

**Personal Involvement and Professional Opinion:  
Local Government Officials' Experiences with Nonprofits and Perceptions of the  
Relationship between Nonprofits and Government <sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

Public service motivation theory can be extended beyond the public sector to explain public employees' personal involvement with nonprofit organizations and the possible spillover effect to their work in government. The relationships between government and nonprofits can range from ones of collaboration to control. In this paper we use resource dependence, collaboration, and social capital theories to frame an exploration of why local government officials may prefer a relationship between local government and nonprofits characterized by mutual collaboration or one characterized by government control. We use multivariate regression analysis on data from a 2010 survey of 1,148 Indiana local government officials to examine how their personal involvement with nonprofits and their perceived importance of that involvement is associated with their perspectives on the nature of the relationship between nonprofits and local government.

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout most of American history government has been an active partner and financier of the Third Sector to a much greater extent than is commonly recognized...Collaboration, not separation or antagonism, between government and the Third Sector...has been the predominant characteristic.

- Waldemar Nielsen (1979) in Grønbjerg & Salamon (2012), 552

This paper contributes to the field, theory, practice, and the conference theme of “Evolving Sectoral Relationships: Global and Local Views” at multiple levels. Public service motivation (PSM) is an important topic, and many studies focus on PSM among public sector employees (e.g., Coursey, Brudney, Littlepage & Perry 2011; Houston 2005). Current research concentrates most often on determining what external factors predict volunteerism (e.g. occupation, sector) and what form that involvement will take (e.g., type of nonprofit organization; volunteering, supporting, advocating).

Our research looks at the topic of PSM from a new perspective: how local government officials’ personal involvement with nonprofits is associated with their perspectives on the relationship between nonprofits and local government. This paper examines the increasingly blurred line between the nonprofit and government sectors by exploring the linkages between public employees’ personal involvement with nonprofits and their professional opinions on whether local government relations with nonprofits should be characterized by collaboration or control.<sup>2</sup>

The form that intersectoral collaboration takes has evolved over time. There is a long history in the U.S. of collaborative relationships between government and nonprofit organizations – what Salamon (1995) calls “third-party government.” Grønbjerg & Salamon (2012) describe how, “the central feature of this approach is the reliance by government on a variety of third parties to carry out functions that the public wants to be performed but is reluctant to have government directly carry out...These third parties include...nonprofit organizations” (553).

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan’s neoliberal agenda further developed this system of indirect public service provision as government relied even more heavily on nonprofits to perform needed public services in an effort to cut costs and improve efficiency. “Thus was born a ‘new public management’ inspired by ‘public choice’ economic theories and dedicated to increasing citizen ‘choice’ and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public action... Private, nonprofit organizations came to be seen as essential partners in making the new public management work” (Anheier & Salamon 2006, 92). This history of “third-party government” and “new public management” led to the modern intersectoral collaboration characterized by increasingly market-like, interdependent, nonhierarchical relationships between government

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<sup>2</sup> The collaboration/control variables originally came from a Danish survey and reflect the strong state model in social democratic regimes in which “control” is considered appropriate, or at least more appropriate than in the U.S. context where there is a general preference for the limited state. However, given the growing pressure for less “preferential treatment” of nonprofits – i.e., for nonprofits to “pay their fair share” – we feel that the collaboration/control variables are also relevant in regard to the American nonprofit sector.

agencies and nonprofit organizations working together to meet public needs and provide benefits to all parties involved (Gazley & Brudney 2007).

However, modern nonprofit scholarship has criticized traditional theoretical perspectives, such as resource dependence theory, for not taking into account factors other than funding scarcity that influence and constrain strategic choices to collaborate, including institutional environment, structural context, and other organization- or agency-specific factors (Guo & Acar 2005). Collaborative intersectoral relationships are increasingly understood as voluntary, autonomous partnerships between equals, with diverse goals that go beyond simply serving community needs and include building capacity, sharing risk, aligning missions and objectives, and collectively solving mutual problems. Studies have also shown that partnership between nonprofits and government can increase familiarity and trust between the involved parties (although not without potential risks as well) (Gazley & Brudney 2007).

We build on previous scholarship by exploring the impact of both traditional public service motivation factors, such as hours worked, depth of involvement, and type of nonprofit and diverse economic, community, and external factors, on the attitudes of local government officials (LGOs) regarding the nature of the relationship between nonprofits and local government. We use multivariate regression analysis on data from a 2010 survey of 1,148 local Indiana mayors, county auditors, county and town council members, and township trustees (response rate of 35 percent). We merge these survey data with county level data on population demographics and nonprofit assets.

Our paper contributes to the field in several ways. First, while there is some prior literature on the existence of nonprofit-local government relationships and the forms they take, there is very little research on local government officials' perceptions of what those relationships should look like. There is still less research on what influences LGOs' attitudes about the relationship between nonprofits and local government, and practically nothing on how LGOs' personal involvement with nonprofits relates to those attitudes. Further, while there are many studies examining collaboration theories between local governments and nonprofits, studies of relationships in which the local government enacts control over nonprofits are missing. In this paper, we tentatively investigate control, while focusing more solidly on collaboration. We do, however, provide an exploratory first step in elucidating why local government officials may prefer a controlling relationship with nonprofit organizations, which may be used as a jumping off point for further analysis of the topic.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

We begin by examining previous scholarship on public employee volunteerism informed by public service motivation theory and social capital theory, followed by a review of relevant literature in the areas of resource dependence and collaboration theories and the concept of new public management. We divide the literature into four broad topical areas, in accordance with the four general issue areas that we model in our regression analysis. For each topic we outline a model and the hypotheses we test to determine whether local government officials' personal involvement with nonprofits and perception of the importance of that involvement for their work impacts their attitudes on the nature of the relationship between nonprofits and local government.

Very little previous literature applies directly to our research questions, particularly regarding the impact of personal involvement on LGO attitudes; however, we use some established theories to indirectly inform our hypotheses. Each issue area below begins with a discussion of applicable theoretical perspectives followed by the relevance to the topic and our hypotheses.

## **Nonprofit Involvement**

Research has shown that, on the whole, government employees are characterized by a desire to work for the public good. Research describes public employees who have demonstrated a sense of selflessness and motivation to serve the public as exhibiting what is known as public service motivation. Houston (2005) asks whether public employees are “walking the walk” of public service motivation, not just “talking the talk” (67). As an example, he investigates whether government employees are more likely than others to donate time, blood, and money to charitable organizations. He finds that employees in public organizations actually do exhibit characteristics of public service motivation and are more likely to volunteer for charity and donate blood than employees in for-profit companies (Houston 2005).

A study by Buurman, Delgaauw, Dur & van den Bossche (2012) looks into which of three rewards employees in different sectors are likely to choose: a donation to charity on their behalf, considered the pro-social reward; a gift card for well-known locations, the more self-interested option; and a lottery ticket, the risky option. They find that public sector employees, particularly at the beginning of their careers, are more likely to choose a reward that benefits society over the risky or self-interested options. Further, research supports the notion that public and nonprofit employees have similar work motivations (Coursey, Brudney, Littlepage & Perry 2011; Taylor 2010). One study suggests that public service motivation is not limited to formal public sector institutions but rather is meant to describe a type of work activities (Coursey, Brudney, Littlepage & Perry 2011). These activities may be performed in different organizations across sectors and so it follows that employees in public institutions and nonprofit organizations with similar missions may have significant characteristics in common.

