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JOURNAL OF PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT AFFAIRS

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Book Review

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Using Self-Assessments to Improve Board Performance and Build Nonprofit Capacity

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Judith L. Millesen

This paper presents the nonprofit board self-assessment tool as a valuable, formative addition to the toolkit of nonprofit stakeholders, including evaluators, who are focused on improving both board and organizational performance. Using self-assessment data from a study of 156 nonprofits, the study tested five hypotheses about the effectiveness of five nonprofit governance best practices: strategic planning, reducing ambiguity on the board, board giving, strong internal controls, and evaluating the chief executive officer. The study finds that some nonprofit management best practices are more effective than others when it comes to assessing board performance. Moreover, consistent with previous research, board members and CEOs occasionally view performance differently. The paper concludes with a discussion about how nonprofit organizations, evaluators, and others can use these findings, as well as self-assessment tools, to improve nonprofit board governance and strengthen organizational capacity.

Keywords: Governance, Self-Assessment, Nonprofit Capacity

Many evaluations focus on helping nonprofit organizations to achieve better outcomes (Benjamin, 2012), through the evaluation program processes (Wiecha & Muth, 2021), as well as their management and governance practices (Lee & Nowell, 2015; Owen & Lambert, 1998). Moreover, the sponsors of nonprofit evaluation—often government and philanthropic foundations—are also interested in building the capacity of nonprofit organizations, by funding evaluation work that also addresses these important issues (Kinarsky, 2018; Lemire et al., 2018; Newcomer & Brass, 2016). One commonly used approach to assessing nonprofit performance and building capacity is the board self-assessment tool. Typically, these are questionnaires or checklists completed by board members, and sometimes staff, to identify and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the governing board and its management practices (Harrison & Murray, 2015).

The purpose of this research is two-fold. First, the development and proliferation of nonprofit board self-assessment tools is described, showing how they can be a valuable, formative tool for evaluators and others trying to improve the management and governance of nonprofit organizations. Second, the research reports on the findings from a study of 156 nonprofit organizations that have used a board self-assessment tool. The study tested five hypotheses about the effectiveness of five nonprofit governance best practices: 1) strategic planning; 2) board ambiguity; 3) board giving; 4) internal controls; and 5) chief executive evaluation. The findings show that when it comes to board performance, some nonprofit management best practices were judged to be more effective than others. The paper concludes with a discussion

about how nonprofit organizations, evaluators, and others can use these findings together with self-assessment tools together to improve nonprofit board governance.

Literature Review

During the last thirty years, nonprofit organizations have begun to recognize the value and importance of using different evaluation tools to improve their effectiveness and measure their performance, including: conducting needs assessments (Sankofa, 2021), using theories of change and logic models (DuBow & Litzler, 2019; Yampolskaya et al., 2004), tracking inputs, outputs, and outcomes, and other performance measures (Bagnoli & Megali, 2011; Lee & Clerkin, 2017; Lee & Nowell, 2015); and adopting managerial standards of practice or seeking accreditation (Eckerd & Moulton, 2011; Hao & Neely, 2019). Some nonprofit organizations have also begun to recognize the value and importance of using evidence-based practices, statistical modeling, and more rigorous evaluation designs to assess and measure their impact (Gordon & Heinrich, 2004; Schweigert, 2006; Weitzman et al., 2009; Zandniapour & Deterding, 2018).

While many would agree that using these evaluation tools and strategies have served nonprofit organizations well by helping them to respond to external pressures for more accountability; document outcomes; secure funding from government, foundations, and donors; and meet community needs (Bryan et al., 2021; Greenwald, 2013; Mitchell, 2013; Sloan, 2009), others would argue that internal accountability and measuring performance for internal use is equally, if not more so, important (Alaimo, 2008; Ebrahim, 2016; Torres & Preskill, 2001). This is especially true at the board level, given the board's fiduciary and governance responsibilities, as well as their legal mandate to oversee the organization's pursuit of its charitable mission (Renz, 2016).

Board Self-Assessment Tools

Nonprofit board self-assessment tools have been gaining in popularity and prevalence to help board members evaluate and assess board effectiveness (Gill et al., 2005; Harrison & Murray, 2015; Holland, 1991; Paton et al., 2000). While nonprofit boards vary considerably in terms of size and composition, there is a great deal of consensus about the functional roles they should play. The board of directors, at a minimum, should promote the organization's mission and vision, engage in planning, oversee the organization's finances and resources, assess the chief executive's performance, and conduct productive meetings (BoardSource, 2017; Brown & Guo, 2010; Green & Griesinger, 1996; Renz, 2016).

To that end, a variety of questionnaires and checklists have been created to help evaluate nonprofit board effectiveness. Some of these are available online for free, while others are proprietary and available for purchase. They are typically quantitative in nature, relying on a series of questions that are combined into scales to capture perceptions of performance across different dimensions (BoardSource, 2017; Gill et al., 2005; Harrison & Murray, 2015; Jackson & Holland, 1998). Not only can internal stakeholders such as boards and CEOs use these tools, but they can also be used by external evaluators and consultants working to improve the overall management and governance of the organization (BoardSource, 2021; Gazley & Kissman, 2015; Millesen & Carman, 2019). In reflecting on the state of nonprofit boards and describing "healthy boards of directors" as "more of an exception than the norm," Counts (2020) concludes: "It's more important than ever that every governing body regularly assesses its performance" (p. 6).

Nonprofit Board Best Practices

The nonprofit sector employs more than 10% of the U.S. private workforce at more than 1.7 million nonprofit organizations (Candid, 2021; Salamon & Newhouse, 2019). This means with

an average board size of 15 people (BoardSource, 2017) there are upwards of 25 million people serving on boards across the United States. As a result, there is a healthy industry of educational offerings, management support organizations, and consultants focused on helping these organizations and their volunteer boards to implement both sound management and strong governance practices. For example, nonprofit management as an educational degree or concentration is fairly common (Mitchell & Schmitz, 2019), as evidenced by the growing numbers of undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs at colleges and universities in the U.S., as well as internationally (Mirabella et al., 2007; Mirabella & Wish, 2000; Weber & Brunt, 2020). Other degree programs, such as social work, business, leadership, and community studies, also offer specialized content relating to nonprofit management and governance (Mirabella et al., 2022).

As nonprofit education has developed, so too have professional organizations that provide support for nonprofit organizations and the field (Abramson & McCarthy, 2012; Weber & Long, 2021). Academic membership organizations were created to support research about nonprofit organizations (e.g., Association for Research on Nonprofit and Voluntary Action, International Society for Third-Sector Research); journals and magazines and other practitioner-focused publications were created to disseminate knowledge and information; infrastructure organizations were founded to provide institutional capacity building and support (Abramson & McCarthy, 2012; Gazley & Kissman, 2015; International Society for Third-Sector Research, n.d.; Walden et al., 2015; Weber & Brunt, 2020). Watchdog organizations, such as Charity Navigator and others, emerged to provide information, oversight, and accountability to the public (Cnaan et al., 2011). Finally, consulting firms have proliferated to provide evaluation and capacity building assistance to improve the operations and governance of these organizations (Cagney, 2010).

Taken together, these entities have worked in concert to make sure nonprofit organizations implement a variety of management practices with the intent to improve performance. While the literature is flush with advice and best practices (Åberg, 2013; Jaskyte & Holland, 2015; Zimmermann & Stevens, 2008), there are five that are quite ubiquitous across both the practitioner and academic press: 1) the necessity to engage in strategic planning; 2) the need to reduce ambiguity on the board; 3) the importance of board giving; 4) the significance of having strong internal controls; and 5) the responsibility to evaluate the chief executive officer. What follows is a description of how each are expected to improve performance, along with the hypotheses tested in this study.

Strategic Planning. When nonprofit organizations apply to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to be recognized as tax exempt, the IRS requires a narrative description of past, present, and planned activities (Internal Revenue Service, 2017, p. 2). The narrative is expected to describe who conducts each activity, where these activities are conducted, how much time is spent on the activities, how they are funded, along with other pertinent details (Internal Revenue Service, 2020, p. 8). As new nonprofit organizations develop and grow, they typically seek to continue these activities and increase their capacity. One of the most common tools that nonprofits use is the strategic plan, which is intended to help provide detailed directions and guidance to help them achieve short and long-term goals (Allison & Kay, 2015; Bryson, 2016; Herman & Renz, 1998; Liket & Maas, 2015; Marx & Davis, 2012; Sowa et al., 2004). Therefore, the first hypothesis for this study is:

H₁: Nonprofits that have a strategic plan will have better performance ratings.

Reducing Ambiguity. Board members of nonprofits often report that they are unsure of their duties and responsibilities (Coulson-Thomas, 1994; Mason & Kim, 2020; Mathews, 2020). To clear up this uncertainty and ambiguity, nonprofit organizations are advised to adopt certain processes and procedures for their boards to follow, thereby improving the collective performance of the board. These practices typically include efforts to clarify the board's roles

and responsibilities, having an orientation for new board members, having retreats for planning and reflection, and being clear about use and the purposes of different board committees (Brown, 2005; Davis & Herrell, 2012; Marx & Davis, 2012; Northrup, 2018; Reid et al., 2014; Van Bussel & Doherty, 2015). These practices are designed to build board capacity, shorten the learning curve for new board members, reduce uncertainty and ambiguity, and ensure that the board functions in ways that advance mission-related goals and objectives (Brown, 2007; Gazley & Kissman, 2015; Piscitelli et al., 2020; Wathen, 2014). To that end, the second hypothesis for this study is:

H₂: Nonprofits with practices designed to reduce ambiguity will have better performance ratings.

Board Giving. In addition to leading and guiding the nonprofit organization, the board members are responsible for ensuring that the nonprofit organization has adequate financial resources to achieve their goals and mission (Renz, 2016). While staff can be instrumental in fundraising (e.g., writing grant proposals and organizing fund-raising events), board giving is also important. Many consultants and board developers advocate for 100% giving among board members, suggesting that this metric sends a clear message to potential funders and donors about their commitment, as well as the validity, legitimacy, and trustworthiness of the organization (Davis, 2017; Davis & Herrell, 2012; Renz, 2016). Even if this standard or expectation is not explicit or required, researchers have observed that there is often social pressure or an implied expectation that board members will make annual financial gifts to the organization (DellaVigna et al., 2012; Proper, 2019). To that end, the third hypothesis for this study is:

H₃: Nonprofits with more board members who give will have better performance ratings.

Internal Controls. Nonprofit boards are also entrusted with ensuring that resources are used effectively, overseeing the finances, and making sure that various internal managerial controls are in place (Ebrahim, 2016; Hodge et al., 2011; Renz, 2016). These efforts typically entail having a written code of ethics (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012), policies for disclosing conflict of interests (Lister, 2013), whistleblower policies and protections (Fogal, 2013), document retention and destruction policies (Saxton & Neely, 2019), and financial audits (Cordery et al., 2019). In addition, boards of directors are advised to make sure they receive regular financial reports (Bell & Ellis, 2016), formally approve the organization's annual budget (Blazek, 1996), review the IRS Form 990 annually (Saxton & Neely, 2019), and carry directors' and officers' liability insurance (Herman, 2010). The reasoning here is that these types of managerial controls help the boards uphold their fiduciary responsibility and ensure that resources are being used prudently. To that end, the fourth hypothesis for this study is:

H₄: Nonprofits with more internal, managerial controls will have better performance ratings.

Evaluating the CEO. In addition to overseeing the programs and finances of the organization, boards are responsible for overseeing and evaluating the chief executive. This involves providing "strategic direction, support, advice, and performance feedback to the organization's chief executive" (Renz, 2016, p. 136). While the primacy or centrality of this relationship has long been recognized as being integral to the success of nonprofit organizations (Carver, 1997; Drucker, 1990; Heimovics, et al., 1993; Jäger & Rehli, 2012), developing and nurturing this relationship can be challenging. Many chief executives do not feel supported by their boards (Cornelius et al., 2011). Others have noted that it can be hard for boards to strike the right balance between being engaged and attentive while avoiding being micromanagers (LeRoux & Langer, 2016; Mason & Kim, 2020; Stewart, 2016). While formal annual performance appraisals and clear salary structures are not the norm in many

nonprofit organizations (Cornelius et al., 2011; Stewart, 2016), these can be effective tools for improving organizational performance when linked to organizational strategy and performance goals (Day, 2016; Herman & Renz, 1998). To that end, the fifth hypothesis for this study is:

H₅: Nonprofits with boards that evaluate the CEO and pay attention to their salary structures will have better performance ratings.

Data and Methods

This study relied primarily on BoardSource self-assessment survey data. BoardSource is a U.S.-based organization that “supports, trains, and educates more than 60,000 nonprofit board leaders from across the country each year” (BoardSource, n.d.-a, n.p.). Although the BoardSource Self-Assessment (BSA) tool has evolved over time, it has been used for more than 30 years to provide feedback to thousands of boards on their performance. Over the years, the BSA for nonprofit boards has also been customized for associations, community foundations, private foundations, credit unions, independent schools, and a variety of other sub-sectors within the nonprofit sector (BoardSource, n.d.-b).

The BSA is distributed to participating board members via email containing a link to the online survey. The BSA asks board members to evaluate their individual performance as well as the board’s collective performance using a series of questions based on recognized roles and responsibilities of nonprofit boards. The questions focused on nine different dimensions of performance: mission; strategy; funding and public image; board composition; program oversight; financial oversight; CEO oversight; board structure; and meetings.

The data for this study come from 156 nonprofit organizations who completed the BSA during a two-year period (May 2013–June 2015). These are nonprofit organizations who voluntarily chose to participate in the self-assessment process. In total, survey responses were collected from 2,668 individuals, with 156 surveys being completed by the CEO of each organization and 2,512 surveys being completed by board members of these organizations’ members.

For each participating organization, we gathered additional descriptive information from the IRS Form 990 (corresponding to the year the organization completed the BSA). The organizations in this study ranged in age, from 2 to 132 years old. The number of board members varied by organization, ranging from 3 to 48. Annual operating budgets of these organizations ranged from \$5,000 to almost \$70 million. The sample included nonprofits with mission areas in Arts & Culture (n=32, 20.5%); Health/Human Services (n=34, 21.8%); Housing & Community Development (n=30, 19.2%); Education & Youth (n=26, 16.7%); and Other (n=34, 21.8%).

The BSA data were used to discover the extent to which implementing five best practices influenced the way board members and CEOs perceive organizational performance. The self-assessment asked board members to evaluate their performance using a series of questions based on the recognized roles and responsibilities of nonprofit boards. The CEOs also completed a version of the self-assessment, providing additional information about the organization’s management practices (BoardSource, 2021).

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables for the study were created from 66 self-assessment questions that corresponded to the board’s different roles and responsibilities. These questions asked the board members and CEOs to use a six-point rating scale (poor=1, fair=2, don’t know/NA=3, OK=4, good=4, excellent=6) to rate the current performance of the board with respect to how

well it: 1) Sets direction for the organization; 2) Ensures effective planning; 3) Enhances the organization's public standing and ensuring adequate financial resources; 4) Builds a competent board; 5) Monitors and strengthens program services; 6) Protects assets and provides financial oversight; 7) Supervises and evaluates the CEO; 8) Maintains sound board policies and structures; and 9) Conducts productive board meetings. Summative scales were created for each of these nine role and responsibilities, capturing the assessment of the board members (nine dependent variables) and the assessment of the CEO (nine dependent variables).

For example, in order to assess the role and responsibility of the first dependent variable, 'setting the direction' for the organization, the respondents were asked to rate how well the organization was doing this according to five criteria: supporting the organization's mission; agreeing on how the organization should fulfill its mission; periodically reviewing the mission to ensure it is appropriate; articulating a vision that is distinct from the mission; and using the organization's mission and values to drive decisions. The responses to each question were added together to create a summative scale (to capture 'sets direction for the organization'). The lowest possible value for this scale was 5, which would mean the respondent rated the board as 'poor' for all five criteria and the highest possible value for this scale would be 30, indicating that the respondent rated the organization as 'excellent' for all five criteria.

To illustrate this further, we offer the following example: One of the organizations in the data set has responses from three board members and the CEO. In this case, the values for the summative scale for 'sets the direction of the organization' for the three board members were 14, 18, and 23, respectively, which were calculated by summing their ratings for the five questions that make up the scale: 14 ($4+2+1+2+5=14$), 18 ($5+5+2+2+4=18$), and 23 ($5+5+4+4+5=23$). The average of these three values (18.33) was used to capture the overall rating from the board members ($14+18+23=55$; $55/3=18.33$). The value of the summative responses from the CEO was used for the CEO rating (in this case, the value equaled 13; $2+4+1+4+1=13$) (See Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variables).

Tests for the reliability of the scales were very good, with alpha coefficients (α) ranging from 0.828 for CEO supervision to 0.916 for funding and public image (BoardSource, n.d.; Hair et al., 2010; Mohsen & Dennick, 2011) (See Table 2: Board Roles and Responsibilities).

Independent Variables

Survey data from the CEOs included detailed information about organizational management and oversight practices. This information was used to create five independent variables that corresponded to the five core activities (i.e., strategic planning, reducing ambiguity, board giving, internal controls, CEO evaluation) believed to result in improved perceptions of board performance. The first independent variable indicated whether the organization had a written strategic plan (coded as 0 if no, 1 if yes).

The second independent variable was a summative scale comprised of six questions about activities designed to reduce ambiguity, including: 1) Is a structured, formal orientation held for new board members, 2) Is the length of board member terms defined?, 3) Is there a maximum number of consecutive years a board member can serve?, 4) Does the board have an annual retreat?, 5) Do board committees have written charters or job descriptions?, and 6) Is there a written policy specifying the executive committee's roles and powers? If a board did not engage in any of these practices, the value for this variable was 0. If the board engaged in all of these practices, the value for this variable was 6. The reliability for this scale, however, was somewhat low ($KR-20=0.489$) (Allen, 2017).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables (n=156)

	Average Rating from Board Members*						Rating from the CEOs					
	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Skew-ness	Kur-tosis	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Skew-ness	Kur-tosis
1) Setting the Direction	23.141	5.597	5.000	30.000	-1.033	0.681	24.406	2.824	14.500	29.170	-0.781	0.353
2) Strategic Actions/Activities	26.019	7.781	6.000	36.000	-0.883	-0.096	28.122	4.069	15.730	34.090	-0.983	0.674
3) Positive Image/Fundraising Prospects	42.442	12.539	12.000	66.000	-0.467	-0.581	49.469	6.148	32.000	60.000	-0.739	0.046
4) Collective Board Governance	33.641	9.057	9.000	48.000	-0.600	-0.289	36.387	4.883	20.390	45.910	-0.963	1.058
5) Program Oversight	25.955	6.279	8.000	36.000	-0.586	-0.238	27.845	3.248	16.620	34.580	-0.727	0.618
6) Financial Oversight	39.064	7.690	8.000	48.000	-1.244	1.750	38.531	4.227	23.110	46.130	-0.739	0.729
7) CEO Relationship	32.622	7.134	7.000	42.000	-0.804	0.341	33.333	3.930	20.890	39.780	-0.527	-0.273
8) Sound Board Policies/ Procedures	37.186	8.604	8.000	48.000	-1.039	0.983	38.382	4.727	22.330	45.050	-0.940	0.745
9) Productive Board Meetings	32.583	6.926	9.000	42.000	-0.969	0.865	34.622	3.843	17.780	40.400	-1.197	2.186

The third independent variable captured the percentage of board members making a financial contribution to the organization in the previous year (ranging from 0% to 100%). The fourth independent variable was an additive scale comprised of 11 questions about the internal controls that were in place. These included: 1) Does the organization have a written code of ethics?, 2) Does the organization have a whistleblower policy that provides protection for employees who report suspected illegal activities?, 3) Does the organization have a document retention and destruction policy?, 4) Does the organization carry directors' and officers' liability insurance?, 5) Does the organization have a written conflict-of-interest policy?, 6) Within the past year, has the organization obtained a formal independent audit?, 7) Have all current board members and senior staff signed a conflict-of-interest and annual disclosure statement?, 8) Did the board, or a committee of the board, meet with the auditors without staff present?, 9) Did all board members receive a copy of the organization's IRS Form 990?, 10) Did the full board formally approve the organization's annual budget?, and 11) Does the full board receive financial reports at least quarterly? If a board did not engage in any of these practices, the

Table 2. Nine Board Roles and Responsibilities (n=2,668^a)

Nine Board Roles and Responsibility	Dependent Variable Name	Number of Survey Questions for each Scale	Reliability (α)
1) Set direction for the organization	Setting the Direction	5	0.882
2) Ensure effective planning	Strategic Actions/Activities	6	0.908
3) Enhance the organization's public standing and ensuring adequate financial resources	Positive Image/Fundraising Prospects	11	0.916
4) Build a competent board	Collective Board Governance	8	0.898
5) Monitor and strengthen program services	Program Oversight	6	0.889
6) Protect assets and provide financial oversight	Financial Oversight	8	0.875
7) Supervise and evaluate the CEO	CEO Relationship	7	0.828
8) Maintain sound board policies and structures	Sound Board Policies/Procedures	8	0.901
9) Conduct productive board meetings	Productive Board Meetings	7	0.887

Source: BoardSource Self-Assessment (n.d.)

^a The reliability statistics were calculated from the individual survey responses of the 156 CEOs and 2,512 board members (156+2,512=2,668).

value for this variable was 0. If the board engaged in all of these practices, the value for this variable was 11. The reliability for this scale was acceptable (KR-20=0.751) (Allen, 2017).

The fifth independent variable was also a scale capturing the extent to which the board performed formal evaluations of the CEO. Three survey questions comprised this scale: 1) Is the chief executive evaluated annually by the board?, 2) Does the evaluation of the chief executive include a formal, written performance review?, and 3) Does the board periodically review executive compensation at comparable organizations? If a board did not engage in any of these practices, the value for this variable was 0. If the board engaged in each of these practices, the value for this variable was 3. The reliability for this scale was acceptable (KR-20=0.709) (Allen, 2017).

Control Variables

In keeping with previous research which suggests that the use of formal management practices and professionalism varies among nonprofit organizations, this study controlled for several important organizational characteristics, including total annual revenues, age, board size, and mission area (Hackler & Saxton, 2007; Hwang & Bromley, 2015; Hwang & Powell, 2009; McClusky, 2002).

As we noted above, total annual revenues (corresponding to the year of the self-assessment) were recorded from the nonprofit organization's IRS Form 990 (Candid, 2021). While the total annual revenues ranged from less than \$500,000 to more than \$69.5 million, these data were recoded as ratio data to minimize skewness (corresponding to \$500,000 increments, with 1

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Control and Independent Variables (n = 156)

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Control Variables						
Total Revenue	20.724	29.845	1.000	140.000	2.194	4.376
Age	41.506	27.620	2.000	132.000	1.035	0.588
Board Size	17.910	8.187	3.000	48.000	1.087	1.147
Arts & Culture	0.205	0.405	0.000	1.000	1.475	0.177
Health/Human Services	0.218	0.414	0.000	1.000	1.380	-0.098
Housing & CD	0.192	0.395	0.000	1.000	1.577	0.492
Education & Youth	0.167	0.374	0.000	1.000	1.806	1.279
Other Nonprofit	0.218	0.414	0.000	1.000	1.380	-0.098
Independent Variables						
Strategic Plan	0.808	0.395	0.000	1.000	-1.577	0.492
Board Mgmt. Practices	4.135	1.410	0.000	6.000	-0.620	-0.167
% Board Giving	82.180	29.424	0.000	100.000	-1.809	2.030
Internal Controls	8.750	2.213	0.000	11.000	-1.082	0.941
Evaluate CEO	2.051	1.094	0.000	3.000	-0.791	-0.759

representing less than \$499,999, 2 representing \$500,000 to \$999,999, on up to 140, representing more than \$69.5 million). Age was calculated from the year the organization was founded (listed on the IRS Form 990) (ranging from 2 to 132 years). Board size was captured by the number of voting members currently serving on the board (listed on the IRS Form 990) ranged from 3 to 48, and five dummy variables (coded as 0 or 1) were created to capture each organization's primary mission area: arts and culture; health and human services; housing and community development; education and youth; and other (e.g., funders, advocacy, sports) (See Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Control and Independent Variables).

Bivariate Correlations

Statistically significant bivariate correlations between the independent and control variables ranged from a low of 0.162 (between board giving and age) to a high of -0.504 (between arts and culture nonprofit organizations and management controls) (See Table 4: Bivariate Correlations among the Independent and Control Variables).

Regression Analysis

Linear regression was used to test each of the five hypotheses (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Eighteen models were run, with nine predicting the variation in the assessments made by the board members and nine predicting the variation in the assessments made by the CEO. Variance inflation factor tests revealed that multi-collinearity was not an issue in any of the models (all values were less than 2.18) and reference category for primary mission area was 'other' types of nonprofit organizations (Nishishiba, 2014).

Findings

A review of the findings from the regression models show that the models accounted for modest proportions of variance in perceptions of effectiveness across the nine dimensions of performance. The adjusted R^2 value among board members ranged from a low of 0.208 (conducting productive board meetings) to a high of 0.435 (maintaining sound board policies and procedures). The regression models also accounted for modest proportions of the variance in the CEO's perceived performance. The lowest adjusted R^2 value was for projecting a more positive image and improving fundraising prospects (adjusted $R^2=0.264$), while the highest value for adjusted R^2 was for having a good relationship with the CEO (adjusted $R^2=0.430$).

Table 4. Bivariate Correlations Among the Independent and Control Variables (n=156)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
Total Revenue	1												
Age	0.304**	1											
Board Size	0.139	0.410**	1										
Arts & Culture	-0.287**	0.088	0.317**	1									
Health/Human Services	0.238**	-0.014	-0.080	-0.268**	1								
Housing & CD	-0.088	-0.262**	-0.320**	-0.248**	-0.258**	1							
Education & Youth	0.240**	0.224**	0.123	-0.227**	-0.236**	-0.218**	1						
Other Nonprofit	-0.090	-0.025	-0.036	-0.268**	-0.279**	-0.258**	-0.236**	1					
Strategic Plan	0.069	-0.017	-0.117	-0.195*	0.139	0.156	-0.044	-0.058	1				
Board Mgmt. Practices	0.235**	0.294**	0.113	-0.071	-0.095	-0.070	0.177*	0.071	0.116	1			
% Board Giving	0.017	0.162*	0.249**	0.173*	-0.005	-0.228**	0.094	-0.032	-0.100	0.106	1		
Internal Controls	0.335**	0.181*	-0.000	-0.504**	0.158*	0.188*	0.113	0.053	0.254**	0.265**	0.012	1	
Evaluate CEO	0.309**	0.118	0.111	-0.228**	0.075	0.096	0.042	0.018	0.127	0.297**	0.112	0.464**	1

** p<0.01

* p<0.05

Performance Assessment Among Board Members

The findings provided support for four of five hypotheses. Specifically, having a written strategic plan (H_1) was a positive, significant predictor for four dependent variables: setting direction ($\beta = 0.204$); strategic actions/activities ($\beta = 0.237$); collective board governance ($\beta = 0.137$); and sound board policies/procedures ($\beta = 0.161$). Reducing ambiguity through the implementation of more structured board management practices (H_2) was a positive, significant predictor of building more effective collective board governance ($\beta = 0.167$) and maintaining sound board policies and procedures ($\beta = 0.139$). Implementing greater numbers of internal management controls (H_3) was a positive, significant predictor of having a more favorable rating for providing financial oversight ($\beta = 0.270$) and maintaining sound board policies and structures ($\beta = 0.178$).

Most notable among the independent variables was that implementing practices associated with evaluating the CEO (H_5) was a positive, significant predictor across all of the dependent variables: setting the direction ($\beta = 0.280$); strategic actions/activities ($\beta = 0.241$); positive image/fundraising prospects ($\beta = 0.269$); collective board governance ($\beta = 0.280$); program oversight ($\beta = 0.254$); financial oversight ($\beta = 0.198$); CEO relationship ($\beta = 0.327$); sound board policies/procedures ($\beta = 0.264$); and productive board meetings ($\beta = 0.233$). Interestingly, board giving (H_4) does not appear to be related to perceptions of effective performance.

Several control variables were also significant predictors of the average board self-assessment scores. Most notably, evaluating the CEO and the total annual revenue (measured in \$500,000 increments) were positive, significant predictors across all dimensions of board performance. Board members at less established organizations (as measured by age) were less likely, on average, to rate their organizations favorably with respect to

Table 5. Regression Findings for Average Assessment by the Board Members (n=156)

	Setting the Direction	Strategic Actions/ Activities	Positive Image/ Fundraising Prospects	Collective Board Governance	Program Oversight	Financial Oversight	CEO Relationship	Sound Board Policies/ Procedures	Productive Board Meetings
<i>Control Variables</i>									
Total Revenue	0.188*	0.212**	0.208*	0.175*	0.213*	0.235**	0.230**	0.187*	0.179*
Age	-0.118	-0.135	-0.161	-0.143	-0.193*	0.038	-0.160*	-0.077	-0.154
Board Size	0.050	0.114	0.286**	0.236**	0.163	0.060	0.073	0.106	0.042
Arts & Culture Health/Human Services	-0.081	-0.141	0.032	-0.099	-0.029	-0.092	-0.058	-0.039	0.013
Housing & CD Education & Youth	0.016	-0.005	-0.004	-0.051	0.047	-0.028	0.052	0.072	0.062
	0.043	0.107	-0.001	0.035	0.138	0.063	0.184*	0.124	0.145
	0.102	0.076	0.038	0.129	0.059	0.098	0.216**	0.192*	0.129
<i>Independent Variables</i>									
Strategic Plan Board Mgmt. Practices	0.204**	0.237**	0.140	0.137*	0.124	0.070	0.115	0.161*	0.082
% Board Giving Internal Controls	0.075	0.038	-0.047	0.167*	-0.051	-0.005	-0.037	0.139*	0.016
Evaluate CEO	0.028	0.016	0.090	-0.048	-0.052	0.053	-0.011	0.018	0.019
	0.097	0.062	0.090	0.090	0.146	0.270**	0.083	0.178*	0.163
	0.280**	0.241**	0.269**	0.280***	0.254**	0.198*	0.327***	0.264***	0.233**
R ²	0.358	0.367	0.300	0.411	0.315	0.424	0.410	0.479	0.269
Adj. R ²	0.304	0.313	0.241	0.362	0.258	0.376	0.361	0.435	0.208

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

program oversight ($\beta=-0.193$) and the CEO relationship ($\beta=-0.160$). In contrast, organizations with greater numbers of voting board members were more likely, on average, to rate themselves higher on projecting a more positive image and improve fundraising prospects ($\beta=0.286$) and collective board governance ($\beta=0.236$).

Table 6. Regression Findings for Assessments by the CEOs (n=156)

	Setting the Direction	Strategic Actions/ Activities	Positive Image/ Fundraising Prospects	Collective Board Governance	Program Oversight	Financial Oversight	CEO Relationship	Sound Board Policies/ Procedures	Productive Board Meetings
<i>Control Variables</i>									
Total Revenue	0.157	0.243**	0.300***	0.224**	0.237**	0.201**	0.242**	0.250**	0.297**
Age	-0.191*	-0.151*	-0.189*	-0.129	-0.166*	-0.072	-0.121	-0.124	-0.135
Board Size	-0.020	0.073	0.094	0.085	0.004	0.077	0.004	-0.115	-0.117
Arts & Culture	-0.066	-0.098	0.111	0.070	0.020	-0.071	-0.050	0.064	-0.073
Health/Human Services	-0.087	-0.088	0.049	0.001	-0.103	-0.084	-0.075	-0.058	-0.103
Housing & CD Education & Youth	-0.071	-0.003	-0.091	0.073	-0.104	-0.038	0.003	-0.028	-0.073
	0.091	0.035	0.033	0.163	0.089	0.005	-0.020	0.080	-0.042
<i>Independent Variables</i>									
Strategic Plan Board Mgmt. Practices	0.161*	0.329***	0.086	0.179*	0.143*	-0.004	0.008	0.036	0.007
% Board Giving	0.074	-0.024	-0.070	0.095	-0.081	0.159*	0.082	0.133	0.041
Internal Controls	0.079	0.044	0.163*	0.058	0.067	0.085	0.078	0.058	0.063
	0.289**	0.187*	0.122	0.067	0.296**	0.417***	0.297***	0.305**	0.329**
Evaluate CEO	0.203*	0.249**	0.287**	0.330***	0.273**	0.085	0.321***	0.226**	0.188*
R ²	0.371	0.459	0.321	0.365	0.368	0.433	0.474	0.388	0.395
Adj. R ²	0.319	0.414	0.264	0.312	0.315	0.385	0.430	0.336	0.344

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

There were also three significant differences by primary mission area. Board members from education and youth nonprofits were more likely to rate themselves higher on having a good relationship with their CEO ($\beta=0.216$) and maintaining sound board policies and procedures ($\beta=0.192$). Board members from housing and community development nonprofits were more likely to rate themselves higher on having a good relationship with their CEO ($\beta=0.184$) (See Table 5: Regression Findings for Average Assessment by the Board Members).

Performance Assessment among CEOs

The findings from assessments of the CEOs were fairly consistent with those of the board members. For example, CEOs of nonprofit organizations where the board is making efforts to implement formal evaluations of the CEO were more likely to rate their organization higher across all dimensions of board performance (with the exception of financial oversight). CEOs of nonprofit organizations implementing more internal management controls were also more likely to rate their organization more favorably across seven of the nine dimensions of board performance (with the exceptions being positive/fundraising prospects and collective board governance).

Other important predictors of favorable performance ratings by the CEO included: implementing more board management practices and better financial oversight ($\beta=0.159$) (supporting H_1); having a strategic plan and setting the direction ($\beta=0.161$), strategic actions/activities ($\beta=0.329$), collective board governance ($\beta=0.179$), and program oversight ($\beta=0.143$) (supporting H_2). Among the most notable difference between the board member and CEO assessments of performance was related to board giving, in that CEOs of boards with greater percentages of board members who give, were more likely to assess themselves on cultivating a positive image and fundraising prospects ($\beta=0.163$).

For the CEOs, there were no significant differences with respect to primary mission area. Yet, total annual revenue was a positive, significant predictor across all dimensions of board performance, with the exception of setting direction for the organization. Age was a negative predictor of four performance measures: setting direction for the organization ($\beta=-0.191$); being strategic with actions and activities ($\beta=-0.151$); projecting a more positive image and improving fundraising prospects ($\beta=-0.189$); and program oversight, ($\beta=-0.166$). (See Table 6: Regression Findings for Assessments by the CEOs).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to show how evaluation through a self-assessment tool can yield valuable performance information that can be used to inform capacity-building initiatives. The findings highlight how certain management practices might be better at increasing both board and organizational performance compared to others. The findings together with the recommendations advanced also offer a formative addition to the toolkit of nonprofit stakeholders, including evaluators, who are focused on improving both board and organizational performance.

Strategic planning is touted as an essential element of effective nonprofit management (Allison & Kay, 2015; Bryson, 2016; Marx & Davis, 2012). Bryson (2016) argues that strategic planning can help nonprofit organizations be proactive and resilient in response to an increasingly volatile and changing external environment. Moreover, the process of strategic planning clarifies organizational mission, vision, and values; deepens engagement among stakeholders; and builds a shared understanding of who the organization is, what it does, and why it does those things. The plan can also be used to guide decision making, develop budgets, prepare for leadership changes, and educate internal constituencies. The findings here support the value of strategic planning and its relationship to improved perceptions of performance.

When the organization had a strategic plan, both the board members and the CEOs reported higher levels of performance across three of the nine dimensions of effectiveness (setting direction, strategic actions/activities, and collective board governance). Board members also tended to rate themselves higher on a fourth dimension of effectiveness (sound board policies and procedures) when there was a strategic plan. Once an organization's strategic directions and high-priority goals are clearly defined, its resources can be allocated more effectively. And

just as important, once a vision of the future is clarified, the staff are better positioned to advance a solid purpose and direction, and stakeholders and constituents become more engaged. This means, from a capacity-building perspective, the self-assessment process is an essential tool that can be used to inform the strategic planning process helping organizational leaders, consultants, and board members to capitalize on organizational strengths while also identifying areas where an additional investment of resources might be needed to improve future performance.

With a clear picture of its desired future, the organization is in a strong position to bring about that future, and when efforts to mitigate role ambiguity are in place, the board understands how it can contribute to that shared vision. Board members often experience role ambiguity because of poorly communicated expectations (Doherty & Hoye, 2011) and the self-assessment can be used to inform strategies focused on reducing that ambiguity. It is often assumed that board members are expected to have a clear understanding of their role, high levels of commitment, and specific talents that add value to the board in ways that are reflective of a particular role orientation (Doherty & Hoye, 2011). Nonprofit boards often engage in activities designed to reduce board member uncertainty with the expectation that these actions will result in improved performance.

Findings reported here suggest that investing in efforts that seek to reduce board ambiguity through activities such as holding an orientation, hosting an annual retreat, defining term limits, and providing job and committee descriptions, improved perceptions of performance among board members across two dimensions (collective board governance and sound board policies and procedures); while CEOs linked these activities to improved performance related to financial oversight.

According to a report published by the Nonprofit Research Collaborative (2015), six in ten nonprofit organizations require board members to make a financial gift to the organization. Giving USA published an article (Lapin, 2018) on their website arguing that, “Board member giving is a public commitment to the organization’s work” (para. 16) and that “participation indicates that each board member has a strong commitment to the organization and its mission. The message to the donor community is quite compelling and a necessary motivator for others” (para. 10). It seems reasonable then, to expect that when board members make a personal contribution to the organization, that activity would be associated with positive perceptions of performance. Interestingly, only CEOs made a connection between board giving and one dimension of performance (positive image/fundraising prospects); board members make no such link.

Crutchfield and McLeod Grant (2007) argue, “...greatness has more to do with how nonprofits work outside the boundaries of their organizations than with how they manage internal operations” (p. 35). While this might be true for “greatness” the findings here suggest getting your house in order is a positive predictor of effective board performance, particularly among CEOs. The CEOs working for organizations with strong internal controls (i.e., code of ethics; whistleblower, document retention, and conflict-of-interest policies; D&O insurance; and financial controls) reported higher levels of performance across seven of the nine dimensions of effectiveness, while board members linked these activities to improved performance related to financial oversight and sound board policies.

While there is no shortage of advice on how nonprofit leaders might improve both board and organizational performance, the challenge for many is figuring out where to start—how to prioritize multiple ‘good’ or ‘desirable’ courses of action. With so many important roles and responsibilities it can be challenging to know where to start. Among the board members who completed the self-assessment, only one key practice was a positive, significant predictor of effectiveness across all nine dimensions of board performance. When there was an annual CEO performance appraisal and written review, coupled with a periodic review of executive

compensation, board members reported positive perceptions of board performance on every indicator. This was true for CEOs as well, except for the fact that CEOs did not perceive this practice to be an indicator of effective performance on the dimension of financial oversight.

