

## **Editor's Introduction: Making the Public Sector Work Better**

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In this new issue of *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*, we offer a collection of *Research Articles* focused on important ways by which government agencies and nonprofit organizations can work to improve their operational capacity, service delivery, and financial sustainability. Our *Social Equity* article offers insight and practical advice for increasing access to electronic research participation among individuals with disabilities. We offer two *Book Reviews* of important recent work focusing on political power and municipal takeovers and engaging citizens in contract governance. Finally, we introduce the *New Voices* section with a research article on the disruptive effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on nonprofit operations and volunteer loss resulting from the shift to online service delivery.

Focusing on improving government operations, Jang et al. (2021) use discrete event history analysis to examine state adoption of performance-based budgeting and the factors that help to explain some states' resistance in doing so. Using four different potential explanations of budgetary rule choice, the authors analyze legislative adoption decisions from 1993 to 2008 and find that earlier adopters of performance-based budgeting primarily do so for financial management reasons, as well as from path dependence and mimicking behaviors. Surprisingly, the authors find that political preferences are not influential in such adoption decisions. Certainly, meeting financial challenges through innovative budgetary practices and financial management systems is crucial as states continue to face financial hardships, particularly as they emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a similar vein, Yaskewich (2021) analyzes the gambling expansion bill passed in Pennsylvania in 2017 to determine the underlying factors influencing local jurisdictions' decisions about whether to allow casino gambling or ban new casinos from opening within their borders. Using multilevel linear probability models, the author finds that household income, tax competition, consumer preferences for gambling, and racial composition of residents are influential in municipalities' decisions to opt out of the state-granted opportunity to expand gambling as a means for diversifying local tax structures. The insight from this study has important implications for other states considering allowing local autonomy in gambling expansion decisions.

Using regression analysis of strategic initiatives from a variety of U.S. municipalities, Mitchell et al. (2021) offer a contingent micro-organizational process implementation model to assess the extent to which strategic activities help to improve implementation outcomes. By giving consideration to all five implementation phases and three-way interactions to capture contextually appropriate practices, the authors provide evidence to support a multi-level and interdependent conception of strategy that warrants a broadening of public strategy implementation models. Based upon their findings, they offer specific implementation

practices that are most impactful for a particular type of strategic initiative in a particular implementation phase.

Lee (2021) uses the framework of New Public Management, which suggests market-based reforms might generate indirect costs resulting in negative employee behavior in public sector organizations, to examine the relationship between contracting out and voluntary employee turnover in U.S. federal agencies from 2010 to 2017. The findings reveal that growth in contracting activity does increase indirect costs of federal agencies as reflected by higher turnover rates, but such effects are reduced when employees are more satisfied with their jobs. As such, this study provides important insight into how federal agencies might create a more desirable experience for their employees in the face of increasing contracting activity in order to reduce any potential destabilizing consequences resulting from employee turnover.

Turning to the nonprofit sector, Walters and Wallis (2021) examine the organizational capacity of nonprofit organizations located in rural and persistently poor counties in the Southern region of the U.S., which is an understudied geographical area encompassing much of the nation's rural poverty. Through the use of IRS Form 990 data and survey results, the authors are able to measure and assess organizational capacity in a variety of areas, including the strong areas of financial management, strategic planning, collaboration, and program planning, as well as the more challenging areas of evaluation, succession planning, fundraising, human resources, and volunteer management. Ultimately, the findings from this study help to provide important guidance for rural nonprofits to enhance their capacity and improve service delivery in areas where needs are greatest.

Kuenzi and Stewart (2021) analyze the career backgrounds of nonprofit executives to assess the extent to which their credentials and experience helps to accelerate their pathway up to the top position. As expected, their findings reveal that nonprofit sector experience is integral to the upward mobility of nonprofit executives; however, other factors like education, credentials, and other previous experience unsurprisingly do not reduce their time to the top position. This study offers important implications for nonprofit leadership development and professionalization of the sector, suggesting complexities that have previously been undiscovered.

In this issue's *Social Equity* section, Allgood (2021) highlights the unique and important issue of increasing access to public administration research for individuals with disabilities. The author provides an informative discussion of the various types of categorical disabilities, their manifestations, and prevalence of them among individuals in the U.S. She then provides a series of examples of electronic research designs and data collection methods and how individuals with disabilities might be limited or prevented from participation, thereby leaving research samples less representative of the broader population studied. The author then offers a helpful account of how electronic research might be developed in a more equitable manner to remove barriers for individuals with disabilities to ensure greater participation and more profound adherence to social equity as a core principle of public administration research.

In her review of Nickels' (2019) book entitled, "Power, Participation, and Protest in Flint, Michigan: Unpacking the Policy Paradox of Municipal Takeovers," Eikenberry (2021) highlights the important but often neglected topic in public administration of municipal takeovers and the related division of powers between state and local governments. By highlighting the historical and contemporary perspective of the book, Eikenberry (2021) is able to contextualize the set of financial challenges faced by Flint, Michigan within the broader consideration of local democracy and, in particular, the institutional role of philanthropic foundations and other elites in shaping local powers. In doing so, Eikenberry (2021) highlights the effective approach of Nickels (2019) in presenting a case of municipal takeover that moves beyond technical explanations to shed an important light on the underlying political context

and issues of structural racism as paramount to perpetuating the city's problematic fiscal condition.

Also, Gabrini (2021) offers an account of the book entitled, "Citizen Participation in the Age of Contracting: When Service Delivery Trumps Democracy," by Amirkhanyan and Lambright (2018). As explained by Gabrini (2021), the book utilizes interviews of contract managers from the private, nonprofit, and government sectors to examine the nexus of citizen engagement in contracting for human and social services. Gabrini (2021) highlights the useful literature review provided in the first two chapters of the book as comprehensive and well-rooted in the historical development of citizen participation in democratic processes broadly and the progression of public administration and its focus on professionalization. Ultimately, however, Gabrini (2021) notes that a major finding of this work is that contract managers have often not been overly successful in effectively engaging citizens in contract governance.

Finally, this issue of JPNA introduces a new section of the journal entitled, "New Voices," which is led by Section Associate Editor and incoming co-Editor of *Nonprofit Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Jaclyn Schede Piatak. The *New Voices* section provides an outlet for early career scholars to refine their work for publication through a developmental peer-review process. With a goal of assisting pre-tenured faculty and doctoral students better navigate the review-and-publication process, authors receive detailed reviews, editorial guidance, and enhanced opportunity to revise work with potential to make an important contribution to the field. In the inaugural *New Voices* section, Newby and Branyon (2021) offer a timely and in-depth study of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to have widespread consequences for essential service delivery. Through qualitative analysis of interviews of nonprofit managers in the Southeastern region of the United States, Newby and Branyon (2021) are able to shed new light on the disruptive effects of the pandemic on nonprofit operations and volunteer loss, which they examine through the lens of the resilience framework. In doing so, the authors discover that adapting to an online environment and the consequent loss of face-to-face service delivery for their clients has had as much, and perhaps even greater, an impact than the financial strain felt across the nonprofit sector.

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