Similar to public service motivation theory is what we call “volunteer theory”. Research shows that government employees are more likely than their for-profit counterparts to volunteer (Houston 2005; Lee 2012; Rotolo and Wilson 2006). Rotolo and Wilson (2006) find that public employees are driven to volunteer due to their personal values, as seen in public service motivation theory; vested interest due to the nature of their government work; and increased social relations with others who volunteer. Gazley (2010) notes that at the local level, “where city and county administrators often work formally and informally with business and nonprofit service providers to deliver services” (653-4), myriad factors influence the nature of public-private partnerships. Gazley studies the influence of volunteering on nonprofit-government relationship outcomes and whether volunteering may have a positive effect on results of the partnership. She finds that “a public manager with nonprofit and volunteer experience is more likely to report satisfaction with partnership outcomes” (Gazley 2010, 668).

Public service motivation and volunteer theory demonstrate that public sector employees may be more willing than others to volunteer or otherwise become involved with nonprofit organizations. Research on the similarities between the work undertaken by nonprofit and public

organizations and in turn the type of people who choose to work for them demonstrates that LGOs may feel connected to some extent to nonprofit employees both through their work and outside of it. We use public service motivation and volunteer theory to inform our hypotheses that government employee interactions with nonprofits are likely occurrences, and ones that would be seen as important to LGOs' public sector work, which may in turn influence their attitudes toward government relationships with nonprofit organizations. We believe that it logically follows to analyze the consequences of public service motivation and volunteer theories, through theories of social capital and trust, and how those consequences influence attitudes toward collaboration.

Since Robert Putnam extensively studied social capital nearly two decades ago, researchers have explored what this resource means for government-nonprofit partnerships. "Social Capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2000, 19). These feelings of trust as a result of increased social capital could spill over into work relationships. The social capital and trust built during extracurricular involvement with nonprofit organizations may allow LGOs to trust nonprofits more in regard to work activities and so strengthen their attitudes toward local government-nonprofit collaboration. Putnam also describes interactions across diverse groups of people as developing bridging social capital, which not only increases general trust but may help reduce divisions across groups (Putnam 2010). For this reason, we believe that the diversity of fields with which LGOs are personally involved may impact their attitudes toward collaboration. We hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1: Local government officials with increased exposure to nonprofits through leadership/membership positions (degree of involvement), volunteer hours, and diversity of fields will be more likely to support a collaborative relationship.*

*Hypothesis 2: Local government officials who perceive their experiences with nonprofits to be more important for their work will be more likely to support a collaborative relationship.*

Figure 1: Phase 1 Basic Model



## Economic Influences

Budget cuts affect all levels of government, but drastic cutbacks to funds available for government provision of public benefit services has hit local government especially hard in recent years. Local government revenue shortfalls have been influenced by factors such as the impact of the Great Recession and the collapse of the housing market (Grønbjerg 2011; Mikesell 2014; Pagano & McFarland 2013), and, particularly in Indiana, declining revenues due to property tax caps (McGiverin-Bohan et al. 2014).

When confronted with reduced funds for social service provision, local government officials often must make difficult choices about whether to cut services completely, scale back the amount of services provided, or rely on local nonprofits and other providers to step in and help fulfill community needs. Local governments have long chosen to collaborate with nonprofit organizations, both formally and informally, to provide needed public services rather than risking damaging government reputation and the health of the community as a whole by stopping service provision completely.

Resource dependence theory is important in understanding this aspect of local government-nonprofit partnerships. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) describe how, at its most basic level, the decision to collaborate arises out of organizational efforts to deal with dependencies and uncertainties in the external resource environment. Gazley and Brudney (2007) further explain: “collaboration helps to buffer external uncertainties—financial or strategic—that may inhibit, generally, either private nonprofit or public achievement of policy goals” (392).

In addition to the desire for cost savings, there are a number of other potential motivations for government to collaborate with nonprofits, including the expansion of services beyond current capacity (Miranda & Andersen 1994; Sclar 2000), and to better achieve goals and objectives in order to fulfill public expectations (Linden 2002). For nonprofits, as noted above, collaboration with government has mainly been understood as a strategic response to funding uncertainty (e.g., Gazley & Brudney 2007; Grønbjerg 1993; Pfeffer & Salancik 1978; Provan & Milward 1995). However, collaboration can also improve nonprofit service provision, increase nonprofit visibility, and create a stronger sense of community (Snavey & Tracy 2000). Indeed, the American history of indirect government service provision and “new public management” discussed previously have further cemented the centrality of intersectoral collaboration for the operation of the modern nonprofit sector.

However, government-nonprofit partnerships can also present challenges and pose risks to all parties involved, although the research on this topic is more limited. Gazley and Brudney (2007) warn of the potential danger presented by these “closer alliances and more intertwined funding streams” (390). For nonprofits, intersectoral partnerships may contribute to mission drift, loss of autonomy or decision-making power, or greater funding instability. For public agencies, collaboration with nonprofits may lead to a “loss of control, threats to authority, or greater difficulty in holding private organizations accountable to public standards” (Gazley & Brudney 2007, 390).

It is also important to make a distinction between a partnership and a contractual relationship – the former is usually a more traditional principal-agent dynamic, where power and autonomy is not shared equitably and parties' goals and mission do not necessarily align; while the latter is characterized by a principal-steward or principal-principal relationship dynamic among equal partners pursuing similar or shared goals (Gazley & Brudney 2007; Van Slyke 2006). Witesman and Fernandez (2012) argue that government may minimize these agent problems by selecting partners whose mission and goals of serving the public interest are similar to their own – namely, nonprofits.

It is within this complex, multi-layered, interdependent collaborative context that nonprofits and government must decide whether and how to work together to meet community needs. In addition to concerns for how to best serve the community using limited resources, LGOs likely take into account their own personal and professional understanding of and experience with nonprofit organizations in their decision to partner or contract with local nonprofits. Whether their past involvement with the nonprofit sector leads them to understand the relationship between nonprofits and government as best characterized by control and hierarchy, or by collaboration and equitable partnership, likely influences their decision-making processes. Given these theories and findings, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 3: Local government officials in governments that have established alternate service arrangements with local nonprofit organizations in response to declining revenues will be more likely to support a collaborative relationship.*

*Hypothesis 4: Local government officials whose unit of government provides public services through a contract with a nonprofit organization will be more likely to support a collaborative relationship.*

## **Community Influences**

Similar to the economic influence arguments previously discussed, the perceived direction of and problems faced by LGOs' communities may contribute to their views on the nature of the relationship between government and nonprofit organizations. We describe in above how collaboration theory posits that by working together to meet shared goals or solve common problems, nonprofits and government can pool their respective resources, capacity, and expertise in order to reach solutions that would not be possible individually and will ultimately better serve the community as a whole.

A logical extension of this argument is that the more LGOs report problems facing their community, or express more concern about the direction their community is heading, the more they may be interested in professionally partnering with local nonprofits in order to better address these issues. We postulate that this may be especially true for LGOs who have previous personal experience with nonprofits, as they may be more fully informed about the expertise and capacity nonprofits may have at their disposal that could help local government address pressing community needs. There is little existing scholarship on the relationship between community conditions and intersectoral collaboration, so our research in this area represents an important contribution to a gap in the field.

Similarly, new public management suggests that for the past several decades, government prioritized providing effective, efficient public services in the most transparent and cost-effective manner possible. To do this, government has provided nonprofit organizations (and more recently for-profit companies (Anheier & Salamon 2006; Grønbjerg & Salamon 2012)) with public funding to provide these services, thereby removing government from direct service provision. Studies show that the public tends to trust nonprofits more than government (at the federal, state, and local level) and for-profit businesses (Grønbjerg 2009; O'Neill 2009). Coupled with the typical American desire for limited government (Grønbjerg & Salamon 2012) and the historic failure of the market to adequately provide necessary public goods (Steinberg 2006), nonprofits are the natural providers of many critical public services.