Limitations and Opportunities

There are, of course, some limitations to the study to keep in mind. First, in this case, the self-assessment process was voluntary. As such, it is likely that the organizations who participated in the process are inherently different from organizations that do not choose to engage in this type of reflective, formative, and capacity-building endeavor. Second, this self-assessment relies on subjective ratings by internal stakeholders. Other self-assessment tools might include objective measures as well, such as financial or staffing ratios, or assessments by external stakeholders, such as beneficiaries or partner organizations. Third, the reliability of the ambiguity scale was somewhat low, suggesting there are opportunities to improve that measure. Fourth, the sample for this study was comprised (almost exclusively) of nonprofits incorporated in the United States. Thus, using the self-assessment tool with nonprofit organizations in a different context could provide interesting findings to compare and contrast. Finally, the data for the study were collected between May 2013 and June 2015. More recent data might yield some differences in the findings, given that recent economic shocks associated with the downturn in the economy and the pandemic have prompted some nonprofit organizations to pay closer attention to importance of having strong management practices and financial reserves (Kim & Mason, 2020).

Implications and Conclusions

These findings have important implications for the many stakeholders who are working to improve the management and governance of nonprofit organizations—volunteer board members, executive leaders and staff, funders, donors, and the myriad of consultants, Management Support Organizations (MSOs), and others interested in building nonprofit capacity—as well as evaluators who focus on organizational development (Kelly & Kaczynski, 2008). Board and/or organizational self-assessment processes can yield useful insights that can be used to help organizations to define a capacity-building improvement plan, based on self-assessed need. The findings from this study further inform capacity-building efforts by highlighting the relationship between certain practices and overall performance.

For example, the findings related to strategic planning are confirmatory. Strategic planning remains a valuable tool that helps nonprofit organizations determine how and where to focus activity, and it can be a starting point for many types of evaluation efforts (Allison & Kay, 2015). Moreover, the decision of some funders to require or at least value the presence of a strategic plan when making funding decisions (Johnsen, 2015) seems to be well-placed in that having a strategic plan is positively related to assessments about performance. The implication for capacity builders or others seeking to improve performance is quite clear: make sure the organization not only has a strategic plan, but uses that plan to guide decision making, develop budgets, inform programming, and evaluate progress toward mission-related goals and objectives.

Research has shown that nonprofit boards of directors experience role ambiguity. The self-assessment process can help capacity-builders to identify those areas where the board is struggling the most. Findings from this study suggest that by investing in efforts to reduce board ambiguity, such as having board retreats and formalizing voluntary board service, are not only received well, they also seem to result in increased perceptions of performance. While many boards lack formal structures and procedures (Parker, 2007), these findings suggest those who give advice to nonprofits about improving board governance (e.g., nonprofit CEO's,

evaluators, and other management consultants) should continue to advocate for these kinds of important investments of time and resources.

Investing in mechanisms to ensure financial accountability seems to have ripple effects. While some nonprofits see these requirements as external compliance burdens (Ebrahim, 2016), stakeholders that require these practices (e.g., accreditors, auditors, legislators) may be adding value to the nonprofit organization in unintended or unexpected ways. With respect to the finding about evaluating the performance of the CEO, again, those who give advice to nonprofit organizations about how to strengthen its leadership (e.g., evaluators, management consultants, funders) should continue to advocate for annual performance appraisals and help nonprofits to build and nurture the relationship between the CEO and the board.

Thinking a bit more about the finding that board members do not necessarily make the link between board giving and performance, it seems reasonable to conclude that it may not only be important but also helpful for those seeking to build nonprofit capacity to communicate the performance implications of board giving to the board of directors. The data in this study suggest that board members may be thinking in instrumental terms when assessing performance (i.e., if we have a strategic plan we will perform better) rather than thinking about how certain behaviors or practices might signal strong performance to external stakeholders (e.g., successful organizations have high levels of board giving). As long as board giving is touted as an important indicator of organizational success, and/or funders require 100% board giving before awarding a grant, board members should at least understand performance-related implications of their decision making. That is, it could be the case that boards with low levels of giving may be perceived to have corresponding levels of organizational health, while those with high levels of board giving are believed to be strong and successful.

Finally, the findings from this study show how self-assessments can be a valuable evaluation tool. On the one hand, a self-assessment is valuable in its own right, helping to gather important formative feedback about the board's performance, informing capacity-building efforts to make organizational changes and improvements. On the other hand, when the findings from self-assessment tools are pooled together collectively, across a large sample of boards, they offer new insights and information contributing to the evidence related to good nonprofit management and governance practices.

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Facing Newness and Smallness: A Multiple Case Study of Nonprofits Creating Schools

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This paper utilizes the literature on liability of newness and smallness to examine new nonprofit school venture creation and explore what challenges new school ventures face. We ask the following research questions: What challenges and obstacles do new nonprofit school ventures face? How do new nonprofit school ventures manage to maneuver, mitigate, or overcome these challenges and obstacles? To answer these questions, we conducted a comparative case study of three nonprofit organizations operating schools in Sweden. Our material consisted of semi-structured interviews and archival documents. The article illuminates two salient challenges for new school ventures: the need for legitimacy from a diverse set of stakeholders and the marshalling of sufficient resources. To cope with these challenges, the organizations combined an outward conformist strategy with an inward resource replacement strategy. Moreover, even though all ventures experienced obstacles, the character and magnitude of these obstacles differed depending on their mode of emergence.

Keywords: Nonprofit Schools, Education Entrepreneurship, Liability of Newness, Liability of Smallness, Sweden

Introduction

Education represents one of the largest domains of nonprofit activity around the world, “on average outpacing every other type of nonprofit employment” (Bromley et al., 2018, p. 527). Nevertheless, in elementary and secondary education, public institutions generally remain the dominant provider in almost all Western countries. Because an educated population is essential to building and improving society, public schools have remained a fundamental instrument to ensure that all children obtain access to education. However, some countries, such as Chile, the United States, and Sweden, have elected to implement policies that allow for educational providers beyond public schools at the elementary and secondary levels. A central mechanism of these policies has been the so-called school vouchers, which provide parents with the option to send their children to a school—public, nonprofit, or for-profit—using all or part of the public funding set aside for their children’s education. Thus, two principal ideas for implementing a voucher-based school system include (i) encouraging and ensuring greater plurality in education delivery from alternate actors, including nonprofit actors, and (ii) stimulating educational entrepreneurs to launch new nonprofit (or for-profit) school ventures (Blix & Jordahl, 2021).

Propagating and cultivating new nonprofit schools within these voucher systems have, however, been far from smooth (Levin, 2011). Indeed, empirical research focusing on new

nonprofit voucher schools in the United States has illustrated how regulations and entry barriers can impede nonprofit school entry and that the majority of those attempting to do not survive the startup phase (Andersson & Ford, 2017). These results have compelled even the starkest advocates of greater educational plurality and new school entrants to recognize that starting a new school can be a tremendously challenging undertaking and that failure is “an inseparable part” of the type of educational entrepreneurship associated with school voucher systems (Hess & McShane, 2016, p. 199).

Whereas prior scholarship has focused on new nonprofit school entry from a macro perspective, emphasizing features such as entry rates, policy design, and/or the role of civil society regimes (e.g., Andersson & Ford, 2017; Ford, 2015; Henrekson et al., 2020), there is a scarcity of research that has focused on new nonprofit school entrants from an organizational and operational perspective. Although external factors incontrovertibly play a significant role in shaping the environments in which nonprofit educational entrepreneurs operate, macro factors alone are insufficient to fully comprehend or capture the internal processes facilitating the entry process of new nonprofit school ventures. This article aims to examine new nonprofit school venture creation in the context of the Swedish voucher-based school choice system. Specifically, we ask the following questions:

1. What challenges and obstacles do new nonprofit school ventures face?
2. In what ways do new nonprofit school ventures manage to maneuver, mitigate, or overcome these challenges and obstacles?

Utilizing the literature on the liabilities facing new ventures (Aldrich & Auster, 1986; Stinchcombe, 1965) and the institutional strand of evolutionary organizational theory emphasizing the critical role of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) as a point of departure, we conduct a comparative case study of three new nonprofit school ventures in Sweden. We draw on Smith and Petersen’s (2011) perspective of educational entrepreneurship as a type of organizing activity, where different types of actors attempt to create and launch new educational ventures. The ways that nonprofit schools emerge can differ depending on the type of actor that initiates projects to open new schools. Our three cases demonstrate different paths leading to the particular outcome of starting a new school venture: (i) the creation of a new nonprofit organization from scratch, (ii) the acquisition of already existing schools by an already existing nonprofit organization, and (iii) the creation of a new school venture within an existing nonprofit organization.

Examining new nonprofit school emergence is important for at least two reasons. First, the formation and entry of new nonprofit school ventures is not a uniform or homogenous event but a process that can look very different across different agents of education entrepreneurship. Thus, to unpack how civil society can facilitate plurality in school voucher systems, we must begin to better understand how new nonprofit school ventures emerge. Second, previous research has pointed to the liability of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965) as a major contributing factor to the failure of nonprofit school ventures (Ford & Andersson, 2019); however, little is known about how the liability of newness specifically affects new nonprofit school ventures or how those seeking to launch such ventures attempt to overcome these liabilities. While the liability-of-newness perspective offers a powerful lens for explicating the failure of new school ventures, it is equally essential to examine how new nonprofit schools can maneuver the type of operational and organizational challenges associated with the liability of newness and increase the legitimacy of the organizing effort to survive and thrive.

The Swedish Educational Context

Starting in the late 1980s, the Swedish national school system underwent a series of reforms that radically remodeled and reconfigured it from one of the most centralized and tightly

controlled educational systems in the world to one where decision making, funding, and control were significantly more decentralized (Lundahl, 2005). In the early 1990s, Sweden implemented a school voucher system that allowed privately operated schools to compete on an equal financial basis with public schools for students (Blomqvist, 2004). One of the principal objectives of this voucher-based school system was to encourage and ensure greater pluralism in the provision of education by enabling parental choice and incentivizing new school entry (West, 2017). This education entrepreneurship component was heavily advocated for by scholars and policy makers in Sweden, who envisioned an amplified and diverse school market consisting of a variety of independent¹ school ventures, including business enterprises, charitable organizations, cooperatives, and associations (Werne, 2018).

Since the implementation of the voucher system, the number of students enrolled in independent schools has increased significantly. For example, in 1999, less than 5% of high school students and approximately 3.5% of elementary school students were enrolled in an independent school. Two decades later, those numbers had grown to 28% and 14%, respectively, with three-quarters of independent school students attending a for-profit school (Henrekson et al., 2020).

Sweden, with its universal coverage, is in many respects the home of the most extensive and well-established voucher program in the world. Furthermore, given the few restrictions on who is allowed to own and manage an independent school, Sweden offers a fitting context for exploring educational entrepreneurship (Blix & Jordahl, 2021). Thus, we view the Swedish voucher program environment as particularly apt for examining the type of how-question(s) posed in this article. Interestingly, even though Sweden is ranked as having one of the most enabling philanthropic environments globally (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2022), the entry of new nonprofit schools has not been a major factor contributing to the growth of the Swedish independent school sector. Instead, most independent elementary and secondary school students have attended new, for-profit schools (Henrekson et al., 2020). Hence, despite the desire and intention among policy makers to create a more pluralistic, independent Swedish school sector and despite the low barriers to new school entry, relatively few new nonprofit schools have been founded over the past three decades. This, in turn, can be viewed as a sign that the liabilities facing new nonprofit schools are particularly potent issues and thus merit attention.

The Liabilities of New Ventures

The struggles facing new ventures have long intrigued scholars, expressed by notions such as the liability of newness and the liability of smallness (Aldrich & Auster, 1986; Stinchcombe, 1965) and by emphasizing actions aimed at increasing the legitimacy of the organizing effort (Suchman, 1995). Here, we use these perspectives to capture several key features of the venturing process, which provide a basis for comparisons across the three school ventures examined.

Stinchcombe (1965) introduced the *liability-of-newness* concept to describe the precarious reality of new organizations. He (1965) identified four intricate, and interlinked, *liabilities of newness* impacting the viability and, ultimately, survival chances of emerging and new ventures. First, new organizations, especially new types of organizations, need to determine and develop from scratch new roles that new employees must learn and be socialized. Second, as the process of inventing new roles unfolds, “[...] the determination of their mutual relations and of structuring the field of rewards and sanctions so as to get the maximum performance, have high costs in time, worry, conflict, and temporary inefficiency.” Third, since the people hired to work for new organizations often do not know each other beforehand or have previous experiences working together, new organizations need to build trust among strangers to create an efficient work environment. Fourth, Stinchcombe (1965) claimed that “one of the main

resources of old organizations is a set of stable ties to those who use organizational services.” Consequently, to be successful, new organizations must cultivate and develop new ties with potential stakeholders, such as users/beneficiaries of their services (pp. 148–150).

The liability-of-newness construct has long enticed organizational researchers (e.g., Carroll & Delacroix, 1982), including nonprofit scholars (e.g., Bielefeld, 1994), and the influence of Stinchcombe’s ideas is difficult to refute, as evidenced by many review articles (e.g., Abatecola et al., 2012). As researchers have begun to empirically explore the liability-of-newness phenomenon, the size of new ventures has come to the fore. Freeman et al. (1983), for example, were able to show how increasing the size of an organization can mitigate the liability of newness. Even if most new ventures tend to be small, Aldrich and Auster (1986) observed how some new organizations “have parent companies that provide for them financially, whereas others are fortunate and find substantial backing from investors and relatives” (p. 181). This, in turn, prompted Aldrich and Auster to recognize the influence of what they refer to as the *liability-of-smallness*, which includes the lack of financial resources and a disadvantage in raising capital from creditors and investors; unfavorable tax laws; difficulty handling the administrative workload and overhead expenses related to regulatory compliance; and difficulty attracting a skilled workforce. Others have observed how smaller organizations tend to have higher production costs and are less able to diversify their risks (e.g., Wholey et al., 1992).

An important complement to the liabilities perspective comes from the institutional theoretic strand of evolutionary organizational theory calling attention to the role of *legitimacy*. According to this perspective, new ventures struggle due to their lack of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995; Wievel & Hunter, 1985). Because new ventures may not appear as accountable and reliable as existing ones, they need to create the external perception that they are legitimate to garner support and survive in the competition with already established organizations.

Combining the above perspectives effectively frames many of the key challenges that new nonprofit ventures must address, thus providing a lens for comprehending why it is difficult for such new nonprofit ventures to establish themselves. These challenges can be condensed into two key features. The first feature has to do with challenges *internal* to the organization, such as creating, organizing, and maintaining a stable organizational infrastructure and routines for the new venture. This not only includes securing physical assets, such as buildings, equipment, and inventory, but also how to secure and organize the human resources and administrative systems necessary to propel and govern the new venture. Prior studies have suggested that these undertakings, including developing organizational structures and functions to help facilitate and resolve communication and coordination challenges, can be slow and challenging in new nonprofits (Andersson, 2016; Bess, 1998). The second involves linkages to the *external* environment, including to key stakeholders, such as beneficiaries (e.g., parents and students), resource providers (e.g., donors, foundations, or government bodies), and volunteers. As noted earlier, by being new to the game, new nonprofit ventures face serious legitimacy hurdles, making it difficult to marshal resources, trust, and commitment from external stakeholders (Wievel & Hunter, 1985). Singh et al. (1986) investigated voluntary social service organizations in Canada and showed that external legitimacy plays a vital role in the initial success of organizations. Likewise, a study by Hager et al. (2004) found that linkages to the external environment, as reflected by a reliance on volunteers and donated income, reduce the risk of organizational failure. Thus, gaining legitimacy is essential for new nonprofit ventures seeking to attract and secure external funding and be a magnet for beneficiaries and volunteers.

In this study, we follow Suchman’s (1995) definition of legitimacy as “a generalized perception [...] that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system” (p. 574). Suchman (1995) further noted that there are different forms of legitimacy (pragmatic, moral, and cognitive) and different paths for organizations to take to

gain legitimacy through conformity, environmental selection, or manipulation. Previous research combining liability of newness and smallness with theories pertaining to organizational legitimacy has commonly employed a quantitative empirical approach (see Hager et al., 2004; Singh et al., 1986). As a result, these studies have been unable to properly distinguish between the separate but interrelated processes through which organizations gain legitimacy from different types of stakeholders and the interaction between internal organizational processes and external legitimacy accretion.

In summary, even if the implementation of a school voucher system is intended to stimulate new entrants to a nonprofit school venture, the process of concretizing the idea of a new social venture into something tangible is a complex and challenging undertaking (Edenfield & Andersson, 2018). Given that this study aims to better understand new nonprofit venture creation at the elementary and secondary school levels in Sweden, we deem that the two liability perspectives combined with external legitimacy are highly useful to illuminate and contextualize the undertakings of the three ventures examined.

Method and Empirical Data

A Multiple Case Study Approach

Our methodological approach drew on the multiple case study approach to conducting research. According to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), the multiple case study approach “typically answers research questions that address ‘how’ and ‘why’ in unexplored research areas particularly well” (pp. 26–27). Moreover, the case study approach is particularly appropriate when the empirical inquiry studies a complex phenomenon in a real-life context where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin, 1981). Therefore, given that this study aims to examine startup issues encountered by nonprofit school ventures and how they seek to maneuver and mitigate these issues in the context of the Swedish school system, we deemed the multiple case study approach to be highly suitable.

The central notion of research using the multiple case study approach is to use cases as the basis for developing new perspectives and understandings, and possibly even new theories. According to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), using multiple cases is effective because they enable the collection of comparative data and permit a replication logic, as each case can be viewed as a “distinct experiment that stands on its own as an analytic unit” (p. 25). By contrasting and extending findings from the different cases, scholars can confirm or disconfirm emerging conceptual insights and perspectives.

Ultimately, we selected the multiple case study approach because it supports the illustration of essential processes about important phenomena that are grounded by comparative empirical data—in this case, focusing on new nonprofit venture creation.

Case Selection and Introduction

Following the approach typically taken in designing research using the multiple case study approach, our paper relies on theoretical sampling. We selected three Swedish nonprofit organizations operating schools, each representing a unique mode of emergence leading to the creation of new schools. The selected organizations also differ in terms of size and age. The organizations are a long-standing Christian charity organization (Organization A), a youth culture organization running various projects for young people (Organization B), and a Muslim organization focusing on the integration of immigrant children (Organization C).

Table 1 provides an overview of the three organizations. To ensure anonymity, we concealed the names of the organizations.

Table 1. Description of the Organizations

Name	Mode of Emergence	Focus Solely on Education	Age	No. of Schools	No. of Students	Key Informants Interviewed
Organization A	Acquired six high schools from a bankrupt for-profit company group in 2013. A separate foundation was set up for the school-related activities.	No	1856	6	2,540	CEO Chairman of Board School Principal
Organization B	The schools are run within the same organization as the other organizational projects.	No	1984	3	1,270	CEO Chairman of Board School Principal School Principal
Organization C	Grass-root project initiated by parents and other engaged individuals.	Yes	1995	1	100	Founder/CEO/ Chairman of Board School Principal

Data Collection

Case studies can accommodate a rich variety of data sources, including interviews, archival material, surveys, and direct observations. We predominantly used interview data from nine key informants from three key positions within the hierarchical chain of command of the organizations: chairman of the board, CEO, and school principal (see Table 1). We complemented the interviews with archival material consisting of annual reports, strategy plans, regulatory documents, and mission statements. We conducted interviews with key informants, as they represent an efficient way to gather rich, empirical data when the phenomenon of interest is a process that cannot easily be assessed or captured by other forms of data, and we wanted to obtain insights into and perspectives on the new venture process from diverse perspectives. A semi-structured interview was conducted with each informant. The organizations were approached via email, and an initial meeting was set up with the CEO. During this meeting, potential interviewees were identified. The length of the interviews ranged from one hour to one and a half hours. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interviews consisted of three sections. First, background questions were asked about the organizations, the informants themselves, and their positions within the organization. Second, questions were asked about the process to open the schools, including how the projects were first initiated, the motivation behind establishing the schools, the different types of challenges that the organizations experienced, and how the projects were financed. Third, inquiries were

made about the daily operations of the schools, including questions concerning school governance, funding strategies, and the school's relationships with authorities. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the interview guide to be supplemented with questions that seemed fruitful to pursue during the interviews. Both authors were present during all of the interviews. Immediately after the interviews, we cross-checked facts and impressions.

Data Analysis

As a first step in the data analysis process, we wrote individual case histories using the interview data and archival data from each organization (Eisenhardt, 1989). The case histories provided an important first impression and general overview of the extensive data collected. There was strong agreement over several identified liabilities and challenges among the respondents for each case. However, in each case, the different informants appeared to approach our questions with a slightly different focus. For example, in interviews with the chairmen and the CEOs, the foci were more on motives and strategic decision making, whereas the interviews with the principals focused more on daily operations. As a second step, we carried out a cross-case analysis, looking for similar themes across the cases but also noting important differences in the experience of establishing and running schools. To compare several possible themes across the three cases, we organized the data into tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Then, we revisited previous findings from the liabilities and new venture legitimization literature and compared this extant literature with our empirical findings. We examined key features of the founding and operation of the schools in relation to the concepts identified in the theoretical section: accessing internal and external resources, cultivating ties to new users (students), establishing external legitimacy, hiring skilled employees, developing trust, and building complex organizational structures and processes. This examination enabled us to compare and contrast the experiences, challenges, and liabilities of the three organizations in the process of starting and operating nonprofit schools. Thus, the analytical process occurred via recursive cycling among the case data, emerging theory, and extant literature (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

The Process of Establishing and Operating a New Nonprofit School

In this section, we present our results. We describe and discuss various aspects of starting and running a nonprofit school organized around the themes identified by the data analysis.

Initial Funding of the New Venture

The initial cost of setting up a complex welfare service such as a school is high (Lewis, 2017). Premises and equipment must be acquired, and salaries must be paid to the people involved. Therefore, actors entering the Swedish voucher sector need to expend considerable amounts before they receive any voucher revenue. Out of the three school venture projects in our study, two had financial backing from parent organizations, and one had no such support.

For the two larger organizations, A and B, excess capital could be transferred from other projects within the organization to the school venture projects. Organization A issued a loan for the school's foundation to acquire the six high schools and to establish a backup fund for the first few years of operations. Organization C had almost no money when starting its school. Most of the work, including filling out applications and organizing for the start of the school, was done by volunteers. Costs were kept to a minimum; however, some funding was still required before the school could start receiving voucher revenue. According to the founder:

If I remember it correctly, we collected money among the parents for the first month's rent and the acquisition of the school bus so that we could collect students from a larger area. (CEO and founder, Organization C)

By making this statement, the founder showed how tight the budget was before public funding was received and the active engagement of the parents in the project.

In sum, following the literature on the liability of smallness (Aldrich & Auster, 1986), we found that the smaller Muslim school had a relative disadvantage in raising enough capital for the new venture. Funding a new venture is difficult for small organizations in general and especially when the new venture is as complicated and costly as a new school.

Voucher Payments and a Lack of Philanthropic Funding

As pointed out by Lurz and Kreutzer (2017), the products and services provided by nonprofit organizations are typically not paid for by the receivers but by third parties, such as the state or organizational or individual donors. This is certainly the case regarding the Swedish school voucher system since schools are prohibited by law from collecting tuition fees. All three organizations claim that the funding of the schools' day-to-day operations consists entirely of voucher revenue from the municipality or the central government in the form of additional grants or targeted contributions. The only exception is one of the schools operated by Organization B that still receives additional funding from the parent organization. That school is in a suburban, low-income area, and the steering group was well aware that starting a school in that particular area would entail new types of problems and challenges.

Even though it might seem straightforward in theory, the Swedish funding scheme for independent schools is rather complicated. The voucher amounts differ between municipalities, and schools can be eligible for additional state grants for several reasons, such as enrolling students with special needs (The Education Act, 2010). As a result, all organizations reported spending much time and energy trying to optimize their public funding. This includes both filling in grant applications to the central government and ensuring that they attract enough profitable students (see the section on 'attracting students'). By running several schools, Organization A and B can take advantage of economies of scale since administrative costs (such as applying for grants) can be shared among the schools.

In a social democratic welfare state such as the Swedish one, large public sector spending on social welfare and education has been considered to crowd out private donations (Vamstad & von Essen, 2013). Thus, philanthropy in Sweden has traditionally been directed toward causes not considered the responsibility of the public sector. In line with this, none of the organizations in this study received any monetary philanthropic funding directly aimed at their school ventures, except for the small donations from the parents that were given initially to Organization C. However, the interviewees had slightly different views regarding the possibility of receiving philanthropic donations in the future. In regard to their Muslim orientation, the principal at Organization C's school claimed that the issue of philanthropic funding was potentially problematic for them:

The reason we cannot do it [raise philanthropic funding] in our case is that it is so sensitive. Where does the money come from? How do the people who sent the money feel about different school-related issues in relation to the curriculum? Therefore, the question of whether we should be raising

philanthropic capital has never even been brought up. (Principal, Organization C)

In other words, because of the Muslim orientation, receiving donations could damage the perceived legitimacy of the school since it would raise questions regarding whether the donors wished to exert influence on how the school is managed.

None of the interviewed representatives from Organizations A and B perceived the potential of receiving philanthropic donations as problematic. At the same time, none of them believed that it would be possible to raise donations for the daily operations of the schools since Swedish donors are of the general opinion that the funding of schools is the responsibility of the municipalities. However, even if no such attempts had been made, it was believed that it would be possible to raise money for specific projects or to acquire school buildings.

Attracting New Students

As pointed out by the liability-of-newness literature, one crucial task for new organizations is to cultivate ties to new users of their services. Two different aspects concerning strategic decision making on student enrollment are discussed: attracting students in general and attracting the ‘right’ students.

Two schools in our study, Organization C’s school and Organization B’s school in the suburban area, struggled to convince enough students to enroll to be economically viable. As one informant pointed out, having 30 students in a class requires approximately an equal amount of work as having 25 students, but the organization receives 20% more funding. Currently, Organization B’s suburban school has only 40 total students spread out over three grades (grades 7–9). Last year, only five new students started in seventh grade, and the school was subsequently forced to integrate the seventh and eighth grades. The fact that the school is in an ethnically diverse, low-income area was identified by the interviewees as part of the problem. According to the chairman of the board, the more resourceful families living in the area generally enroll their students in schools in wealthier and less crime-ridden parts of Stockholm, thus shrinking the pool of potential students. Moreover, Organization’s B brand is not as well established among immigrant families as in other groups in society.

Organization C struggled with a low student count for many years. In 2005, when the school had been in operation for ten years, it still had only 21 students. The current lower limit for running a school in Sweden is 20 students. One reason for the limited enrollment mentioned by the interviewees is that a similar school, but with a more pronounced religious profile and explicit ties to the local mosque, opened in the same area one year after the founding of Organization C’s school. Competition between the schools was inevitable. Today, the school is still small; however, according to the informants, it has enough students to at least be financially viable.

Since Organization A acquired already existing schools with a student body of approximately 2,300 ‘included in the purchase,’ its experience differed from that of the other two organizations. One reason for the bankruptcy of the previous owner was decreasing student numbers, mainly because of smaller cohorts of high school students. This development continued after the acquisition, and Organization A faced minor financial difficulties before the number of students increased. However, the chairman of the board expressed another interesting dilemma that the organization had grappled with at some of the schools, namely, that the students it attracted were too ‘good’ in relation to its mission to prevent individuals from becoming unemployed and being socially excluded by educating students from vulnerable groups. The chairman of the board explained:

We cannot choose our students [...] And the better we do our job of educating the students, the better are the students that apply to the schools and the more difficult it is for us to enroll the kind of students that we wish to have. Therefore, for every improvement we make, we shoot ourselves in the foot [...] We are stuck. It is an impossible situation
(Chairman of the Board, Organization A).

That is, Organization A aims to reach vulnerable students, students experiencing difficulties in school, immigrant students with insufficient language skills, and students with special needs. However, the design of the voucher scheme makes it difficult for these students to gain entrance to some of Organization A's schools. On the other hand, Organization A also acknowledged that a school with only those kinds of students would not be well functioning; therefore, the ideal is a mix of students from different backgrounds and qualifications. According to the chairman of the board, Organization A strives to collect a surplus from well-functioning students and then use that surplus as extra support for students facing various challenges.

A school in central Stockholm run by Organization B has a similar vision of achieving a mixed student body of both high-performing students and students experiencing difficulties in school, as well as students from different municipalities and types of areas in the greater Stockholm region. However, to break even, the organization calculated that it needs at least 75–80% of the student body coming from Stockholm, which has the highest voucher payments. By administering an entrance exam for admission to the school's five different extracurricular programs (basketball, aesthetics and art, dance, skateboarding, and training and health), Organization B gains greater control over which students they admit. This way, they can ensure that enough students from areas with high voucher payments are enrolled.

The Right Person in the Right Place

Hiring skilled employees, socializing them into their respective roles, and cultivating trust both vertically and horizontally in the organization are factors described by Stinchcombe (1965) as crucial for the success of new ventures. Having discussed organizational decision making regarding students, we now turn to the employees working in the organizations under review. As is shown, having skilled employees is also important for the perceived legitimacy of schools in the eyes of public authorities.

Organizations A and C reported having problems when initially starting and running schools because individuals holding key positions had insufficient knowledge about the school sector. These problems were reportedly resolved after these key persons either had been exchanged or had acquired school sector know-how. The founder of Organization C described the process to start the school as very difficult. They had to rewrite the application ten to fifteen times before it was approved by the authorities. Finding a building for the school was also difficult, and the initial building was ill-suited for hosting a school. The school had to move eleven times before it found its current, long-term solution in cooperation with the municipality.

The first decade of the existence of Organization C's school was characterized by uncertainty, resistance from public authorities, and scrutiny from the media. The Swedish School Inspectorate wanted to close the school in the late 1990s because of signs of ill management, rumors about violent teachers, and illegal confessional elements in its teachings. The school won its court case against the School Inspectorate and was allowed to remain open. The school was also featured in a TV documentary about Muslim schools in Sweden that presented a harsh critique of its operations. According to the founder and former school principal, the

situation started to turn around after he attended a headmaster training university program in 2002. During the program, he realized that what is important is knowing

how to be integrated into the school world—that is what makes all of the difference. You need to be educated and have experience. You simply have to think in the same way as the public authorities. You have to speak the same language (CEO and founder, Organization C).

Both the founder and the current headmaster claimed that they now feel much more trusted by government agencies such as the Swedish School Inspectorate. Over the years since the fight in court, the school has proven itself during various inspections and is now considered one among many independent schools.

Organization A also had problems at the beginning related to the person in charge not knowing what to do and not do in the school world. The CEO of the parent organization was appointed the CEO of the school foundation after the acquisition of the six high schools. She and the chairman of the board started a recruitment process to find someone to manage the school foundation and be the immediate supervisor of the schools' principals. It took almost a year before the role was filled, and the person recruited did not do a good job. According to the former CEO, the failed recruit reflected her "inability to fully judge competence" in the school field. Once it had become clear that the recruit was not working out, the board of the school foundation revolted. The current chairman of the board was dismissed together with the newly recruited manager, and the former CEO was forced to resign from her position as CEO of the schools' foundation. A new manager was recruited who has solid experience in the school world.

Having employees with school sector 'know-how' is undoubtedly important when running a school. However, the organizations also emphasized the importance of having employees whose individual values align with the organizational values and reasons for running schools. The former CEO of Organization A described how the personal values of the principals were an important factor considered when the decision was made concerning what schools to acquire. Several of the representatives from Organization B expressed a similar view. One of the principals described the concept as each school having its melody, and its principals or teachers must be in tune with the melody of the school for which they work.

Discussion

We have examined the establishment and undertakings of three nonprofit school ventures in the context of the Swedish voucher-based school system. Utilizing the lens of the liabilities of newness and smallness, supplemented by an emphasis on external legitimacy, we highlighted several key challenges confronting the three school ventures and examined how these challenges were maneuvered, mitigated, or overcome. As earlier research suggested (Singh et al., 1986), we showed that the liability of newness does not apply uniformly to all organizations in a population by examining three different types of new nonprofit ventures (one created from scratch, one built through intrapreneurial efforts within an existing organization, and one created through the acquisition of already existing schools). Furthermore, we examined how the specific institutional context of the Swedish welfare state and the design of the voucher scheme impact the kinds of challenges that educational entrepreneurs face. Table 2 provides a summary of our findings and illustrates that, even though the three ventures experienced obstacles stressed in studies on the liabilities of newness and smallness, the features and magnitudes of these obstacles differed across the three cases.

Table 2. Summary of the Findings

Liability component	Organization A	Organization B	Organization C
Initial Funding	No (used internal resources)	No (used internal resources)	Yes (very tight budget)
Funding Day-to-Day Operations	Yes (dependent on maximizing public grants, no philanthropic funding)	Yes (dependent on maximizing public grants, no philanthropic funding; use internal resources)	Yes (dependent on maximizing public grants, no philanthropic funding)
Building Organizational Structure	No (separate foundation for the schools with an administration unit; opportunities for economies of scale)	No (the schools can share key administrative functions with the rest of the organization)	Yes (very small administration; hard to find suitable locales)
School Sector Know-How/Right Person for the Job	Yes (initial struggles because the CEO did not know how to operate a school successfully; considered important that the teachers share the mission and values of the organization)	No (considered important that the teachers share the mission and values of the organization)	Yes (initial struggles because the CEO/principal did not know how to operate a school successfully)
Legitimacy in the Eyes of the Public Authorities	No (well-known organization trusted by the authorities)	No (well-known organization trusted by the authorities)	Yes (initial troubles gaining the trust of the municipality / school authorities)
Attracting Students	Yes (hard to attract the right kind of students in relation to the mission)	Yes (hard to attract the right kind of students in relation to the mission; easy to attract students to the centrally located school since they are a well-known organization there; hard to attract students to the suburban school)	Yes (hard to attract enough students; initial competition with another Muslim school located close by)

In this section, we shift from a within-case focus to a cross-case perspective and seek to encapsulate how the three ventures were able to maneuver the different liabilities and what this suggests for future research.

Launching a new nonprofit school venture requires a certain amount of financial capital to initiate the new school's operations before it starts to receive public funding. Our study illustrates two paths to cope with this type of challenge. One path is via educational intrapreneurship, which is when an already existing nonprofit organization creates a new autonomous or semiautonomous school venture. Such school ventures can be supported by reallocating already existing resources, thus decreasing the need to secure such resources from external funders, which is very difficult for nonprofit organizations in the Swedish setting. Moreover, when a new school venture is grafted onto or emerges from an already established nonprofit organization, it can trade on the legitimacy of the older organization and, thus, has a path that allows it to maneuver around some of the uncertainty and liabilities facing school ventures created from scratch.

Although the liability-of-newness perspective recognizes the difficulty in assuring and enrolling *new* stakeholders, established organizations can, at least in theory, tap into a pool of preexisting stakeholders. While preexisting stakeholders may still need to be convinced about the legitimacy and worthiness of a new venture, it seems reasonable that this step is less cumbersome than enrolling brand-new stakeholders to support an emerging venture. Ford and Andersson (2019), for example, found that new, religious nonprofit voucher schools in Milwaukee were more likely to survive than were new, nonsectarian schools. One contributing factor, according to Ford and Andersson (2019) is that religious schools typically have vast and well-established networks of stakeholders and other types of resources available to them, which many nonsectarian schools lack.

The second path aligns closely with Baker and Nelson's (2005) notion of entrepreneurial bricolage, i.e., "making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities" (p. 333). Bricolage implies a type of resource replacement strategy in which the entrepreneurial agent engaged in bricolage 'makes do' by regarding as potential resources what others might regard as inept or impractical. According to Baker and Nelson (2005), the flexibility inherent in bricolage allows entrepreneurs to test, and refuse, traditional limitations regarding what is an appropriate or useful resource for a given task. We regard all three organizations in our sample as engaging in entrepreneurial bricolage to some extent, not the least concerning the enrollment of different types of students. However, Organization C is without a doubt the most obvious showcase of entrepreneurial bricolage in our study. For example, the initial funding of its schools was achieved by an unorthodox pooling of resources, such as volunteer labor and private donations from parents.

The schools in our sample struggled in different ways with the enrollment of students by not attracting enough students, profitable students, or the right students in relation to their missions. In the scholarly literature on voucher schemes for welfare delivery, it has been pointed out that if providers receive the same fixed price per user and the cost of delivering a service differs systematically across users, incentives may arise for providers to cherry-pick the most profitable users—*cream skimming* (Bartlett & Le Grand, 1993). We found that the organizations in some instances had difficulties reconciling their missions to educate a certain type of student with the tight budget constraints of the voucher system and the mechanisms of choice in education. Consequently, the organizations are forced to cream skim to make ends meet.

At the same time, the organizations perform a type of 'reversed' cream skimming when trying to attract vulnerable students or students facing challenges, in line with their missions. That is, the enrollment of students is complicated by what is commonly referred to as 'the double bottom line' of nonprofit organizations, i.e., making ends meet and simultaneously providing a social impact (Young & Lecy, 2014). While not being able to attract enough students can be perceived as a consequence of the lack of legitimacy among certain groups of parents, attracting too good students in relation to the mission can be perceived as a problem of having

too much legitimacy among socioeconomically strong parents of high-performing children who then crowd out students experiencing challenges in school.

As was pointed out by Chambré and Fatt (2002), nonprofits that receive public funding are often subject to very complex and burdensome accountability requirements since government agencies need to demonstrate that taxpayer funds are being spent responsibly. Operating a nonprofit school in Sweden entails having to comply with the government regulations stipulated in the curriculum and school law, being subject to regular inspections by the Swedish School Inspectorate, and frequently filling out forms when applying for additional public funding.

As proposed by Aldrich and Auster (1986) and as evidenced by the experience of Organization C's school, small organizations often struggle to handle the administrative tasks and overhead expenses related to regulatory compliance because of insufficient funding. Moreover, the relationship between the government and Organization C also demonstrates how internal change processes can be closely related to external legitimacy. Not until leading figures in Organization C had learned the language and codes of government agencies and how to properly conform to behavioral requirements, standards, and expectations did the critique from the School Inspection become less harsh and the school manage to secure a stable location through cooperation with the municipality. The school also seemed to have had a disadvantage in the beginning because of its Muslim profile since that automatically created the perception that it was less trustworthy and should be viewed more suspiciously by the state. At the same time, it was important to the organizations in our sample that their schools did not become indistinguishable from public schools. The interviewees thought that a crucial justification for their schools' existence was the fact that they could offer something to their students that public schools could not.

Conclusion

This article examined the creation of new, nonprofit school ventures in the context of the Swedish voucher-based school choice system and depicted the challenges and obstacles faced by three distinctive school ventures and how these obstacles were maneuvered. Our results show that even though all ventures experienced challenges and obstacles, the character and magnitude of these obstacles differed depending on their mode of emergence. Specifically, the article illuminated two salient challenges for new school ventures: the need for legitimacy from a diverse set of stakeholders (e.g., families/parents and regulators) and the marshalling of sufficient resources for their initial startup phases and day-to-day activities. To cope with these challenges, the new ventures orchestrated approaches combining an outward conformist strategy to signal "[...] allegiance to the cultural order and to pose few challenges to established institutional logics" (Suchman, 1995, p. 587), with an inward resource replacement strategy that allowed these educational entrepreneurs to launch and nurture new school ventures despite apparent resource constraints.

