, b) contributions from Puerto Rican Clinical Community Psychologists trained in the United States who now work in Puerto Rico, c) research and its dissemination about psychologists’ participation in public policy, and d) the active role of the PRPA, in particular its CPPP. Unfortunately, despite these advances, training programs still lag behind in providing the education necessary for engagement in public policy processes, although a few have initiated internships and created courses. There have been, however, some developments in continuing education sponsored by the PRPA. The contributions of the CPPP have varied depending on its leadership’s time, expertise and other resources. In order for psychology PP contributions to continue its growth, these challenges need to be addressed by the PRPA.

A first recommendation is related to training. Strengthening training for work in public policy is essential. Programs should start by creating awareness at the undergraduate level of the possibilities psychologist have to influence policy making while providing examples of success stories in the area. This can be done through specific courses like the one previously mentioned, workshops and symposiums where psychologists can share with students their experiences in public policy, and recommendations. Graduate programs should include courses about policy issues and work but should also incorporate discussions of the implications of psychological research – of all specialties - for analyzing social problems and developing, implementing and evaluating policy solutions. Training programs should also identify practicum and internship sites related to public policy for their students. Finally, it would be beneficial to research attitudes and skills necessary for policy work among students and psychologists. This would facilitate creating interest in working at this level as well as developing expertise in the field.

Another recommendation focuses on the importance of disseminating the work of successful role models and programs. There is a lot of concern and fear that devoting time, or one’s career, to policy is a lost cause due to the political culture and environment (Díaz Meléndez & Serrano-García, 2012). If colleagues can see that there are many who have succeeded, and a sizeable number who make their living at this level of intervention, this could promote further engagement. This could be accomplished by conducting qualitative research to document the experiences of such individuals and organizing presentations at local conferences and university forums to dialogue with professionals and students about the experiences of psychologists in public policy. The PRPA could also include brief biographies or interviews of successful individuals or descriptions of programs in the permanent column the CPPP has in every issue of their newsletter.

Finally, the authors have demonstrated that the PRPA has had a major role in promoting involvement in public policy by psychologist. However, the voluntary nature of the Association challenges its leadership to think
creatively about sustaining its CPPP. Some possible strategies may be to 1) identify funds to provide a small financial incentive for possible coordinators, 2) create alliances with other professional organizations such that their policy work can be consolidated and not fragmented, 3) make policy a priority for all Association committees, 4) reduce the workload for the CPPP and make policy an institutional priority, and 5) limit the scope of their policy interventions. The latter would narrow the Association’s interventions, but would enhance their effectiveness.

This summary should provide evidence of the impact that professional organizations can have when they include policy work and training in their agendas. If these efforts are done in conjunction with other psychological, community and government organizations, chances for success increase exponentially and thus, should be promoted.

Community psychologists are particularly prepared to spearhead efforts in public policy (SCRA, 2012). As such they should continue leading the psychological discipline in these efforts, and gain support from other specialties and disciplines. Lessons learned in Puerto Rico can serve as examples for other countries. If community psychologists are committed to social justice and change, they should continue to pave the road that has been initiated by many hard working, committed and successful colleagues.

References


NOTES

1 From this point on the article will refer to social and clinical-community psychologists as community psychologists.
2 This refers to the articles summarized in the previous section.
3 Text in bold refers to subjects that repeat themselves in both journals.
4 Text in bold refer to topics that appear in more than one decade.
5 This video received an award in the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) Video Competition at the 2013 SCRA Biennial. It was edited by Soélix Rodríguez and Irma Serrano-García.