Therefore, we explore the possibility that LGOs who report greater community problems and concern with the direction their community is heading may be more likely to pursue a collaborative relationship with local nonprofits. In an area where social problems are already an issue, presumably the problems are too great for local government to manage on its own. LGOs may then look to nonprofits to help address community issues. In an effort to improve public opinion about failing government services, LGOs are also likely to recognize that any government effort to address community needs must be as efficient, effective, and transparent as possible. Scholarship and history demonstrate that in these situations, government tends to rely on the nonprofit sector to supply public goods and services that it has been unable to provide successfully. Paired with our analysis of the influence of personal LGO involvement with nonprofits, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 5: Local government officials reporting more pessimistic views on the direction of and greater problems in their communities will be more likely to support a collaborative relationship.*

## **External Influences**

We have limited data available on factors that may be influencing local government officials' opinions on collaboration other than the opinions expressed in the survey. We do believe, however, that two additional indicators may be informative when exploring the manner in which LGOs view nonprofit government relationships. First, the role that officials play in government is important. For example, a school board member and a mayor have very different professional responsibilities and may view collaboration differently. Type of political position held is one of the few personal characteristics captured by the survey.<sup>3</sup> Each occupation may have different levels of professional interactions with nonprofit organizations which leads them to view the nature of government-nonprofit relationships differently. For this reason, it is important to see if officials in different roles have unique attitudes on collaboration. There are a number of general theories on how individuals in different professional occupations diverge in terms of volunteer habits that we use to inform our hypotheses.

Webb and Abzug (2008) explore whether there is a relationship between an individual's occupation and their probability of volunteering. Their results suggest that there may be some

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<sup>3</sup> The survey is administered to Indiana mayors, county auditors, county and town council members, and township trustees.



association between occupation and volunteering. Specifically, they find that “professionals, managers, and those in the military are more likely to volunteer than are their nonprofessional, nonmanagerial, and nonmilitary counterparts” (Webb & Abzug 2008, 703). Wilson and Musick (1997) look at the impact of professional position on the social participation of people in different kinds of occupations. They report that “within each sector, elite occupations, professionals and managers, consistently report the highest rate of volunteering” (262). Professional occupations require initiative and independent judgment, which may in turn encourage civic participation (Wilson and Musick 1997).

This research on occupation and volunteering informs our ideas regarding potential differences in the experiences and attitudes of the various local government occupations represented in our data. We propose that the more “professional” and self-directed roles – that is, prominent elected positions such as mayors and council members – will be more likely to interact with nonprofit organizations through their increased likelihood of volunteering. It follows from theories described above that this increased likelihood of volunteering will in turn increase the levels of social capital for the LGOs in these occupations. Higher levels of social capital will positively influence “professional” LGOs’ attitudes toward collaboration with nonprofit organizations.

*Hypothesis 6: Local government officials who hold prominent elected positions (Mayors and Council Members) will be more likely to support a collaborative relationship.*

Second, we use total county-level nonprofit asset holdings as a proxy for the presence of well-endowed high-capacity nonprofits in the community. This allows us to see if the existence of larger (and potentially more professionalized) nonprofit organizations is associated with attitudes regarding the nature of nonprofit-local government relations. Resource dependence theory explains why external resource constraints may force public and nonprofit organizations to rely on each other (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Nonprofits may depend on government entities for funding to expand their services, while local governments may offer funding to nonprofits to provide services for which the public sector may not have the capacity (Gazley & Brudney 2007; Grønbjerg 1993; Pfeffer & Salancik 1978; Provan & Milward 1995).

It logically follows that local nonprofit organizations with greater capacity and expertise may experience increased partnership opportunities with local public sector agencies and, in turn, increase LGOs’ exposure to the local nonprofit sector. Professional exposure of this kind may lead to the creation of more social capital and trust that influence attitudes toward collaboration (Putnam 2000). In addition, high-asset nonprofits are often more visible in the community and are likely to include foundations, universities, and hospitals. Local government officials may see greater opportunity for developing meaningful collaborations with these organizations because they bring more to the table in terms of resources, expertise, and capacity to provide services.

For these reasons, local government officials in communities with high-asset nonprofits may have more experiences with government-nonprofit partnerships and therefore be more willing to collaborate.

*Hypothesis 7: Local government officials in communities with high nonprofit asset holdings will be more likely to support a collaborative relationship.*

Figure 2: Phase 2 Expanded Model



### Collaboration vs. Control

Very little previous research explores why local government officials may prefer a controlling relationship with nonprofits rather than a collaborative relationship. As discussed above, collaboration theory is a well-established area of scholarship, which has broadened our understanding of why and how government and nonprofits work together. However, studies find that collaboration can be challenging, put increased demands on time and resources, and is not always successful (e.g., Gazley & Brudney 2007; Guo & Acar 2005). It therefore stands to reason that in some situations, local government officials may prefer to exercise greater direct control over nonprofits' actions or use of resources, rather than expending the energy to work collaboratively with nonprofits to utilize those resources in partnership for the good of the community. Because of this paucity of research in the area of LGO preference for government control over (rather than collaboration with) nonprofits, our analysis on this topic is exploratory. However, we generally expect the directions of the hypotheses for collaboration to flip for the control dependent variable. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 8: The direction of the coefficients of most variables will be opposite what is expected for collaboration if an LGO is more likely to support a controlling relationship.*

## METHODS

We test these hypotheses using a 2010 cross-sectional survey of Indiana local government officials that included questions about a range of local government conditions as well as a series of nonprofit-related questions. Unfortunately, the survey contains no questions about the personal socio-demographic characteristics of LGOs (such as their age, gender, level of education, family status, income) or their political careers (length of time in office, previous

positions held) – all factors likely to be related to attitudes on nonprofit-government relationships. In order to capture at least some of these unmeasured dimensions, we supplement these survey responses with 2010 county-level information on economic, political, and nonprofit indicators.

We use multivariate regression analysis with county-level clustered robust standard errors to test the hypotheses regarding how LGOs' personal involvement with nonprofits and their perceived importance of that involvement is associated with their perspectives on the nature of the relationship between nonprofits and local government. For phase 1 we consider personal involvement variables to examine whether the extent and type of LGOs' personal involvement with nonprofits is related to LGOs' attitudes on the relationship between government and nonprofits. For phase 2, we add variables capturing economic, community, and external influences on officials' attitudes. The same two-phase process is used for both the collaboration and control dependent variables. We produce a series of three final models for the control dependent variable due to anomalous results.

## **Sample**

Our primary data come from the *Intergovernmental Issues in Indiana* survey that the Indiana Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (IACIR) conducts periodically in order to assess LGOs' attitudes and perceptions on key community issues (health, economics, local services, land use, public safety, and quality of life) as well as "hot button issues" such as property tax policies and government-nonprofit relationships (Palmer, Wyeth, & Chang 2010).

In late 2010, the IACIR distributed both web and paper versions of the *Intergovernmental Issues in Indiana* survey to 1,148 local officials including mayors, town council members (where the population was greater than 500), county auditors, county council members, a randomly selected member of each board of commissioners, school board members, and two randomly selected township trustees from each county. The overall effective response rate was 35 percent. Almost 59 percent of respondents were affiliated with town/city government, 26 percent with county government, and 15 percent with school districts. Respondents represent 91 of Indiana's 92 counties.