Future research can further unpack the conformist element by exploring how new, nonprofit schools are able to obtain different types of legitimacy (e.g., pragmatic, moral, and cognitive) via this approach. Likewise, although entrepreneurial bricolage offers a way for resource-poor, new nonprofit ventures to take action and stay alive, future research would benefit from exploring the sustainability of this approach in the long term.

We end by noting some limitations of this study. The limited number of cases clearly limits the generalizability of our findings. Furthermore, there is a selection bias issue from all three ventures being 'survivors' of the entrepreneurship process, and the data collection for the study was performed after the schools had already been in operation for a few years, raising the risk that the informants' memories of the venture founding process might be distorted.

Consequently, future research would significantly benefit from including failed ventures as well as closely examining startup processes of new school ventures in real time.

Notes

1. We use the term independent schools (*fristående skolor*) to refer to nongovernmental for-profit and nonprofit schools that receive state funding through the voucher scheme.

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The Role of Nonprofit Organizations in the Co-Production of Welfare Services: A Systematic Literature Review

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This review studies previous research on the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare services. The need for the review stems from the lack of systematic literature reviews related to nonprofit organizations, co-production, and welfare services. The empirical material is delimited to peer-reviewed research published in international academic journals and analyzed in relation to levels of co-production, the role of organizations, and nonprofit organizational distinctiveness. Main findings include that research has primarily studied the role of nonprofit organizations in relation to co-production and enabling favorable conditions, and that existing research identifies several potential distinctive contributions made by nonprofit organizations to co-production. Implications include encouraging co-management of welfare services, enabling co-production in welfare services beyond public organizations, and exploring how different types of organizations contribute to co-production.

Keywords: Co-Production, Welfare, Nonprofit Organizations

Introduction

What do we know about the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare services? Many countries are searching for new ways to provide and govern welfare in order to meet major demographical, political, and economic challenges (Pestoff, 2009). Co-production is promoted as one of these ways, as it is said to provide a model for the mix of professionals and users as well as different organizations and sectors to contribute to the provision of welfare services (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Brandsen et al., 2018; Ibsen, 2021; Ostrom, 1996; Parks et al., 1981; Verschuere et al., 2012). Even though co-production is far from a panacea (Brandsen & Helderman, 2012; Porter, 2012), research has established that co-production could increase quality, democratic participation, and user satisfaction, among other results (Rantamäki, 2017; Segnestam Larsson et al., 2021; Vamstad, 2012).

Many examples and illustrations of the role and significance of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare services can also be identified in research (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Neubeck, 2016; Pestoff et al., 2006). For example, nonprofit organizations are said to facilitate, enhance, and promote user participation to a higher degree, while their role at the same time mainly is limited to producing services together with users rather than managing or governing the organizations that deliver these services together with users (Pestoff, 2009;

Prentice, 2006; Vamstad, 2012). There also exists research on how nonprofit theories and frameworks can inform research on co-production (Benjamin & Brudney, 2018).

Despite a significant amount of research coupled with numerous empirical examples (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Pestoff, 2012; Verschuere et al., 2012), there appears to exist relatively little comprehensive knowledge related to the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare services. In comparison, among the many existing systematic reviews of co-production (Clifton et al., 2020; Jukić et al., 2019; Rodriguez Müller et al., 2021; Voorberg et al., 2015), there is no review that solely focuses on the role of nonprofit organizations in relation to co-production.

The aim of this article is to contribute to previous research by presenting the results of a systematic literature review of the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare services. The research questions that direct the article are:

- What is the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare?
- To what degree do users and professionals produce, manage, and govern welfare services together in nonprofit organizations?
- In what ways do nonprofit organizations make unique contributions to co-production?

It should be noted that there exist many different definitions and understandings of co-production (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Loeffler, 2021a; Pestoff, 2012) and similar concepts in the literature, such as co-creation (Brandsen et al., 2018; Loeffler, 2021b; Rodriguez Müller et al., 2021; Torfing et al., 2019; Voorberg et al., 2015), although some argue that for example co-production and co-creation are conceptually distinct (Torfing et al., 2019). Co-production is in this article defined as a process that takes place between users and professionals, rather than as processes in the collaboration between, for example, the public and the nonprofit sector, between public and nonprofit organizations, or between public organizations and external stakeholders (Brandsen et al., 2018; Ibsen, 2021; Jukić et al., 2019; Verschuere et al., 2012).

The next section presents a framework for analysis, related to the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare services. The framework is used to code and analyze the empirical material. The methodology and the empirical material are then described, followed by a presentation of the findings in relation to publication characteristics and the role of nonprofit organizations in co-production. The results of the review are in the analysis and the discussion related to more general literature reviews on the role of co-production in welfare (Verschuere et al., 2012) and literature reviews on co-production in public organizations (Rodriguez Müller et al., 2021; Voorberg et al., 2015). The article is concluded by listing the main contributions to the knowledge base as well as by pointing out implications for policy, practice, and research.

Framework for Analysis

Commonly used conceptual frameworks for identifying and discussing the role of nonprofit organizations in societal affairs—such as nonprofits as avant-garde, complement, alternative, or replacement (Lundström, 1996)—fit less well with the definition of co-production used in this article. One main reason is that these frameworks seek to categorize the role of nonprofit organizations primarily in relation to a dominant actor, such as the government and its public organization. The goal in this article is less to understand the role of nonprofit organizations in relation to the state, and more to tease out the specifics of the role of nonprofit organizations in relation to the type of co-production that takes place between professionals and users (Brandsen et al., 2018; Ibsen, 2021; Jukić et al., 2019; Verschuere et al., 2012).

In this article, levels of involvement and the role of nonprofit organizations in co-production will be used for understanding, coding, and analyzing the relationship between nonprofit organizations and co-production of welfare services. Levels refer here to the focus of the involvement of users and nonprofit organizations, such as an individual or an organizational level. The role of nonprofit organizations highlights the different roles these organization can have in co-production, such as enabling or delivering services. In addition to levels and roles, I will also identify and analyze if, and if so, to what degree nonprofit organizations make distinctive contributions to co-production of welfare services. These three dimensions of co-production, constituting the framework for analysis, are introduced below.

Levels of Involvement

Research has long since noted that co-production could focus on different levels (micro-meso-macro), and furthermore that users and nonprofit organizations could engage at different levels (individual-organizational-societal) (Brandsen et al., 2018; Loeffler, 2021a; Pestoff, 2012; Voorberg et al., 2015). Based on typology related to nonprofit and state relationships (Osborne & McLaughlin, 2004), Brandsen and Pestoff (2006) have developed a conceptual framework related to the original concept of co-production. The framework was developed partly because of the observation that the term co-production has been used in different contexts and for different phenomena (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Loeffler, 2021a; Pestoff, 2012). The conceptual framework distinguishes the following three manifestations of co-production, here referred to as 'levels of involvement':

- Co-production refers to a level of involvement in which users and nonprofit organizations partly or fully participate in the production of services.
- Co-management concerns involvements in which users and nonprofit organizations participate in the management of services.
- Co-governance refers to a level of involvement in which users and nonprofit organizations participate in the formulation of policies and planning of services.

In an article published six years later, Pestoff (2012) clarifies that both co-production and co-management take place on the output or implementation side whereas co-governance usually could be found on the input side. It should furthermore be noted that the levels of involvement are not mutually exclusive. Nonprofit organizations could for example have structures that enable participation of users, combining co-production and co-management. Like Brandsen and Pestoff (2006), I refer to all three levels of involvement under the heading of co-production. Other researchers have also used the concepts of co-governance and co-management in a similar fashion (Lindsay et al., 2018; Poocharoen & Ting, 2015).

Role of Nonprofit Organizations

Whereas levels of involvement refer to if co-production focuses for example on production or management, the role of nonprofit organizations highlights the extent to which nonprofit organizations are involved in co-production. Based on a review of research on co-production in general (Verschuere et al., 2012), a framework is therefore developed and presented in this article that distinguishes between enabling, providing mechanisms for, and delivering co-production.

- Enabling favorable conditions for co-production. These conditions could include supporting, connecting, and protecting users, proving legitimacy for co-production as a norm and praxis in society, or other circumstances that may hinder or facilitate co-production.
- Providing organizational mechanisms for co-production. Mechanisms may include organizational structures that enable participation, promote innovations in the

production or management of welfare services, or uphold key variables that are required for co-production to take place.

- Delivering results. This degree of co-production refers to nonprofit organizations being directly involved in the production and provision of welfare services, such as childcare or home support.

Like levels of involvement, the three themes are only to be considered as analytical devices and may therefore not be mutually exclusive in real world examples. For example, participation could be regarded as a mechanism for co-production (as co-production could be defined as users participating in the production of welfare services; see, for example, Brandsen et al., 2018; Verschuere et al., 2012) as well as the key outcome of co-production (as research has established that co-production could increase democratic participation; see, for example, Rantamäki, 2017; Vamstad, 2012).

Distinctive Contributions

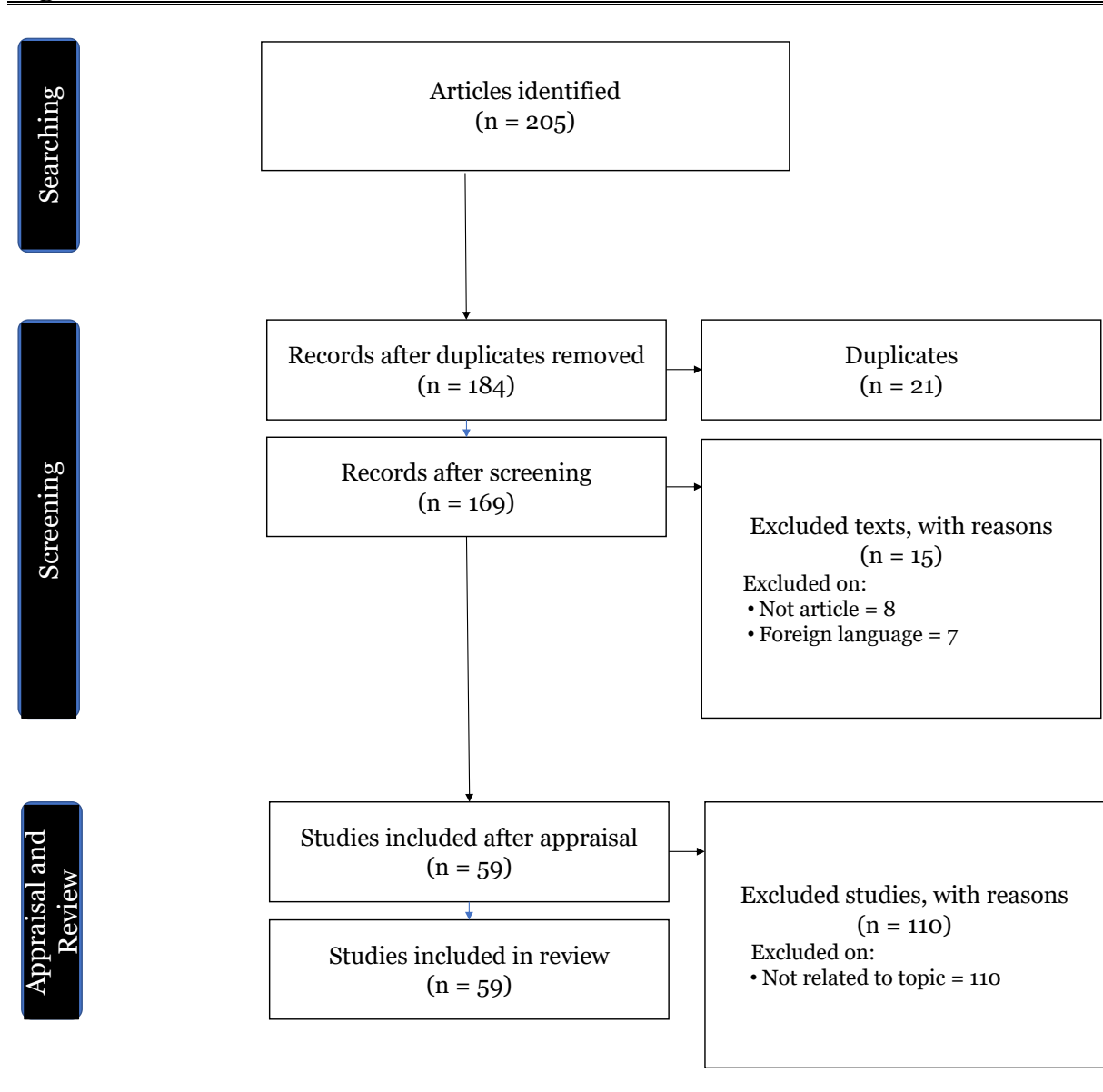
Finally, as noted above, the literature also provides many examples of the significance of nonprofit organizations in co-production (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Neubeck, 2016; Pestoff et al., 2006), begging the question if and, if so, to what degree nonprofit organizations make unique contributions to co-production. At times, the concept of distinctiveness has been used to identify unique and essential characteristics and qualities of nonprofit organizations to distinguish them from other societal phenomena (Anheier, 2005; Hall, 1992; Salamon et al., 2000; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). For example, by comparing nonprofit organizations to public and for-profit organizations, researchers discuss how nonprofit organizations at times deliver better quality, and are more flexible and innovative (Kendall, 2003; Roseneil & Williams, 2004; Salamon et al., 2000; Sherman, 2003). Inspired by previous research, distinctiveness is in this article therefore defined as the unique ways in which nonprofit organizations and their activities contribute to co-production in comparison to public and for-profit organizations. For example, in the case of organizations, distinctive contributions could concern the role of organizational missions, ideologies, and values in co-production, or unique forms of access to certain target groups or resources (such as volunteering), and how these characteristics differ from public and for-profit organizations involved in co-production.

Method and Empirical Material

In terms of methodology, a systematic literature review of previous research was carried out in December 2020 (Gough et al., 2012). In terms of methodological steps, a search string was developed based on combining terms related to co-production, nonprofit organizations, and welfare. The search string was then adapted, as their thesauruses were different, and applied to three databases for academic research (Academic Search premier, SocIndex, and Sociological abstracts).¹

The selection of articles was based on pre-defined eligibility criteria (see Figure 1 below). Report eligibility criteria focused on formal elements and included that the articles should be a) peer-reviewed research, b) written in English, and c) published in international academic journals. The initial search (205 articles) was as a result firstly reduced by deleting duplicates (21 articles), texts that were conference papers (8), and articles written in other languages than English (7). The remaining 169 articles were downloaded. Study eligibility criterion focused on the topics. As this review focuses on co-production, nonprofit organizations, and welfare, I excluded articles that did not address all three topics. Following the study eligibility criterion, I screened the title and abstracts of the 169 articles, out of which I deemed 110 articles to be less relevant for the review.

Figure 1. Selection Process



The resulting 59 articles, covering a period between 1999 and 2020, were coded by the author with the support of software for qualitative analysis (Nvivo). The purpose of the coding was to organize the articles and their various dimensions as well as to analyze these dimensions. The articles were coded firstly in relation to (1) publication year, (2) the origin of the article, (3) the main nonprofit concept, (4) type of research approach (theoretical/empirical), and (5) methodological orientation.

Thereafter, the articles were coded in relation to the framework for analysis, that is (6) levels of involvement in co-production (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006), (7) the role of nonprofit organizations (Verschuere et al., 2012), and (8) the degree to which nonprofit organizations are said to make distinctive contributions to co-production (Anheier, 2005; Hall, 1992; Salamon et al., 2000; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). The results of the analysis are presented in the next sections.

Table 1. Publication Year and Origin

Country or Continent	Articles in 1999 2000 2002 2005 2006 2007 2009 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020																	Number of Articles in Total
Australia										1				1	2			4
Brazil									1									1
Canada	1				1	1		1					1			1		6
China													1					1
Denmark															2	1	1	4
England									1				2					3
Europe									1									1
Finland														1				1
Germany					1						1							2
India								2										2
Italy							1							1				2
Japan																	1	1
N/A											1							1
Netherlands							1											1
Norway															1			1
Pakistan															1			1
Scotland											1	1		1	1			4
Sweden									1									1
Ukraine			1															1
United Kingdom								1	1	1	2	1	2	1		4	2	15
United States		1		1			1				1			1	1			6
Total	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	4	4	2	7	2	6	5	7	8	4	59

Publication Characteristics

Most of the articles are published in a wide range of different journals (45 different journals in total). Nevertheless, eight articles are published in *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations*, three in *BMC Health Services Research*, three in *Health Expectations*, two in *Public Management Review*, and two in *Social Policy & Administration*. Furthermore, in the final selection of articles, there was an increase in the number of publications over the years. Ten papers were published during the first period (1999–2009) and 49 in the later period (2011–2020). The ‘top-scoring’ year was 2019, with 8 articles (see Table 1).

Origin and Nonprofit Concept

Most articles relate to a European context. 36 of the articles are from or based on material from European countries or the European region. In more detail, 15 articles could be attributed to the United Kingdom. If articles from England and Scotland are attributed to the United Kingdom, the total amount rises to 22 articles, making the United Kingdom an exception in this research field. This is noteworthy as it has been argued that the field of co-production originally had been developed in the context of the so-called ‘residual’ welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990), such as Great Britain, the US, Holland, and Belgium (Bovaird, 2007; Parks et al., 1981; Pestoff, 2012). The next largest region in terms of number of articles is North America, including six articles from or based on material from the United States and six from Canada. Four articles could be related to Australia and Denmark, and two from Germany and Italy. The remaining articles originate from different countries, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and China.

The main concepts for denoting matters related to the nonprofit sector were the third sector (14 articles or 24%) and community (11 articles or 18%). The prominence of the concept of the third sector could partly be attributed to the finding that most articles relate to a European context, as some European scholars and research traditions have favored the concept of the third sector over other concepts. Furthermore, ten articles (17%) used primarily the concept of volunteers, five articles (9%) used non-government, and three (5%) used civil society. Only two articles (3%) used primarily the concept of nonprofit. I was not able to identify a concept related to the nonprofit sector for seven (12%) of the articles.

Type of Research Approach

Of the 59 articles studied, I deemed 47 (80%) to be primarily empirically oriented, six (10%) to be primarily theoretically oriented, four to be both empirically and theoretically oriented (7%), and two (3%) un-categorizable. The domination of the empirical orientation of research on nonprofit in co-production seems to be similar to research on co-production in general (Verschuere et al., 2012).

Articles were seen as empirically oriented if they were based on new empirical findings which were essential for the presentations. The empirically oriented articles often addressed co-production in social work (38%) and health care (34%), including providing services for older people (Doheny & Milbourne, 2013), community participation in rural health services design (Farmer & Nimegeer, 2014), and co-production of community mental health services (Væggemose et al., 2018). To a lesser extent, the empirically oriented articles addressed co-production in education (10%) and other fields of interest (18%), the latter including areas such as research, citizen participation, or membership in associations.

Articles that were not based on primary empirical data, but that rather had the aim of bringing new understanding to the conceptualization of co-production through argumentation (built on existing theories or analytical concepts) were regarded as theoretically oriented. Journal

articles with a theoretical orientation included, for example, the application of empowerment-oriented approaches to co-production (Breton, 1999), an article that identified four alternate models of user value cocreation (Nambisan & Nambisan, 2009), and an article that discussed hybridity in relation to nonprofit organizations and co-production (Pestoff, 2014).

Four articles were deemed to be both empirically and theoretically oriented. One example of such an article is the article, *An Ambiguous Concept: On the Meanings of Co-production for Health Care Users and User Organizations?* (Ewert & Evers, 2014). Presenting empirical material from the health care sector in Germany, the article also addresses the vagueness of the concept of co-production, arguing for example that uncertainty and ambiguity is the normalcy when it comes to define co-production.

Finally, there were different reasons for not categorizing the remaining two articles into any of the groups. One article had neither an empirical nor a theoretical orientation (Brown et al., 2005), the other promoted an online toolkit for co-production for community based participatory research (Goodman et al., 2018).

Methodological Orientation

Similar to reviews of research on co-production in general (Verschuere et al., 2012), a significant portion (20%) of the research on nonprofit organizations, co-production, and welfare services is case study based (Morton & Paice, 2016; Tarlau, 2013; Væggemose et al., 2018). Furthermore, and partly as a result of case study designs, but also the prevalent use of interviews and participatory and action research methods, most authors use qualitative data (59%) (Baker & Irving, 2016; Jagosh et al., 2015; Lum et al., 2016). There are a smaller number of articles using quantitative methods (10%), including surveys and mappings (Lelieveldt et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2011; Vamstad, 2012). There are also a set of articles using a mix of methods (10%), including a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Ewert & Evers, 2014; Sadler et al., 2017; Strokosch & Osborne, 2017). Finally, it was difficult to categorize the methodology for some articles (21%) due to factors such as theoretical orientation or the use of secondary material (Farmer et al., 2015; Goodman et al., 2018; Young et al., 2017). The aforementioned review of research comments on the qualitative nature of co-production research, arguing that it, on the one hand limits the scope of findings, but that these limitations also are understandable given the continued conceptual discussions surrounding co-production (Loeffler, 2021a; Pestoff, 2012; Verschuere et al., 2012).

Results

In addition to findings related to publication characteristics, articles were also categorized in relation to levels of involvement, the role of nonprofit organizations as well as if they addressed potential distinctive contributions made by nonprofit organizations to co-production.

Levels of Involvement

As presented in the framework for analysis, levels of involvement refer to if co-production focuses on production, management, or governance (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). In the selection of 59 articles, I categorized 35 (59%) as mainly focusing on co-production, four (7%) to be primarily focused on co-management, 18 (30%) as focusing on co-governance, and two (3%) to be un-categorizable (Kuts, 2002). Even though the applied framework only differentiates between three levels of involvement, it should be noted that the selected articles used a variation of concepts related to co-production, including co-design (Farmer et al., 2018), co-creation (Brown et al., 2005), and co-construction (Lum et al., 2016). The categorization, however, not only considered the preferred used of concepts, but also the focus

of the articles, and finally collapsed the various manifestation into the three included in the framework.

Articles were seen as focusing on co-production if they addressed levels of involvement in which users partly or fully participate in the production of their own service. As expected, given that close to six out of ten articles were categorized as co-production, they displayed a wide range of plurality in regard to origin (Bano, 2019; Breton, 1999; Roberts et al., 2014), the concept used to denote nonprofit (Derges et al., 2014; Ewert & Evers, 2014; Lelieveldt et al., 2009), type of research approach (Alm Andreassen, 2018; Boccacin, 2017; Væggemose et al., 2018), welfare area of interest (Doheny & Milbourne, 2013; Evans, 2012; Rantamäki, 2017), and methodological orientation (Lee & Han, 2016; Paterson et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2011).

Articles that focused less on users producing their own services, and more on the involvements in which users and nonprofit organizations participate in the management of services, were regarded as primarily co-management oriented. The four journal articles with such an orientation included articles that studied the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-management of promoting asylum seeker integration in Scotland (Strokosch & Osborne, 2017), the facilitation of personal development for public involvement in health-care education and research (Read et al., 2020), and the involvement of parents in cooperative child care in Sweden and Germany (Pestoff, 2012; Vamstad, 2012).

Finally, articles were seen as focusing on co-governance if they addressed levels of involvement in which users and nonprofit organizations participate in the formulation of policies and planning of services. Examples of co-governance-oriented articles tended to focus more on how users and nonprofit organizations participated in the planning and implementation of services at a sectoral level than on the formulation of policies (Bode, 2006; Fazzi, 2009; Jagosh et al., 2015). For example, one article studied involvement of the nonprofit sector and users in the governance of health service provision in the United Kingdom (Martin, 2011), and another article described a pendulum movement over time between co-production and co-governance in the home care services in Canada (Jetté & Vaillancourt, 2011).

Similar to how Brandsen and Pestoff (2006) noted that the categories in their conceptual framework were not mutually exclusive, several examples could be found in which the levels of involvement overlapped in the articles. One such example is the article, *Co-production and Service Quality: The Case of Cooperative Childcare in Sweden* (Vamstad, 2012). In addition to the use of co-production in the title and the categorization of the article as primarily co-management oriented, the empirical material presented in the article shows how parents were simultaneously involved in the management of the cooperatives as well as in the production child care. Hence, the levels of involvement are neither to be regarded as mutually exclusive from an analytical perspective nor from an empirical one.

Role of Nonprofit Organizations

In contrast to levels of involvement, I was not able to categorize the role of nonprofit organizations (Verschuere et al., 2012) for more than half of the articles (58%). The main recurring reason for this was that the specific role of nonprofit organizations was simply not addressed. For example, the article, *A Coproduction Community Based Approach to Reducing Smoking Prevalence in a Local Community Setting*, describes how local residents were recruited and trained as community researchers to deliver a smoking prevalence survey in the United Kingdom (McGeechan et al., 2016). The article does not, however, address the role of nonprofit organizations.

Of the remaining 25 items studied, I categorized ten of the 25 articles (38%) as enabling favorable conditions for co-production, six (23%) as delivering results, and five (19%) as providing organizational mechanisms. I also deemed that one article (4%) paid equal attention

to enabling favorable conditions and providing organizational mechanisms (Lelieveldt et al., 2009), and that three other articles (12%) paid equal attention to all three degrees of involvement (Boccacin, 2017; Ewert & Evers, 2014; Pestoff, 2014).

Articles were categorized as enabling favorable conditions for co-production if the role of nonprofit organizations mainly related to circumstances that facilitated co-production. One example of enabling conditions is an article that showed that the highest levels of change related to co-production occurred in the presence of involvement and support of nonprofit organizations (Derges et al., 2014). Other examples of enabling favorable conditions included nonprofit organizations having access to public servants and elected officials (Lum et al., 2016), building relationships and protecting users (Strokosch & Osborne, 2017), enhancing, facilitating, and promoting greater citizen and community participation (Fazzi, 2009; Pestoff, 2012; Thomas et al., 2011).

Articles that highlighted how nonprofit organizations uphold variables required for co-production to take place were regarded as primarily providing organizational mechanisms for co-production. The five articles placed in this category included examples of providing organizational mechanisms such as co-operatives for users (Prentice, 2006), organizations developing collaborative relationships for patients (Baker & Irving, 2016), nonprofit organizations enabling citizens to be involved as volunteers (Lee & Han, 2016; Væggemose et al., 2018), and organizations ensuring good governance to co-production partnerships (Bano, 2019).

Finally, articles that mainly described and analyzed the production and provision of welfare services by nonprofit organizations were seen as delivering results. The six articles categorized as delivering results included studies that analyzed the quality of services in childcare in Sweden (Vamstad, 2012), how member structures and membership in nonprofit organizations affect the creation and delivery of value (Hager, 2014), and the role of nonprofit organization for the supply and results of home support services in Canada (Jetté & Vaillancourt, 2011).

The presentation above underscores the positive role of nonprofit organizations in co-production of welfare services, and therefore arguably also obscures the more problematic issues. Despite this, there were articles that addressed some challenging aspects that could be related to nonprofit organizations and co-production. For example, one article discussed how co-production may co-opt nonprofit organizations to reproduce predominant government priorities rather than prioritizing stakeholder views (Kuts, 2002). Other articles highlighted the danger that nonprofit organizations may function solely as ordinary customer services (Ewert & Evers, 2014), that nonprofit organizations' disorganized character may affect co-production negatively (Prentice, 2006), or that nonprofit organizations' participation in welfare reforms is mainly rhetoric (Fazzi, 2009). Research on co-production in general has also brought attention to some of the more problematical sides, such as the risks of co-production excluding marginal groups in society (Brandsen & Helderman, 2012; Porter, 2012).

Distinctive Contributions

Out of the 59 articles included in the review, only 15 articles (25%) addressed the topic of nonprofit organizations making unique, distinctive contributions to co-production (Anheier, 2005; Hall, 1992; Salamon et al., 2000; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). I categorized three of the 15 articles (20%) as focusing on nonprofit organizations' role as essential to the very definition of co-production, seven articles (47%) as providing theoretical and empirical illustrations of distinctive contributions, and finally five articles (33%) as stating that nonprofit organizations to some degree, and under specific circumstances, may make distinctive contributions. In contrast to levels of co-production and the role of nonprofit organizations in co-production, the categories for analyzing the distinctive contributions were developed inductively.

Three articles addressed the topic of distinctive contributions by defining co-production as only or mainly related to the activities and characteristics of nonprofit organizations. For example, in the article, *Coproducing Rural Public Schools in Brazil: Contestation, Clientelism, and the Landless Workers' Movement*, the author defines co-production as, “the active participation of civil society actors in the provision of public goods” (Tarlau, 2013, p. 395). By referencing other researchers another article in the review notes, “that members of professional associations create and deliver much of the value enjoyed by the membership (i.e., ‘coproduction’)” (Hager, 2014, p. 415). Hence, co-production requires the participation of nonprofit organizations, and they deliver much of the value. A variation of considering nonprofit organizations as essential to co-production is an article discussing co-production mainly carried out by user organizations, such as self-help groups (Ewert & Evers, 2014).

Seven articles provided theoretical and empirical illustrations of distinctive contributions made by nonprofit organizations. One set of illustrations discussed the characteristics of nonprofit organizations, including for example the combination of a public purpose with the ability to involve users in a way that ensures the legitimacy of co-production in general (Lelieveldt et al., 2009) and how nonprofit organizations are more willing to diverge from core tasks to promote co-production (Strokosch & Osborne, 2017). Another set of examples related to user involvements. Nonprofit organizations were said to provide significant user involvement and control (Prentice, 2006), have a tradition in which users and staff co-produce the services together (Vamstad, 2012), and involve citizens individually as volunteers or collectively (Væggemose et al., 2018). One article also listed how nonprofit organizations were seen as ways to protect and promote individual and family choices, promote social cohesion, and offer bottom-up local control that builds community participation (Prentice, 2006).

Finally, five articles described how nonprofit organizations, to some degree, under specific circumstances, and—in comparison to public and for-profit organizations—made distinctive contributions. For example, nonprofit organizations are consulted to a higher degree on a range of policy issues (Lum et al., 2016) and deliver services that other organizations cannot easily provide (Lee & Han, 2016). Furthermore, in comparison to the private sector, nonprofit organizations are expected to be driven more by ideals and to be more participatory, democratic, and effective in promoting co-production (Bano, 2019). Even though the distinctive contributions of nonprofit organizations are acknowledged, one researcher argues that not all nonprofit organizations automatically can be equated with greater user participation (Pestoff, 2012). In a different article, the same researcher notes that the fact that nonprofit organizations are involved at different levels of co-production “may result in competing expectations about their role and what their distinctive contribution should be, both internally and externally” (Pestoff, 2014, p. 1419).

Findings and Discussion

There exists more research than expected on the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare services, as evidenced by the number of articles identified as part of this systematic literature review as well as their theoretical and empirical contributions. Even though a certain level of knowledge was expected, given the rising academic interest in matters related to co-production, it is still noteworthy that a review of literature—delimited to selection criteria related to co-production, nonprofit organizations, and welfare services—produces such a significant amount of research. I would therefore argue that this empirical result constitutes one of the main findings of this review.

In starting to review the research field in more detail, this article has presented the results of the coding of the included articles in relation to research characteristics, such as type of research approach and methodological orientation. For example, most articles relate to a European context, are primarily empirically oriented, and most articles use qualitative

Table 2. Combining Levels of Involvement and the Role of Nonprofit Organizations

Co-Governance	14%	0%	5%
Co-Management	10%	0%	5%
Co-Production	24%	24%	19%
	Enable favorable conditions	Provide organizational mechanisms	Deliver results

methods. These results obviously contribute to our shared understanding of what we know, that is the qualitative dimensions of empirical manifestations of co-production in Europe. At the same time, the categorization also indirectly indicates what we would need to study more, including, for example, co-production in other regions of the world as well as quantitative and comparative dimensions of co-production. There also seems to exist less knowledge production related to the analytical and theoretical side of co-production.

The article has also categorized the empirical material in relation to the framework for analysis. A way to analyze these empirical findings could be to compile these descriptions into a table that combines what I have conceptualized as levels of involvement and the role of nonprofit organizations (see Table 2). It should be noted that the compilation of what we know was firstly delimited to the 25 articles (42%) that I was able to categorize in relation to both levels and degrees of involvement. For comparative reasons, I also decided to omit the article that paid equal attention to enabling favorable conditions and providing organizational mechanisms as well as the three articles that paid equal attention to all three degrees of involvement. Thus, Table 2 is based on 21 out of 45 articles included in the review.

According to the compilation, research has so far primarily focused on how users and nonprofit organizations are involved in co-production and then co-governance and co-management. Research has also to a greater degree studied how nonprofit organizations enable favorable conditions and then how they provide organizational mechanisms and deliver results. The two dimensions taken together specify that research to date mainly has focused on how nonprofit organizations enable favorable conditions, provide organizational mechanisms, and deliver results for co-production. At the same time, the compilation in Table 2 also indicates what we would need to study more if we are to understand the role of nonprofit organizations better and more comprehensively in the co-production of welfare services. These lesser-known areas include primarily nonprofit organizations' role in all three degrees of involvement in relation to co-management. We also need to pay more attention to the role of nonprofit organizations in providing organizational mechanisms and delivering results in relation to the co-governance and co-management of welfare services.

Moreover, I have also presented the degree to which articles included in this review have addressed the topic of distinctive contributions, that is if and, if so, to what degree nonprofit organizations make unique contributions to co-production. Based on this categorization I would argue that we know that some articles regard nonprofit organizations as essential to co-production, that several articles provide illustrations of theoretical and empirical illustrations of distinctive contributions, and that some authors state that nonprofit organizations to some degree, and under specific circumstances, may make distinctive contributions. However, as only one fourth of the articles explicitly or implicitly addressed the topic, the notion of distinctiveness, nonprofit organizations, and co-production is an area that could be explored further in future research.

An area that also should be explored in more depth is similarities, differences, and distinctiveness between co-production implemented by nonprofit organizations, as they are manifested in this review of the literature, with co-production as implemented by public and

Table 3. Schematically Comparing the Results of This Review with Other Systematic Reviews

	Systematic Reviews on Co-Production and Public Organization	This Systematic Review on Co-Production and Nonprofit Organizations
Assumption	Welfare services first and foremost a public good	Welfare services originated in the nonprofit sector and more than a public good
Target Group	Citizens	Users, self-help groups, and members
Methodological and Empirical Orientations	Qualitative case studies of an empirical nature from European countries	Qualitative case studies of an empirical nature from European countries
Levels of Involvement	Public organizations co-produce, co-manage, and co-governance	Nonprofit organizations mainly co-produce
Role of Organizations	Public organizations enable favorable conditions, provide organizational mechanisms, and deliver results	Nonprofit organizations mainly enable favorable conditions
Distinctive Contributions	Not discussed	Nonprofit organizations considered essential to the very definition of co-production as well as make distinctive contributions

for-profit organizations. For example, do nonprofit, for-profit, and public organizations engage in different types of co-production? Or in different policy areas? Even though these questions are outside the scope of this article, some preliminary insights could be formulated based on a comparison with published reviews of the literature related to public organizations (Clifton et al., 2020; Jukić et al., 2019; Rodriguez Müller et al., 2021; Voorberg et al., 2015). These insights are presented in Table 3.

Several critical remarks could be made in relation to the results of the review. First, as discussed in the presentation of the framework for analysis as well as in the presentation of results, it should be noted that the levels of involvement, the analytical role of nonprofit organizations in co-production, and the notion of nonprofit organizational distinctiveness are only to be considered as analytical devices and may therefore neither be mutually exclusive nor apparent in real world examples. Second, in addition to the dominance of qualitative dimensions of the role of nonprofit organizations in co-production in Europe discussed above, the variety of concepts for denoting matters related to the nonprofit sector, such as the third sector or civil society, questions the degree to which similar types of organizations have been studied. Third, there is a tendency in reviews such as this as well as in nonprofit research to underscore the positive sides of nonprofit organizations. Despite this, it should be noted that the review also identified articles that addressed some challenging aspects related to nonprofit organizations and co-production, including that nonprofit organizations' disorganized character may affect co-production negatively, among other things. There were also articles that, for example, argued that not all nonprofit organizations automatically can be equated with distinctive contributions to co-production.

It should finally be acknowledged that the results of this review are affected by the framework for analysis, the applied methodology as well as the acknowledged delimitations, including the selected databases, the terms used in the search string, and the demarcation to welfare services. For example, the field of welfare could be more regulated than other fields, mainstreamed by new public management and/or provide less room for differences among providers, that could serve as explanations to the results of the review. In addition, the results could be affected by the limitations of conducting a systematic review by only one researcher.

Thus, I cannot formulate conclusions beyond these limitations. However, the results of the review are in line with results from some other studies of a more overarching character (e.g., Benjamin & Brudney, 2018). Future research should not only explore areas that we know less about, such as the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-management of welfare services, but also review what the literature knows about the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production in other areas of society.

Conclusion

This article has explored what previous research knows about the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare services by conducting a systematic literature review. The need for the review stems from the lack of comprehensive knowledge related to the role of nonprofit organizations in the co-production of welfare services as well as the fact that most previous systematic literature reviews focus on public organizations. Main contributions to the research field include that co-production should be associated with and researched in not only public organizations but also nonprofit organizations as well as the findings from the review. These findings include that research primarily has studied the role of nonprofit organizations in relation to co-production and enabling favorable conditions as opposed to co-management, co-governance, providing organizational mechanisms, and delivering results. Another contribution is the potential distinctive contributions of nonprofit organizations to co-production identified and studied in the literature.

These contributions have potential implications for practice, policy, and future research. Practitioners, in particular managers of nonprofit organizations, are encouraged to invite research that could study the degree to which users co-manage welfare services as well as if nonprofit organizations provide organizational mechanisms and deliver significant results related to co-production. Policymakers and politicians need to consider also nonprofit organizations to a higher degree in policies and regulations if they wish to promote co-production in welfare services beyond public organizations. Future research, finally, should explore the results from this article in other fields and countries by using more comparative and quantitative methods. In particular, we would encourage research that would explore the potential distinctive contributions made by different types of organizations, including public, for-profit, and nonprofit organizations.

Notes

1. Search string in e.g., Academic Search Complete looked as follows: ("Co-produc*" OR Coproduc* OR "Co-governance" OR Cogovernance OR "Co-manage*" OR Comanage* OR "Co-creat*" OR Cocreat* OR "Co-construct*" OR Coconstr*) AND (DE "NONPROFIT organizations" OR DE "NONPROFIT sector" OR DE "VOLUNTEER service" OR DE "SOCIAL participation" OR DE "CIVIL society" OR DE "NONGOVERNMENTAL organizations" OR DE "COOPERATION" OR DE "COOPERATIVE societies" OR Volunteer* OR Voluntary OR "Third sector" OR "Cooperative organization*" OR "Faith-based organization*") AND (DE "PUBLIC welfare" OR DE "SOCIAL services" OR DE "WELFARE state" OR DE "MEDICAL care" OR DE "PUBLIC health" OR DE "EDUCATION" OR DE "ELDER care" OR "Social work" OR "Health care").

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Nonprofit Planning and Impact with Regard to the 2018 Tax Law

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The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) is considered the largest tax overhaul since 1986 and was anticipated to produce declining charitable donations for nonprofits and was expected to create disruption across the nonprofit sector in 2018. This study tests whether small nonprofits (under \$250,000 in revenues) or large nonprofits (over \$250,000 in revenues) planned differently due to the law and secondly, how they were affected by the law. Utilizing survey data from 50 nonprofits, this research offers qualitative data on both large and small nonprofit organizational awareness as it relates to the rollout of the law.