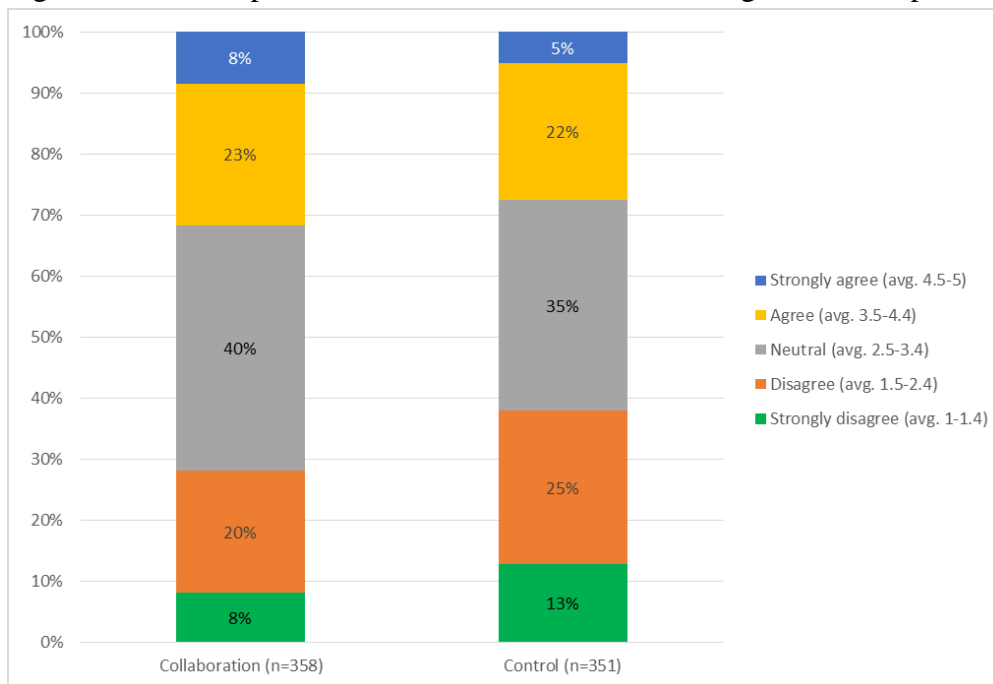
## **Dependent Variables**

***Attitudes toward Nonprofit-Government Relations.*** We develop two measures of local government officials' attitudes toward nonprofit-government relations based on factor analysis of six questions with a 5-point agree/disagree Likert scale. The governmental control of nonprofits measure derives from LGOs' agreement that 1) local governments should control nonprofit use of government funding, 2) local governments should have an influence on nonprofit activities, and 3) nonprofits should adjust their activities to the needs of local government in order to receive funding. The factor loadings ranged between 0.78 and 0.82 with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72, indicating the variables measure a single latent construct. The measure of governmental collaboration with nonprofits is based on officials' agreement that 1) nonprofits should actively participate in solving local problems, 2) it is important that nonprofits participate in local government decision-making, and 3) nonprofits represent public interests on local issues. While

the Cronbach's alpha for this grouping was marginal at 0.68, the correlation with the other three measures was low, and the factor scores ranged between 0.71 and 0.82.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of LGOs' agreement with the question gauging whether the relationship between local government and nonprofits should be one of collaboration or control. A larger percentage of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the relationship should be characterized by collaboration (31 percent) than by control (27 percent). Similarly, a larger percentage of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the relationship should be characterized by control (38 percent) than by collaboration (28 percent). Overall, a larger proportion of LGOs expressed support for a collaborative relationship between nonprofits and government than for a controlling relationship. In order to explore the factors influencing these attitudes, we analyze control and collaboration as separate dependent variables. We regress each dependent variable on the same two-phase set of independent variables; however, we expect the independent variables that explain the most variation for each dependent variable to be different for collaboration versus control.

Figure 3: LGOs' Opinions on Collaborative or Controlling Relationships, Average Scores



## Independent Variables

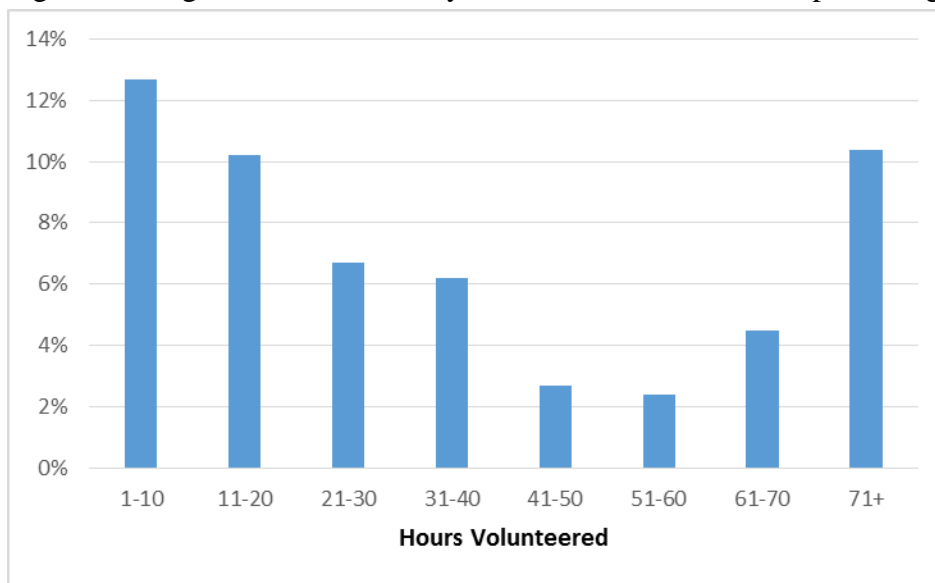
We consider the extent of LGOs' involvement with nonprofits as members, leaders, or volunteers; the type and number of nonprofit fields in which they have experience; and how important they perceive this involvement to be for their own work as government officials. Other relevant questions from the survey provide information on the type of position held, whether respondents say local government depends on or contracts with nonprofit service providers, and LGOs' opinions on the direction of and problems in their communities. We merge these survey

responses with 2010 county-level information on total nonprofit assets (from IRS Form 990, The Urban Institute). We also note whether the county is urban or rural (defined below).

***Personal Involvement with Nonprofits.*** We measure the breadth and depth of officials’ engagement with nonprofits as well as how important they perceive these activities to be for their work. Officials indicated their membership or leadership (past or present) and volunteer hours in twelve nonprofit fields: arts/culture, sports/recreation/social, education/research, health, social services, environmental/animal protection, economic/community development, law/advocacy/politics, philanthropic, international, business/professional/union, and other.

To determine whether the type or intensity of involvement with nonprofits is important, we include four dichotomous variables indicating whether the LGO has any involvement in any of the twelve fields as a current member or leader, as a past member or leader, as a current leader only, or as a past leader only.<sup>4</sup> We also include a variable measuring the total number of hours per month the LGO volunteers for any of these activities (Figure 4). On average LGOs report volunteering 23 hours per month.

Figure 4: Range of LGOs’ Monthly Volunteer Hours with Nonprofit Organizations



We use a number of iterations of the field variables due to the large number of non-mutually exclusive individual fields from which the LGOs could select.<sup>5</sup> All iterations include any current or past involvement of any kind (member, leader, or both; or any hours reported). Fields with the greatest amount of involvement are sports (51 percent of respondents), economic development

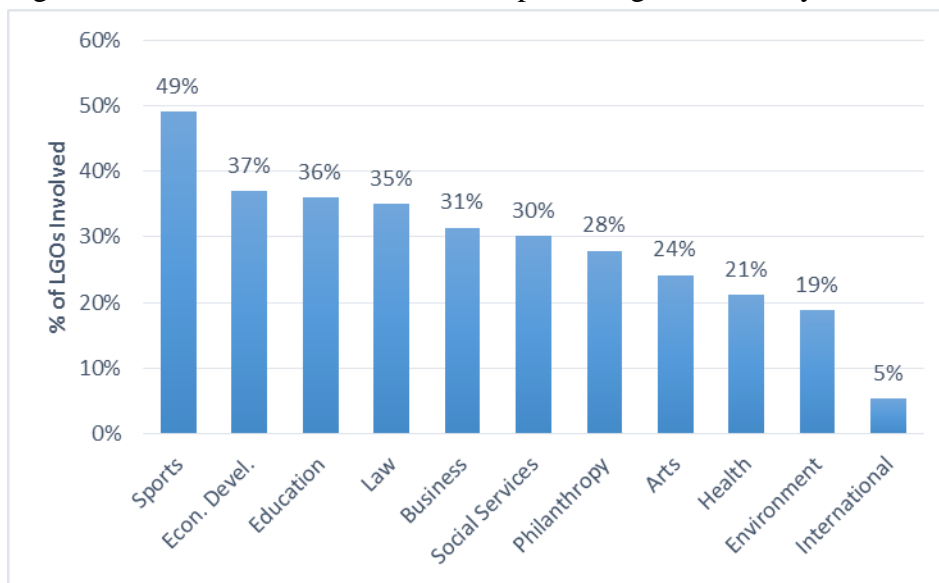
<sup>4</sup> To avoid issues with near multicollinearity because of the overlap between member or leader, and leader alone, all four variables were not inserted into the model at once. Instead, we try either both current variables together, or both past variables together.

<sup>5</sup> We do not include responses for the “other” field, because of the ambiguity of the category. Only five percent of respondents reported that they are or have been involved with “other” nonprofits (n=20); small sample size is another reason to remove this field from analysis.

(38 percent), education (37 percent), law (36 percent), business (32 percent), and social services (31 percent).

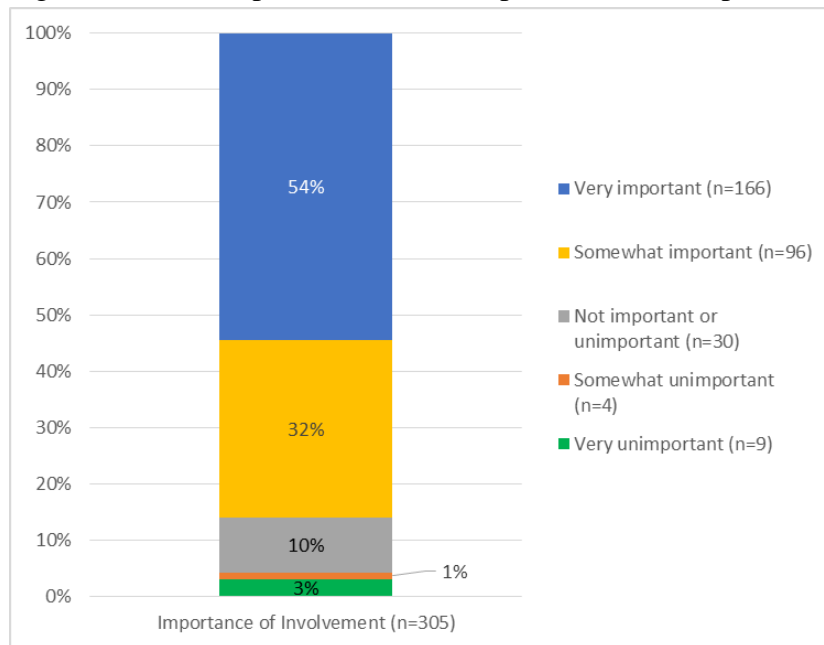
First, we try each field individually. We also conduct a factor analysis which divides the fields into three main factor groupings: 1) sports, education, economic development, law, philanthropy, business; 2) health, social services, environment, international; and 3) arts and culture. Because the factor loadings were relatively low for all factor groups, we also divide the fields into two different sets of groupings that seem more logical. The first set, grouped according to more or less public visibility, are: 1) sports, education, health, arts and culture, and social services (more visible); and 2) environment, economic development, law, philanthropy, international, and business (less visible). The second set, grouped according to what seemed to be natural pairings, are: 1) arts, education, and sports; 2) health and social services; and 3) economic development, philanthropy, business, and law. Despite these various groupings, however, participation in the individual fields proves to have the most explanatory power in the final models. We also try a simple count of the number of fields with any involvement to see if breadth of fields is more important than type.

Figure 5: LGOs' Involvement with Nonprofit Organizations by Field



Finally, we examine a third indicator of the intensity of involvement with nonprofits: whether LGOs say their involvement with nonprofits is important for their work as government officials. Overall, 54 percent say their nonprofit involvement is very important and 32 percent report that it is somewhat important for their work. Figure 6 shows the breakdown of responses.

Figure 6: LGOs' Opinions on How Important their Nonprofit Involvement is for their Work



**Economic Influences.** We use responses regarding two different iterations of nonprofit service provision to measure government reliance on nonprofit service providers in response to financial pressures. First, we use a dummy variable indicating whether LGOs reported that “my local government” provides any of sixteen types of different services (e.g., juvenile detention, economic development, special education) exclusively through contracts with a nonprofit organization. Because of the survey requirement that contracted nonprofit service provision can be the *only* method of delivering the service, this question likely provides an inaccurate measure. Regardless, it does not end up being significant in the final models. Second, we use a dummy variable indicating whether officials’ unit of local government has responded to declining revenues by, among many other possibilities, “establish[ing] alternate service arrangements with local nonprofit organizations.”

**Community Influences.** To determine whether local community conditions and reported community problems impact LGOs’ attitudes about the nature of government-nonprofit relationships, we include a five-point scale variable measuring whether respondents feel optimistic or pessimistic about the direction their community is heading. The survey also includes an extensive list of community conditions, which respondents can indicate as a major problem, moderate problem, or minor or no problem. Of the more than 70 individual conditions, we measure responses in 23 specific issue areas where nonprofits have historically played a major role in problem solving or service provision. The survey divides these issues into six broad groups: health, economics, crime, development, community quality of life, and poverty, which we confirm through factor analysis. Chronbach’s alpha values for the two groups that end up in the final model (health and community quality of life) are both strong at .82.

**External Influences.** We use type of political office held, rural versus urban county, and nonprofit asset holdings by county to measure external factors that may influence officials’ attitudes about the nature of the relationship between nonprofits and local government. We

speculate that LGOs holding prominent elected positions, such as mayors or council members, are more likely to have extensive professional and personal interactions with key nonprofit institutions as a result of their positions. Consequently, we expect them to develop relationships and build social capital as a result of these interactions and therefore be more likely to support collaboration due to increased levels of trust. We also explore whether LGOs holding positions in fields with greater nonprofit involvement – particularly school board members – may have differing attitudes about nonprofits because of their increased exposure to a specific subset of the nonprofit sector in their community.

To manage the highly skewed population distribution among Indiana counties, and to capture urban communities where large charities are more likely to be present (McGiverin-Bohan et al., 2014), we use a variable to indicate whether a county is urban or rural. We try a variety of different iterations of this population variable, though none are ultimately significant. These iterations include a dummy variable indicating whether a county contains a town with more than 10,000 residents, dummy variables indicating which population quartile a county is located in, and a scale variable measuring the same population quartiles.

Finally, we measure county nonprofit wealth as the sum of total nonprofit assets reported to the IRS on Form 990 (The Urban Institute). We use this measurement as a proxy for the size of the presence of nonprofit organizations in the community. A larger presence of high-asset nonprofit organizations may lead to increased exposure of local government officials to nonprofits in both a professional and informal manner. High-asset nonprofits may also provide more attractive opportunities for local government officials to collaborate with these organizations due to resource constraints, as these organizations often have access to significant resources, expertise, and capacity.