Keywords: Tax Law, Nonprofits, Surveys, Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, Nonprofit Size

Introduction

With the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) in 2017, the tax law (Public Law No: 115–97) which was signed by President Trump on December 22, 2017, and took effect in 2018, was expected to have major ramifications for the nonprofit sector. Considered the largest tax overhaul since 1986 (Tax Foundation, 2017), this law was anticipated to produce declining charitable donations for nonprofits and was expected to create disruption across the nonprofit sector. Although there have been minor nonprofit related tax law updates since the TCJA's passage such as the \$300 charitable deduction for nonitemizers in 2020 (Chubb, 2020), the TCJA remains a major tax law worthy of study as it relates to the impact of charitable giving to nonprofit organizations.

In 2017, United States charitable giving had grown to the largest number on record, reaching \$410.02 billion, with individuals donating \$286.65 billion of that total amount (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2019). Recently, the number of households donating declined from 68% in 2002 to 55.5% in 2014 prior to the TCJA (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2019).

With the passage of this tax law, the number of individuals itemizing their deductions is expected to decrease and therefore reduce the number of those receiving credit for charitable giving. The Tax Policy Center at the Urban Institute and Brookings Institution estimates that the number of households claiming a deduction for charitable contributions will fall from 21% under the prior law to 9% under the new TCJA law (Gale et al., 2018, p. 21). According to Howard Gleckman (2018) of The Tax Policy Center, the law is expected to reduce charitable giving by approximately 5% (Gleckman, 2018, p. 4).

Further, Rikki Abzug (2019) noted that, “The hurried passage of the bill by Christmas of 2017, meant that by the beginning of 2018, nonprofit leaders, practitioners, and advocates, were scrambling to try to understand the new provisions by which they would have to abide” (Abzug, 2019, pg. 1).

Knowing that this tax law would have implications for nonprofits, this leads to the research question: With the onset of the law, are 501c3 nonprofits with under \$250,000 revenues (small nonprofits) less aware than 501c3 nonprofits with over \$250,000 revenues (large nonprofits) about the effects of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act on their anticipated charitable giving?

Since smaller nonprofits would have less resources to follow developments on the tax law or to employ individuals with such knowledge, the hypothesis speculates as to whether these small nonprofits might be less aware. However, results from organizational surveys will test this hypothesis to ultimately determine whether smaller nonprofits do have less awareness.

I collected original empirical data featuring 50 nonprofit organizational surveys across 13 states in America in 2018, during the first year of the law’s implementation. Nonprofits were split into two groups: under \$250,000 in revenues (termed ‘small nonprofits’) and over \$250,000 in revenues (termed ‘large nonprofits’). The organizational surveys featuring qualitative data were completed by 50 nonprofit organizations who were issued a set of fixed questions such as “How has your nonprofit been affected by the Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017? If yes, how so?” and “Has your nonprofit planned differently due to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017? If yes, how so?” This mix ensures a yes/no answer to the questions but also offers additional qualitative evidence that provides a deeper picture regarding this awareness.

Theoretical Background: Charitable Deductions as a Tax Incentive

Literature Shows People are Motivated by Tax Incentives

Charitable giving by individuals is affected by tax incentives. One study based on interviews with 500 grantors of large charitable trusts found that 27% of all donors are primarily motivated by tax advantages (Cermak et al., 1994). In a survey of charitable giving to medical research foundations, Dawson (1988) showed that income or the motivation to take advantage of tax benefits was a significant predictor of amount given to these foundations. Further, Clotfelter (1985) found that charitable deductions, tax rates, and other items associated with the tax system do affect the size and amount of charitable giving. Smith (1980) noted that economic motivations, including potential tax changes, is likely the most important of all mediators of giving. Auten et al. (2002) found that taxes affect the level of contributions by an individual in multiple ways. Pelozo and Steel (2005) recognized that tax deductions for charitable giving end up resulting in a larger amount given to the charity. Specifically, they found that a decrease of \$1 in the cost of giving through tax incentives can actually yield greater than \$1 in donations by an individual to a nonprofit.

Further, the wealthy alter their charitable giving the most when tax incentives change. Steinberg (1990) noted that wealthy donors are more sensitive to price elasticity over tax law changes, than others. Auten et al. (1992) also found that high income taxpayers are most affected by increases in the tax price of giving and that in response they often decrease their contributions.

In sum, charitable giving by individuals is affected by tax incentives and this is particularly true for wealthy individuals. Therefore, the research question which addresses whether nonprofits are aware of the new tax law’s effect on charitable giving is relevant.

Literature Shows Giving Expected to Decrease with Passage of the 2017 Tax Law

There is ample literature that shows expected charitable giving was predicted to decrease with the passage of the 2017 tax law. This tax law, with most tax effects beginning January 1, 2018, was anticipated to have implications for charitable giving to nonprofits since the law was expected to reduce the number of itemizers. Prior to the tax law, approximately 25% of taxpayers itemized deductions on their returns (Rosenberg et al., 2016) and so the charitable deduction changes could affect up to one-quarter of Americans. However, these one-quarter of taxpayers who itemize actually contribute most of the charitable giving. They contribute 82% of all charitable giving (Rosenberg et al., 2016), so a tax law change affecting those 25% of taxpayers has major ramifications.

As mentioned previously, the Tax Policy Center at the Brookings Institution and Urban Institute predicted the number of households claiming a deduction for charitable contributions would fall from 21% to 9% due to the law (Gale et al., 2018, p. 21). Gale et al. also predicted that the number of households who claim a deduction for charitable contributions will fall from 37 million to 16 million in 2018, which is the first year the tax law is in effect (Gale et al., 2018, p. 21). Gleckman (2018) noted that the share of middle-income households who could claim the charitable deduction would drop from 17% to 5.5%.

A reduction in the number of households claiming a deduction for charitable contributions does not necessarily presume a reduction in charitable giving. However, additional research had predicted that this would be the likely result. Indiana University's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and the Independent Sector produced the research report *Tax Policy and Charitable Giving Results* in May 2017 which offers an overview of proposed policy changes on charitable contributions and government tax revenue as the TCJA law was taking shape. One of the findings was that the current tax proposals (before TCJA passage) would reduce charitable giving by between \$4.9 and \$13.1 billion (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and the Independent Sector, 2017).

Another study also found evidence of an anticipated charitable giving decrease. Stallworth and Rosenberg (2017) estimated that charitable giving as a result of the law would decline by between \$12 and \$20 billion in 2018, or between 4% and 6.5%. Further, they argue that economists generally agree that the tax deduction increases charitable giving (Stallworth & Rosenberg, 2017), so any effort to reduce this tax deduction would have implications for donations by individuals to charities.

During the 1980s, there was a time when non-itemizers were able to deduct donations to charity and this allowed a researcher to determine whether the tax incentive led to increased giving. Duquette (1999) found that while charitable giving by nonitemizers is responsive to tax incentives, it is more responsive for itemizers. The implication from this finding is that these reductions in tax incentives via the TCJA would also face a decline in charitable giving.

A George Washington University study noted that this decline in predicted charitable giving from TCJA would be so great that it would also result in losing 220,000 nonprofit sector jobs (Gates, 2017).

The Philanthropy 2018 & 2019 Outlook recognized that many individuals bumped up their donations in 2017 to beat the upcoming tax changes, which will likely result in a major decline in charitable giving for 2018 (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2018).

In addition, the National Council of Nonprofits issued 2018 Tax Law guidance to nonprofit board and staff members that mentioned this anticipated reduction in charitable giving due to the law (National Council of Nonprofits, 2018).

One research team even went so far as to release guidance as to potentially reverse the effects of this anticipated TCJA charitable decline. After Indiana University's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and the Independent Sector predicted a charitable decline (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and the Independent Sector, 2017), they then analyzed five policy tax proposals that could potentially return levels of charitable giving post TCJA implementation. Their findings included weighing the potential effects of a non-itemizer charitable deduction, a non-itemizer with a modified 1% floor, a non-refundable 25% charitable giving tax credit, and an enhanced non-itemizer charitable deduction (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2019).

The literature distinctly anticipates a drop in charitable giving as a result of the TCJA law. However, the literature does not offer a nonprofit organizational awareness of this anticipated drop, and further, does not provide that organizational awareness by size of nonprofit. What is missing from the literature is a perspective on nonprofit organizational awareness of this anticipated charitable giving decline due to the law and further, how nonprofit organizational size may affect this awareness.

Data Collection and Methods: 50 Nonprofits Surveyed

I designed an open-ended survey that was distributed to nonprofit organization leaders with a set of fixed questions resulting in primary data collection. In September and October 2018, these surveys were collected from 50 nonprofit organizations in the United States across 13 states. These surveys explicitly utilized a representation of all four regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West). The states surveyed were the following: Minnesota, Texas, Connecticut, West Virginia, Oregon, Florida, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Michigan, Missouri, Georgia, California, and Utah. These states were selected to ensure a large and small population mix, in addition to, a regional mix.

Charity Navigator has a repository of over 160,000 rated nonprofits in the United States (Charity Navigator, 2021) and this nonprofit organization was utilized for sourcing nonprofits in August–October 2018. Nonprofits were selected from 13 states in Charity Navigator's database and an attempt was made to procure equal numbers of returned surveys from nonprofits in two categories, under \$250,000 in revenues and over \$250,000 in revenues. 20 surveys were received from nonprofits with under \$250,000 in revenues and 30 surveys were received from nonprofits with over \$250,000 in revenues. An attempt had been made to procure equal numbers of surveys from both categories, but the 60%/40% split was due to the submission rate of the nonprofit leaders. Likely due to more staff, larger nonprofits submitted surveys at a higher rate.

According to Lee et al. (2012), 71% of public administration articles in the top five public administration journals which utilized primary survey data utilized samples of fewer than 500 cases. They further added that their findings in the public administration literature generally featured small-scale surveys. Initial contacts were made with 334 nonprofits via email with additional email reminders and phone follow-ups as needed in order to obtain the sample size of 50 nonprofits. A total of 49 nonprofits completed the survey in full and one additional nonprofit completed the survey partially.

The return rate from these organizational officials was 15%. In this research design, the surveys were both targeted to organizational officials and also included open-ended questions, so the response rate would differ from a close-ended general population survey which would often beget a higher response rate. In this research design, survey participants were also not forced to respond which can provide a higher response rate, but may distort the responses (Baruch, 1999).

The goal was to obtain completed questionnaires from two nonprofit groups, those reporting under \$250,000 in revenues in years 2015, 2016, or 2017, as well as those reporting over \$250,000 in revenues over the same time period. The cutoff of \$250,000 was utilized as this was approximated to be where a charity would start to ramp up a professional staff. It was estimated that a charity under \$250,000 may be all volunteer or operate with minimal personnel only.

Thirty surveys were completed by nonprofits with over \$250,000 in revenues. An additional twenty surveys were completed, including one partially completed, from nonprofits with under \$250,000 in revenues. A list of the nonprofit organizations can be found in Appendix A.

Surveys were completed in September and October 2018 with fifty nonprofits across the United States. Each nonprofit assigned an organizational representative to fill out the survey. The survey was completed by either an organizational leader or professional at the nonprofit. The names of interviewees are not disclosed, and organizational anonymity was granted if the nonprofit so desired. The nonprofits were asked the following questions for this phase of the research:

- Has your nonprofit planned differently due to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017? If yes, how so?
- Has your nonprofit been affected by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017? If yes, how so?

The goal for these questions was to learn awareness of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017.

Researchers utilize questionnaires as a quantitative data type that obtains primary data and are most useful when the research question calls for a descriptive research design (McNabb, 2008). As evident, these survey questions first asked a yes/no question which is considered a closed question. However, each of the two closed questions, were then followed up with an open-ended question. Open-ended questions allow the interviewee to answer the question however they wish and with as little or as much information as needed (McNabb, 2008). Yin (1994) adds that open-ended questions allow for a researcher to seek facts and obtain an interviewee's opinion about details.

Findings

As mentioned previously, a total of 50 surveys were returned from nonprofits in September and October 2018. This included 20 surveys from nonprofits with under \$250,000 in revenues and 30 surveys from nonprofits with over \$250,000 in revenues.

Planning Differently

For the under \$250,000 in revenues nonprofit category (henceforth, smaller nonprofits), the revenues ranged for reported exact figure responses of \$31,539 to \$221,269. For the over \$250,000 in revenues nonprofit category (henceforth, larger nonprofits), the revenues ranged for reported exact figure responses of \$312,486 to \$42,301,608.

For the smaller nonprofits, 19 out of 20 answered the survey question: "Has your nonprofit planned differently due to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017? If yes, how so?" However, the nonreporting nonprofit did answer the follow-up question: "Has your nonprofit been affected by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017? If yes, how so?"

By the time of the surveys in September and October 2018, the law had been in effect roughly 9 to 10 months. Regarding the first question about their smaller nonprofit planning differently

due to the TCJA, 18 of the 19 smaller nonprofits reported they had not planned differently. One smaller nonprofit reported they had planned differently. This equates to 5% of the smaller nonprofits planning differently due to the TCJA of 2017.

Dream Catcher Stables Inc., which was the sole nonprofit stating they had planned differently due to the TCJA law, noted, “We continue to encourage donations large and small. For capital reasons we have added a recycling campaign.”

However, there were many reasons as to why almost all of these small nonprofits had not planned differently due to the law.

Some qualitative answers suggested smaller nonprofits were not concerned about the TCJA Law. Health Access Connect, Inc. of Texas, described the following, “I don’t think it will lead to wide shifts in donor interest. It might be more consequential if we were a larger organization or more dependent on large donations from high-net-worth individuals.” Despite the law’s implementation, a small nonprofit in South Dakota said, “Our plan and mission to create a better educational system towards agriculture has not changed” (Confidential South Dakota 002). Another small nonprofit in South Dakota added, “No change to our mission or plans” (Confidential South Dakota 001).

Other small nonprofits were concerned but uncertain or unaware. Minnesota Brownfields in Minnesota reported, “We are small (4 FTE employees) so don’t have the ability to analyze the impact of the change, but we do understand that it could be negative bc of less incentive for charitable contributions.” Hemistar Conservancy in Texas said, “We think the jury is still out with regard to impact on fundraising for our project.”

Another small nonprofit in Pennsylvania answered no to the question of whether they were planning differently due to the law; however, they said, “We have been doing more fundraisers to make up for decreased donations” (Confidential Pennsylvania 001). Since their answers seemed somewhat contradictory, this suggests some ambiguity here as well.

For the larger nonprofits, thirty answered the survey question: “Has your nonprofit planned differently due to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017? If yes, how so?” Of those, 5 of the larger nonprofits said yes and 25 said no. This equates to approximately 17% of the larger nonprofits planning differently due to the TCJA of 2017.

Of the large nonprofits who noted they had planned differently, their qualitative information suggested there were many actions they were taking to plan differently. The Minnesota Chorale wrote, “We are carefully monitoring the potential impact this legislation will have, especially if it has a negative impact on donations from individuals.” Connectkids Inc. in Connecticut said that the way they are planning differently is to, “Try to find staff that is long-term and to stretch our funds.” A West Virginia large nonprofit noted that they were planning differently due to the TCJA law but added they were also concerned about a decrease in state funding at the same time, “Because of less government support (mostly state funding) we embarked on an endowment campaign to build some reserves as the state funding will continue to drop off (or so we project)” (Confidential West Virginia 011). Another large West Virginia nonprofit noted that, “We plan on reaching out of our community for help and to achieve greater results in our mission” (Confidential West Virginia 012). Tomorrow’s Rainbow Inc. in Florida, said, “We are asking individual to make long-term donation to address the new tax so that they can receive their deduction.”

As for those large nonprofits who noted they did not plan for the TCJA law, there were many reasons cited. The Montrose Center in Texas said, “We don’t know how to plan, there is such uncertainty.” A large nonprofit in Oregon said, “we will monitor to see how it impacts YE giving” (Confidential Oregon 010). A large nonprofit in Georgia said, “Not yet, because we

were not prepared for the huge decrease this year, but we have already started to think about what we will need to do differently next year to convince people to still donate and invest in our services” (Confidential Georgia 011).

To summarize the results of question one, “Has your nonprofit planned differently due to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017? If yes, how so?” only 5% of the smaller nonprofits planned differently due to the TCJA of 2017, whereas 17% of the larger nonprofits planned differently. This suggests that there was not much planning associated once the TCJA was passed by either the small or large nonprofits. Less than 1 in 5 large nonprofits from the sample planned at all and only 1 in 20 small nonprofits planned accordingly. Further, there was more planning associated with the large nonprofits, a difference of 12%.

The reasons small nonprofits gave for not planning for the TCJA law included that they were not concerned about the TCJA law, they were uncertain, or they were unaware. The reasons larger nonprofits gave for not planning for the TCJA law included that they were uncertain or had not started planning yet. In other words, there was uncertainty about what the TCJA law would mean for their nonprofits.

The reasons larger nonprofits gave for planning for the TCJA law included that they are monitoring incoming donations to see if there is a negative impact, looking to stretch funds, greater emphasis on community donations, and encouraging charitable deduction tax planning to better align with the law. These larger nonprofits who did decide to plan did so because they expected a financial reduction in charitable giving due to the TCJA law.

Affected by Law

The second question, “Has your nonprofit been affected by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017? If yes, how so?” was utilized to provide qualitative information regarding how these nonprofits were affected by the law since the law had now been in effect 9 to 10 months at the time of the surveys. Twenty small nonprofits answered this question with the following responses: 15=no, 1=not yet, 3=uncertain, and 1=yes. So, 75% of small nonprofits did not believe the TCJA had affected them, despite the law being in effect for 9 to 10 months.

The majority of small nonprofits reported no impact, some impact, or uncertainty concerning how their nonprofit had been affected by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. Some small nonprofits reported no impact. A small Texas nonprofit said, “No, except our students are finding more jobs available which allows them to use the experience and training they have gained from our time together” (Confidential Texas 001). Health Access Connect, Inc. in Texas noted, “Not that I know of yet.” A Connecticut small nonprofit said, “No it has not since [confidential] has changed names” (Confidential Connecticut 002).

One small Pennsylvania nonprofit alluded to negative impact, but did not explicitly state as such, “...The economy itself reflects on donations. The less people have, the less they can donate” (Confidential Pennsylvania 001).

Another small nonprofit reported uncertainty, “Not sure at this time. Probably not affected to [sic] much since we are a smaller organization” (Confidential Connecticut 001).

In sum, the small nonprofits reported no impact, negative impact, or uncertainty concerning how their nonprofit had been affected by the law.

Thirty large nonprofits answered this question with the following responses: 17=no, 5=not yet, 4=uncertain, and 4=yes. So, 57% of large nonprofits, the 17 nonprofits reporting “no,” did not believe the TCJA law had affected them.

Large nonprofits reported a range of answers including positive impact, uncertainty, no impact, or negative impact.

There were some large nonprofits reporting positive impact from the TCJA law. One nonprofit who was encouraging early donations and tax planning due to the law said, “We are doing good compare [sic] to prior years like 2010–2016” (Confidential Florida 011). Missouri nonprofits noted, “Yes, overall improvement of the economy seems to have impacted generosity” (Confidential Missouri 011), and “We continue to grow staff. Funding sources have increased” (Confidential Missouri 012).

Another nonprofit that reported impact, reported it but in a negative fashion. A large Georgia nonprofit noted, “We cannot say with 100% certainty that the legislation affected us, but it is easy to assume that it did because of the large decrease in individual support we have received so far this year. Because most individuals elected the standard deduction, there was less of an incentive to give to nonprofit organizations like ours.”

Other large nonprofits reported uncertainty due to the law. VSA Minnesota reported, “It is too early to know. I think we will have a better idea come about January 15, 2019.” Connectkids Inc. of Connecticut said, “Possibly affected but we are a small organization so it is hard to tell right now.” Another large Connecticut nonprofit said, “Unsure at this time” (Confidential Connecticut 010). The large West Virginia nonprofits shared, “Not that we know of yet. We work on fiscal year, so are looking towards the end of year giving to tell the tale” (Confidential West Virginia 010), and “We do not know right now. Next year we will have more access to this question” (Confidential West Virginia 011).

A few large nonprofits reported no impact. One large nonprofit reported, “I am not aware of our agency being affected by this act” (Confidential Texas 010). A large Missouri nonprofit noted, “Not yet” (Confidential Missouri 010).

In addition to commenting on how the law had potentially affected the large nonprofits, two nonprofits noted annoyance at who the law benefitted. The Montrose Center in Texas reported, “Not yet, but we expect funding cuts to cover the growing deficit caused by giving the 1% huge tax cuts.” A confidential Michigan large nonprofit added, “The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that the Trump Administration passed does not help the people that we service. We would rather have seen those tax breaks given to the people that actually need the extra money as opposed to the top 1%” (Confidential 010).

In sum, there was more awareness by the large nonprofits (43%) than the small nonprofits (25%) that the law had affected or might affect them. Finally, it is also important to note that some large and small nonprofits are funded with mostly or all government sources rather than individual donations. For instance, one large Georgia nonprofit stated, “Budgets are always set in place for nonprofits that receive federal funding over a year in advance so we are unlikely to know of the impacts of federal legislation until the following year” (Confidential Georgia 010). A small nonprofit said we “work in mental health, so we are not a big receiver of donations in the first place” (Confidential Texas 003).

Discussion

Post-Law: What Happened?

The researchers, such as those at the Tax Policy Center, who predicted the law’s potential impact, in addition to, the charitable organizations surveyed, were not privy to the 2018 data when delivering their assessments. However, post-surveys, there is now data on what occurred

with regards to charitable giving within the first full year of TCJA implementation during 2018.

The IRS reported that the number of people who itemized in 2017 was 46.2 million and post-law, the number who itemized in 2018 was 16.7 million (Mercado, 2020, pg. 3). Further, the IRS reported 36.8 million charitable contributions on 2017 tax returns (pre-law) but that dropped significantly to 13.9 million for 2018 tax returns (Mercado, 2020, pg. 3).

Giving USA 2019: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2018 noted the 2018 estimate for individual donations declined 3.4% when adjusted for inflation from 2017 to \$292.09 billion (Giving USA, 2019). This report noted that part of the reason the individual giving decline was not steeper was due to the strong economy having a positive effect on individual giving (Giving USA, 2019).

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic brought new minor nonprofit related tax legislation such as the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act which instituted a \$300 above the line charitable contribution deduction (Chubb, 2020) which could potentially help buffer some of the effects of this decline in individual giving with regards to the TCJA law.

Regardless, the researchers correctly predicted the trend that there would be a decline of itemizations in 2018 and a decline in 2018 charitable giving.

Implications

According to the Tax Foundation, the TCJA was the “most significant tax code overhaul in over three decades” (Tax Foundation, 2017, pg. 1). Yet, there was not much nonprofit organizational awareness of a major tax law passed 9–10 months earlier that would likely have implications for their donations. Although some nonprofits have other revenue sources, including government funding, donations remain a major source of revenue for many nonprofits. So, the notion that these nonprofits had little awareness of an upcoming revenue decline is telling. There was a disconnect between how these large and small nonprofits had planned for regarding the TCJA versus how the public policy literature had documented likely anticipated outcomes, including that of the Tax Policy Center at the Urban Institute and Brookings Institution and Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.

As noted, 5% of the smaller nonprofits reported planning differently due to the TCJA of 2017 and 17% of the larger nonprofits planned differently. So, as the hypothesis offered, the larger nonprofits had more awareness than the small nonprofits. However, the large nonprofits still were largely unaware. This finding might be surprising as one would expect larger nonprofits to have more professional staff to track these updates.

Regarding the second question, 57% of large nonprofits and 75% of small nonprofits did not believe the TCJA had affected them, despite the law being in effect for 9 to 10 months. So again, despite the public policy literature predicting an anticipated affect, the nonprofits, in both large and small categories, were largely stating there was no impact on revenues via donations within the first 9 to 10 months.

When the large nonprofits who did report some type of effect, it ranged from “not yet” or “uncertain” to an explicit “yes.” So, there was some uncertainty as to the impact of the law.

Reframing these results, 5% of smaller nonprofits reported planning differently, but yet, 25% of the small nonprofits believed the law had either affected them or might have already affected them within the first 9 to 10 months. This 25% reported effect was only within the first 9 to 10 months of the law’s implementation and so that percentage would likely have increased once a full year of donations were collected by the end of 2018.

Like the small nonprofits, there was also a disconnect between what the large nonprofits planned for versus what happened to them with regards to TCJA impact. 17% of larger nonprofits reported planning differently, yet 43% of the large nonprofits believed the law had either affected them or might have already affected them within the first 9 to 10 months. This 43% reported effect in the large nonprofits was only within the first 9 to 10 months of the law's implementation and so that percentage would likely have increased once a full year of donations were collected by the end of 2018.

In sum, although large nonprofits were more aware, they also were not as aware as they needed to be with regards to how TCJA might impact them. One potential solution is for the tax policy researchers, such as the Tax Policy Center, to produce a free video disseminated to nonprofits on how a major tax law could impact them. Another potential solution is for the National Council of Nonprofits to disseminate their findings more widely on how major tax reform can affect nonprofits (National Council of Nonprofits, n.d.). The Council has a document explaining impacts of TCJA and other laws (National Council of Nonprofits, 2018, April 5), and many of the organizations surveyed here could have likely benefited from this information had they been aware of such document. Further, the Council could disseminate this work by partnering with other organizations serving nonprofit leaders such as the National Association of Nonprofit Organizations and Executives which has trained over 17,000 charitable leaders (<https://nanoe.org>) or the National Association of Nonprofit Professionals (<https://www.nanpp.org>). Solutions such as these could help rectify the problem of both small and large nonprofits being uninformed about the impacts of this major tax law on their organizations.

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Appendix A. List of Nonprofit Organizations

A list of the nonprofit organizations surveyed, including those selecting anonymity.

Under \$250,000 in revenues

Name of Organization, Amount of Revenues, Year of Revenues.

Minnesota

Protect Minnesota, \$150,936, 2016

Minnesota Brownfields, \$221,269, 2016

Texas

Dream Catcher Stables Inc., \$77,547, 2017

Health Access Connect, Inc., \$31,359, 2016

Hemistar Conservancy, \$195,361, 2016

Confidential Texas 001

Confidential Texas 002

Confidential Texas 003

Connecticut

Confidential Connecticut 001

Confidential Connecticut 002

Florida

Florida Artists Group, Inc., under \$50,000, 2017

Confidential Florida 001

Pennsylvania

Love to Langa, under \$50,000, 2017

Confidential Pennsylvania 001

South Dakota

Confidential South Dakota 001

Confidential South Dakota 002

Michigan

Friends of the Novi Public Library, under \$50,000, 2017

Confidential Michigan 001

Missouri

Vikings USA Boothel, MO, \$82,880, 2017

Confidential Missouri 001

Over \$250,000 in revenues

Name of Organization, Amount of Revenues, Year of Revenues

Minnesota

VSA Minnesota, \$374,066, 2016

Confidential Minnesota 010

Confidential Minnesota 011

Texas

The Montrose Center, \$7,767,573, 2016,

Confidential Texas 010

Confidential Texas 011

Connecticut

Connectkids Inc., \$312,486, 2016
Confidential Connecticut 010

West Virginia

Confidential West Virginia 010
Confidential West Virginia 011

Oregon

Confidential Oregon 010
Confidential Oregon 011

Florida

Tomorrow's Rainbow Inc., \$322,559, 2017
Confidential Florida 010
Confidential Florida 011
Confidential Florida 012

Pennsylvania

Brittany's Hope, \$1,402,677, 2016
Camp Orchard Hill, Inc., \$1,632,868, 2016,
Confidential Pennsylvania 010

South Dakota

South Dakota Community Foundation, \$42,301,608, 2016
Confidential South Dakota 010

Michigan

Junior Achievement of SE Michigan, \$1,528,621, 2017
Confidential Michigan 010

Missouri

Confidential Missouri 010
Confidential Missouri 011
Confidential Missouri 012

Georgia

Confidential Georgia 010
Confidential Georgia 011

California

HomeAid America, \$758,357, 2016

Utah

YWCA Utah, \$6,182,113, 2016

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Organizational Resilience of Intimate Partner Abuse Nonprofits During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Nonprofits often function as a key part of the social safety net by providing services to vulnerable populations and strengthening communities. Despite their essential nature, research on organizational resilience (OR) among nonprofits tends to focus on surviving financial distress, while other organizational aspects of resilience are less emphasized. Finding few nonprofit OR models that address our research context, we adapt and extend a model of OR from the for-profit sector. Our model adaptation includes technical, social and financial resources and expands each category to cover unique aspects of nonprofits that the for-profit OR model does not contain. We also borrow concepts from social-ecological resilience (SER) to enhance our nonprofit-adapted OR model, which we test using a case study of intimate partner abuse (IPA) agencies. We examined eight IPA nonprofits in a Midwestern state during the COVID-19 pandemic, interviewing both managers and frontline staff. We hope our adapted model can be used by researchers and practitioners to better understand and evaluate OR not only in IPA agencies, but all nonprofits.

Keywords: Resilience, Nonprofits, COVID-19, Organizational Resilience, Intimate Partner Abuse, Intimate Partner Violence

Introduction

Organizations sometimes confront sudden, unexpected changes. Such emergencies require adaptation. Those organizations that can adapt or transform their operations so they continue to function can be said to possess organizational resilience (OR) in the face of challenges; those that do not may cease to function altogether (Tengblad & Oudhuis, 2018b; Trussel, 2002). Despite the size and importance of the U.S. nonprofit sector and their often-significant differences from for-profit organizations, we found few nonprofit-specific OR models (Searing et al., 2021; Witmer & Mellinger, 2016). Understanding key strategies of adaptation in these organizations can help them build resilience prior to emergencies and ensure they are more prepared to survive, thrive and, most importantly, continue to serve our communities even in the most challenging of times.

As an increase in intimate partner abuse¹ (IPA) was widely expected during the COVID-19 pandemic (Reference Group for Gender in Humanitarian Action, 2015; Smith, 2019), we worked with a sample of these agencies to learn more about how they were weathering this challenge. One major theme emerged around coping with changing circumstances and

adapting operating approaches to manage them. As we did not find a nonprofit OR model to apply in this setting, we adapted and extended a model from the private sector (Tengblad, 2018b) to apply to nonprofits.

We begin by reviewing literature showing how IPA increases during pandemics and other crises (such as natural disasters). We then examine OR's roots and existing for-profit OR models, and we discuss some useful concepts from social-ecological resilience (SER) that are less emphasized in OR and that help provide better insight. From there we introduce our adapted model and illustrate it using a sample of IPA agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nonprofits and IPA Under COVID–19

Nonprofits provide support for the most vulnerable in our communities. During the COVID–19 global pandemic, many Americans have utilized nonprofits, from community food banks to mental health helplines and many others. Nonprofits typically offer either goods (e.g., food and clothing) and/or services (e.g., counseling). OR in nonprofits is key to maintaining these organizations as an irreplaceable source of support for individuals and their communities in times of crisis.

Research shows that nonprofit funding has suffered due to COVID–19 (Maher et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2021). The U.S. government offered some nonprofit relief funding, including grants through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (Maher et al., 2020).

While human-service nonprofits were challenged by the pandemic, those serving primarily women and children experiencing abuse were particularly challenged as lockdowns to contain the virus confined women with their abusive partners.² Research shows IPA and violence increase in times of stress, such as pandemics and natural disasters (Bandiera et al., 2019; Godin, 2020; Roesch et al., 2020; Sety et al., 2014; Stripe, 2020; Women's Aid, 2020; WHO, 2020). Lockdowns, where people are required to stay at home and sharply curtail social interactions, remove many safeguards women use to try to manage abuse and violence directed at themselves and their children (Peled & Gil, 2011). Additionally, the economic impacts of pandemics, including job losses and disruptions to childcare and schooling, can also limit survivors' options.

Several studies, including a meta-analysis (Piquero et al., 2021), found an increase in domestic violence in the U.S. during the early lockdown phases of the COVID–19 pandemic (Boserup et al., 2020; Godin, 2020; WHO, 2020). Though some IPA agencies in the U.S. experienced decreased call volumes during some periods of the pandemic, many in the field felt this represented women's lack of access to phones, or lack of safety to reach out for help (Campbell, 2020), rather than a decrease in abuse (Evans et al., 2020).

Organizational Resilience

Often organizations develop within a specific niche with a specific purpose and assume the status quo will simply continue. However, change is a constant in organizational life and though some change is gradual, organizations sometimes face drastic, catastrophic change. Whether an organization can adjust to slowly or quickly changing conditions may determine whether it continues to function and fulfill its mission.

Though resilience originated within ecology (Biggs et al., 2015; Holling, 1973; Pimm, 1984), the concept has also been adopted and adapted in a variety of other disciplines, including the

management of organizations such as businesses (Linnenluecke et al., 2012; Tengblad & Oudhuis, 2018a; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007).

In business, resilience is used in relation to organizations facing change. Many definitions of OR within the business literature are similar, with slight variations. Tengblad and Oudhuis (2018b, p. 3) define OR as the ability to “maintain their vitality in a changing world that constantly requires adaptation.” Vogus and Sutcliffe (2007) define OR as “maintenance of positive adjustment under challenging conditions such that the organization emerges from those conditions strengthened and more resourceful” (p. 3418).

Business researchers tend to look at how aspects of OR impact a for-profit organization’s financial and overall health (Tengblad & Oudhuis, 2018b). Much OR research has focused on ‘high reliability organizations’ that face high-risk challenges in day-to-day operations (airlines, nuclear power plants, etc.) and practice OR as a daily preventive measure to build the skills, processes and resources needed to prevent or manage a major catastrophe (Tengblad, 2018a).

Nonprofits have employees, must manage their finances, and often have a similar basic structure to for-profit business, but they also differ in some important ways. For example, for-profits have generating profits as the primary mission with perhaps some social goals on the side, whereas nonprofits primarily have a social mission for which generating revenue is essential. Similarly, volunteers are nonexistent in the for-profit sector but are a mainstay of nonprofits.

Some studies on nonprofit OR have focused on key factors or characteristics in nonprofits that can help nonprofits to be more nimble in stressful circumstances, but without offering a holistic model of nonprofit OR. For example, Witmer and Mellinger (2016), in a study of large healthcare nonprofits, posited that OR-focused adaptation in nonprofits is somewhat different than in the for-profit sector. They reported the major keys to adaptation in these nonprofits as fiscal transparency, hope and optimism, servant and transformational leadership, community reciprocity, improvisation, and commitment to mission. Another study (Mosley et al., 2012) looked at how nonprofit organizational characteristics such as organization size, age, and manager training impacted adaptive choices during a period of financial stress (e.g., cutting personnel or programs, adding new programs, building joint programs with other organizations or using earned income tactics to continue to function). They found larger organizational size and the presence of a strategic plan made organizations more likely to engage in adaptive tactics, but organizational age and higher professional training did not predict a higher likelihood of using the aforementioned adaptive tactics (Mosley et al., 2012).

Insights for OR from Social-Ecological Resilience

SER evolved from earlier resilience work focusing on ecological systems and how they react to change. Today, SER focuses on integrated natural-human systems and how they respond to change and interact in complex ways given their dynamic nature (Holling, 1973; Walker & Salt, 2012). Walker et al. defined resilience as the “capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks.” (Walker et al., 2004, p. 1).

The stronger focus on systems could be useful for analysis of OR in nonprofits. Appreciating an organization’s environment or context may add critical information about future challenges and increase its ability to plan for adaptation. Context for a nonprofit could include the physical environment (natural disasters, climate change, etc.), but it can also include the socio-political environment (e.g., precarious state funding for certain services or political currents negatively impacting certain groups, such as anti-immigrant sentiment or legislation). Physical or socio-political environment can impact an organization or its clients.

The 3-D resilience framework (Béné et al., 2013) describes three types of capacity that collectively and individually can lead to resilience—absorptive coping capacity (coping), adaptive capacity (adaptation), and transformative capacity (transformation). If returning to a previous status quo is the goal, then coping, or the capacity to absorb short-term shocks and continue to function, might be sufficient (Béné et al., 2013). Coping is a ‘resistance’ strategy, or resisting change by absorbing a shock (Béné et al., 2014), for example using financial reserves to absorb pandemic losses. Coping is a common resilience strategy where it is manageable and affordable in the near-term, but it may not be sustainable in the longer term and may leave an organization with reduced capacity for resilience in the future.

When a crisis or challenge to the status quo goes beyond what a system or organization can absorb, then adaptation, or the ability to adapt and adjust, becomes salient (Béné et al., 2013). Adaptation requires different organizational resources, like planning, learning, and sometimes cooperation or collaboration (Béné et al., 2014). Examples of adaptation include being more flexible about work hours to allow staff to meet clients outside of normal business hours during an emergency, thus increasing access to services to help more clients more quickly.

Sometimes adaptations, or incremental changes, are not enough to maintain current functions and a transformation to a new state is the only option. Transformation is the ability to respond to situations by creating a “fundamentally new system when ecological, economic, or social (including political) conditions make the existing system untenable” (Walker et al., 2004, p. 1). Transformation as a part of OR is rare, as organizations seek first to cope and adapt and only transform as a last resort. IBM, for example, transformed from a manufacturing company to a service-driven information technology company when faced with an inability to adapt and remain relevant in manufacturing (van Kralingen, 2010).

Using these three categories can help organizations to better understand where their actions lie on the resilience framework and evaluate how actions impact current and future resilience capabilities. However, coping, adaptation and transformation are often used dynamically depending on what a situation calls for at a given point in time; resilience is said to emerge from ‘trade-offs and synergies’ between these capacities (Béné et al., 2014). In this paper, we identify coping and adaptation as elements of resilience, which is an evolving, dynamic state rather than a one-time outcome (Béné et al., 2013).

A Model of OR for Nonprofits

In this section we draw on existing models of OR from business and nonprofits to analyze OR in IPA nonprofits during the COVID–19 pandemic. Not finding a model that fit our purposes, we developed our own adapted model as presented below.

Existing OR Models

OR models focus primarily on the for-profit sector, with a smaller, more recent literature focusing on nonprofits. There are several OR models for for-profit organizations, such as one by Linnenluecke et al. (2012). They built a longitudinal model around organizational adaptation during different phases of emergencies. They explore how an organization may experience different crisis phases differently, perhaps stumbling initially, but recovering quickly and learning from the experience in subsequent phases of a crisis. Similarly, Vogus and Sutcliffe’s model (2007) focuses on organizational capabilities in for-profit organizations and in what state they emerge from challenging conditions. These models may be useful in examining the overall experience of organizations post-pandemic, but they were not suited for a cross-sectional study during the pandemic.

Searing et al. (2021) created a model of nonprofit OR with five focal areas, including financial, programs and services, management and leadership, human resources and outreach. Both Mosley et al. (2012) and Searing et al. (2021) touch on categories similar to our adapted model, but both focus mainly on resilience in the face of financial hardship and lack a focus on technical aspects of organizations. Technology use in nonprofits has a long history and is accelerating in line with technology use across our society (McNutt et al., 2018). Technology is increasingly important for service delivery, fundraising, grant-seeking, research, outreach, service provision, effective administration (McNutt, 2020), collaborations (Barrett et al., 2018), etc. As information technology emerged as a strong theme in IPA agency adaptation during the pandemic, we turned to for-profit OR models, seeking one that explicitly included technology.

Tengblad's (2018b) for-profit OR framework focuses on three resource areas that impact the ability to adapt: financial, technical, and social resources. First, Tengblad's model highlights the role of financial resources as they impact an organization's ability to exist, procure supplies and invest in needed resources such as staff, training, and technology. His second focus area is technical resources, which includes actual technology—machines and programs to run them—but also the technical knowledge within an organization. The final focus area in Tengblad's model is social resources, or the relationships, internal and external, that help the organization accomplish its work.

Adapted OR Model for Nonprofits

Knowing IPA agencies would be under special stress during the pandemic, we wanted to capture their experience and examine their resilience during this crisis. Our model adaptation grew out of our findings and includes an emergent theme on the important role played by technology during the pandemic. Not finding a nonprofit OR model that explicitly included technology, we chose to adapt Tengblad's (2018b) model as its focus on financial, technical, and social resources is straightforward and centers around the areas of adaptation we felt most relevant to nonprofits. The focus on social resources is particularly pertinent for nonprofits, and we felt the focus on technical resources in resilience was crucial given the increasingly important role of technology in many nonprofits today.

Our adaptation uses modified versions of Tengblad's categories and adds additional focus areas (see Table 1).

1. Financial Resources

Tengblad's financial resilience category looks at an organization's financial balance, profitability, liquidity, business contracts and intangible assets. Nonprofits (including IPA agencies) are generally funded through a mix of government funds (federal and state monies), foundation grants and private donations, with government monies making up most of IPA agency budgets (Wiley & Berry, 2018). Our adapted model of financial resources has five categories: a) overall financial state; b) staffing levels;³ c) grants, service contracts and loans; and d) fundraising.

The stability of their funding streams greatly impacts the adaptability of nonprofits, either giving them latitude to innovate and make changes or limiting their adaptive capacity. Research shows several strategies have positively impacted nonprofit financial states during crises, such as maintaining strong connections to external funders (Lin & Wang, 2016) and streamlining grant processes (Putnam-Walkerly, 2021). Additionally, in 2020 the federal government, states and foundations offered grant monies targeted specifically toward IPA agencies because they anticipated a rise in domestic abuse during pandemic lockdowns (Paarlberg et al., 2020).⁴

Table 1. Adapted Model for Organizational Resilience in Nonprofit Organizations

Model Category	Sub-Category	Description
1. Financial Resources	a. Overall financial state	Changes in organization's current finances compared to pre-crisis levels
	b. Staffing levels	Changes in personnel and staffing numbers/levels
	c. Grants, service contracts & loans	Changes in grants, service contracts, and any additional loans
	d. Fundraising	Changes in fundraising levels
2. Technical Resources & Organizational Processes	a. Technological assets & deployment	How technology enables/stymies crisis response
	b. Technical know-how	Technical capability of technical/other staff; process for making technical changes and level of stakeholder involvement
	c. Organization & procedures	Changes in how work is done during crisis, compared to pre-crisis
	d. Technical innovation	New technology and new uses of technology
3. Social Resources	a. Followership & relationships with employees	Changes in communication, employee relations, focus on staff safety & support
	b. Relationships with clients	Changes in interactions with clients, roles and responsibilities between staff and clients
	c. Relationships with partners	Changes in relations with organizations nonprofit depends on to accomplish its mission
	d. Relationships with funders	Changes in relations with funders (local, state, regional & national level)
	e. Relationships with top management & board	Changes in how top management operate (power sharing, etc.) and function/relations of board
	f. Relationships with volunteers	Changes in use, number & function of volunteers
	g. Relationships with networks or coalitions	Changes in frequency or content of relations with organizations in network or coalition (lobbying, technical assistance, etc.)
	h. Relationships with community	Changes in level of support from community
	i. Relationships with other stakeholders	Other significant organizational relationships impacting crisis response
4. Mission & Values	a. Mission	Shift or change in organizational mission during crisis
	b. Values	What values do nonprofits maintain and what values do they step away from?
5. Environmental & Contextual Factors	a. Geographic location & environment	Dis/advantages based on area and area resources—hampering or helping crisis response
	b. Societal values, norms & movements	Ongoing or concurrent events in society impacting crisis response

2. Technical Resources and Organizational Processes

The second piece of Tengblad's model is technical resources, including products and services, production technology and organization of work, logistics and supply chains, information

systems and technical knowledge and innovation (Tengblad, 2018b). Our adapted model of technical resources and organizational processes has four categories: a) technological assets and deployment; b) organization and procedures; c) technical know-how; and d) technical innovation. We focus on how technology can facilitate adaptation to maintain or enhance service provision.

Though technology (hardware and software) sometimes lags at nonprofits due to scarce funding, technology adoption has increased in this sector as organizations recognize its potential to increase their impact through improved management, measurement, and internal and external communication (McNutt, 2020; McNutt et al., 2018). A recent study (Newby & Branyon, 2021) found technology played a key role in keeping nonprofits engaged with their client populations during the pandemic. Additionally, another study documented the rapid shift to technology-mediated communication between social workers and their clients during the pandemic (Mishna et al., 2020).

However, IPA agencies may differ somewhat from other nonprofit sectors due to special concerns that virtual communication technologies might expose their clients to further harm by abusive partners (Al-Alosi, 2020; NNEDV, 2022). Both funding and safety issues have affected and complicated technology adoption among IPA nonprofits. For example, prior to the pandemic in our sample of agencies few advocates had laptops and telehealth was not used.

3. Social Resources

Tengblad (2018b) writes, “To be organizationally resilient, a company must develop mutually trusting relationships with committed coworkers, loyal customers, reliable suppliers/partners, supportive owners and various other stakeholders” (pp. 45–46). Tengblad’s model of social resources has five categories: a) followership and relationships with unions; b) relationships with customers; c) relationships with suppliers and partners; d) relationships with owners and financiers; and e) relationships with other stakeholders. These categories provided a starting point but required significant adaptation and expansion for application to nonprofits.

Nonprofits rely on many relationships to accomplish their missions, and these partners and networks can greatly contribute to—or limit—options for adaptation. Our adapted model of social resources has nine sub-categories: a) followership and relations with employees; b) relationships with clients; c) relationships with partners; d) relationships with funders; e) relationships with volunteers; f) relationships with networks and coalitions; g) relationships with top management and board; h) relationships with community; and i) relationships with other stakeholders.

Social resources can impact adaptation in nonprofits in a wide variety of ways. Staff knowledge, dedication, and compassion was rated as a top strength for IPA shelters in one survey and ‘lack of staff’ rated as a top weakness facing many IPA organizations (Roberts et al., 2007). The work of human service nonprofits typically involves person-to-person communication (whether in-person, via phone, etc.) requiring emotional intelligence and effort on the part of their employees; such ‘emotional labor’ is difficult to sustain when employees are exhausted or feel unsupported by the organization (Guy et al., 2014).

In nonprofits such as IPA agencies that serve traumatized populations, employees bear an even higher burden of emotional labor and require higher levels of support and inclusion from their agencies (Slattery & Goodman, 2009). In general, inclusive decision-making within and between organizations (Biggs et al., 2012) can empower, increase communication, and result in greater resilience. Additionally, engaged board members stepping up fundraising and outreach efforts can increase adaptation options and, in the long-term, resilience.

4. Mission and Values

We added a fourth category to Tengblad's model to capture the importance of mission and values to nonprofits. An organization demonstrating strong adherence to accomplishing its mission despite challenges, like a pandemic, may be able to continue to attract funding, attract more dedicated staff, and earn greater respect from clients.

While mission is the driving reason for the existence of a nonprofit, values are important to how a nonprofit accomplishes its mission. Values include things like 'client needs come first' or a strong belief in protecting client confidentiality. Like mission, values can be an important part of staff and client retention; an organization may adapt and even change some values in a crisis, but radically changing significant values is likely to cause stress within the organization and potentially with clients and community partners.

5. Environmental and Contextual Factors

Environmental and contextual factors also impact adaptation and, ultimately, resilience. We suggest two primary contextual factors for consideration, but we acknowledge this category might differ significantly depending on the nonprofit organization or sector. These factors cannot be changed quickly and so can help/hamper adaptation.

a. Geographic location and environment. A nonprofit with a strong relationship with a wealthy local company may have a ready source for emergency aid, potentially increasing their financial resilience and positively impacting technical resilience, both of which could positively impact social factors in resilience. Nonprofits in less wealthy communities may not have access to the same resources, resulting in greater resilience challenges. Lin and Wang (2016) found higher levels of fiscal stress in nonprofits located in rural areas.

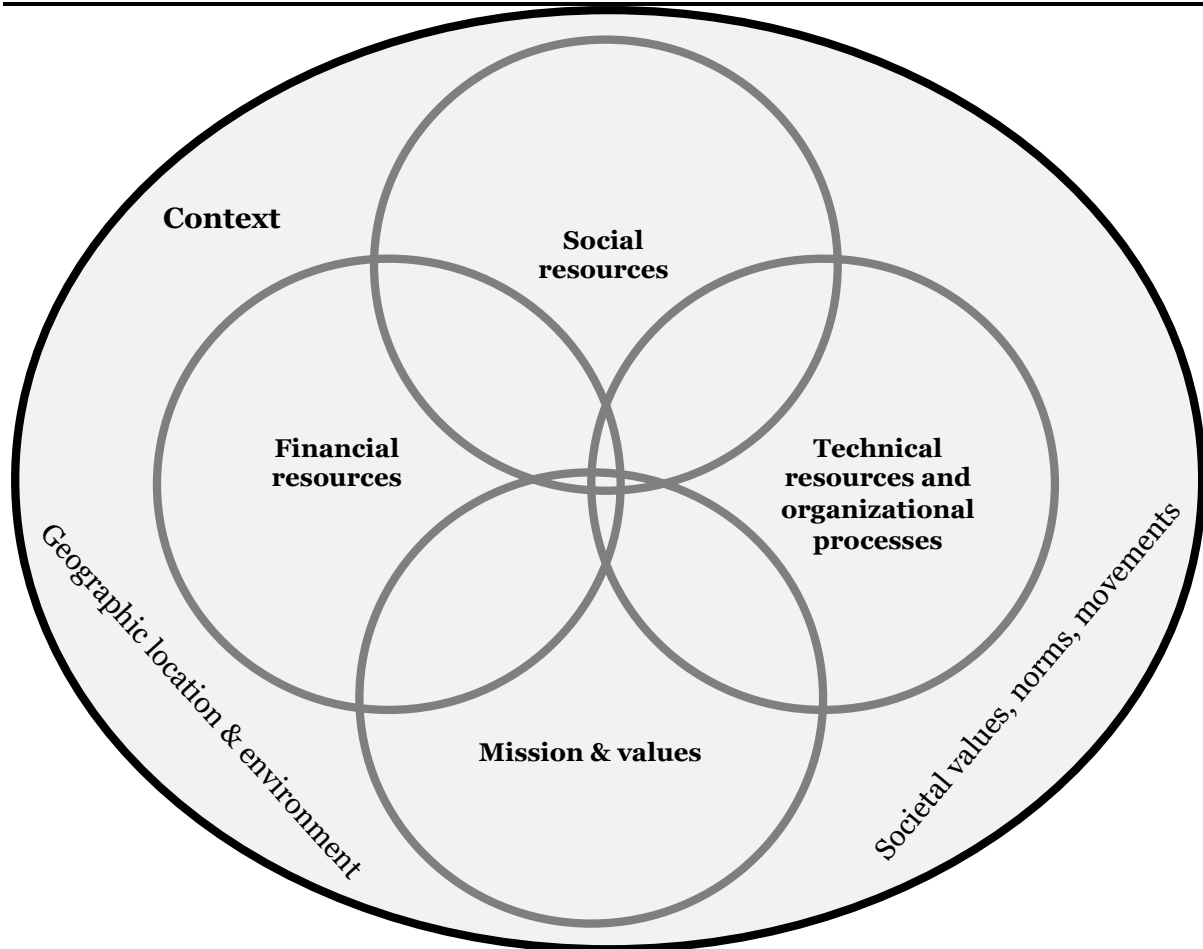
Additionally, nonprofits are tied to the environment around them. A nonprofit located in an area where climate change is dramatically increasing flooding or causing extended droughts will also be impacted by these phenomena, as will the people they serve.

b. Societal values, norms, and movements. Nonprofits are situated in communities and buffeted by the same winds of change occurring around them. When community issues arise and community members take sides, nonprofit agencies cannot always remain neutral, and often must adapt and examine their own policies. For example, many IPA agencies have anti-racist policies in place because the communities they serve have taken steps to begin to address racism. Additionally, nonprofits are impacted by local and state policies and values about their mission; in locations where IPA is regarded as a family matter, rather than a crime, IPA agencies face more obstacles to obtaining community support and funding.

Finally, our adapted model shows overlap across categories (see Figure 1), as we have found adaptation actions may cross categories. For example, adaptations in fundraising may enable technological changes that also improve client service.

Method

This study was approved by an institutional review board (IRB) under strict safety protocols during a time when most research was stalled due to the pandemic. All recruiting and interviewing were done remotely, by phone.

Figure 1. Adapted Model of Organizational Resilience for Nonprofit Organizations

Recruitment and Sample

There are roughly 50 agencies in this Midwestern state that serve survivors of abuse, including some on campuses, some run by religious organizations and some focused on abuse in native communities (Women's Law, 2022). Our eight participating organizations represent a spectrum of IPA agencies, from smaller, rural programs, to mid-sized suburban agencies to some of the largest IPA agencies/programs; our sample comprises roughly 16% of all IPA agencies in the state. The IRS 990 forms for the agencies show they employ between 29 and 121 people, with revenues ranging from a million dollars to nearly \$5.5 million annually (Table 2). All participating organizations are registered as 501(c)(3) and therefore are classified as nonprofits under U.S. tax codes.

We had existing research relationships with all organizations in this case study, making this somewhat of a convenience sample. We wanted manager perspectives of challenges and responses, as well as front-line staff opinion about the actual impact of the changes, so we interviewed at least one managerial staff member and one frontline staff member from each participating nonprofit (n=18). Managers were interviewed and then asked to nominate frontline staff to participate, in a form of snowball sampling.

All agencies were long-standing, with the majority gaining 501(c)(3) status in the late 1970s or early 1980s and one more than fifty years ago. All operate on a mix of government funding and grants, as well as private/community foundation support and private donor fundraising. All participating agencies are of sufficient size to have management teams as well as frontline staff. Interviews were conducted between June and October of 2020.

Table 2. Agency Characteristics (n=8)

Agency Characteristic	Range
Number of employees*	>25 to >120
Year 501(c)(3) status granted*	Majority between late 1970s to mid 1980s (one outlier >50 years)
Total revenue*	\$1 million to >\$5 million
Service area	Rural, suburban, urban

* Data pulled from 2020 IRS 990 forms. Sources: Candid Guidestar, ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer

Among participants (n=18) the majority identified as female (n=17, 94%). They averaged 37 years old, ranging from 24 to 62. Most identified as White (n=16, 89%), with one African American (5%) and one mixed race participant (White and Hispanic; 5%). Length of employment with their agency ranged widely, from six months to 37 years, with an average of eight years (Table 3).

Participants were assigned pseudonyms and each is identified as either frontline staff or manager. Eight participants (44%) were managers and ten (56%) were frontline staff. Managers were defined as people who had other employees working directly for them; some managers had limited direct contact with clients. Frontline workers had direct contact with clients as the major part of their work, though some also had additional responsibilities not involving direct client contact.

Interviews

All participants were interviewed by phone individually by the first author and read a consent statement. Interviews averaged 83 minutes in length with a range of 48 to 166.

Interviews were semi-structured, with an interview guide used to ensure interviews covered all topics. Interviews began with more open-ended discussion or narrative questions, such as, “Tell me about how your work has changed since the pandemic started?” From these narrative beginnings, interviews then probed specifically for changes due to the pandemic. The interviewer used time anchors to help interviewees more accurately recall (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992) and contrast past and current work experiences.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions were analyzed in Nvivo, a qualitative software. We used thematic content analysis to create codes in line with analysis guidelines recommended by Miles et al. (2014). After an initial round of open coding, codes were organized by theme, condensing some codes, and creating sub-codes to allow for more granular examination of some ideas.

To protect the confidentiality of participants we shared aggregated results with participant organizations via email, but due to the pandemic we did not meet in person.

Results

In interviews we frequently found responses to the pandemic that demonstrated coping and adaptation, along with issues that negatively impacted OR. We illustrate our adapted model using our IPA case study. In the interest of brevity, we highlight only novel findings; see Table 4 for a brief synopsis of novel results (see Appendix 1 for complete results).

Table 3. Grouped* Participant Demographics (n=18)

	Ranged demographics	
	(#)	(% or average)
Gender		
Female	17	94%
Male	1	6%
Age	24–62	37 years
Race/ethnicity		
African American	1	5%
Mixed race	1	5%
White	16	89%
Length of employment	6 months to 37 years	8 years

* Participants were promised confidentiality to encourage them to speak freely, so we are unable to provide individual details such as age and years of service which might identify participants.

1. Financial Resources

At the time of the interviews (June–October, 2020) most agencies had manageable financial impacts. Some programs reported revenue losses from in-person service contract programs; most losses were temporary (though still significant) as agencies eventually found ways to safely reopen programs.

Grants for hazard pay for in-person staff, pandemic-related supplies (PPE, cleaning supplies, etc.), and technology (laptops for remote staff, tech for clients without access) were extremely helpful for our sample of agencies, increasing the range of adaptation options open to them. However, initially grantmakers also hampered agency agility through complicated application processes, long lead-times in receiving funding and through existing grant provisions requiring in-person service provision. Changes by grantmakers to streamline processes and loosen restrictions aided agency adaptation.

Private donations from individual donors and small businesses are important to IPA agencies; such funds are often used to support new or innovative programming or accomplish tasks not covered by other funders. One such use can be direct assistance payments to clients for housing or other expenses typically not allowable with more restricted monies.

A lot of times we use our general funds, which are our donations, to provide specific assistance to clients and with that money decreasing, when a client comes to me and says, ‘Can you help me pay my car payment?’ Unfortunately, no. ... So that’s impacted our clients in ways that I didn’t foresee when all of this started (Ash, manager).

2. Technical Resources & Organizational Processes

Here we discuss the contributions to OR of technological assets and the know-how to deploy it, and changes in organization and procedures.

a. Technological assets & deployment. The adaptation in IPA services from a communication technology perspective has been revolutionary, and highlighting these changes is a large part of why we chose Tengblad’s model. These agencies went from pure in-person service models pre-pandemic to a purely virtual model at peaks in the U.S. pandemic, to a hybrid model with clients able to choose in-person or virtual services at less intense pandemic periods. This has been a large operational and cultural shift for these agencies that was quickly completed,

Table 4. Synopsis of Novel Results

Model Category & Sub-Category	Results	Immediate Impact on Adaptation	Longer Term Impact on Resilience
<i>1. Financial Resources</i>			
Grants, service contracts & loans	Grants for hazard pay for in-person staff, pandemic-related supplies & technology very helpful. Some grant processes/requirements hampered speed of agency adaptation. Some losses of in-person service contract program revenues due to pandemic. No use of loans reported in sample.	+/-	Unknown
Fundraising	Major fundraising events canceled or moved to virtual; impact unclear at time of interview; some programs slightly up, some slightly down.	Less discretionary funding for rental/bill assistance for clients	Unknown
<i>2. Technical Resources & Organizational Processes</i>			
Technological assets & deployment	Agencies swiftly moved to telehealth as pandemic shutdowns lingered; grants for technology facilitated the shift. Concern over digital divide and access for all clients.	Benefit for some clients; mixed feelings for staff	
Technical know-how	Few agencies with dedicated IT staff resulted in inclusive teams of volunteer staff members making collaborative decisions.	+	+
Organization & procedures	Work schedules changed to protect staff and clients. Work-from-home policies adopted (esp. in regard to protecting client confidentiality). Greater use of communication tech to maintain staff cohesion. Tension over differences between in-person shelter staff and remote staff.	Some work schedules not sustainable long- term. Virtual staff relations helpful, but not same as daily in- person interactions	Work-from-home may help attract employees in future. Staff cohesion in virtual / hybrid organizations is longer-term issue

<i>3. Social Resources</i>			
Followership & relationships with employees	Majority of managers reported special efforts to care for employees (tech-enabled communication, regular check-ins, more efforts to encourage non-work-focused conversation); concerns over employee stress levels & burnout. Examples of inclusive decision making and increased top-down and bottom-up communication.	+/-; difficult to negotiate differences in exposure between in-person shelter staff vs. remote staff	Increased communication and inclusive decision making could strengthen OR; More focus on employee wellbeing could reduce burnout/turnover
Relationships with partners	Community partners such as healthcare systems, police (in some cases less likely to arrest/hold perpetrators), courts (cases delayed leaving clients in limbo for divorce, custody, and felony cases) faced own pandemic challenges and were sometimes less available/responsive	+/-; depended on partners and pre-pandemic strength of relationship	Joint preparation for emergencies could help establish mutual goals to increase systemic/ community resilience
<i>4. Mission & Values</i>			
Mission	Increased focus on short-term mission (supporting clients) vs. longer-term mission of working to end abuse (including work with community partners such as police and courts, as well as community outreach and education efforts). Some efforts to increase virtual outreach & education.	Allowed for greater focus in crisis	Unknown; potentially negative if longer-term mission is lost
<i>5. Environmental & Contextual Factors</i>			
Societal values, norms & movements	Black Lives Matter movement, anti-immigrant policies, etc. added to agency priorities.	Added to organizational priorities, requiring additional resources	Potential to improve staff, client, and community service/relations longer-term

largely successfully, during a global emergency. It is one of the areas of greatest adaptation for IPA agencies and will impact their service reach and ability to accommodate client needs far into the future.

The shift to telehealth happened within days to weeks of lockdowns in our sample, greatly increasing flexibility with minimal disruption in critical services. Telehealth has not merely been a replacement for in-person services but in some cases has additional benefits for clients.

Clients are missing far less appointments because it's from the comfort of their own home. They don't have to travel. They don't have to worry about gas money. They don't have to worry about their kids having daycare or contacting the abuser to help them out for an hour with the kids or dropping them off so that they can go to counseling, and they drive all the way out to [city name]. I mean we're not close to a lot of people and so that telehealth has been amazing. I mean absolutely amazing. We're offering [support] groups via telehealth now, those are super well attended which is different and so our goal is to keep that around forever. I mean it's fantastic (Hazel, manager).

Telehealth was not seen as a panacea, however. Some participants worried some survivors may have technological barriers (such as wi-fi access or bandwidth limitations) or a lack of technological comfort. Interviewees reported several solutions to bridge the tech gap—giving survivors phones or tablets, finding free wi-fi locations and coaching clients through technical issues.

b. Technical know-how. Many IPA agencies lack dedicated technical staff. In our sample technical know-how largely came from managers and frontline staff organizing on-the-fly problem-solving teams. These organizations also had to find creative ways to accomplish their goals within existing technical packages they could afford and start using immediately. Not having specific technical staff in some cases meant technical decisions were made with wider staff participation.

We had representation from advocates, from residential...from therapy. [There] was a small team of people who chose the virtual platform that we use and that wasn't me as a supervisor who was doing it. We had the people who were gonna be using it every day figure out what they wanted and then we went with that (Cedar, manager).

c. Organization & procedures. These organizations instituted many changes in work scheduling during the pandemic to ensure services could be maintained with limited in-person staff exposure. Only one organization reported a widespread exposure of essential staff to COVID-19 followed by mandatory quarantine, requiring other staff and management to step in to maintain continuity of essential services. One organization paired up essential workers to limit exposure; if one of the pair became infected, both would quarantine, but other paired in-person staff would be unaffected and able to step in to provide coverage. Another organization had essential shelter staff work solo for 30 to 38-hour shifts for weeks to avoid widespread exposure. Such schedule changes were a key response to the pandemic.

Changes in usage patterns for existing communication technologies enabled isolated staff to maximize communication among staff, an important aspect of adaptation. The technologies have filled an important gap, but most do not see them as a complete replacement for in-person communication.

We have phones, we have email, we have text, and we have...a chat program within in my office which we just got at the beginning of the pandemic—which has been great—but it's not the same as running over to your coworker's office and processing this...traumatic event your client just went through (Magnolia, frontline staff).

3. Social Resources

Lacking the financial and technical resources many resilient for-profit organizations may have, strong relationships and networks are often the bedrock of nonprofits. Although social resources may be more difficult to measure, they may also be the hardest to develop. Money can be raised in a day (with luck and strong fundraising strategies), technical resources can be purchased quickly (though they may take longer to integrate and function), but it takes time to change a workplace climate and build relationships.

a. Followership and relationships with employees. In an emergency, frontline workers are often those enacting the mission of the organization, which can suffer if they are disaffected, feel unsupported or unappreciated. Tengblad (2018b) therefore defines followership as “work engagement, responsibility, cooperation and trustworthiness” but also sees employees as “co-producers of leadership and co-creators of workplace conditions” (p. 46).

Negotiating the differences in exposure and work between shelter workers and staff working from home was complicated for many agencies. Staffed 24 hours a day, every day, shelters do not allow for remote work, whereas many other IPA employees could and did work exclusively from home at times during the pandemic. Division between shelter workers and other IPA staff are not uncommon, as shelter workers tend to have less training, fewer degrees, lower pay (often working just part-time and/or multiple other low-paying jobs) and more difficult hours (weekends, holidays, nights, etc.). Shelter workers in most agencies spoke of pushing management to address their safety concerns, as managers' workspaces are often not co-located with shelters. Shelter workers in some agencies felt top management did not understand the daily exposures and risks they faced.

I mean, quite frankly I was frustrated. I was mad. And that was why I said, you know, 'This is crazy! ...We want our voice heard. Why are we still meeting with clients [in person]? It doesn't make any sense. ...Why am I expected to meet a client in my small office [when other staff groups have stopped in-person contact]?' (Willow, frontline staff).

It's doubtful any organization addresses all employee concerns perfectly during an emergency, but we did hear examples of adaptive behaviors often cited in OR literature, like inclusion and support (Tengblad, 2018b).

Our [top manager] had a very strong belief that the person who pushes the broom buys the broom. ...honestly everything that we did—it was with both

that administration side and representation from all the different areas (Cedar, manager).

c. Relationships with partners. IPA agencies were buoyed by the response of some of their partner organizations and stymied by others. IPA agencies typically work closely with police and courts, as well as schools, landlords, and hospitals on immediate issues and the longer-term goal of ending abuse. Agencies tried to continue these inter-agency efforts during the pandemic but often found community partners struggled to engage. “We had a meeting...no one came” (Cedar, manager).

We specifically heard a lot about negative impacts to IPA resilience due to pandemic-related issues in police, courts, and housing-related entities. For example, housing advocacy work was greatly impacted by the pandemic as state housing agencies could be difficult to contact and some landlords were unwilling to risk exposure to show properties. During early lockdown periods this caused housing delays for IPA clients, potentially forcing these clients and their children to stay longer in emergency shelters (an experience many families find stressful) or living with their abusive partner.

Other agencies reported that strong pre-pandemic relationships with local landlords helped them overcome these issues, a strong sign of how well-developed relationships positively impacted an agency’s resilience.

The landlord would be like ‘Oh yeah, I trust you so... I’ll open [the property] up. You guys close it up. I’ll be there at that time. I’ll see you walk in. I’ll wave and I’ll leave.’ And I’m like, ‘This is fantastic. I’m loving this, yeah!’ So, we have some great landlords that we’re working with (Olive, manager).

4. Mission and Values

IPA agencies have always had a dual mission—a short-term focus on supporting survivors of abuse and a longer-term mission to end intimate partner abuse. While we did not detect large shifts in overall mission the pandemic seems to have, at times, caused agencies to focus on near-term survival and immediate client and staff needs, while focus on their longer-term mission waned in the most extreme phases of the pandemic.

IPA agencies have traditionally had strong values around client empowerment and confidentiality. We found some change in these areas, but perhaps in ways that will ultimately increase resilience. With telehealth, advocates were no longer in complete control of client confidentiality; clients needed to decide where, how and when to communicate. This change is in line with the empowerment philosophy present in most IPA agencies; ultimately, more fully informed, actively participating clients may more evenly distribute the responsibility for confidentiality and reshape it in ways that clients deem important.

Analysis also indicated increased agency focus on staff wellbeing.

So, making sure that we are still serving our survivors to the best of our ability, but yet still keeping our staff safe. Because if [staff] are not safe, then we’re still not helping our survivors, right? So, it’s kind of that balancing act (Olive, manager).

5. Contextual Factors

Our model (see Figure 1) acknowledges organizations are often dealing with complex issues in addition to emergencies. We found evidence that some participating organizations were impacted by their geographic location and by social movements occurring simultaneously with the pandemic. One example of this is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Many agencies spoke about working to address concerns raised by the BLM movement during the pandemic, which required additional resources (time, effort, thought, etc.).

In our case study, we found one additional factor impacting organizational resilience: time. Resilience in longer-lasting emergencies may have different dimensions than resilience in shorter-term disasters. Longer-term disasters, such as pandemics, may cause fatigue or may spur new and deeper kinds of adaptation and resilience.

I think in the beginning...most of my frontline staff was like 'Oh, it's gonna be a few weeks. It's gonna be a month max. It's not a big deal we'll get through it.' ...as the time kept going, they started realizing, 'no, this might be more longer term.' And I think they started adapting relatively well to it, I feel like (Olive, manager).

Discussion

Ensuring nonprofits are resilient in crises is crucial to ensuring that many societal needs continue to be met even in emergencies. OR in nonprofits is a building block of community resilience. Evaluating resilience in nonprofits can increase preparedness in the sector and, by extension, the communities they serve.

This study presents several insights for nonprofits. The adapted model provides a holistic framework that covers areas of nonprofit resilience that previous nonprofit OR research did not, and it highlighted a wider range of adaptation in IPA agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall model is widely applicable across the nonprofit sector as OR across these organizations is impacted by quality of financial, social and technical resources and focus on mission and values. However, the subcategories developed in this study apply most closely to the IPA sector and may be most useful to closely related nonprofits, such as those focusing on sexual assault, substance use issues and other human-service nonprofits. Less closely related nonprofits are encouraged to modify subcategories to best reflect their organizations and ties to their communities and contexts. Consideration of an organization's wider context (geographic location and social values, norms, and movements) should likewise be applicable to a wide range of nonprofits.

Communication technology was a key factor in how IPA agencies adapted in the COVID-19 pandemic, similar to increased technology use documented among social workers (Mishna et al., 2020). Not only did adding virtual services enable these organizations to continue to fulfill their mission during this extended crisis, it also allowed them to expand service to more clients, such as those with transportation or childcare issues. Ultimately, this shift aligns with IPA agencies' empowerment philosophy by allowing survivors to make their own decisions about which communication modalities are safe for them in their specific situation. Greater use of technology also increased staff safety and mobility in the pandemic.

We see the increased use of technology as a vehicle to provide virtual services to clients as one of the greatest success stories in IPA adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not an isolated trend; many types of nonprofits have shifted to technology to serve clients virtually

(Mishna et al., 2020; Newby & Branyon, 2021); however, given IPA agency concerns about confidentiality and client safety, the quick move to telehealth was perhaps even more remarkable. This shift has the potential to change service paradigms in these organizations and perhaps, over a longer time span, transform how agencies provide services to address IPA, and even transform the IPA system itself.

Adaptations in work organization and procedures, such as creating more flexible work schedules and work-from-home policies, maintained and in some cases expanded client service and helped protect staff during the pandemic. Ultimately such adaptations may better position these nonprofits to compete with for-profit employers who had some of these policies in place prior to the pandemic.

Our model also highlighted social resources and how these relationships helped and hampered agency resilience. The pandemic-inspired shift toward valuing employee well-being as well as client service could help reduce staff turnover and potentially create agencies that are stronger and more resilient. Relationships with some partners, such as courts and police, caused greater stress for our sample of agencies and their clients, highlighting the networked and contextualized nature of resilience (Magis, 2010). Nonprofit relationships, internal and external, and their impact on OR during the pandemic should be examined for successes and failures as lessons learned may then be used to create opportunities to strengthen networks and partnerships for the next crisis.

This study confirms findings from previous nonprofit OR research which show the importance of financial resources during crises (Chen, 2021; Searing et al., 2021). Given the timing of our interviews (from June to October 2020) we provide a snapshot showing relatively stable funding based on pre-pandemic grant cycles and some increased grants specifically targeted to support this nonprofit sector. Traditional large, public fundraising events were cancelled, but many agencies saw only slight declines as their deep roots in their communities, coupled with public awareness of the potential for increased IPA during a pandemic, saw some agencies increase private donations from local companies, community foundations and individuals. Similar to for-profit organizations, the flexibility and discretion associated with such unrestricted funds is an important adaptation factor for many IPA agencies and can help to cushion other changes in funding. These unrestricted funds can also give agencies 'slack' funds in case of disaster or emergency, which has been found to be a key source of resilience in for-profit organizations (Tengblad, 2018b).

Finally, our adapted model also showed how agencies are impacted by their context. Agencies in our sample were impacted by the pandemic, but also by co-occurring events like BLM. This large social movement added to agency priorities in the short-term but also represented a longer-term opportunity to build better relations with staff, clients, and communities of color. These strengthened social resources can improve agency service within these communities, and ultimately serve as a resource for longer-term resilience for IPA agencies. Our model specifically addresses these contextual factors which were not explicitly present in other OR models we examined (Searing et al., 2021; Tengblad, 2018b).

Strengths

By looking across eight different organizations we were able to examine a wider variety of organizations and OR behaviors than might have been seen in a more in-depth, single organization case study. We used a convenience sample and snowball sampling within the participant organizations, allowing us to collect data during an emergency from both managerial and frontline perspectives. Studying one to two organizations in depth was not feasible as most IPA organizations were occupied managing operations in a pandemic.

Limitations

This was a small study of nonprofit IPA staff and managers in the Northern Midwest of the United States conducted during a global pandemic. It may not be representative of how other IPA nonprofits, or nonprofits in general responded to the pandemic; a representative, nationwide sample may have found different results.

We utilized snowball sampling within organizations, with original contacts sometimes choosing both managerial and frontline staff for interviews. Some managers said they chose staff who were outspoken, but others may have chosen staff they felt would be supportive of the organization's pandemic management. A more random sample might have had different results. However participants were chosen, all interviews were conducted individually and confidentially, ensuring frontline staff and managers could express their own views without fearing retribution.

Future Directions

We hope the nonprofit field can use this adapted model of nonprofit resilience to help assess adaptation capacity and, ultimately, resilience. Any assessment should reflect the 'shifting target' of resilience, and be worked into the long-term, short-term, and everyday planning and management of nonprofits.

We also recommend organizations evaluate their adaptation actions using Béné's resilience framework to determine if the actions represent absorptive coping, adaptation, or transformation (Béné et al., 2013). We saw examples of coping—such as 30-hour shifts to limit staff exposures—which exacted a high cost on staff and were not sustainable long-term. We also saw examples of adaptation in the shift to utilizing technology to provide virtual services to clients and interact with other community partners during the pandemic. Categorizing actions may help organizations see if they are over-using one tactic (for example, coping with change while ignoring opportunities to adapt, or vice versa) and create opportunities to discuss various resilience capacities and ensure they clearly understand the resources being used and their costs to current and future resilience capacity.

Communication technologies helped bridge many distances for nonprofit organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mishna et al., 2020; Newby & Branyon, 2021). Future research should look at the widespread technology adoption by IPA agencies during this period to better understand its benefits and any drawbacks, especially regarding whether it impacts relationship-building between advocates and clients. Research on telehealth in general may be applicable, but given the traumatic nature of IPA, specific research may be warranted. Research should also evaluate the impact of distance work on wellbeing and retention for IPA advocates.

Multi-level analysis should continue to be part of future research efforts. Post-pandemic studies of OR in this sector should include individual employee experience of the pandemic and its collective impact on IPA agencies and other nonprofit organizations. Understanding how agencies retained talented staff in this stressful time may highlight useful strategies and tactics for future emergencies. Similarly, community resilience depends on the resilience of many entities (Paarlberg et al., 2020). Future research should examine how nonprofits and governments maintained, or did not, relationships throughout this emergency as a learning tool for the next crisis. Nonprofit OR in this sense would benefit from incorporating more of SER's multi-level systems thinking (Olsson et al., 2004) and going beyond a tight focus only on a single organization.

Finally, time is an important dimension in any analysis of OR. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to directly impact the U.S. for two or more years. OR in short-term shocks—such as a

fire, or tornado—is likely to be different for a much longer-term shock, such as a global pandemic. OR is studied as pre-emergency preparation, immediately-after-the-fact and as a longer-term post-shock recovery and future preparation process. SER's holistic system orientation emphasizes the notion of complex adaptative systems, requiring an acceptance of uncertainty and change and the need for continuous learning (Biggs et al., 2012). Some OR literature speaks of the constant nature of change and adaptation in organizations (often in relation to high-reliability organizations, such as airlines and nuclear energy facilities; Tengblad, 2018a), but OR is seen by some as only necessary in response to large, discrete emergencies. IPA agencies and other nonprofits might benefit from incorporating SER concepts around the constant nature of change and adaptation, making them more prepared for 'everyday emergencies' as well as larger-scale events. As resilience is dynamic, it cannot be accomplished through a one-time discussion, but the capacities leading to resilience can be regularly monitored, evaluated, and nurtured.

Notes

1. There are multiple terms used to describe abuse between intimate partners, such as 'domestic violence' or 'intimate partner violence.' We use IPA as it encompasses the many different forms of abuse and does not imply the primacy of physical violence. Physical violence is not present in all abusive relationships; sometimes the threat of it is enough to induce fear. All forms of abuse impact survivors' health and well-being, and some survivors report other forms of abuse (such as psychological abuse, sexual abuse, etc.) to be more damaging than physical abuse (see, Lacey et al., 2013; Lagdon et al., 2014).
2. Men also experience IPA and are served by IPA agencies, but they make up a much smaller percentage of clients for these agencies.
3. Staffing levels falls under Financial Resources as cutting staff (or staff salaries) is one of the fastest ways to eliminate expenses when revenues fall in for-profit and nonprofit organizations, though it has many other implications and drawbacks.
4. Like most nonprofits, IPA agencies raise or are awarded funds in one year to spend in the next fiscal cycle (meaning funds raised prior to the pandemic were what they were using at the time of this study).