## RESULTS

Tables 1 and 2 (found on page 28 below) display the descriptive statistics and correlations of the dependent and independent variables. Overall, relationships between the variables are weak, though some do show significance. The strongest, although still marginal, correlations are found between the following pairs, all significant at the .01 level:

- School board members and involvement with the education nonprofit field (.412)
- Any current involvement and involvement with nonprofit field (.297-.402)
- Involvement in education and philanthropic nonprofit fields (.373)
- Involvement in philanthropic and law nonprofit fields (.318)
- Any current involvement and importance of involvement for work as an LGO (.241)<sup>6</sup>

Most of these predicted relationships are logical. As previously described, the data suggests that school board members have significant involvement with education nonprofits, likely both professionally and personally. As we will discuss later, this relationship has important consequences for the final model. The remainder of the (somewhat) correlated variables all pertain to aspects of involvement with nonprofits, which is logical given that there is likely

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<sup>6</sup> A full correlation table between all dependent and independent variables can be found on page 28.



positive feedback between deciding to volunteer and actively volunteering, which (if it is a positive experience) thereby strengthens the decision to volunteer, which leads to more or different volunteering, etc.

Table 3 shows the results of the multivariate regression analysis to test all hypotheses. Some of the correlations shown in Table 2 are reflected in the model results, which are modest but do show a number of interesting trends. The final model for the collaboration dependent variable explains only 11 percent of the variance but is highly significant. We produce three versions of the final model for the control dependent variable, due to anomalous results.<sup>7</sup> All three are highly significant. The most comprehensive model (“control 1”) also explains 11 percent of the variance, while the more limited models (“control 2” and “control 3”) each explain 9 percent of the variance.

Although these  $R^2$  values are relatively low, indicating that the models are explaining only a small percentage of the variation in the dependent variables, it is important to note that our results are missing data on personal and socioeconomic characteristics that most surveys capture, and which likely have a significant impact on LGOs’ attitudes regarding nonprofit-local government relationships. Therefore, although our analysis explains only a small amount of variation, the variation that *is* being explained is not usually accounted for in most survey-based research and represents a novel contribution to the field.

We find full or partial support for three of our seven hypotheses with regard to officials’ preference for a collaborative relationship between local government and nonprofits. Findings for three hypotheses are ambiguous or do not show a significant relationship. Findings for one hypothesis show a relationship that is opposite what we expected. We also find only partial support for our final hypothesis, that the direction of relationships is opposite for the control dependent variable.

## **Nonprofit Involvement**

Three of four measures of nonprofit involvement appear to be relevant, although not exactly as expected. Of the four iterations of type of involvement (current leader or member, past leader or member, current leader only, past leader only), only current involvement is found to be significant (at the .05 level), and it does not seem to matter whether involvement is as a member, a leader, or both. However, any current involvement seems to be negatively correlated with the collaboration dependent variable, indicating that involvement with nonprofits decreases the likelihood that a local government official will support a collaborative relationship between nonprofits and local government, which is the opposite of what we expected. Number of hours spent volunteering is not significant.

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<sup>7</sup> When we include only phase 1 (nonprofit involvement) variables in the model, a number of individual nonprofit fields are significant. However, when we add in phase 2 variables, fields become insignificant while school board member is highly significant. We believe this is due to the modest but significant correlation between the education field and school board member variables. We therefore present three forms of the final control model – with both nonprofit fields and school board member (control 1), with school board member and no nonprofit fields (control 2), and with nonprofit fields and no school board member (control 3) – in order to elicit feedback on how to best proceed in exploring these results.

Table 3: Results of Regression Analysis <sup>a, b</sup>

		Collaboration			Control 1			Control 2			Control 3		
	Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$
<b>Nonprofit Involvement</b>	Importance of Nonprofit Involvement	0.16**	(0.06)	0.14	0.08	(0.07)	0.07	0.09	(0.07)	0.08	0.07	(0.06)	0.06
	Any Current Involvement	-0.36**	(0.18)	-0.12	0.42**	(0.17)	0.13	0.49***	(0.17)	0.15	0.36**	(0.16)	0.11
	Volunteer Hours				-0.00	(0.00)	-0.10	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.09	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.11
	Any Involvement in Education NPs	0.26**	(0.12)	0.13	-0.16	(0.15)	-0.07				-0.28**	(0.14)	-0.13
	Any Involvement in Philanthropic NPs	0.28**	(0.11)	0.13									
	Any Involvement in Social Service NPs				0.19	(0.12)	0.09				0.26**	(0.12)	0.12
	Any Involvement in Law NPs				0.16	(0.14)	0.08				0.24*	(0.14)	0.11
<b>Community Influences</b>	Perception of Community Conditions: Health Problems	0.35***	(0.12)	0.18									
	Perception of Community Conditions: Quality of Life	-0.19	(0.16)	-0.07									
<b>Economic Influences</b>	Response to Declining Revenue: Contracting with NPs				-0.42**	(0.21)	-0.12	-0.41**	(0.20)	-0.11	-0.40*	(0.22)	-0.11
<b>External Influences</b>	School Board Member				-0.47**	(0.19)	-0.17	-0.64***	(0.17)	-0.23			
	Total Nonprofit Assets, bil. (County)	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.05	0.02**	(0.01)	0.11	0.02**	(0.01)	0.11	0.02*	(0.01)	0.07
	F	5.94***			5.06***			6.65***			4.31***		
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.11			0.11			0.09			0.09		
	n	266			274			274			274		

<sup>a</sup>  $\beta$  refers to fully standardized (bStdXY) coefficients, *b* refers to unstandardized estimates, and standard errors are in parentheses<sup>b</sup> Cluster-correlated robust standard error estimates

\*p&lt;0.10

\*\*p&lt;0.05

\*\*\*p&lt;0.01

Of the wide variety of nonprofit field and field group variables, no groupings were found to be significant. Of the twelve individual nonprofit fields, involvement with education and philanthropic nonprofits appears to be positively correlated with the collaboration dependent variable (both at the .05 level of significance). We expected the relationship between fields and collaboration to be positive; however, we were unsure at the start of analysis which field(s) would have the most impact on support for a collaborative relationship, or if broader groups of fields would have more explanatory power. Interestingly, education was the only field that was significant no matter what other independent variables it was paired with in the model, indicating a strong relationship between involvement in education nonprofits and LGOs' support for collaboration between government and nonprofits. Breadth of involvement in a variety of nonprofit fields, as measured by a count of the total number of fields in which a respondent participates, is not significant.

Overall, support for Hypothesis 1 is mixed: some individual nonprofit fields show a positive relationship with the collaboration dependent variable, but any current involvement is negative. On the other hand, support for Hypothesis 2 is strong. Importance of nonprofit involvement for work as a government official positively predicts LGO support for a collaborative relationship at the .05 level of significance. Although the bulk of our overall results are mixed, this finding does relate back to our research question of whether LGOs' perceived importance of their nonprofit involvement for their work is associated with their perspectives on the nature of the relationship between nonprofits and local government, at least in regard to support of a collaborative relationship.

### **Economic Influences**

Neither measure of economic conditions appears to be relevant for the collaboration dependent variable. Across the board, the survey measure indicating local government contracting with nonprofits for sole provision of specific social services is not significant (Hypothesis 4). This is possibly due to the imprecise nature of the survey question itself, as discussed previously. However, whether LGOs' unit of local government has responded to declining revenues by establishing alternate service arrangements with nonprofits is also insignificant for the collaboration dependent variable (Hypothesis 3). This result indicates that if economic conditions do influence LGOs' attitudes on the nature of the relationship between nonprofits and local government, we are not capturing the appropriate factors in this analysis. Future research may benefit from including more diverse measures of economic influences, such as county-level unemployment or change in local government revenues.