Disclosure Statement

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Appendix 1. Complete Table of Results

Model Category & Sub-Category	Results	Immediate Impact on Adaptation	Longer Term Impact on Resilience
<i>1. Financial Resources</i>			
a. Overall financial state	Roughly equivalent to pre-pandemic at time of interviews	+	+
b. Staffing levels	Essentially stable; no reported layoffs	+	+
c. Grants, service contracts & loans	Grants for hazard pay for in-person staff, pandemic-related supplies & technology very helpful. Some grant processes/requirements hampered speed of agency adaptation. Some losses of in-person service contract program revenues due to pandemic. No use of loans reported in sample	+/-	Unknown
d. Fundraising	Major fundraising events canceled or moved to virtual; impact unclear at time of interview; some programs slightly up, some slightly down	Less discretionary funding for rental/bill assistance for clients	Unknown
<i>2. Technical Resources & Organizational Processes</i>			
a. Technological assets & deployment	Agencies swiftly moved to telehealth as pandemic shutdowns lingered; grants for technology facilitated the shift. Concern over digital divide and access for all clients	Benefit for some clients; mixed feelings for staff	
b. Technical know-how	Few agencies with dedicated IT staff resulted in inclusive teams of volunteer staff members making collaborative decisions	+	+
c. Organization & procedures	Work schedules changed to protect staff and clients. Work-from-home policies adopted (esp. in regards to protecting client confidentiality). Greater use of communication tech to maintain staff cohesion. Tension over differences between in-person shelter staff and remote staff	Some work schedules not sustainable long-term. Virtual staff relations helpful, but not same as daily in-person interactions	Work-from-home may help attract employees in future. Staff cohesion in virtual/hybrid organizations is longer-term issue
d. Technical innovation	IT benefitted many clients, but virtual children's programs required creativity (meeting outdoors, focus on games, shorter interactions, shift to more parent counseling/support, etc.)	+	Hybrid approach could provide wider array of options for all clients

3. Social Resources

a. Followership & relationships with employees	Majority of managers reported special efforts to care for employees (tech-enabled communication, regular check-ins, more efforts to encourage non-work-focused conversation); concerns over employee stress levels & burnout. Examples of inclusive decision making and increased top-down and bottom-up communication	+/-; difficult to negotiate differences in exposure between in-person shelter staff vs. remote staff.	Increased communication and inclusive decision making could strengthen OR. More focus on employee wellbeing could reduce burnout/turnover
b. Relationships with clients	Efforts to maintain/build rapport virtually; expanded use of text, video and phone. Met with clients outside normal hours, or meeting in-person outside	+	Unknown; requires client-centered research
c. Relationships with partners	Community partners such as healthcare systems, police (in some cases less likely to arrest/hold perpetrators), courts (cases delayed leaving clients in limbo for divorce, custody, and felony cases) faced own pandemic challenges and were sometimes less available/responsive	+/-; depended on partners and pre-pandemic strength of relationship	Joint preparation for emergencies could help establish mutual goals to increase systemic/ community resilience
d. Relationships with funders	Efforts to streamline and get funds to agencies seen as positive; agencies generally reported positive interactions with funders	+	+
e. Relationships with top management & board	More communication from top management seen as mostly positive. Increased engagement from board members in fundraising and community outreach also beneficial	+	+
f. Relationships with volunteers	Severely restricted or stopped due to pandemic. Agencies reported efforts to stay in touch/engage volunteers to maintain active volunteer base once conditions allow a return	Loss of volunteers had negative impact in work hours and grant reimbursements	Unknown
g. Relationships with networks or coalitions	Technical assistance helpful. Greater communication focus mostly at executive levels; participants would have liked more cross-agency communication at all levels to gain ideas for adaptation		

h. Relationships with community	Some agencies reported increased community support	+	Unknown; requires community member research
i. Relationships with other stakeholders	n/a		
<i>4. Mission & Values</i>			
a. Mission	Increased focus on short-term mission (supporting clients) vs. longer-term mission of working to end abuse (including work with community partners such as police and courts, as well as community outreach and education efforts). Some efforts to increase virtual outreach & education	Allowed for greater focus in crisis	Unknown; potentially negative if longer-term mission is lost
b. Values	Challenging to balance client empowerment vs. staff safety; some agencies housed clients unwilling to comply with public health mandates in hotels. Responsibility for confidentiality largely shifted to clients in virtual space.	+/-; staff felt more concern for their well-being—can help maintain or increase their ability to serve clients	Unknown
<i>5. Environmental & Contextual Factors</i>			
a. Geographic location & environment	Agencies in better-resourced communities had more support, increasing their adaptation options. Natural disaster in addition to pandemic increased resilience challenges for one agency	Differed among agencies	Awareness of strengths/ challenges in location/environment in strategic, annual and disaster planning could provide important insights and enable contingency planning Potential to improve staff, client and community service/relations longer-term
b. Societal values, norms & movements	Black Lives Matter movement, anti-immigrant policies, etc. added to agency priorities	Added to organizational priorities, requiring additional resources	

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European Solidarity Corps Projects Responding to COVID-19: Implications for Future Crises

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In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world in an unprecedented way, affecting various areas of the economy and society, including nonprofits and volunteering. However, nonprofits and volunteering did not just face challenges due to the pandemic; they also played a role in dealing with it. This article focuses on the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), an EU initiative that promotes solidarity through volunteering in countries worldwide. There was a content analysis of all the ESC projects with pandemic-relevant keywords. Though the ESC requests for proposals in the first year of the pandemic did not address the pandemic, about 8% of projects explicitly named the pandemic as either a main or secondary reason for the projects. The ESC projects represent a way to relatively flexibly allocate public funding for local and international volunteer projects dealing with various humanitarian crises, such as COVID-19 or the war in Ukraine.

Keywords: Public Projects, Nonprofit Organizations, Volunteering, COVID–19 Pandemic

Introduction

The virus, commonly known as COVID-19, emerged in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and caused a severe global public health crisis (Nanda & Sharma, 2021). In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 crisis to be a public health emergency of international concern (Lai et al., 2020). In February and March 2020, the virus spread across the globe and affected lives and economies worldwide in an unprecedented way. WHO acknowledged this by declaring COVID-19 to be a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Alshammari et al., 2021). The COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent wave of anti-epidemic measures and restrictions changed the world as we know it.

Mandel and Veetil (2020) stated that, “never before has an economy as interlinked as the present system been subject to shocks as large as the lockdowns in the wake of COVID-19” (p. 432). Home schooling and working from home changed many people’s living habits and working conditions, as non-essential businesses and activities were closed or moved to an online environment (Ferry et al., 2021). The situation was largely unexpected, and many governmental steps were criticized (Coccia, 2021; Dunlop et al., 2020; Klimovský et al., 2021). Although there was a certain heterogeneity in governmental approaches to the pandemic (Engler et al., 2021), there was an “almost simultaneous worldwide reaction of lockdowns and shutdowns” (Berrocal et al., 2021, p. 2).

The pandemic very quickly impacted various areas of human life (Azevedo et al., 2022; Borza & Park, 2020; Stötzer et al., 2022), including businesses, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations in terms of procedures, operations, and resources (Shi, 2022). There have been mandatory closures of businesses due to the lockdowns, and other counter-pandemic measures, with relatively slow reopening and tendencies to social distancing (Stötzer et al., 2022; Walmsley et al., 2023). Many nonprofits had to deal with increased demand for their services regarding various kinds of humanitarian assistance due to the lockdowns, shutdowns, and quarantines (Santos & Laureano, 2022).

At the same time, there have been reports of various impacts on nonprofits regarding financing (Hutton et al., 2021; Jeong & Kim, 2021; Luong et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2021; Plaček et al., 2022; Shi, 2022). Other difficulties were related to volunteering due to lockdowns and the virus itself (Biddle & Gray, 2020; Leviten-Reid et al., 2022; Shi, 2022) or a lack of nonprofit staff (Leviten-Reid et al., 2022; Santos & Laureano, 2022). Among other consequences, studies showed reducing the quantity and quality of nonprofits services (Searing et al., 2021), disrupting the practices of nonprofits (Meyer et al., 2021) and also difficulties regarding teamwork due to limited possibilities to meet face to face (Shi, 2022), increased the stress of nonprofit workers (Leviten-Reid et al., 2022). Aside from being impacted by the pandemic, nonprofits and volunteering were also participating in dealing with the pandemic (Azevedo et al., 2022; Biddle & Gray, 2020; Jeong & Kim, 2021; Kuenzi et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2021; Wang & Cheng, 2021).

This article deals with the European Solidarity projects, the international program providing nonprofits with funding, especially to support volunteering projects with the purpose of promoting solidarity and address societal issues. The ESC wrote that the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), the successor of the European Voluntary Service, has a history going back to the 1990s. The ESC offers funding for various kinds of organizations, primarily for volunteering projects (Jeżowski, 2021). Though the ESC is an EU initiative, it includes 55 independent countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa, plus 13 overseas countries and territories (OCTs) from various parts of the world, including the Americas and Oceania.

The ESC focuses on volunteers aged 18-30, covering various costs for them, such as accommodation, traveling, food, insurance, pocket money, etc. (Khabirova et al., 2021). There are two types of organizations in ESC projects to assist volunteers, supporting and hosting organizations. As Khabirova et al. (2021) wrote, “the supporting [organization] is based in a volunteer’s home country, it helps the volunteer prepare for the experience abroad”, while the host organization “receives and helps the volunteer in the destination country” (p. 75). These organizations have a special importance during the pandemic since it is up to them to “provide protection against the disease as well as psychological support and to quickly organize a new program of activities” (Khabirova et al., 2021, p. 75).

This article is focused on the European Solidarity Corps projects addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of the research was to identify the scope and scale of the ESC projects addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, regarding the number of projects and grants, with respect to the country of the applicant, the applicant’s type of organization, program action and project topic, then to identify the lessons from this case study for the future crisis, using recent studies.

Material and Methods

General Methodology Information and Data Sources

A case study approach was applied, specifically a plausibility probe case study (see Levy, 2008), as such studies aim to probe “the details of a particular case in order to shed light on a broader theoretical argument” (p. 6). Mixed research methods were applied. The first part of

the study was a qualitative content analysis in order to create a sample of ESC projects chosen for funding, with COVID-19 being at least one of the reasons for the project listed in the project description.

The ESC itself has had three funding years with available lists of accepted projects: 2018, 2019, and 2020. Program documentation is also available for 2021 and 2022. Projects related to COVID-19 were found only in the funding year 2020. There was one exceptional mention of COVID-19 in the funding year 2019; however, the project description (mentioning lockdowns and other measures that started in 2020) was likely due to some sort of error. Therefore, this project was added to the 2020 sample.

There are four action types in the ESC: 1) volunteering projects, 2) solidarity projects, 3) traineeships and jobs, and 4) volunteering teams in high-priority areas, with the vast majority of projects being in the first two categories. All of the calculations were performed for each category separately and then for all categories together. The second part of the research involved evaluating the projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis using basic descriptive statistics.

Several data sources were used. The main source was the European Youth Portal (2021), specifically the database of funded projects. This database makes it possible to sort projects by project status (ongoing or completed projects), funding years (2018, 2019, or 2020), country, topic, organization type, and action type (volunteering projects, solidarity projects, traineeships and jobs, and volunteering teams in high priority areas). A full-text search was subsequently used for the content analysis of the projects. The other data source was the project documentation for funding years 2018 to 2022. This documentation, available through the ESC guides, provided a broader framework for understanding the aim, tools, and procedures of the ESC.

The ESC report was a supplementary source. It included aggregated data for funding years 2018 and 2019. For supplementary tables showing the possible outreach in terms of the number of people living in the countries collaborating with the ESC, two country databases were used: the CIA World Factbook (2021) and, in a few cases, the Overseas Countries and Territories Association (OCTA) website (2021).

Content Analysis of COVID-Related Keywords

The aim of this part of the research was to identify which projects mentioned the COVID-19 crisis as a reason for the project. 'COVID-19 crisis' here refers to the health emergency resulting from the spread of the virus and to the impact of anti-pandemic interventions.

The European Youth Portal offers various information about the funded projects. In the first phase of the content analysis, the most intuitive keywords were used for a full-text search in the system: COVID-19, coronavirus, epidemic, and pandemic. This was subsequently expanded to include variants with alternate spellings, plural spellings, misspellings, and colloquial names. The expansion of search terms was clearly necessary as some projects were found using these variants; whenever we encountered a variant (such as a misspelling), we applied that variant in a full-text search in case it had been used multiple times.

COVID-19-related keywords can be divided into three categories: a) COVID-19 (COVID, covid19, Kovid, coronavirus, corona, corona-virus, coronacrisis); b) pandemic (epidemic, epidemics, epidemiological, pandemics); and c) lockdown (lockdowns, lock-down, lock-downs, quarantine, quarantines).

In the second phase of the content analysis, all the projects from the first phase were classified in terms of their relation to COVID-19. This was necessary to assess the context of the

keywords. There was then a control full-text search with other illness-related keywords, such as virus, disease, isolated, isolation, distancing, contagious, emergency, respirator, mask, vaccine, vaccination, SARS, and SARS-CoV-2.

Classification of the Projects Regarding Their Relation to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The projects with COVID-19-oriented keywords were divided into one of five categories: 1) COVID as a primary reason for doing the project; 2) COVID as a secondary reason for doing the project; 3) COVID as a reason for adopting the project management and organization; 4) other (e.g., mentioning COVID in the title but not explaining it in the project description; mentioning COVID with no clear significant connections); and 5) unrelated to COVID-19 (such as chimpanzee quarantine).

The projects in category 1 were having COVID-19 crisis as one of the main reasons for the projects. The projects in category 2 were having COVID-19 as an additional reason for the project. The main difference was that category 1 should include projects which would likely not be proposed without the COVID-19 crisis, or their legitimacy in terms of the necessity for the projects would be substantially limited. The projects in category 2 include the COVID-19 crisis as one of the arguments for the projects, typically saying that the COVID-19 crisis worsened the situation of their target group, but the project could likely stand on its own even without the COVID-19 crisis—there would still be a need for a project.

Categories 3, 4 and 5 were used for classifying other projects with COVID-19-related projects. However, in the sections above, they are included in the category of projects not responding to the COVID-19 crisis in terms of the project aims and goals, together with projects which did not include the COVID-19-related keywords. For classifying these categories, the following principles were applied. The projects in category 3 were mentioning possible complications or project management adaptation due to the COVID-19 crisis, and one project mentioning the mentioned positive impact of the COVID-19 crisis on project management. The project in category 4 projects mentioned COVID-19 keywords in the clear COVID-19 context, but its meaning was not clear. For example, projects mentioning COVID-19 in the title but without keyword occurrence in the project descriptions. The projects in category 5 were mentioning keywords that were potentially relevant to the COVID-19 crisis, but they were mentioned in a different context.

For some calculations, the projects were divided into two groups: First, projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis with the pandemic being at least one of the arguments for the projects (categories 1 and 2) and second, projects not reacting to the COVID-19 crisis in terms of the project's goals and impacts (categories 3, 4 and 5).

Quantitative Analysis

The projects could be divided into two basic groups for most of the calculations: one group of projects were reacting in whole or in part to the COVID-19 crisis (categories 1 and 2 above), and the second group of projects that did not mention COVID-19 as a reason for the project itself (categories 3, 4, and 5 above, and obviously any project not containing any COVID-19 related keywords).

The category relevant for the subsequent calculation, the study's main part, was the first group. This is the category for the projects that react, at least in part, to the COVID-19 crisis. Out of all 3,438 ESC projects in the funding year 2020, 275 projects (8%) met this criterion. Additional calculations were made in terms of the financial characteristics of the projects, more specifically in the descriptive statistics of each ESC action in relation to the COVID-19 crisis: median, minimal, and maximum values for the values in the analysis.

Results

European Solidarity Corps and COVID-19

Officially, the core of the EU added value of the ESC is in the cross-border character of the activities and the activities developed and carried out at national or regional levels. The ESC is intended to complement existing public policies and programs, as well as private sector policies and activities, without competing with them or replacing them. Basically, according to the official information, the ESC should “address unmet societal needs that cannot be addressed by the labour market, existing volunteering activities or other types of solidarity programmes” (European Commission, Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU Budget, Financial Year 2020, 2021, p. 87). The ESC is “one of the mechanisms of the European Union promoting solidarity as a value at the grassroots level” (Jeżowski, 2021, p. 91). It can also be seen as an “instrument for financing the Union’s actions” (Moroianu-Zlătescu & Marinică, 2021, p. 132).

Not many studies focus on the impact of the pandemic on the ESC project. However, there are some that mention that the impact was significant, making some of the planned activities impossible due to the lockdowns, quarantines, and social distancing, while some of the other activities were moved to the online environment (Jeżowski & Poszytek, 2022). Volunteers who were abroad on ESC projects also faced the dilemma of whether or not to return to their home countries (Khabirova et al., 2021), while many actually decided to stay (Jeżowski, 2021).

Actors of the European Solidarity Corps

Though the ESC is known as an EU initiative, several institutions and public bodies are involved in ESC implementation. The main institution is the European Commission, which “is ultimately responsible for running the European Solidarity Corps” (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2021, p. 13). The European Commission’s responsibility for the ESC is executed directly or through the European Commission’s Education and Culture Executive Agency.

Though the main responsibility for the ESC is on the European Commission and its Executive Agency, indirect management is the main method of implementation. The European Commission manages the ESC budget, though the budget implementation tasks are up to national agencies. The official rationale for this approach is the adjustment of general priorities to the needs of specific countries, with a certain level of diversity across program countries, and to align the ESC as closely as possible with the recipients of the benefits and impacts of the ESC (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2021).

The national agencies represent “the link between the European Commission and participating organizations at local, regional and national level” (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2021, p. 13). There is usually one national agency in each program country. The national agencies are supposed to guide users through all the ESC project phases, starting with the first contact with the ESC, then through the application process, and through the project implementation until the final evaluation (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2021). These two groups of actors, the European Commission and its Executive Agency and the national agencies, play the main roles in managing and implementing the ESC. However, some other organizations provide complementary expertise: the SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres, the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre, and the Eurodesk Network (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2021, p. 14).

The Policy Contexts, Objectives and Financing of the ESC

Officially, the policy framework of the ESC is mainly set “by the 2008 Council recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers” (European Solidarity Corps Guide,

2021, p. 6). The main policy document is the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (Council of the European Union, 2019), which has 11 ‘European Youth Goals’ in the fields of gender equality, mental health and wellbeing, social inclusion, quality learning and employment, sustainability, and others. According to the actual ESC 2021 program guide (European Solidarity Corps guide, 2021), the general objective of the ESC is to enhance the engagement of young people and organizations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities, primarily volunteering. As is implied by the ESC (European Solidarity Corps guide, 2021, p. 7), the European Commission wants young people and organizations to move toward enhancing their engagement in solidarity activities, especially volunteering. The central targets for ESC are young people and their support in solidarity activities with the goal of making societal changes while improving and validating their skills and becoming active citizens. The specific objectives also state how and where the engagement of young people should be promoted.

Between funding years 2018 and 2020, there were 55,000 ESC opportunities for young people to participate in the program; 280,000 young people registered for the ESC; 39% of the participants had fewer opportunities; and 55% of the ESC program participants were satisfied with their experience (European Commission, Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU Budget—Financial Year 2020, 2021). The funding of the ESC “is provided in the form of grants, procurement and prizes” (European Commission, Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU Budget—Financial Year 2020, 2021, p. 85). The main principle of distributing financial resources to the target organization is via national agencies. According to the official sources for 2019 and 2018 (incomplete), the budget was €197 million granted through 750 projects, with 27,316 young people (volunteers, trainees, or jobholders) participating in the projects in order to “bring positive change to the communities” (European Solidarity Corps, Annual Report, 2020, p. 6). The overall indicative budget for the first program period (2018 to 2020) was €375.6 million (European Solidarity Corps Guides 2018, p. 9; 2019, p. 9; 2020, p. 9). The second program period (2021 to 2027) has an indicative financial budget of slightly over one billion EUR (European Solidarity Corps Guides, 2021).

ESC was obviously not designed to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, as its first funding year was 2018, and the worldwide COVID-19 outbreak was at the beginning of 2020. The call for projects for the funding year 2020 does not mention COVID-19, as the call was published before the pandemic. However, a certain number of projects funded by this program in 2020 clearly stated that COVID-19 was at least one of the reasons for the project. The 2021 ESC call mentioned COVID-19 three times: twice in the minor actions of volunteering teams in high-priority areas and once in the context of health, one of the five priority areas of the ESC for 2021. However, even in the 2022 call, COVID-19 was not a central topic of the ESC.

The Regional Perspective on the European Solidarity Corps and COVID-19 Pandemic

Potential Outreach of the ESC

Several potential outreach groups can be identified in the participating countries and partner countries. The program countries can be divided into countries with a full range of activities and countries with program opportunities other than traineeships and jobs. The program countries with a full range of activities are “accessible to young people legally residing in one of the EU Member States and organizations established in them” (European Solidarity Corps, Countries Covered, 2021, n.p.). The countries with a full range of activities include overseas countries and territories (OCTs) of EU member states (see below), though they themselves are not part of the EU (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2021).

The other group of participating countries have program opportunities other than traineeship and jobs for young people and organizations from the partner countries; this includes

Table 1. Countries in the ESC by the Type of Participation

Region	Independent Countries	Population	Population/World	Area (km ²)	Area/World
Non-EU participating countries	23	494,652,345	6.36%	24,178,881	16.23%
EU program countries	27	450,085,180	5.79%	4,089,599	2.75%
Non-EU program countries	4	85,004,304	1.09%	895,475	0.60%
Ex-EU temporary program country	1	67,081,000	0.86%	241,930	0.16%
EU overseas countries and territories	0*	1,019,372	0.01%	2,197,341	1.48%
Total**	55	1,097,817,044	14.12%	31,602,888	21.22%

Based on the CIA Factbook (2021) and the Overseas Countries and Territories Association (2021).

Note: * 0 independent countries, but 13 overseas countries or territories, ** The public entities/special municipalities Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba were included both in original data for EU program countries and EU OCTs. However, they were included just once in the total row.

Iceland, North Macedonia, Turkey, and Liechtenstein (European Solidarity Corps, Countries Covered, 2021). The dominant country in this group is Turkey. Partner countries do not fully participate in the ESC. However, they may act as partners in certain actions (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2021).

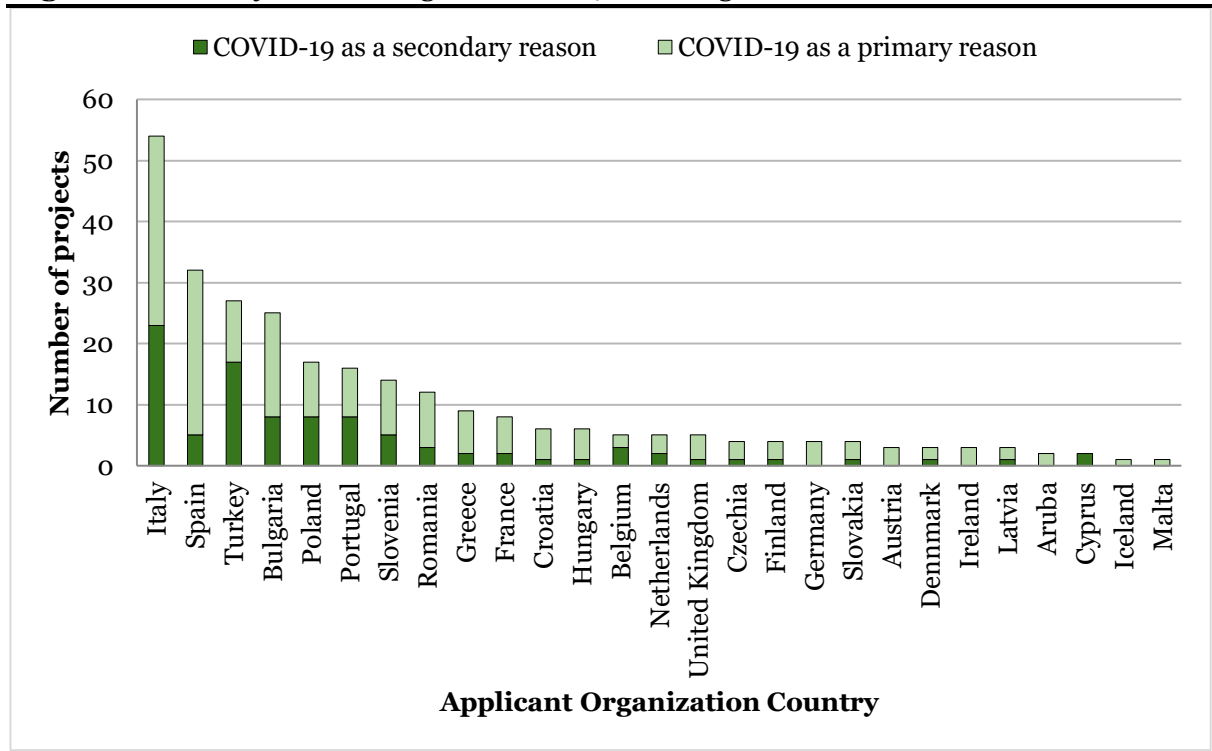
Table 1 shows the 55 countries eligible for partnering or participation in ESC projects with a total population of over one billion. Detailed information can be found in the Appendix (A5 to A9). This makes the ESC potential relevant to policymakers in various parts of the world.

All the program and participating countries and territories have a population exceeding 600 million people, which is almost 8% of the world's population. The territory of these countries exceeds 8 million *km*², which is more than 5% of the world's surface. Due to the EU OCTs' spread across the world, and non-EU programs and participating countries from Europe, Asia, and Africa, the potential ESC outreach is literally worldwide. According to official information from June 2021 (European Commission, Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU Budget, 2021).

Projects Reacting to COVID-19 Crisis by Country

Regarding ESC projects by countries, six countries had more than 400 projects in the first program period (2018 to 2020): Spain (772), Italy (652), Germany (606), France (584), Turkey (496), and Poland (469). These six countries combined represent 50.74% of all ESC projects in this time period. More information is in appendix A14.

Figure 1 and Appendix A4 show the projects that list COVID-19 as a primary or secondary reason for the project by country. In the funding year 2020, out of 3,438 projects, this was 275 projects (8%). These 275 projects were in 26 independent countries, mostly from Europe (24 EU

Figure 1. ESC Projects Reacting to COVID-19, Funding Year 2020

countries plus Iceland and the ex-EU United Kingdom); Turkey, from the Middle East; and Aruba, the constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, located in the Caribbean.

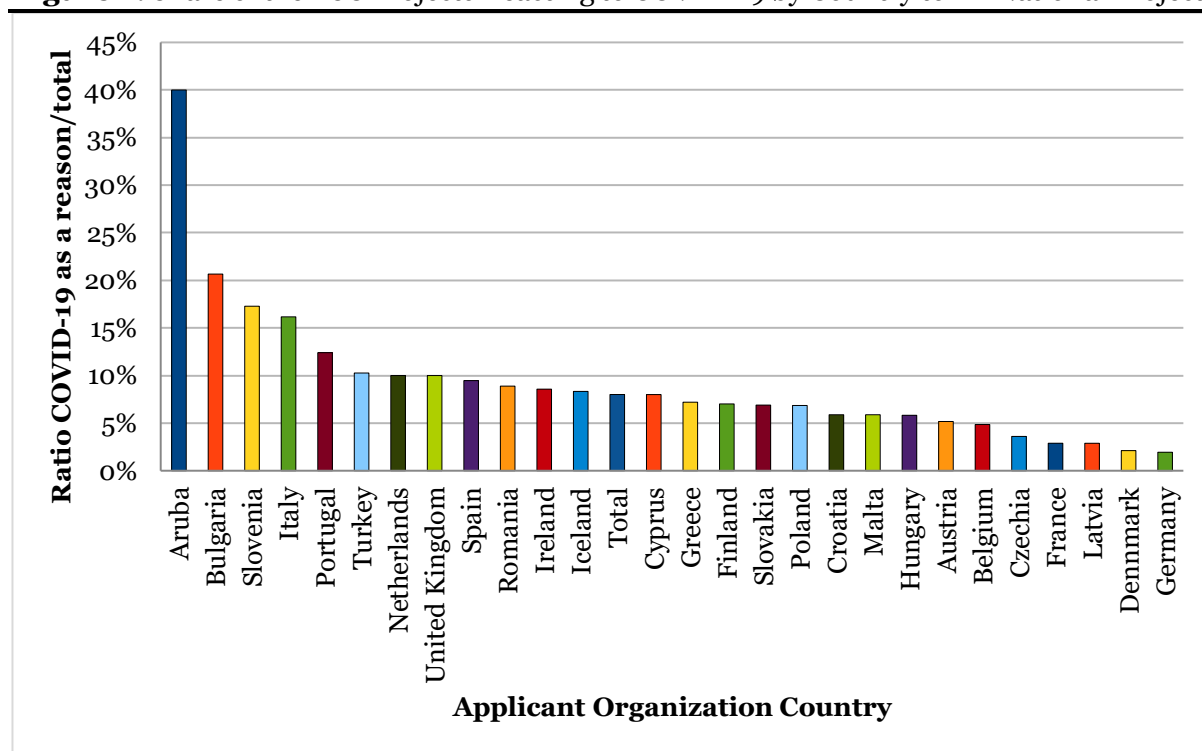
Only the countries with projects reacting partially to the COVID-19 crisis are included in Figure 1. The other countries, specifically Lithuania, Estonia, Sweden, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Curaçao, and French Polynesia, had no projects mentioning COVID-19. Italy had by far the most projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis. Out of the 26 countries (27 including Aruba) with projects reacting to COVID-19, four of them combined have half of the projects reacting to COVID-19: Italy (54 projects), Spain (32), Turkey (27), and Bulgaria (25), for a total of 138 out of 275.

The country with the third highest number of projects reacting to COVID-19 is Turkey. However, Turkey is not a member of the EU and joined the ESC program relatively late, in 2019 (Baikushikova et al., 2021). Turkey has 27 projects reacting to COVID-19, which is nearly 10% of all projects reacting to COVID-19. Also, Turkey is by far the most active non-EU member in this area (the United Kingdom, a former EU country, has five; Aruba, a constituent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, has two; and Iceland has one).

Figure 2 shows a ratio of projects in terms of projects reacting to COVID-19 (at least having COVID-19 as a secondary reason for the project) and projects not reacting to COVID-19. Bulgaria and Turkey have very high ratios of projects reacting to COVID-19 to the total number of projects. In Bulgaria, roughly every fifth project in ESC in the last funding year of the programs was in reaction to the COVID-19 crisis. In Italy, it was roughly every sixth project. Aruba had two out of five projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis, the highest share of the projects reacting to COVID-19. As appendix A15 shows, there is no direct relationship between the number of projects reacting to COVID-19 and the total number of projects by country.

However, it is true that Italy and Spain had the highest numbers both of projects reacting to COVID-19 and of all projects. More specifically, Italy, where the COVID-19 crisis first struck the hardest, had the most projects reacting to COVID-19 and the second-highest numbers of

Figure 2. Share of the ESC Projects Reacting to COVID-19 by Country to All National Projects



all projects, with Spain the opposite. However, Italy even had a much higher share of all projects reacting to COVID-19 (19.64% of all projects responding to COVID-19 of all countries) than the share of the total projects of all countries (9.73%).

COVID Grants by Countries

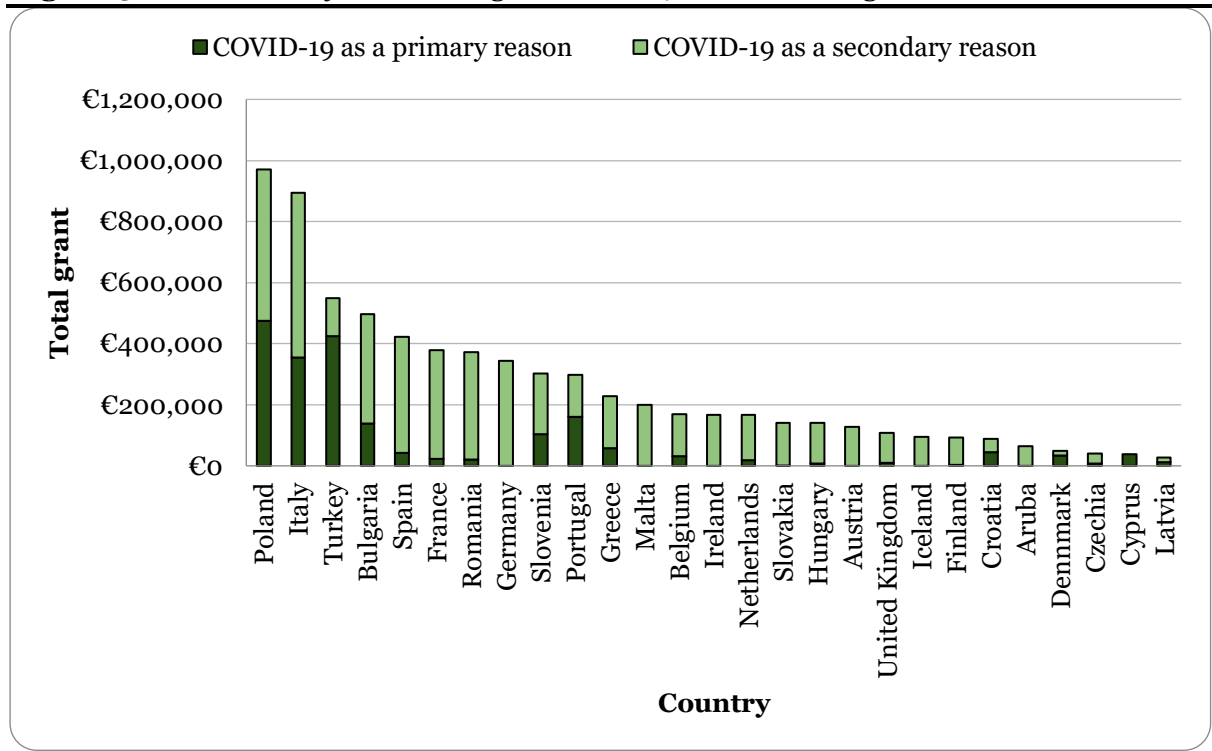
This part presents the results in terms of the grants for the projects reacting to COVID-19 by countries. This does not mean that all this money will remain in these countries since there could be project partners from other countries.

Out of €86 million granted in ESC projects in the funding year 2020, almost €6.5 million (7.47%) were dedicated to projects reacting in whole or in part to the COVID-19 crisis. Figure 3 shows the grant distribution among the countries, together with the total share of grants per country to the total grant amount of ESC projects reacting to COVID-19 in the funding year 2020.

Figure 3 shows how ESC projects financially contribute to multi-level governance in each country in terms of the two types of reactions in the COVID-19 crisis. The highest percentages of grant money allocated to projects reacting to COVID-19 were in Poland (13.91%) and Italy (12.84%). In both cases, the total grants approached a million EUR per country.

COVID-19 in ESC Projects According to the Program Actions

When the COVID-19 outbreak started, the “European Solidarity Corps continued to provide relief where possible through, for example, volunteers giving elderly people a hand with shopping for food or medicines or fighting loneliness” (European Commission, Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU Budget–Financial Year 2020, 2021, p. 86). However, the program itself was not designed to deal with the pandemic. The first three ESC program guides for funding years 2018, 2019, and 2020 did not include any mention of COVID-19, as they were all issued before the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020.

Figure 3. Grants of Projects Reacting to COVID-19 in the Funding Year 2020

ESC Projects Reacting to COVID-19 in the Program Action

The first part of this section focuses on the COVID-19 crisis and ESC projects. Table 1 shows the ESC projects in the funding year 2020 in relation to COVID-19 and types of actions. About two-thirds of the projects (179 projects) that were identified as reacting to the COVID-19 crisis listed COVID-19 as a secondary reason for the project. One-third of the projects (96 projects) described the COVID-19 crisis as a primary reason for the project. Table 2 shows the distribution of ESC projects in the funding year 2020 reacting to the COVID-19 crisis in the program action and the role of the COVID-19 crisis in the argumentation for the project.

Table 2 shows the distribution of projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis. In terms of program activities, most of the projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis were either volunteering projects (49%) or solidarity projects (46.2%).

Table 2. ESC Projects Reacting to COVID-19 in the Program Action and the Role of the COVID-19 Crisis in Funding Year 2020

Program Action	COVID-19 as a Secondary Reason/Focus	COVID-19 as a Primary Reason/Focus	Total	Share
Volunteering projects	94	41	135	49.09%
Solidarity projects	76	51	127	46.18%
Traineeship and jobs	9	2	11	4.00%
Volunteering teams in high priority areas	0	2	2	0.73%
Total	179	96	275	100%
Share	65.09%	34.91%	100%	

Table 3. ESC Projects in Terms of the Action and in Relation to the COVID-19 Crisis

Project Activities	Reacting to COVID	Not Reacting to COVID	All Projects (2020)
Volunteering projects	135	1,880	2,015
Solidarity projects	127	1,164	1,291
Traineeship and jobs	11	103	114
Volunteering teams in high priority areas	2	12	14
Total	275	3,159	3,434

Projects reacting in whole or in part to the COVID-19 crisis made up 8% of all projects, as shown in absolute numbers in Table 3. Table 3 also shows the absolute numbers of projects and their distribution in terms of the program actions and their relations to COVID-19 and the number of projects that did not state that they were reacting to the COVID-19 crisis.

Each of the program actions had projects reacting to COVID-19. The distribution of projects by program actions for projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis is not the same as the distribution of all projects by program actions.

Solidarity projects have a relatively higher share of projects reacting in whole or in part to COVID-19 to all ESC projects reacting to COVID-19 (46.18%) than their share of all projects to all program actions (37.59%). The explanation for this might be the local nature of solidarity projects, when the country of origin of volunteers is the one where they will work (European Solidarity Corps Guide, 2020). Therefore, they might be closer to the problems they want to solve, and the project reaction might be quicker than in volunteering projects. In volunteering projects, the share of the projects reacting in whole or in part to COVID-19 was 49.09% of all program actions, but the share of all volunteering projects to all projects was higher (58.68%).

The other two program actions had a relatively small share of projects, but they both had a slightly higher share of projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis than the share of all projects.

Another interesting indicator regarding the program actions was the rate of projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis. The first group of projects mentioned the COVID-19 crisis as at least a partial reason. The second group of projects did not mention COVID-19 as an argument for a project. However, some of them mentioned the COVID-19 crisis as a potential complication for a project or mentioned a need to adjust activities, or just mentioned the COVID-19 crisis with no clear connection.

Table 4 shows the share of ESC projects by program actions in terms of whether they claimed a reaction to the COVID-19 crisis.

Table 4. Share of ESC Projects by Program Actions in Terms of Their Reactions to COVID-19

ESC Program Actions	Reacting to COVID-19	Not Reacting to COVID-19
Volunteering projects	6.70%	93.30%
Traineeship and jobs	9.65%	90.35%
Solidarity projects	9.84%	90.16%
Volunteering teams in high priority areas	14.29%	85.71%
Total	8.01%	91.99%

Table 5. ESC Grants in Terms of the Action and in Relation to the COVID-19 Crisis in Funding Year 2020

ESC Program Action	Reacting to COVID-19 Crisis	Not Reacting to COVID-19 Crisis	All Projects
Volunteering projects	€5,134,479.52	€68,971,527.47	€74,106,006.99
Solidarity projects	€894,967.20	€7,833,915.57	€8,728,882.77
Traineeship and jobs	€203,744.40	€2,197,417.45	€2,401,161.85
Volunteering teams in high priority areas	€209,978.00	€809,149.64	€1,019,127.64
Total	€6,443,169.12	€79,812,010.13	€86,255,179.25

In future funding years, it is expected that the rate of projects reacting to COVID-19 in volunteering teams in high priority areas might be even higher, with COVID-19 stated as a primary reason for this action. The funding year 2020, shown in the tables, was announced before the COVID-19 outbreak. Also, traineeships and jobs will no longer be part of ESC. Therefore, these shares will soon change.