### **Community Influences**

Two of the six broad areas of community issues in which nonprofits have historically played a role in service provision (health, economics, crime, development, community quality of life, and poverty) appear to be relevant for explaining variation in the collaboration dependent variable. Perception of problems in the current conditions of both community health<sup>8</sup> and community

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<sup>8</sup> In the survey question, this area includes problems in care for the elderly, drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, and obesity.

quality of life<sup>9</sup> are important to the model, although only the health group is significant (at the .01 level). According to the model, LGOs' perception of increased community problems in the area of health contributes to support for a collaborative relationship between local government and nonprofits. This relationship is logical; nonprofit hospitals are typically well-known, well-established, and well-endowed institutions in local communities. Therefore, if local government is struggling to address community health needs, LGOs may be more likely to want to collaborate with local nonprofit hospitals and other health-related nonprofit institutions that may be better situated to help resolve the problem. The perception of problems in the current quality of life conditions in the community has a negative effect on attitudes toward collaboration. This finding requires further research to explain the underlying cause of the negative direction.

The variable measuring whether LGOs' perceptions of the direction their community is heading are more optimistic or pessimistic is not significant. Support for Hypothesis 5 is therefore mixed; pessimism regarding perceived community direction is not related to support for collaboration with nonprofits, but increased community problems specifically in the area of health does contribute to support of collaboration.

## **External Influences**

Type of political position represented appears to have no influence on LGOs' support for collaboration between nonprofits and government (Hypothesis 6). This is a surprising finding, given the extent of research conducted on the importance of professional role in predicting public employee volunteerism. It is even more surprising given the strength of the school board member position in predicting (in a negative direction) LGOs' support for government control over nonprofits (see below for further discussion). We need to conduct further research to determine why this might be the case.

Large, wealthy nonprofits – particularly universities and hospitals – tend to be located in more urban areas. We therefore test whether the urban-ness of a county (indicating the presence of large, resource-rich nonprofits) influences officials' attitudes toward the nature of the relationship between local government and nonprofits. Whether a county is urban or rural appears to have no influence on LGOs' support of a collaborative relationship between government and nonprofits. We try a wide variety of population variables to measure the degree to which a county can be considered urban, but none are significant for either dependent variable. This finding is unexpected given the ongoing debate on whether nonprofits should be required to remit payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs) to local government to help compensate for the public services their tax-exempt properties consume (e.g., Bowman and Fremont-Smith 2006; Kenyon and Langley 2010; Longoria 2012). It is possible that whether a county is urban or rural is an inadequate measure of the presence of large, wealth nonprofit organizations. Further research in this area is needed to help explain this finding.

County-level nonprofit asset holdings appear to have a strong impact on both the collaboration and control dependent variables (Hypothesis 7), although in the opposite direction than we predicted. We hypothesize that local government officials in counties with high nonprofit asset

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<sup>9</sup> In the survey question, this area includes problems in vitality of neighborhoods, vitality of downtown, arts and cultural resources, and community involvement.

holdings would prefer a collaborative relationship with nonprofits. Large nonprofit institutions with high levels of assets – namely, hospitals, universities, and foundations – are more visible than small, grassroots nonprofit organizations. Therefore, LGOs may see greater opportunity for developing meaningful collaborations with these organizations because of the sizeable resources, expertise, and capacity to provide services that large nonprofits have to offer. However, our results show that in fact the opposite is the case: high county-level nonprofit asset holdings negatively contributes to LGOs' preference for a collaborative relationship, and positively contributes to LGOs' preference for a controlling relationship. We consider why this might be in the following section, within our discussion of the control dependent variable.

### **Collaboration vs. Control**

Overall, our results show only partial support for Hypothesis 8, predicting an opposite relationship between the control dependent variable and the independent variables than between the collaboration dependent variable and the independent variables. The relationships are indeed opposite for all independent variables except involvement in certain nonprofit fields and the importance of involvement for work as a local government official. In addition, two independent variables – any current involvement and county-level nonprofit assets – do also have opposing signs, but the directions are the opposite of what was predicted for each dependent variable.

***Nonprofit Involvement.*** Results for the control dependent variable are challenging to interpret. Any current involvement is positive and significant, suggesting that volunteering with nonprofits contributes to LGOs' preference for a controlling relationship between government and nonprofits, the opposite of what we expected. However, number of hours is negative.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps superficial or short-term nonprofit involvement reveals local nonprofit capacity and expertise, which leads LGOs to desire direct access to those resources, while the social capital developed through more in-depth involvement allows officials to appreciate the potential benefits both local government *and* nonprofits may enjoy through equitable partnership rather than a controlling relationship. As there is no previous research on this topic, this question is ripe for further investigation.

Involvement in the education field negatively impacts preference for government control over nonprofit activities, but involvement in law or social service nonprofits is positive. Ambiguity in the signs of the nonprofit fields variables is expected, given that we were unclear from the start about how involvement with specific nonprofit fields may influence LGOs' attitudes on the relationship between government and nonprofits. Therefore, support for Hypothesis 1 is partial for control.

Hypothesis 2 is not supported by any of the control models. Importance of involvement is positive for the control dependent variable, just as it is for the collaboration dependent variable, which is opposite the direction we hypothesized. Although the variable is insignificant, it does contribute to the explanatory power of the overall model. This topic is unexplored in the literature, so we can only speculate why this might be the case. Perhaps greater perceived

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<sup>10</sup> Although the hours and importance of involvement variables are not significant for control, we found that they were important for the overall significance and explanatory power of the control models, so we retained them in the final models.

importance of nonprofit involvement for LGOs' work contributes to officials' preference for working with nonprofits in general (i.e., rather than not working with them), rather than contributing in a particular direction toward a preference for collaboration rather than control, as we initially hypothesized.

***Economic influences.*** Establishing alternate service provision arrangements through nonprofits in response to declining revenues is significant and negative for all versions of the control model. This suggests that working with nonprofits to provide public services negatively contributes to officials' preference for a controlling relationship between local government and nonprofits, which is the direction we predicted. Hypothesis 3 is therefore supported for the control models.

***Community Influences.*** None of the community conditions or community direction variables are significant for any of the control models (Hypothesis 5). Next steps in our analysis include looking into why community conditions and direction seem to have no influence on attitudes toward control.

***External Influences.*** The relationship between being a school board member and support for a controlling relationship between government and nonprofits is negative and highly significant (Hypothesis 6). However, likely due to the modest but significant correlation between the school board member and education nonprofit field involvement variables, inclusion of the school board variable renders the education and other field variables insignificant in the control models. The presence of a relationship between being a school board member and participating as a member or leader in local nonprofit education institutions is not surprising, but there is no research suggesting why being a school board member may so strongly predict a decreased preference for a controlling relationship between local government and nonprofits. More research needs to be conducted in this area in order to attempt to explain this finding.

As we discuss in the previous section, county-level nonprofit asset holdings appear to have a strong impact on both the collaboration and control dependent variables (Hypothesis 7), although in the opposite direction than we predicted. While we hypothesized that local government officials in counties with high nonprofit asset holdings would prefer a collaborative relationship with nonprofits, in fact high county-level nonprofit assets positively contributes to LGOs' preference for a controlling relationship. There are a number of reasons why this may be the case. Large nonprofits with high asset holdings may be seen as more similar to for-profit businesses in their style of operations, leading to support for government taxation and regulation of nonprofits similar to that of for-profits. Alternatively, LGOs may believe the government-nonprofit relationship could operate more efficiently under a hierarchical principal-agent relationship when the nonprofit organization involved is run, in the public's view, more like a for-profit business (e.g., see Witesman & Fernandez 2012). Another possibility is that LGOs may feel that large, powerful nonprofits should be more attentive to local community needs and should accommodate themselves to directly supporting local government in addressing those priorities. Clearly this is a complex area with no clear explanation, deserving of further study.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, we find full or partial support for some of our hypotheses and none for others. We find mixed support for the hypotheses regarding the influence of nonprofit involvement on local government officials' attitudes toward the nature of the relationship between government and nonprofits. Exposure to certain nonprofit fields is associated with a preference for a collaborative relationship, but current involvement with nonprofits in general was associated with a preference for a relationship characterized by government control over, rather than collaboration with, local nonprofits. This finding is tempered somewhat by the negative association between a greater number of hours spent volunteering per month and preference for a controlling relationship. We speculate that perhaps superficial or short-term nonprofit involvement reveals local nonprofit capacity and expertise, which leads LGOs to desire direct control over those resources, while the social capital developed through more in-depth involvement allows officials to understand the potential benefits both local government *and* nonprofits may enjoy through equitable partnership rather than a controlling relationship.