ESC Projects Regarding the Program Action

As Table 5 shows, €6,443,169 out of €86,255,179 (7.47%) was dedicated to the projects either directly reacting to the COVID-19 crisis or seeing COVID-19 as a secondary reason for the project. Volunteering projects had the highest rate of the aggregated grant money for all countries and projects in the funding year 2020 (85.81%), followed by solidarity projects (10.18%). These two groups have the highest share, considering the number of projects. However, the ratios to the number of total projects are different: volunteering projects had 49%, and solidarity projects had 46.2%. The Appendix (Tables A2 and A3) shows the basic descriptive statistics for identifying project sizes. The median grant in the funding year 2020 was €12,568 per project. The median grant in the funding year 2020 for projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis was €9,601. In both cases, volunteering had the highest rate of grants in ESC.

ESC Grants by Program Actions and the Role of COVID-19

The previous part did not discuss whether the COVID-19 crisis was a primary reason for the project or a secondary reason for a project that would be needed even without the COVID-19 crisis. Table 6 specifies the distribution of these grant amounts among those two subtypes.

A total of €2,009,197 were assigned to the projects directly reacting to the COVID-19 crisis (31% of all COVID-19 related projects). These projects might not have been proposed and funded without COVID-19, though this is an assumption built on the argument that these projects list COVID-19 as one of the main reasons for the project, or even the single main reason. The other €4,437,860 (59%) were assigned to the projects that stated that COVID-19 had worsened the situation of the target group of the project and/or it was a secondary reason for the project. These projects would probably still have been proposed even without the COVID-19 crisis. More detailed results are in the Appendix (Tables A1, A2, and A3).

Types of Organizations in the ESC

ESC Projects by the Types of Organizations

Taking into account the types of organizations provides more information about the nature of organizations receiving funding from the ESC. In the three years of the first program period, the vast majority of projects were classified as NGOs or social enterprises. The European Youth

Table 6. ESC Grants by Program Actions and the Role of COVID-19 in Funding Year 2020

Projects with COVID-19 Related Keywords	COVID-19 as a Primary Reason/ Main Focus	COVID-19 as a Secondary Reason	All projects reacting to COVID-19	Share
Volunteering projects	€1,430,172.56	€3,704,306.96	€5,134 479.52	79.64%
Traineeship and jobs	€15,410.00	€188,334.40	€203,744.40	3.16%
Solidarity projects	€353,636.20	€545,219.00	€898,855.20	13.94%
Volunteering teams in high priority areas	€209,978.00	€0.00	€209,978.00	3.26%
Total	€2,009,196.76	€4,437,860.36	€6,447,057.12	100%
Share	31.16%	68.84%	100%	

Table 7. Types of Organizations in the ESC Divided into Thematic Clusters

Type of Organization (clusters)	2018	2019	2020	Total	Percent
NGO or social enterprise	668	1,923	2,417	5,008	71.47%
Sports and youth work	45	324	440	809	11.50%
Public sector organizations	45	159	177	381	5.44%
Cultural organization, regardless of legal status	44	96	88	228	3.25%
International organization regardless of legal status	29	65	85	179	2.55%
Education and research organization	19	85	75	179	2.55%
Private company	8	27	31	66	0.94%
Other	24	58	75	157	2.24%
Total	882	2,737	3,388	7,007	100%

Portal organization classification mixed two perspectives: legal entities and the sector of an organization. According to European Youth Portal, there were 61 types of organizations among ESC grantors, most quite minor. These have been arranged in the eight clusters presented in Table 7.

Some are clustered according to legal status (private nonprofits and social enterprises, private companies, public sector organizations), others by sector (sports and youth work, etc.). Details about the clusters and types of organizations are in the Appendix (Table A10).

ESC Projects by the Types of Organizations

This part focuses on the grants according to the clusters. Table 8 clearly shows that the vast majority of the grants reacting to COVID-19 are contracted to NGOs and social enterprises (91.57%, almost €6 million), followed by public sector organizations (4.14%, €262,495), education and research institutions (3.68%, €233,455), and youth work organizations and informal groups (0.61%, €38,788).

If the solidarity projects were included, the category of ‘youth work organizations and informal groups’ would likely be higher. Only 11 out of 61 organization categories are represented among the projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis in 2020; private companies and international organizations are not represented here, although they were eligible.

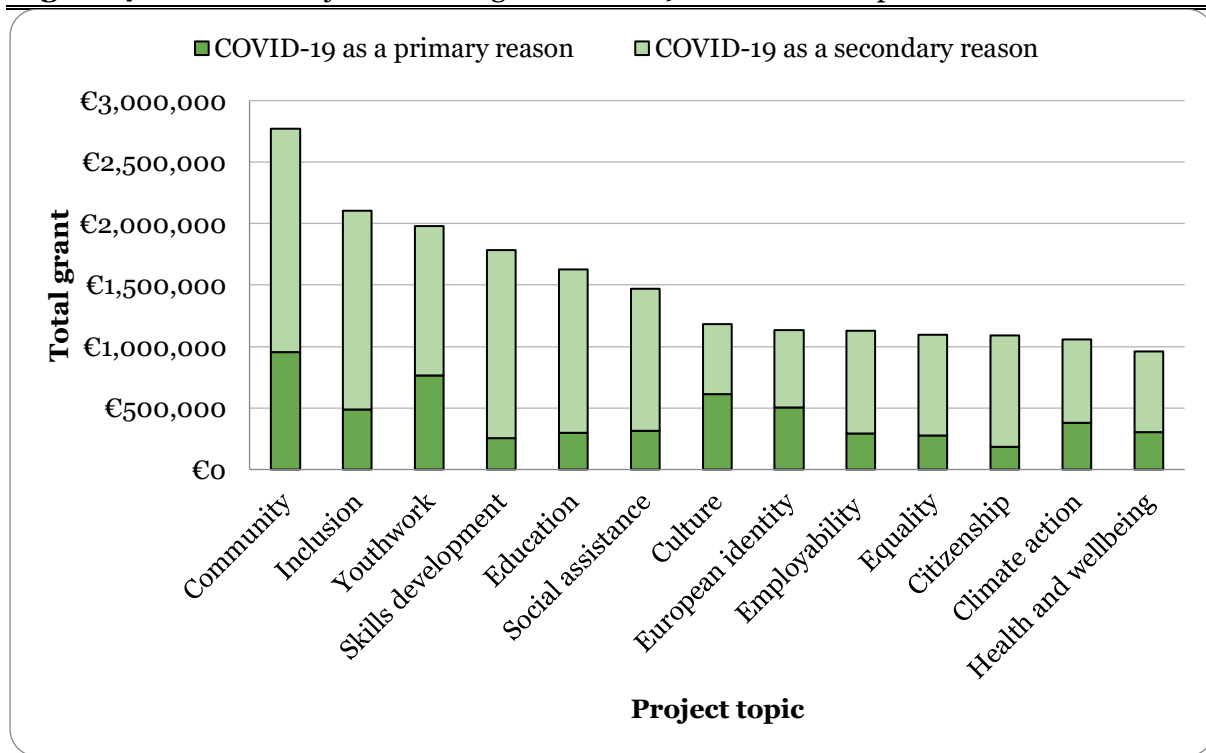
Table 8. Legal Entities, 2020, Total, COVID Grants (Excluding Solidarity Projects)

Legal Entity	COVID-19 as a Primary Reason	COVID-19 as a Secondary Reason	All projects reacting to COVID-19
NGOs and social enterprises	€1,594,959.36	€4,215,253.36	€5,810,212.72
Education and research	€182,764.00	€50,691.00	€233,455.00
Public sector organizations	€97,584.00	€164,911.00	€262,495.00
Youth work organizations and informal groups	€21,536.00	€17,252.60	€38,788.60
Total	€1,896,843.36	€4,448,107.96	€6,344,951.32

Project Topics in the ESC

The European Youth Portal has 22 topics for the ESC projects that are represented in three of its actions: volunteering, solidarity projects, and traineeships and jobs. The fourth ESC action, volunteering teams in high priority areas, does not have a topic classification since it is focused on that year's high priority areas.

This part presents the results for project grants reacting to COVID-19 by topic in terms of the grants. One project could have up to three topics; with a few exceptions, this was the case. Figure 4 presents information about the grant distribution of the projects reacting to COVID-19 according to the project topics.

Figure 4. Grants of Projects Reacting to COVID-19 in Terms of Topics

The most frequent topic connected with mentioning COVID-19 as a reason for the project was community development, at 39.4%. Grants for projects related to community development and reacting to COVID-19 totalled €2,769,577, with €957,061 going to community development projects having COVID-19 as a primary reason for the project. The second most frequent topic of projects reacting to COVID-19 was inclusion, with 29.9% of project grant shares (€2,101,880); €487,846 went to inclusion projects having COVID-19 as a primary reason for the project. The third most frequent category was youth work, with 28.2% of the grant money (€1,980,675) going to projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis; €765,984 went to youth work projects having COVID-19 as a primary reason for the project. Other topics among projects receiving grants while reacting in whole or in part to COVID-19 were skills development (25.4%), education and training (23.1%), and social assistance and welfare (20.9%). The complete information is in the Appendix (Table A11).

Discussion

The Regional Significance of the European Solidarity Corps for Unexpected Crises

The pandemic was a challenging time for international solidarity in the European Union and other parts of the world as well. On the one hand, there was cross-country cooperation on hospital care and patient transfers, but on the other hand, there were border closures, and the situation was also difficult regarding exports of protective medical equipment (Berrocal et al., 2021; Chopin et al., 2020). At the time of this paradox, ESC offered a platform practically promoting solidarity not only in the EU but also in EU Overseas countries and territories and other partner countries.

This pandemic was not the last international crisis, e.g., the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 displaced millions of people, the majority of them women, the elderly, children or people with severe health conditions (Maternik et al., 2023; Elliott, 2022).

This means the war in Ukraine in 2022 caused a refugee crisis with several impacts on the individual and societal needs that the ESC is addressing. Moreover, of the countries with the highest numbers of refugees per capita, all are involved in the ESC. The vast majority are program countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Germany, Austria and Ireland), while Moldova and Montenegro are partner countries (Elliott, 2022). Though further research is needed, the ESC, due to its regional and thematic focus, has the potential to diminish the negative impact of international crises of a humanitarian nature.

ESC Volunteering and International Crises

As Morawski & Szczegieliński (2021) wrote, volunteering is an instrument to help minimise the negative effects of the pandemic. With the exception of Traineeship and jobs action, the ESC focused on volunteering. Therefore, ESC projects provide the potential for organizations to obtain additional funding for volunteering projects, which can minimize the negative impact of the pandemic.

What makes ESC volunteering relatively unique is the centralised database of projects and volunteering opportunities, which served as a basis for this research. This information is publicly available, not just for researchers or volunteering organizations but also for volunteers themselves. As Almeida (2021) wrote, “a common point among them is the need to centralize access to this information for those in need and volunteers,” while this “approach intends to increase the coordination and impact of these initiatives” (p. 49).

What makes this centralised online marketplace for international volunteering opportunities even more important is that the ESC program and partner countries comprise 55 independent

countries (including Kosovo and Palestine with disputed status) and 13 OCTs with a population exceeding one billion (14% of the world population). This potentially enables efficient allocation of volunteer resources internationally, in this way forming local and international partnerships with various types of organizations to create synergies and increase efficiency of dealing with crises like the pandemic.

Another issue is the qualitative impact of volunteering, both on volunteer well-being and on the volunteering performed. With regard to the research studies on ESC volunteering during the pandemic, such studies are not very common. Jeżowski & Poszytek (2022) mentioned e-volunteering in the case of the European Solidarity Corps volunteering in Poland, such as online shopping for the elderly, foreign language classes for young people and coaching and online psychological support online.

Volunteering can also be an instrument contributing to dealing with other crises, such as the refugee crisis resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as volunteers often help the refugees (Maternik et al., 2023; Shmidt & Jaworsky, 2022; Šveda & Štefková, 2022; Kyriazi, 2022).

Volunteering is a tool enabling citizens to participate in dealing with crises, including humanitarian ones. The ESC is focused on volunteering projects, offering various kinds of organizations, especially nonprofits, financial support for organized volunteering. Therefore, the ESC has the potential to contribute to dealing with the crises through its support to volunteering projects.

ESC Project Topics and Global Crisis

The pandemic has caused challenges for elderly care, childcare, and home schooling (Stötzer et al., 2022), while many people lost part of their income or even their jobs (Santos & Laureano, 2022). There were also challenges regarding older LGBTQ+ adults during the pandemic (Perone, 2021).

The ESC proved to be a natural funding source for COVID-19-oriented volunteer projects, even though the 2020 request for proposals was issued before the pandemic and did not explicitly mention it. Though the rate of the ESC projects in the funding year 2020 was 6%, the share of the projects reacting to COVID-19 will likely be higher due to the thematic overlaps between the impact of the pandemic and the focus of the ESC, and also due to the fact that some ESC projects were submitted before the pandemic started, and therefore could not include pandemic related keywords. The reason for that is the focus of the ESC program on promoting solidarity, dealing with social issues, supporting communities, inclusion, etc. Studies on the impact of the pandemic will likely continue, but based on the current literature, it seems that the pandemic has been impacting the ESC program target groups. There are also some studies, such as Khabirova et al. (2021), who wrote about the European Solidarity Corps projects during the pandemic, that “volunteers participate in projects that are highly useful, such as working with disabled people or for various NGOs” (p. 74).

In summary, the literature shows various impacts of the pandemic on various vulnerable target groups. It also seems very likely that the war in Ukraine and the refugee crisis will also impact these groups of people. The ESC's aim is to address these target groups. Therefore, it supports solidarity, social protection, inclusion, education, communities, and protecting the health and the environment via volunteering projects. The ESC seems to be a natural public funding tool diminishing the impact of the international crisis worsening the situation in the areas addressed by the ESC.

Nonprofits in the ESC and Implications for Future Crises

Although various legal entities can apply for ESC projects, nonprofits are the dominant type of organization applying. Nonprofits usually both participate in dealing with crises like pandemics, wars and humanitarian crises, and are also impacted by them. However, as Azevedo et al. (2022) wrote, “governments cannot adequately respond to this crisis without the support of the private and nonprofit sectors, particularly in aiding the most vulnerable populations” (p. 476), specifically mentioning natural disasters, terrorism, pandemics, and other humanitarian crises that require collaborative responses and relief efforts.

The majority of ESC project applicants in the ESC were nonprofits, and as a result, the ESC is providing the nonprofits, together with other actors, funding opportunities to deal with the crises through volunteering projects. The benefit of the ESC is that this can be done even without a request for proposals, which would specifically be focused on a crisis, as discussed above. Regarding specific types of challenges for nonprofits during the COVID-19 pandemic, the literature mentions diminishing financial donations due to the financial pressures donors were facing (Tandon & Aravind, 2021), returning the public funds due to unrealized projects, (Plaček et al., 2022), financial losses and increased expenditures due to the lockdowns (Meyer et al., 2021), and cancelled fundraising events (Shi, 2022). This analysis showed that the ESC offers financial resources to fund volunteering projects promoting solidarity, with various thematic overlaps with the impact of the health and humanitarian crises, and can therefore, potentially be a partial solution for these challenges, though more research is needed. Also, “seeking new funding streams,” both public and private, was also reported in the literature (Hutton et al., 2021, p. 17).

Another issue of nonprofits during international crises is their resilience and preparedness for crises. Searing et al. (2021) wrote that “the pandemic will likely not be the last extended crisis nonprofits face,” while resources should be dedicated to nonprofit resilience now (p. 193). Therefore, the ESC can potentially diminish the negative impact of the pandemic or other crises on nonprofits, through public funding for volunteering projects, though further research is needed. Hutton et al. (2021) wrote that their study suggests that financial resources such as multi-year operating grants and staff and volunteer retention are especially important for the nonprofit resilience. Since ESC is offering multi-year grants, including the finances for a volunteer coordinator, volunteering expenses, etc., it can potentially support resilience, though more research is needed.

The research shows that various types of organizations submitted projects. The ESC grantees with projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis have target groups that existed before the crisis, but their mission was affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Without such a massive pandemic, these organizations would probably not have submitted projects dealing with infectious viruses. This is indicated by how few organizations in previous years had projects on health topics. However, when such a massive pandemic happens, it crosses their activity fields. This is not a new principle; a similar principle was recorded by Mareš et al. (2013) during massive flooding in the Czech Republic. That study showed that in addition to prominent humanitarian organizations regularly participating in flood management, many other nonprofits from various fields participated in recovery after the flood.

Nonprofits are both negatively impacted by crises and participate in dealing with them. Providing multi-year grants for volunteering projects on topics related to crises, the ESC has the potential to help nonprofits with both, though further research is needed.

Research Limitations

The research has several limitations. First, only the projects submitted after March 2020 have COVID-19-related keywords. No project mentioned pandemics in general before the COVID-

19 crisis started. Most likely, this was because even most professionals did not see something like this as very likely. Therefore, there will likely be more COVID-19-related projects because projects were already aimed at problems that were worsened by the COVID-19 crisis, such as elderly isolation, social exclusion, and education.

The second research limitation is that the content analysis works only with the project descriptions of successful projects. This means that applicants submitted arguments and connections to COVID-19. On the other hand, these projects were approved by national public agencies and succeeded in competing with other projects. Therefore, the acceptance for funding can be seen, with some limitations, as a validation from the national agencies.

The third research limitation is that the analysis focuses on the information in the project description and does not consider the projects' real impact, along with the impact on volunteers' well-being, volunteering patterns or the efficiency of international volunteering programs. Evaluation of the projects should be one of the next steps, but this was usually not yet possible, as most of the COVID-19-related projects are still running. Also, such analysis would be much more demanding in terms of financial, personnel, and analytical costs. A possible solution might be to start with a limited segment or include some data that are not publicly available, such as project reports from the ESC. Considering all of the above, this analysis aims to provide material for further evaluation in COVID-19 public policy evaluation.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 crisis has been an unprecedented challenge for societies and economies. The virus itself and the anti-pandemic measures and restrictions have had a significant societal and economic impact. Nonprofits and volunteering were impacted by the pandemic but were also a tool for recovery. This research addressed the European Solidarity Corps projects in the funding year 2020; the main method was content analysis using COVID-19 pandemic-related keywords for searches in the ESC project database. In the funding year 2020, 275 out of 3,434 ESC projects (8%) listed the COVID-19 crisis as a reason for the project. Out of these 275 projects, 96 (35%) said the COVID-19 crisis was a primary reason for the project, and 179 projects (65%) stated the COVID-19 crisis was a secondary reason. In the funding year 2020, the total sum of ESC grants was €86.26 million. From that amount, €79.81 million (92.5%) went to projects that did not mention COVID-19 as a reason or rationale for the project. This does not mean that they are not actually dealing with the consequences of the pandemic, as some of them were submitted before the COVID-19 outbreak and have some thematic overlaps. However, €6.44 million (7.5%) went to projects mentioning the COVID-19 crisis as a primary or secondary reason or rationale for the project. This number of projects and grant amounts represent money at least partially relevant for evaluating and assessing the anti-pandemic policies.

The applications of projects reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic came from 27 countries; 24 EU member countries; Aruba, one of the Overseas countries and territories which is not part of the EU; the United Kingdom, which is no longer part of the EU; and Turkey, an EU candidate country. The project distribution among countries was highly disproportionate. Half of the projects were in Italy, Spain, Turkey, and Bulgaria. The countries with the highest percentages of grant money allocated to projects reacting to COVID-19 were by far Poland and Italy, followed by Bulgaria and Spain.

Most projects reacting to COVID-19 were classified as community development projects, followed by inclusion, youth work, skills development, education and training, and social assistance and welfare. This is likely a result of an overlap between the focus of the ESC program and the areas of life and society impacted by the pandemic. Similarly other

international humanitarian crises, such as the war in Ukraine and the refugee crisis, will likely have similar overlaps and effects.

The vast majority of grants for projects reacting to the COVID-19 crisis went to organizations classified as nonprofits and social enterprises: €5.8 million out of €6.4 million (92%). However, other organizations were represented as well, including public sector bodies and educational institutions. Considering the volunteering focus of the ESC, it is natural that nonprofits play such a significant role in the projects reacting to COVID-19, as they do in the ESC. This is, however, also significant because nonprofits are not usually sufficiently prepared for crises, which can interrupt their funding, supply of volunteers, etc. Therefore, the ESC serves as a tool for nonprofits to apply for funding for volunteering projects right after the crises happen, if the crises impact key areas of the ESC, such as inclusion, community development, solidarity, education, environmental protection, human rights, etc.

As a result, nonprofits and other organizations do not have to wait until governments or other organizations issue requests for proposals related to particular issues such as pandemics, war, etc. For organizations new to the ESC, this is a two-step process because they need a quality label first to apply for the grant, but it is possible they already have it. Therefore, ESC can potentially help nonprofits to obtain some additional funding in times of crisis, as well as additional volunteering help. In this way, it can help them with the two challenges in crises, to survive and to participate in dealing with the crisis.

Some impacts will probably be long-term and therefore are not yet proven. In light of its focus, the ESC programs seem to be a way to provide funds for improving the situation for the one billion people within the area of the ESC program and participating countries.

The study is based on the project descriptions, which can be considered a study limitation. Projects with thematic overlaps with the impact of COVID-19 that were submitted before the COVID-19 crisis were not classified as reacting to the COVID-19 crisis; they might have been if they had been submitted sometime later. Also, the connections to COVID-19 were declared by the project grantees; it was not possible to evaluate the projects themselves. However, only projects approved by national agencies and funded were analyzed. The results are linked to the ESC program and may not apply to other public programs. However, the results and implications of this study can be further investigated in other public programs, as the principle of the results is relatively universal. The ESC thematic focus appears to overlap with the health and humanitarian crises and their impact. Some of the pandemic's impact is on the vulnerable population, which is also one of the ESC target groups. Therefore, the ESC has the potential to participate in dealing with the consequences of health and humanitarian crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the related refugee crisis, and others.

Therefore, future research should address the actual impact of the ESC projects that address the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, another study could replicate this approach regarding the ESC projects and the war in Ukraine and the resulting refugee crisis, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Another interesting idea for research is how many of the activities in the ESC projects reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic would have been done even without ESC funding, and if so, whether they had an impact on quality. A final research idea is to look at how many volunteers would actually have volunteered without support from the ESC, and in which form and to what extent.

Disclosure Statement

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Appendix

Table A1. Descriptive Statistics, All ESC Projects, Funding Year 2020

Statistic	Volunteering Projects	Solidarity Projects	Traineeships and Jobs	Volunteer Teams in High Priority Areas	Total
Median	€25,581.00	€6,888.00	€11,977.40	€55,617.50	€12,568.00
Average	€37,257.92	€6,766.58	€21,062.82	€72,794.83	€25,603.59
Mode	€11,143.00	€6,888.00	€3,731.00	#N/A	€6,888.00
Min	€0.00	€0.00	€1,305.60	€37,905.00	€0.00
Max	€391,359.00	€25,568.00	€268,950.00	€146,748.00	€980,830.00
Total	€74,106,006.99	€8,728,882.77	€2,401,161.85	€1,019,127.64	€86,255,179.25

Table A2 Descriptive Statistics, COVID-19 as Primary or Secondary Reason for the Project, Funding Year 2020

Statistic	Volunteering Projects	Solidarity Projects	Traineeships and Jobs	Volunteer Teams in High Priority Areas	Total
Median	€30,349.00	€6,888.00	€12,152.80	€104,989.00	€9,601.00
Average	€43,884.44	€7,102.91	€18,522.22	€104,989.00	€25,168.63
Mode	€66,944.00	€6,888.00	#N/A	#N/A	€6,888.00
Min	€3,692.00	€1,000.00	€2,787.00	€63,230.00	€1,000.00
Max	€281,318.00	€14,382.00	€61,272.00	€146,748.00	€281,318.00
Total	€5,134,479.52	€894,967.20	€203,744.40	€209,978.00	€6,443,169.12

Table A3. Descriptive Statistics, Not Reacting to COVID, Funding Year 2020

Statistic	Volunteering Projects	Solidarity Projects	Traineeships and Jobs	Volunteer Teams in High Priority Areas	Total
Median	€25,130.60	€6,888.00	€11,802.00	€51,136.50	€12,772.00
Average	€36,843.76	€6,730.17	€21,334.15	€67,429.14	€25,329.11
Mode	€11,143.00	€6,888.00	€3,731.00	#N/A	€6,888.00
Min	€0.00	€0.00	€1,305.60	€37,905.00	€0.00
Max	€391,359.00	€25,568.00	€268,950.00	€143,620.00	€391,359.00
Total	€68,971,527.47	€7,833,915.57	€2,197,417.45	€809,149.64	€79,812,010.13

Table A4. ESC Projects in the Funding Year 2020 According to Countries and Relations to COVID-19

Applicant Organization Country	COVID-19 as a Primary Reason	COVID-19 as a Secondary Reason	All projects reacting to COVID-19	Share
Italy	23	31	54	19.64%
Spain	5	27	32	11.64%
Turkey	17	10	27	9.82%
Bulgaria	8	17	25	9.09%
Poland	8	9	17	6.18%
Portugal	8	8	16	5.82%
Slovenia	5	9	14	5.09%
Romania	3	9	12	4.36%
Greece	2	7	9	3.27%
France	2	6	8	2.91%
Hungary	1	5	6	2.18%
Croatia	1	5	6	2.18%
Belgium	3	2	5	1.82%
Netherlands	2	3	5	1.82%
United Kingdom	1	4	5	1.82%
Germany	0	4	4	1.45%
Czechia	1	3	4	1.45%
Slovakia	1	3	4	1.45%
Finland	1	3	4	1.45%
Denmark	1	2	3	1.09%
Latvia	1	2	3	1.09%
Austria	0	3	3	1.09%
Ireland	0	3	3	1.09%
Cyprus	2	0	2	0.73%
Aruba	0	2	2	0.73%
Malta	0	1	1	0.36%
Iceland	0	1	1	0.36%
Total	96	179	275	100%

Table A5. EU Members ESC Program Countries

	Country	Population	Population/World	Land Area (km ²)	Region
1	Germany	79,90,481	1.03%	348,672	Central Europe
2	France*	68,084,217	0.88%	640,427	Western Europe (Metropolitan France), Northern South America (French Guiana), Caribbean (Guadeloupe, Martinique), Southern Indian Ocean (Mayotte), Southern Africa (Reunion)
3	Italy	62,390,364	0.80%	294,140	Southern Europe
4	Spain	47,260,584	0.61%	498,980	Southwestern Europe, North Africa (Ceuta and Melilla), other islands close to the African coast (Canary Islands, Islas Chafarinas, Penon de Alhucemas, and Penon de Velez de la Gomera)
5	Poland	38,185,913	0.49%	304,255	Central Europe
6	Romania	21,230,362	0.27%	229,891	Southeastern Europe
7	Netherlands**	17,337,403	0.22%	33,893	Western Europe
8	Belgium	11,778,842	0.15%	30,278	Western Europe
9	Czechia	10,702,596	0.14%	77,247	Central Europe
10	Greece	10,569,703	0.14%	130,647	Southern Europe
11	Portugal	10,263,850	0.13%	91,470	Southwestern Europe
12	Sweden	10,261,767	0.13%	410,335	Northern Europe
13	Hungary	9,728,337	0.13%	89,608	Central Europe
14	Austria	8,884,864	0.11%	82,445	Central Europe
15	Bulgaria	6,919,180	0.09%	108,489	Southeastern Europe
16	Denmark	5,894,687	0.08%	42,434	Northern Europe
17	Finland	5,540,720	0.07%	303,815	Northern Europe
18	Slovakia	5,436,066	0.07%	48,105	Central Europe
19	Ireland	5,224,884	0.07%	68,883	Western Europe
20	Croatia	4,208,973	0.05%	55,974	Southeastern Europe
21	Lithuania	2,711,566	0.03%	62,680	Eastern Europe
22	Slovenia	2,102,106	0.03%	20,151	south Central Europe
23	Latvia	1,862,687	0.02%	62,249	Eastern Europe
24	Cyprus	1,281,506	0.02%	9,241	Middle East/Europe
25	Estonia	1,220,042	0.02%	42,388	Eastern Europe
26	Luxembourg	639,589	0.01%	2,586	Western Europe
27	Malta	460,891	0.01%	316	Southern Europe
	Total	378,172,180	5.80%	4,089,599	

Based on CIA World Factbook (2021).

*Data for France includes Metropolitan France and overseas regions French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte and Reunion.

**The Netherlands is one of the constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Table A6. Former EU Member State, ESC Program Country

	Country	Population	Population/World	Area (km ²)	Region
1	UK*	67,081,000	0.86%	241,930	Western Europe
	Total	67,081,000	0.86%	241,930	

Based on CIA World Factbook (2021).

Note: *Until the closure of the projects financed under the MFF 2014–2020.

Table A7. Non-EU ESC Program Countries

	Country	Population	Population/World	Area (km ²)	Region
1	Turkey	82,482,383	1.06%	769,632	Southeastern Europe, Southwestern Asia
2	North Macedonia	2,128,262	0.03%	25,433	
3	Iceland	354,234	0.00%	100,250	Northern Europe
4	Liechtenstein	39,425	0.00%	160	Central Europe
	Total	85,004,304	1.09%	895,475	

Based on CIA World Factbook (2021).

Table A8. ESC Partner Countries

	Country	Population	Population/World	Area (km ²)	Region
1	Russia	142,320,790	1.83%	16,377,742	North Asia, Eastern Europe
2	Egypt	106,437,241	1.37%	995,450	Northern Africa, Asia (Sinai Peninsula)
3	Ukraine	43,745,640	0.56%	579,330	Eastern Europe
4	Algeria	43,576,691	0.56%	2,381,740	Northern Africa
5	Morocco**	36,561,813	0.47%	716,300	Northern Africa
6	Syria	20,384,316	0.26%	185,887	Middle East
7	Tunisia	11,811,335	0.15%	155,360	Northern Africa
8	Jordan	10,909,567	0.14%	88,802	Middle East
9	Azerbaijan*	10,282,283	0.13%	82,629	Southwestern Asia, Europe (small European portion north of the Caucasus range)
10	Belarus	9,441,842	0.12%	202,900	Eastern Europe
11	Israel	8,787,045	0.11%	21,497	Middle East
12	Libya	7,017,224	0.09%	1,759,540	Northern Africa
13	Serbia***	6,974,289	0.09%	77,474	Southeastern Europe
14	Norway	5,509,591	0.07%	304,282	Northern Europe
15	Lebanon	5,261,372	0.07%	10,230	Middle East
16	Georgia	4,933,674	0.06%	69,700	Southwestern Asia, Europe (a sliver of land north of the Caucasus)
17	Palestine	4,906,308	0.00%	6,000	Middle East
18	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3,824,782	0.05%	51,187	Southeastern Europe
19	Moldova	3,323,875	0.04%	32,891	Eastern Europe
20	Albania	3,088,385	0.04%	27,398	Southeastern Europe
21	Armenia	3,011,609	0.04%	28,203	Southwestern Asia (possibly Europe or the Middle East)
22	Kosovo	1,935,259	0.02%	10,887	Southeast Europe
23	Montenegro	607,414	0.01%	13,452	Southeastern Europe
	Total	494,652,345	6.30%	24,178,881	

Based on CIA World Factbook (2021).

Note: *including the exclave of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic and the Nagorno-Karabakh region; ** Including Western Sahara; *** excluding Kosovo;

**** Including Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Table A9. Overseas Countries and Territories of EU

	Country or Territory	Country	Relationship to the EU state	Region	Population	Share to all OCTs	Land Area (km ²)
1	French Polynesia	France	Overseas collectivity (often referred as an overseas country)	Oceania	297,154	29.15%	3,827
2	New Caledonia	France	Special collectivity (or a sui generis collectivity)	Oceania	293,608	28.80%	18,275
3	Curaçao	Kingdom of the Netherlands	Constituent country of the kingdom*	Caribbean	151,885	14.90%	444
4	Aruba	Kingdom of the Netherlands	Constituent country of the kingdom*	Caribbean	120,917	11.86%	180
5	Greenland	Kingdom of Denmark	Self-governing part of the kingdom	Northern North America	57,799	5.67%	2,166,086
6	Sint Maarten	Kingdom of the Netherlands	Constituent country of the kingdom*	Caribbean	44,564	4.37%	34
7	Bonaire	Netherlands	Public entity (special municipality) of Netherlands**	Caribbean	20,104	1.97%	294
8	Wallis and Futuna Island	France	Overseas collectivity	Oceania	15,851	1.55%	142
9	Saint Barthélemy	France	Overseas collectivity	Caribbean	7,116	0.70%	25
10	St. Pierre and Miquelon	France	Overseas collectivity	Northern North America	5,321	0.52%	242
11	Sint Eustatius	Netherlands	Special municipality of Netherlands**	Caribbean	3,138	0.31%	31
12	Saba	Netherlands	Public entity (special municipality) of Netherlands**	Caribbean	1,915	0.19%	13
13	French Southern and Antarctic Territories***	France	Overseas territory	Southern Indian Ocean; Antarctic region	0	0.00%	7,747
	Total				1,019,372	100%	2,197,341

Based on CIA World Factbook (2021) and Overseas Countries and Territories Association (2021).

Note: * Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten are constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, together with the Netherlands. **Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are part of the Netherlands, one of the constituent countries of the Kingdom of Netherlands. ***French Southern and Antarctic Territories has no permanent local population. The land area size does not include Adélie Land (about 500,000 km²) in Antarctica.

Table A10. 5.4 ESC Projects by Types of Organizations and Cluster

Cluster	Type of Organization	2018	2019	2020	Total	Share
NGO or Social enterprise	Non-governmental organization/association/social enterprise	593	1,698	2,162	4,453	63.03%
	Foundation	52	148	171	371	5.25%
	Civil society organization	16	50	48	114	1.61%
	Social enterprise	7	25	34	66	0.93%
	Civil society organizations for European remembrance	0	2	2	4	0.06%
	Total	668	1,923	2,417	5,008	70.88%
Sport and youth work	Group of young people active in youth work	20	206	279	505	7.15%
	Youth organization	16	82	120	218	3.09%
	Sport club	5	12	19	36	0.51%
	National Youth Council	3	12	7	22	0.31%
	organization or association representing the sport sector	0	7	6	13	0.18%
	Sport federation	1	5	9	15	0.21%
	Sport league	0	0	0	0	0.00%
	Total	45	324	440	809	11.45%
Public sector organizations	Local public body	37	114	124	275	3.89%
	Public service provider	2	22	21	45	0.64%
	Regional public body	2	11	19	32	0.45%
	National public body	4	11	12	27	0.38%
	Association of twinned towns	0	1	1	2	0.03%
	Total	45	159	177	381	5.39%
Cultural organization, regardless of legal entity	Non-Profit making cultural organizations	31	64	63	158	2.24%
	Non-publicly funded cultural organizations	3	7	5	15	0.21%
	Publicly funded cultural organizations	1	5	6	12	0.17%
	Music Centre	1	3	1	5	0.07%
	Music producers	1	3	1	5	0.07%
	Theatre	0	3	3	6	0.08%
	Opera	1	2	2	5	0.07%
	Film fund or foundation	0	0	1	1	0.01%
	Film market organization	0	2	0	2	0.03%
	Film school	0	1	0	1	0.01%

International organization regardless legal form	Art Agents	0	1	1	2	0.03%
	Concert hall	1	1	1	3	0.04%
	Publisher association	0	1	0	1	0.01%
	Art gallery	0	1	0	1	0.01%
	Video Games Developer/Producers	0	0	1	1	0.01%
	organization active in the organization of	0	1	1	2	0.03%
	Audiovisual Archives	1	1	1	3	0.04%
	Television broadcaster	1	0	0	1	0.01%
	organization active in the organization of	1	0	0	1	0.01%
	Audiovisual Events	1	0	1	2	0.03%
	Artists Agents	1	0	0	1	0.01%
	Audiovisual Operators	1	0	0	1	0.01%
	Dance Company	1	0	0	1	0.01%
	Total	44	96	88	228	3.23%
	European NGO	24	57	68	149	2.11%
	Civil society organizations working at European level	1	6	3	10	0.14%
	EU-wide network	2	1	8	11	0.16%
	International agencies and organizations	1	1	1	3	0.04%
	European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation	0	0	0	0	0.00%
	European or international public body	0	0	1	1	0.01%
	International organization under public law	0	0	2	2	0.03%
	Pan European network active in the culture sector	1	0	2	3	0.04%
	Total	29	65	85	179	2.53%
Education and research organization	Higher education institution (tertiary level)	1	25	28	54	0.76%
	School/Institute/Educational center – General education – primary level	2	13	0	15	0.21%
	School/Institute/Educational center – Vocational Training – secondary level	3	10	7	20	0.28%
	School/Institute/Educational center – Adult education	4	8	10	22	0.31%
	School/Institute/Educational center – General education – pre-primary level	2	9	9	20	0.28%
	School/Institute/Educational center – General education – secondary level	2	8	6	16	0.23%

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Private companies	School/Institute/Educational center – Vocational Training – tertiary level	2	8	7	17	0.24%
	Research institute/center	3	4	8	15	0.21%
	Total	19	85	75	179	2.53%
	Small and medium sized enterprise	5	14	30	49	0.69%
	Large enterprise	3	13	1	17	0.24%
	Total	8	27	31	66	0.93%
	Other	17	38	61	116	1.64%
	Accreditation, certification or qualification body	5	15	9	29	0.41%
	Organizations active in the field of humanitarian aid	1	3	5	9	0.13%
	Counselling body	0	1	0	1	0.01%
Other	Social partner or other representative of working life (chambers of commerce, trade union, trade association)	1	1	0	2	0.03%
	Total	24	58	75	157	2.22%

Based on the European Youth Portal (2021).

Table A11. ESC Project Grants by Topic, The Funding Year 2020

	Project Topic	COVID as a Primary Reason	COVID as a Secondary Reason	Total	Share
1	Community development	€957,061.00	€1,812,516.00	€2,769,577.00	39.38%
2	Inclusion	€487,846.80	€1,614,033.36	€2,101,880.16	29.88%
3	Youthwork	€765,984.56	€1,214,691.40	€1,980,675.96	28.16%
4	Skills development	€255,362.76	€1,528,343.40	€1,783,706.16	25.36%
5	Education and training	€298,623.00	€1,327,517.60	€1,626,140.60	23.12%
6	Social assistance and welfare	€312,385.00	€1,154,903.96	€1,467,288.96	20.86%
7	Culture	€613,774.00	€570,486.00	€1,184,260.00	16.84%
8	European identity and values	€506,272.00	€629,057.20	€1,135,348.20	16.14%
9	Employability and entrepreneurship	€290,407.80	€837,511.00	€1,127,918.80	16.04%
10	Equality and non-discrimination	€274,225.00	€821,451.20	€1,095,676.20	15.58%
11	Citizenship and democratic participation	€182,821.00	€907,296.60	€1,090,117.60	15.50%
12	Climate action, environment and nature protection	€377,218.80	€680,871.20	€1,058,090.00	15.04%
13	Health and wellbeing	€302,739.20	€658,899.76	€961,638.96	13.67%
14	Rural development and urban regeneration	€70,400.00	€274,293.40	€344,693.40	4.90%
15	Physical education and sport	€145,536.00	€96,725.00	€242,261.00	3.44%
16	Human rights	€91,419.00	€107,220.00	€198,639.00	2.82%
17	Reception and integration of third-country nationals	€0.00	€193,075.00	€193,075.00	2.74%
18	Territorial cooperation and cohesion	€22,136.00	€85,710.60	€107,846.60	1.53%
19	Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	€0.00	€97,214.00	€97,214.00	1.38%
20	Research and innovation	€23,710.00	€23,600.00	€47,310.00	0.67%
21	Disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery	€44,276.00	€0.00	€44,276.00	0.63%
22	Transport and mobility	€10,927.56	€0.00	€10,927.56	0.16%
	Total	€2,040,501.56	€4,993,326.96	€7,033,828.52	100%

Table A12. ESC Project 2018-2019 by Topics and Program Actions

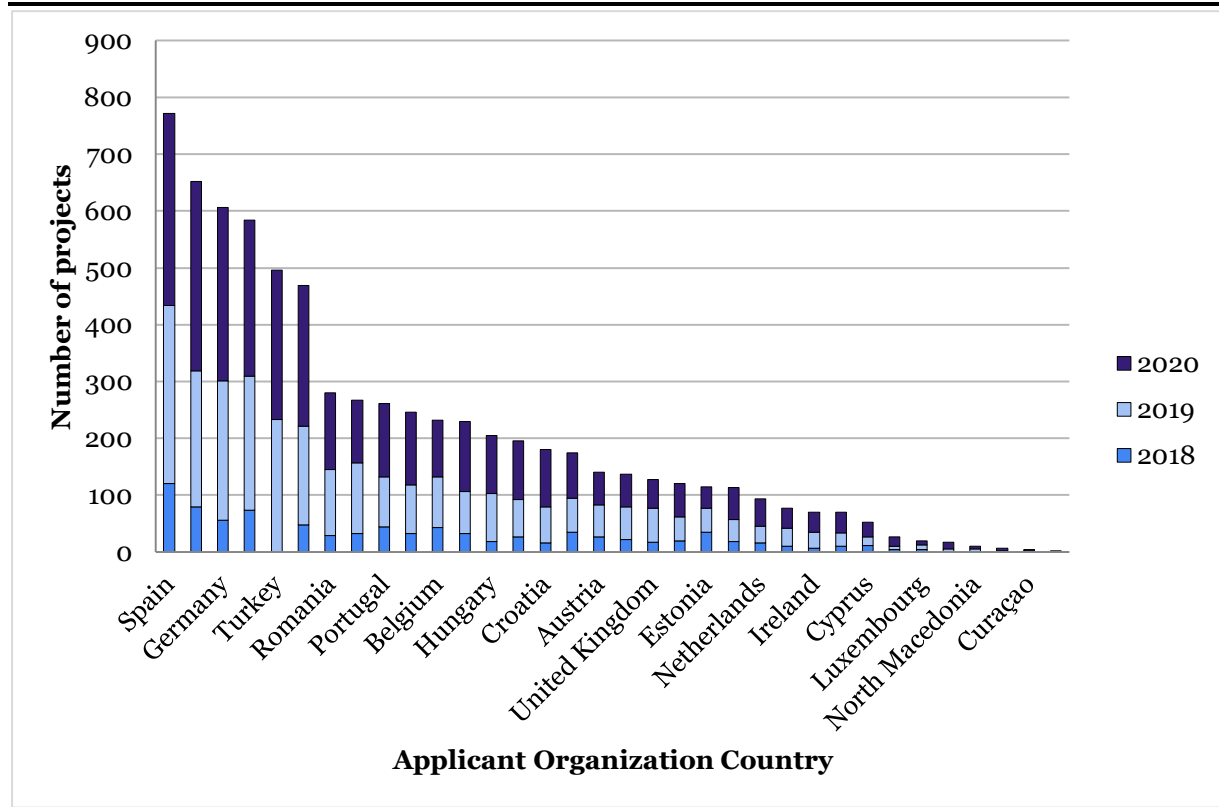
	Project Topic (*)	Total	Volunteering	Solidarity Projects	Traineeships and Jobs
1	Inclusion	1,235	916	296	23
2	Youthwork	1,003	782	193	28
3	Community development	946	525	401	20
4	Education and training	885	633	218	34
5	Citizenship and democratic participation	823	600	214	9
6	Culture	789	612	166	11
7	Equality and non-discrimination	764	528	224	12
8	Skills development	681	433	225	23
9	Climate action, environment and nature protection	555	369	178	8
10	European identity and values	553	430	90	13
11	Employability and entrepreneurship	383	245	103	35
12	Health and well-being	347	208	137	2
13	Social assistance and welfare	326	259	62	5
14	Rural development and urban regeneration	263	194	66	3
15	Human rights	207	143	64	0
16	Physical education and sport	116	59	55	2
17	Reception and integration of third-country nationals	113	69	39	5
18	Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	96	75	21	0
19	Territorial cooperation and cohesion	68	45	21	2
20	Research and innovation	32	23	9	0
21	Disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery	20	9	11	0
22	Transport and mobility	11	2	8	1
	Not Applicable	233	233	0	0
	Total	3,750	2,685	984	81

Source: European Commission, European Solidarity Corps report, 2018 and 2019 (2020).

Table A13. ESC Share of Projects 2018-2019 by Topics and Program Actions

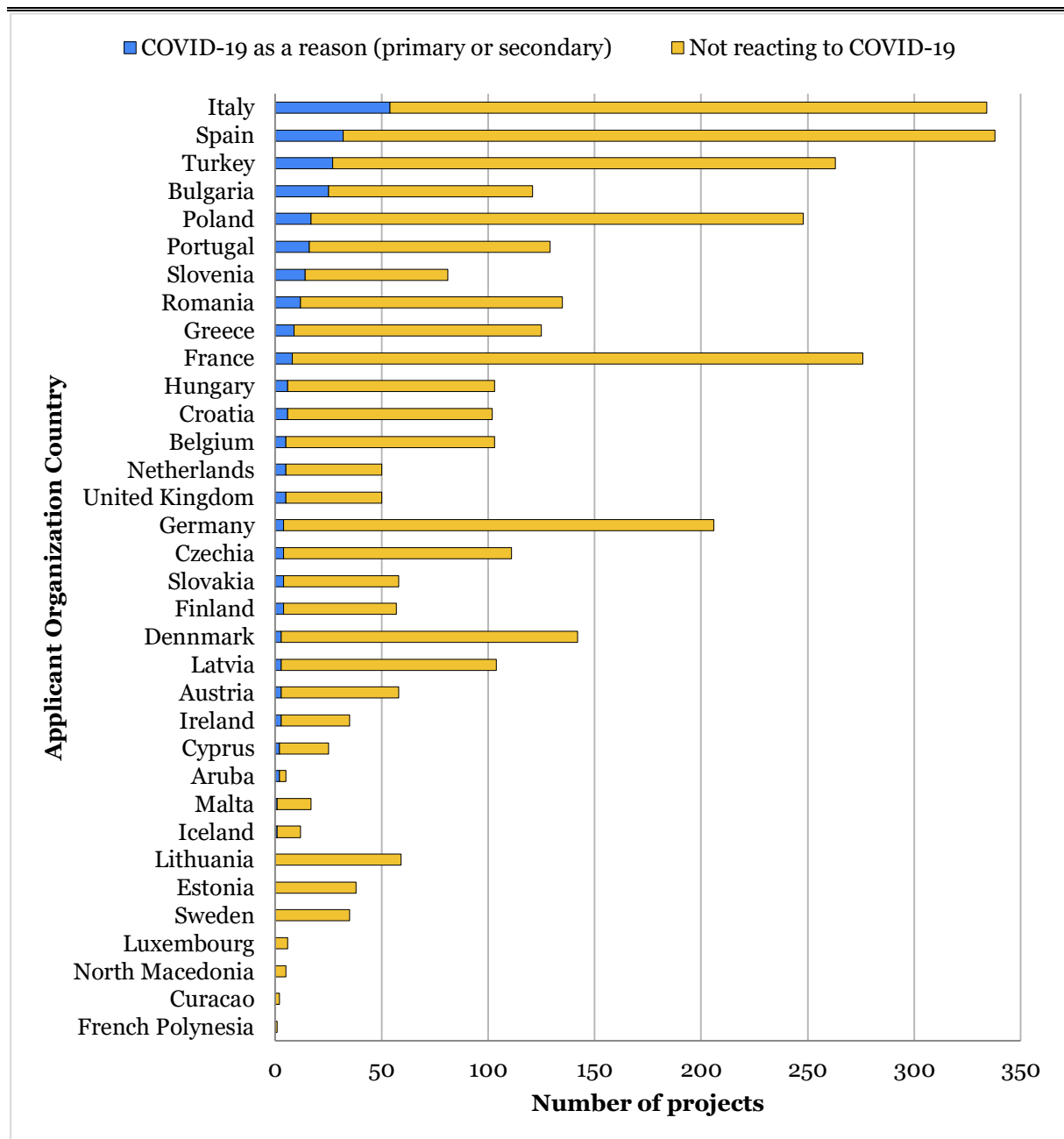
	Project Topic (*)	Total	Volunteering	Solidarity Projects	Traineeships and Jobs
1	Inclusion	32.93%	34.12%	30.08%	28.40%
2	Youthwork	26.75%	29.12%	19.61%	34.57%
3	Community development	25.23%	19.55%	40.75%	24.69%
4	Education and training	23.60%	23.58%	22.15%	41.98%
5	Citizenship and democratic participation	21.95%	22.35%	21.75%	11.11%
6	Culture	21.04%	22.79%	16.87%	13.58%
7	Equality and non-discrimination	20.37%	19.66%	22.76%	14.81%
8	Skills development	18.16%	16.13%	22.87%	28.40%
9	Climate action, environment and nature protection	14.80%	13.74%	18.09%	9.88%
10	European identity and values	14.75%	16.01%	9.15%	16.05%
11	Employability and entrepreneurship	10.21%	9.12%	10.47%	43.21%
12	Health and wellbeing	9.25%	7.75%	13.92%	2.47%
13	Social assistance and welfare	8.69%	9.65%	6.30%	6.17%
14	Rural development and urban regeneration	7.01%	7.23%	6.71%	3.70%
15	Human rights	5.52%	5.33%	6.50%	0.00%
16	Physical education and sport	3.09%	2.20%	5.59%	2.47%
17	Reception and integration of third-country nationals	3.01%	2.57%	3.96%	6.17%
18	Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	2.56%	2.79%	2.13%	0.00%
19	Territorial cooperation and cohesion	1.81%	1.68%	2.13%	2.47%
20	Research and innovation	0.85%	0.86%	0.91%	0.00%
21	Disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery	0.53%	0.34%	1.12%	0.00%
22	Transport and mobility	0.29%	0.07%	0.81%	1.23%
	Not Applicable	6.21%	8.68%	0.00%	0.00%

Based on European Solidarity Corps Report, 2018 and 2019 (2020).

Figure A14. Projects by Country, Funding Years 2018 to 2020

Based on the European Youth Portal (2021).

Figure A15. Countries Ranked by the Number of Projects Reacting to COVID-19 in Funding Year 2020



Based on the European Youth Portal (2021).

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#BlackLivesMatter (BLM) Was Never About Officer Race

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Of course, *#BlackLivesMatter* (BLM) is about race. However, the ‘B’ in BLM refers to the victim’s race, not that of the officer involved in the interaction. Still, the discourse has primarily been framed as White law enforcement versus Black citizenry. The BLM social movement for racial justice began as a hashtag following the 2012 death of Trayvon Martin. In the following years, *#BlackLivesMatter* was used to bring attention to inequitable police interactions experienced by Black people, disproportionately resulting in death. The George Floyd case acted as a focusing event for the movement, where a Black victim was killed by a White police officer but calls for *#BlackLivesMatter* were not because the officer was White. In this essay, we argue that the police system is embedded with institutional racism at the organizational level (e.g., policies, procedures, climate) and that public trust in police is positional, not racial, indicating that systemic changes are required at the organizational level to improve police outcome equity.

Keywords: Policing, Trust, Power, Institutional Racism

Introduction

If you were asked to imagine a U.S. news headline in which a police officer was accused of using excessive force in a traffic stop resulting in the serious injury or death of the person being stopped, the likelihood is high that that image would be of a Black citizen, likely male, and a White police officer. The ubiquity of this scenario in the news for the past decade has created a collective availability heuristic that explains the likely image. “Black civilians are more likely to be stopped by police than White [sic] civilians, net of relevant factors” is the claim that Kramer and Remster (2018, p. 2) make in their article examining racial disparities in police use of force. What they and others have since discovered is that there are inequities in policing outcomes when examined through the lens of racial and ethnic minorities (Engel & Calnon, 2004; Fryer, 2016; Levchak, 2017; Ross, 2015).

These inequities are in effect with every potential interaction with police. In the United States, Black and Brown citizens are more likely to enter the criminal justice system than White citizens (Essex & Hartman, 2022). From suspicion to stops to arrests to use of force, Black citizens are often the victims of racial bias in policing, resulting in inequitable outcomes. Of primary concern in the past decade, however, has been the almost flippant use of force toward Black Americans during all manner of police interactions. Seemingly, *#BlackLivesMatter* (BLM) was a response to the deaths of Black civilians at the hands of White law enforcement officers. The repeated theme in stories demonstrated to the U.S. and the world that there was

a racial conflict taking place, mostly in urban and suburban areas, between White police and Black civilians. However, #BLM grew out of collective Black frustration surrounding the perceived lack of police accountability in instances of excessive force toward the Black community (Biondi, 2016). This indicates that while the race of the victim is salient to the #BLM agenda, the racial identity of the force wielding officer has little relevance, thus, BLM makes no racial accusations for the officer—it was never about their race.

#BlackLivesMatter has become a social movement network of largely grassroots collectives, joining individuals as well as related organizations that press to expose and rectify inequity and discrimination brought by systemic and overt racism in the U.S. The catalyst for the use of the social media hashtag came not from a case involving law enforcement but rather the acquittal of a former neighborhood watch captain in Florida who shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin because he appeared suspect. The killing took place in 2012, and a year and a half later, the acquittal ignited the movement. The hashtag became non-violent street protests in 2014 and has continued under the banner of the raised fist, an icon used to represent the unity of generally oppressed people. For #BlackLivesMatter, that fist is black and is also called the Black Power fist, made widely known by the Black Panther Party of the 1960s (Green-Hayes & James, 2017; Rhodes, 2017). While much of the BLM message is reminiscent of those who lived through the Civil Rights Movement, the stark difference is that much of the leadership of BLM are women (Rickford, 2016; Scott & Brown, 2016).

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, urban municipal governments joined the movement by identifying intersections with ‘Black Lives Matter,’ naming streets after prominent Black figures, and removing icons of the Confederacy from prominent locations (Chacko, 2021). The movement was not without its critics, however. The most immediate and common pushback was from those who shouted, ‘All lives matter.’ Then, following an increase in news coverage of violence against law enforcement, ‘Blue lives matter.’ These statements, while intended to stand opposed to BLM, sparked a national conversation on racism and the nation’s racist history (Atkins, 2019). A political counter to BLM came with the critique of critical race theory (CRT) being taught in schools. While CRT is not taught in k-12 education institutions, almost entirely right-leaning politicians have created a strawman in the branch of critical theory, the philosophical approach to the study of social power structures, that replaced the ‘all lives matter’ chant with a more sinister attack on BLM (Morgan, 2022). Under the anti-CRT banner, books by Black authors, courses about Black history, and speakers about Black experiences have come under a rather inscrutable microscope. The national resistance to a movement pointing out what criminal justice scholars, sociologists, and Black Americans have known for over two centuries only accentuates the White versus Black mentality that sits pervasively within U.S. institutions.

That mentality isn’t exactly an accurate representation of BLM, however. What BLM simply points out is that Black lives do, in fact, matter all the time, not simply when compared to White lives. The fact that most of the racism in institutions against Black Americans exists because of White control of these institutions, while salient, is not the point. This idea was brought to light on January 7, 2023, when 29-year-old Tyre Nichols was killed by members of the Memphis Police Department for reportedly reckless driving. After he was pulled from the car, maced, and tasered, Nichols attempted to flee to his mother’s home nearby. Before he got there, five Black police officers repeatedly punched, kicked, and beat him with batons (Cardia et al., 2023). While some attempted to portray this incident as vindication for police violence against Black citizens, others pointed out that the culture of law enforcement is what truly stands in opposition to #BlackLivesMatter.

Law enforcement reform advocates point to the culture of policing as being wrought with racial bias and dehumanization, where Black officers are cultured to see Black citizens the way the institution sees them (Hajela, 2023). Human rights groups have, for decades, attempted to find cures for the racism ingrained within law enforcement agencies (Souhami, 2014). Though

once thought to be only the overt racism perpetrated by White men in police uniform, the institutional racism of law enforcement goes beyond that to bias in traffic stops, interpretation in guilt, and assessment of behavior. The complexities of this phenomenon and suggestions for moving forward are discussed at length in this paper beginning with the history of the institution itself within racist roots.

Development of the Police System

Slavery was the most influential political-economic institution in colonial America (Coates, 2003). As a result, all U.S. institutions were foundationally shaped by slavery. In this era, the slave patrol system acted as an enforcement body in the preservation of White supremacy (Moore et al., 2016) by capturing fugitive slaves, reducing the frequency and impact of slave revolts, and sustaining White control in southern states where enslaved Africans represented the demographic majority (Cooper, 2015; Wilson, 2022). During the Reconstruction era, newly enacted laws and patrol practices guided the evolution of the slave patrol system into modern policing (Moore et al., 2018). Police officers interpreted new laws and practices with the same purpose underlying the disbanded slave patrol system—the monitoring and control of the Black population (Cooper, 2015). The ideological conviction guiding the brutality of Reconstruction-era police can be traced back to the ideology underwiring the cruel reality of slavery, that Black residents understood only force (Gregory, 2022).

By the beginning of the 20th century, racially inequitable police practices were institutionalized as a cultural norm within U.S. police departments. Black residents were targeted for arrest, mob lynching, and long sentences, while White residents received reduced punishments for the same crimes (Gregory, 2022). Externally, officer discretion cemented racialized inequity in the delivery of police services. Internally, administrative discretion over departmental policies and procedures codified institutional racism into the police system.

Modern police violence reflects historical police violence, which is grounded in the racialized development of the United States. Scholars have compared police killings of Black residents in the 21st century to the violence perpetrated by slave patrols and Jim Crow-era police officers, finding similarities (Cooper, 2015; Moore et al., 2016). Literature examining police outcomes has identified racial inequities across the board. Proportionally, Black Americans represent 12.4% of the U.S. population but accounted for 27.6% of deaths in police custody between 2013 and 2022 (Mapping Police Violence, 2023). Academic literature has found that Black Americans are more likely to be stopped, searched, and become the victim of police force (lethal and non-lethal) than any other racial group (Kochel et al., 2011). These racial disparities highlight the racial inequity experienced by Black Americans within police interactions and provides data-driven insight into the constrained trust-power relationship between the Black community and police.

Trust

The concept of trust is complex and multidimensional in nature, and its importance to public institutions cannot be understated. Generally, trust is defined as “a willingness to rely on others to act on our behalf based on the belief that they possess the capacity to make effective decisions and take our interests into account” (Houston & Harding, 2013, p. 55). While private organizations often rely on economic mechanisms to measure performance, public organizations depend on public perceptions to inform management decisions and measure operational success. Public perceptions of organizational trustworthiness are positively linked to public perceptions of organizational legitimacy and performance (Inglehart, 1990). Positive public perceptions of trust in police have also been linked to increased civic involvement

(Putnam, 2000), which is vital to the field of policing, in which civilian reports of criminal activity initiate police action.

The relationship between police departments and the Black community has historically been marred with distrust (Bell, 2017). Highly publicized incidents of police violence involving Black residents have compounded the distrust permeating this relationship (Morin et al., 2017). Warren (2011) argued that these indirect experiences influence individual-level perceived trust of the police institution because the large-scale consumption of negative police narratives shared within social networks can create a preponderant culture of police distrust. Experientially grounded perceptions of police trustworthiness have been found to have a larger effect on minority communities (Reisig & Parks, 2003). For Black Americans, these effects are often sustained despite the racial identity of the officer encountered (Brunson & Gau, 2015).

Trust literature investigating public perception of police has found that trust in police is conceptualized as either institutional, in which the police are perceived to be honest and caring towards the community, or motive-based, in which the police are perceived to display benevolent and caring intentions toward members of the public (Tyler, 2005). However, trust has been found to vary disparately by racial group (Kearns et al., 2020). Broadly speaking, minorities view the police as less legitimate and trustworthy than White-race respondents, indicating differences in perceptions of police trustworthiness between racial groups (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Sargeant et al., 2014).

When one considers that Black Americans are subjected to police violence and biases at a higher frequency than any other race, the distrust characterizing the police-Black community relationship appears to be a rational choice of community preservation. Literature investigating attitudes toward the police has indicated that race, social class, personal experiences, and community context each have a significant influence on public trust (Reitzel & Piquero, 2004), with direct personal experience having the largest effect (Brunson & Miller, 2005). As Black Americans frequently inhabit low-income, relatively high-crime areas, due to historical housing discrimination, Black residents often experience more police contact than residents based in low-crime, wealthy areas.

Recently, scholars have begun examining the impact of vicarious experiences on public perception of the police, finding that when compared to White respondents, Black respondents encounter more negative stories about the police (Reisig & Parks, 2003). Further, White respondents were more likely to encounter negative police narratives from the media, while Black Americans were more likely to hear negative stories from friends and family (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). This is explained within the broader context of trust during interactions shaped by an imbalanced power dynamic.

Power Imbalance

Police serve as street-level bureaucrats in the communities in which they serve; that is, they are “those who, in their face-to-face encounters with citizens, ‘represent’ government to the people” (Lipsky, 1969, p. 1). In their daily administration of duties, police officers and many others in law enforcement represent the criminal justice and public safety systems to those within their jurisdictions. The laws passed within these systems are enforced, often with great discretion, by those at the street level (e.g., a traffic stop where enforcement is wholly at the discretion of the intervening officer). If an excuse for speeding, for example, fits within the specific officer’s particular frame of reason, the offender may simply receive a warning. Otherwise, the officer may choose a harsher punishment. Regarding use of force, the discretion given to police is controlled by the perception of the officer in terms of personal danger. If the officer is in fear of their own or others’ safety, they are permitted, generally, to

respond with an amount of force they feel appropriate and within policy guidelines. In 1982, Waldo warned that expanding the autonomy of bureaucrats could conflict with the popular opinion of a democratic society (Waldo, 1982), and those at street level with greater contact and thus influence on the public could create greater conflict. Policing in the United States, particularly punctuated in the last decade, sits as the epitome of the fruition of this warning.

The autonomy of police departments and discretion of police officers enable significant impact from decisions on the welfare of the public. Thus, they shape the reality of the experiences of the citizenry and signal the hierarchy of value placed on different strata of the public, where police officers occupy a position of power above those they serve. This power imbalance or power asymmetry exists amongst street-level bureaucrats in any position, but the consequences of a rogue clerk of courts do not match those of law enforcement. Though power imbalance and power asymmetry are often used interchangeably, this paper will continue to use ‘power imbalance’ because asymmetries¹ tend to occur naturally within a body, and imbalances² tend to occur between two bodies. This paper, thus, conceptualizes power imbalance as a lack of proportion in the dyadic relationship between groups, here the police and citizenry.

Power imbalance between law enforcement and local citizens occurs because police possess legally prescribed mechanisms that can be used against citizens, such as deprivation of freedom, searches of persons and dwellings, seizure of property, and the use of force (McCartney & Parent, 2015). This great amount of power stands counter to the abject lack of power held by the often low-income, disenfranchised citizens with whom law enforcement often interacts. The trust relationships that result from this power imbalance, which will be explained in further detail below, are not only impacted unidirectionally, where the citizens lose trust in the police meant to serve them, but the police lose trust in the citizens. With an imbalance of power, no improvement in trust can be made, as the imbalance serves as a barrier to learning. Power strata prohibit group members from learning from the differences between groups (Bunderson, 2003).

The power imbalance within police systems and local jurisdictions began as a part of the slave system in the United States, and so mitigating the impacts of this power imbalance has been and will continue to be a harrowed journey. Creating a power-sharing dynamic, where the process for decision-making becomes the shared responsibility for decision-making, thus creating equity amongst stakeholders, is shown to be ineffective when applied in cases such as that outlined in this paper (Linder, 1999; Maner & Mead, 2010; Zerah, 2009). Instead, Choi and Robertson (2014) noted that in cases where decision-making took place in an ecosystem where power was imbalanced, deliberation was an important element in consensus building and decision quality, though it doesn’t eliminate decision inequity. Ran and Qi (2018) follow this in their findings that the natural power imbalance that exists in governance cannot be balanced and that mitigating the impacts of the inevitable should come from the design of collaborative arrangements.

The idea of collaborative policing is often implied through community-based policing (Groenewald & Peake, 2004; Murphy & Muir, 1985), where policing becomes a personal endeavor by officers to develop partnerships with the citizens whom they serve (Bertus, 1996; Brown & Wycoff, 1987; Groenewald & Peake, 2004). Often, videos emerge of law enforcement officers playing basketball with local children in urban or suburban settings or delivering gifts to low-income families during the holidays. Sadly, this seems more of a signal of virtue, as no collaboration is taking place. They are portrayals of benevolent law enforcement, and their popularity serves only as evidence that these acts are outside of the norm or somehow unexpected. Unfortunately, the opportunity to deliberate and collaborate in the moments following a traffic stop or call to emergency operators does not exist, so they must be placed at the policy setting phase where community members have influence in when, where, and how

force can be used on their neighbors, family members, and children. These considerations will be included in the discussion on recommendations below.

Trust & Power

Municipalities operate on a system of transactions, and those transactions come at a set of costs to both in the relationship, which is described fundamentally by Williamson (1985). The transactions between law enforcement and the citizenry are citizen encounters with the police, either from the purview of the victim, bystander, or offender. With this contrast, the economic cost varies greatly, but, as with all transactions, these are contingent on trust (Becker & Stigler, 1974; Chiles & McMackin, 1996; Noorderhaven, 1995; Williamson, 1985), and trust is influenced by context and history in a situational-aware trust and by perceived capability and competence in a character-aware trust (Goto, 1996; Viljanen, 2005).

Without a power dynamic between actor and subject, the trust relationship is balanced, where there is equal assessment of the costs of the transaction and equal assumption of behavior by each party. However, the introduction of power into these transactions or encounters influences behavior. Thus, to understand the impact of power in trust here, this paper will parse out the unidirectional trust where the actor is the civilian and the subject is the law enforcement officer from the bidirectional trust explained above. Schilke et al. (2015) explain how citizens with generally low power are more trusting than officers with generally high power. However, with the influx of reports of behavior by the powerful that does not align with expectations, those with low power may also become suspicious of those with high power. Here again, the actor can be a victim of a crime, an offender in a crime, or a bystander of an event (crime or otherwise).

When a victim of a crime encounters a law enforcement officer, the victim has the expectation that the law enforcement officer's intentions are to somehow correct the wrongdoing against the victim. Thus, the level of trust that the victim affords the officer is based on both the situational trust factors as well as the character trust factors present. Intervening in those factors is the influence of power. Because law enforcement holds a great amount of power and the victim holds relatively none, the victim may experience a lower amount of trust as they understand their transaction costs to be much higher than the officers. The same is true for the bystander and even more so for the offender. In the cases presented throughout this paper, the offender's crimes had an expected result. In some cases, an arrest, in others, prison time, still in others, a warning, etc. However, in each instance, the result was death—an unexpected outcome. When the expected behaviors of those in power are exceeded, trust is eroded (Bunderson, 2003). Reexamining the findings of Schilke et al. (2015), we may conclude that because their determination was rooted in hope and perceived benevolence, that the powerful will use their power to support the powerless, it may not hold within the context of law enforcement where increasingly there are reports of the powerful overexerting their power to harm the powerless.

Despite the decline in trust in law enforcement within Black neighborhoods (Gramlich, 2019), the extant power dynamic dictates that citizens have no choice but to continue to participate in these transactions for most interactions. For instances where Black residents are not the initiator of the interaction, their compulsory participation is, in fact, made so by the power that police wield. However, a declining number of Black citizens are initiating interactions with law enforcement. That is, when they are the victim, they do not utilize law enforcement services as widely (Desmond et al., 2016). While studies have been conducted looking at overall crime reporting and examining overall sentiment toward law enforcement in a BLM era, few have examined the context dependency within these questions.

Understanding the dire implications within the context of trust and power imbalance of citizens and those sworn to protect them, municipalities must work to repair trust. Some calls to defund the police—the actual mandate being to move law enforcement funds to nonpolice victim agencies to provide a more competent approach to certain citizen needs, particularly in the areas of mental health and addiction—have been met with huge pushback. However, some action must be taken to increase trust and bring a better balance of power to restore the functional relationship between Black residents and police officers, required for a healthy society.

Recommendations

In 2015, when then U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Bob McDonald spoke of the required culture shift away from one that resulted in the undue deaths of military veterans, he compared the efforts to change institutionalized culture of an organization that size with turning an aircraft carrier, signaling that any change would happen over a long period of time as turning a ship that size is not a quick and decisive feat. The VA has only been around in its current form since just after World War I. An institutionalized system that has resulted in the undue deaths of Black residents and that has existed since before the Declaration of Independence will require a multifaceted, dedicated, generational effort to correct.

There is no magic wand to solve a problem developed over centuries, but there are actions municipalities can take to begin to bridge relationships between law enforcement and civilians. These come in three different areas and should be considered entirely, as partial solutions will only provide partial results. The areas are: (1) inequitable service delivery, where the service of public safety through law enforcement is inequitably provided on racial lines; (2) imbalance of power where police agencies wield tremendous power over civilians, but do not act in a predictable manner in the exertion of that power; and (3) lack of trust in a bidirectional system requiring trust from law enforcement and from the residents to properly function.

The introduction of coproduction activities is often recommended as a solution to the inequitable delivery or provision of public services (Jakobsen & Andersen, 2013; Whitaker, 1980). Coproduction is introduced as the active participation and driving of changes in service delivery by those being served. However, neither active participation nor instigation of change is enough as Jakobsen and Andersen (2013) point out when those being served are largely low-income, undereducated, and underrepresented. In these instances, the force effects of this population are not strong enough to drive change either because of apprehension in participation or a lack of understanding of the processes of change. Therefore, law enforcement agencies must seek out determinants of change within the population they most unfairly serve. Police departments have to desire to bring change driven by those they appear to distrust most. Coproduction can only support desired outcomes by not simply affording the opportunity to be included, but by extending a request and facilitation to include. Creating these opportunities through meetings with the most at-risk residents in places where community members hold power—churches, community centers, or others—is the first step to engaging in meaningful coproduction.

Within the context of the power imbalance, the primary solution of consensus building is unfeasible. Consensus building cannot happen at the street level when police officers make rapid, in-the-moment decisions. Building consensus should be a priority at the policy-setting stage. That is, guidelines for the use of force, for example, should be defined by a consortium of law enforcement, Black civilians, and other disenfranchised and historically excluded groups. The influence of power in these discussions should be mitigated by mediators familiar with dynamics such as these. The experiences of Black civilians and the intended outcomes of law enforcement must become congruent.

Thus, the recommendation of these authors is to establish between residents and their law enforcement a low-pressure, time-insensitive space for open communication that will result in real policy changes and expectations of accountability. Much of what creates mistrust is not only the power, seemingly haphazardly wielded by law enforcement, but also the lack of transparency in what should be expected of them. This space can catalyze the transparency needed as a start in the building of the bridge. Dialogues can remove the mystery of the thin blue line, and consensus in decision-making will create a more desirable outcome, representative of the community being served.

The perpetual cycle here relies on trust, where people who do not trust law enforcement and a law enforcement that does not trust its people cannot align. Black community perceptions of police trustworthiness develop within the context of individual and vicarious experiences. The influence of these experiences is not bound by time, with many Black parents addressing the racial vulnerability of their children in a socialization practice referred to in the literature as “The Talk” (Anderson et al., 2022, p. 475). In ‘The Talk,’ Black parents inform children of the racialized history of the United States, for the purpose of equipping Black minors with the requisite knowledge to safely interact with police officers. The interpretation and sharing of experiential police interactions within the Black community has the potential to move the trust needle, resulting in improved perceptions of police trustworthiness. To realize this potential, however, an antiracist cultural shift must take place within police departments across the country. Anti-racist organizational change frameworks have been developed and applied in various subfields of public administration, including, education (Welton et al., 2018), healthcare (Esaki et al., 2022), and social work (Aldana & Vazquez, 2020). However, published literature does not address the nuanced complexities of undertaking an anti-racist organizational change approach within the field of policing. To promote racially equitable police outcomes, we call for the development of practical, community-informed guidelines to facilitate anti-racist change efforts.

While we encourage organizations to approach each of these sets of recommendations entirely, there is one final component—each must be founded in an anti-racist effort for change. Law enforcement that is anti-racist is inclusive of all populations being served in decision-making, policymaking, and goal setting, supporting Black community members at odds with the agency as well as others. Coproduction and cooperation must begin with the agency and support the Black members within the agency as well as those within the community. Finally, a balance in policing of Black neighborhoods and Black community members must be a priority and is only something that can be done by the organization. Neighborhoods cannot be over-policed, nor can they be ignored. Black residents cannot be stopped at a higher rate, nor can they be ignored. Actions by police should be expected and exact, even within the bounds of discretion. Only after generations of trust building, and a fully integrated system of governance, will change be felt.

Notes

1. Asymmetry, as defined in the Oxford Dictionary is, a “lack of equality or equivalence between parts or aspects of something.”
2. Imbalance as defined in the Oxford Dictionary is, a “lack of proportion or relation between corresponding things.”

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Changing Systems, Changing Lives: Reflecting on 20 Years by the Nicholson Foundation

Clare Anderson – Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

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Changing Systems, Changing Lives: Reflecting on 20 Years (The Nicholson Foundation, 2021) tells the story of the Nicholson Foundation and its approach to philanthropy in New Jersey and beyond, and from inception in 2002 to sunset in 2021. Far from a procedural description of grantmaking, the chapters of this volume lay out a rationale for why systems change is necessary and offers a roadmap and lessons learned for addressing social, economic, and health disparities. It explains for the reader that “government policies and safety net service systems are our society’s front-line response to the inequity problem” (The Nicholson Foundation, 2021, p. 5), and in doing so, makes a compelling case for ensuring that purposeful effort be focused on change at the systems levels. The stated goal of the foundation “was to augment or change these systems so that the services they provide individuals, families, and communities would be more accessible, more effective, and not work at cross-purposes” (The Nicholson Foundation, 2021, p. 116). This volume accomplishes this goal and serves as a call to action to other foundations, community organizations, and changemakers to undertake transformation so that systems provide accessible, effective and equitable services, and well-being can be achieved. This concise volume is essential reading for anyone engaged in making the U.S. a better place for children and families.

The twenty-year journey of The Nicholson Foundation is told through six theme-based chapters that serve as the core of the volume. These are bookended by an opening chapter on the history of the foundation and its evolution, and a closing chapter reflecting on its contributions and legacy. Each of the theme-based chapters include the philosophy or ‘big ideas’ undergirding and providing structure for the foundation’s work, a rationale for the importance of the theme, one or more illustrative examples of funded projects in which the theme is operationalized, and key insights or takeaways that could guide others embarking on similar efforts. These themes include: 1) engaging with government for systems change, 2) elevating best practices and building evidence for New Jersey, 3) finding and nurturing effective partnerships, 4) investing in organizational nuts and bolts, 5) tackling complex problems through multiple and complementary strategies, and 6) developing future leaders. The introduction also provides an overview of how the foundation operated and why it was successful. These strategies deployed included, among others, engaging with grantees through

technical collaboration, using performance-based grantmaking tying funding to outcome achievement, and elevating issues experienced by those in need and systems change successes through purposeful communications.

The chapter on the history and evolution of the foundation includes a developmental timeline in three-to-five-year increments accompanied by pie charts with funding priorities and amounts. We learn, for example, that in its later years (i.e., 2017–2020) 138 grants worth approximately \$37.7 million were made in the areas of arts, early childhood, health, and strengthening families. Profiles of the foundation's five strategy leaders are provided to frame direction setting at each developmental stage. These descriptions start with Mark Hoover, who established a systems change approach and encouraged partnerships with institutions and government, and end with Kim Boller, who elevated evidence building to quantify impact and supported staff to transition to other organizations where their perspectives and skills gained at the foundation could be put to good use.

Systems change to reduce inequality is a bold undertaking by any philanthropy as government administers policies that were often designed, explicitly or implicitly, to create or further inequity. This endeavor, then, requires not only changing the practices of government but also the mental models, interpretation, and application of policy by leaders and front-line staff. It is also necessary to build trust, coalitions and capacity across government, the nonprofit sector, advocates, communities, and other philanthropic partners to address the policy framework and achieve true systems change. Many philanthropies do not attempt to try and thus limit the scale of change possible given the vast governmental resources, reach, and continuity across time.

Each of the chapters concludes with a summary of impact and sustainability, often with key programmatic or fiscal policies that have been changed as result of The Nicholson Foundation's multi-pronged collaborative efforts. For example, the chapter on 'Tackling Complex Problems with Multiple and Complimentary Solutions' notes that policies related to the child care subsidy rate, the level of income eligibility to qualify for the Child and Dependent Care Tax, and a reduction by 50% in child care co-pays have all been changed to better resource parents. These are enormously important policy changes that directly address social, economic, and health disparities. A discrete chapter on the importance of policy change specifically, as a core component of system change, would have been helpful to synthesize how policy changes were made and the ways in which the Nicholson Foundation contributed to these changes.

Additionally, systems change requires philanthropies to release themselves from expecting impact at the individual level and instead incorporate a focus on more proximal or macro-level outcomes—like policy change. In the concluding chapter, a key passage related to these considerations is worth repeating here:

It is impossible to assess—much less assert—whether our particular initiatives have made life better for people on a lasting basis. The Foundation has been but one, small, player in a sea of effort. We did prove to ourselves that it is possible to influence government from a position outside it, that it is possible to inspire a variety of partners to join in, and that these public–private collaborations can bring about fundamental change (The Nicholson Foundation, 2021, p. 118).

The Nicholson Foundation should be commended for not only attempting systems change but also for reflecting, through this volume, on what was accomplished, what was not, and how

this information could encourage more philanthropies, non-profits, communities, families, and government entities to engage together in this critical endeavor. The overwhelming majority of poor and inequitable social, economic, health and well-being outcomes are preventable and solvable. This essential volume describes how and why systems change is worth pursuing.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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