Findings regarding the impact of the perceived importance of nonprofit involvement for work as an LGO on officials' attitudes toward government-nonprofit relationships are similarly mixed. For collaboration, importance of involvement is positive and significant, predicting greater support for collaborative relationships with increased perceived importance of nonprofit involvement for LGOs' work. However, importance of involvement also has a positive impact in the control models, although the variable itself is insignificant. We surmise that perhaps greater perceived importance of nonprofit involvement for LGOs' work is associated with stronger feelings regarding professional partnerships with nonprofits in general, rather than predicting specific preference for a collaborative versus controlling relationship. As this topic is entirely unexplored in previous literature, further study will be needed to help explain this surprising finding.

We find partial support for the economic and community influences hypotheses. As predicted, we find a negative relationship between establishing alternate service arrangements in response to declining local government revenue and preference for a controlling relationship between nonprofits and local government. However, this finding is not supported for the collaboration model. We also find support for the presence of greater community problems leading to preference for a collaborative relationship, but only in the area of community health issues. This is unsurprising given the important role nonprofit hospitals and elder care facilities have historically played in American communities. We cannot readily explain the negative relationship between greater community quality of life problems and preference for a collaborative relationship, indicating the need for further research in this area.

We find no support for the external influences hypotheses regarding the importance of type of political position and level of county nonprofit assets. No specific political position is associated with preference for a collaborative government-nonprofit relationship; however, the school board member variable is very strongly associated with a negative preference for a controlling relationship between local government and nonprofits. The relationship between nonprofit asset holdings and attitudes toward the nature of nonprofit-government relationship is opposite what we predicted: higher nonprofit asset holdings predicts support for a controlling relationship, not a

collaborative one. Literature regarding government contracting with for-profit companies (e.g., Witesman & Fernandez 2012), coupled with potential public perception of large, resource-rich nonprofits as more for-profit like, may help explain this finding.

Finally, our findings regarding the relationship between the education field, nonprofit involvement, and LGO attitudes merit further discussion. Personal involvement with nonprofit education organizations is found to be significant for both the collaboration and control dependent variables (when the school board variable is not included in the control model),<sup>11</sup> positively predicting support for a collaborative relationship and negatively predicting support for a controlling relationship. When considered along with the strong negative relationship between being a school board member and support for a controlling relationship, it seems as though our research uncovers a relationship between the public school administrators, nonprofit educational institutions and education-focused nonprofit organizations, public employee volunteering, and LGOs' support for a local government-nonprofit relationship characterized by collaboration, not control. We strongly believe that this finding merits further exploration in future research.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Our study focuses more on local government officials' attitudes toward collaboration with, as opposed to control of, nonprofit organizations. There exists very little prior literature on attitudes toward partnerships between public and nonprofit organizations. Gazley & Brudney (2007) look into theories of collaboration, particularly in formal partnerships, between the two types of entities. There is, however, essentially no prior research exploring preference for more control-focused strategies in intersectoral partnerships.

Our research contributes to current literature in a number of areas. First, it expands the already extensive research on collaboration theory. This study also contributes to a greater understanding of the perceptions and opinions of public employees in local leadership positions. In addition, this paper is unique in that it focuses on local government officials' attitudes toward local government-nonprofit partnership, rather than the existence and benefits of those relationships. Our research also provides a jumping-off point for further research on LGOs' attitudes regarding the control of nonprofits through intersectoral partnerships. While logically it may seem that collaboration and control would be polar opposites in regard to the factors and influences that shape preference for one over the other, our research indicates that attitudes toward both may be more similar than we initially thought. As a result, future research may be better served by treating the two strategies as different but interrelated, rather than as perfect opposites. Gazley and Brudney (2007) represent one of the few voices in the literature advocating for a more balanced perspective on intersectoral partnerships, rather than advocating for collaboration as an innate good. We hope that our research may add to a broader understanding of that important perspective. However, because our research on control in particular is so exploratory, further research on the topic needs to be conducted before informed conclusions can be made.

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<sup>11</sup> Only two other independent variables – any current involvement and county-level nonprofit assets – are significant for both dependent variables.



The limitations of our study point to the need for further research on this subject. First, there is a distinct lack of available data on several important indicators. Due to privacy concerns for respondents, the survey does not provide any information on demographic characteristics of LGO respondents. In addition, we have no information on local government officials' work history other than current title. Both areas are likely influential in understanding LGOs' attitudes on the nature of local government-nonprofit relationships. Finally, the survey provides no data on respondents' involvement with religious organizations, including attending church services or participation in religious institutions or religious nonprofit organizations. Since roughly one quarter of Americans are estimated to attend church in any given week (Hadaway, Marler and Chaves 1998), this lack of data on an extremely important possible influence on local government officials' attitudes toward public-nonprofit relationships partially clarifies the limited explanatory power of our model. We were, however, able to analyze the impact of the limited relevant information to which we did have access.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<b>Collaboration (DV)</b>	3.03	1.00	1.00	5.00
<b>Control (DV)</b>	2.81	1.05	1.00	5.00
Importance of Nonprofit Involvement	4.33	0.92	1.00	5.00
Any Current Involvement	0.71	0.46	0.00	1.00
Volunteer Hours	23.37	50.36	0.00	376
Any Involvement in Education NPs	0.37	0.48	0.00	1.00
Any Involvement in Philanthropic NPs	0.29	0.45	0.00	1.00
Any Involvement in Social Service NPs	0.31	0.46	0.00	1.00
Any Involvement in Law NPs	0.36	0.48	0.00	1.00
Perception of Community Conditions: Health Problems	2.08	0.52	1.00	3.00
Perception of Community Conditions: Quality of Life	0.77	0.42	0.00	1.00
Response to Declining Revenue: Contracting with NPs	0.08	0.27	0.00	1.00
School Board Member	0.15	0.36	0.00	1.00
Total Nonprofit Assets, bil. (County)	1.38	4.62	0.01	28.90

Note: (1) Dependent variables bolded. (2) Perception of Community Conditions: Health Problems is an average across the different health related conditions while Perception of Community Conditions: Quality of Life is a dummy variable indicating if respondents thought any quality of life-related conditions were a problem.

Table 2: Correlations between Dependent and Independent Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
<b>(1) Collaboration (DV)</b>													
<b>(2) Control (DV)</b>	.172**												
(3) Importance of Nonprofit Involvement	.134*	.097											
(4) Any Current Involvement	.035	.081	.241**										
(5) Volunteer Hours	.071	-.075	.044	.264**									
(6) Any Involvement in Education NPs	.171**	-.085	.161**	.402**	.251**								
(7) Any Involvement in Philanthropic NPs	.153**	.005	.119*	.297**	.237**	.373**							
(8) Any Involvement in Social Service NPs	.128*	.108*	.145*	.335**	.106*	.201**	.242**						
(9) Any Involvement in Law NPs	.050	.123*	.155**	.391**	.197**	.178**	.318**	.205**					
(10) Perception of Community Conditions: Health Problems	.153**	.027	.088	.047	.020	.095	.070	.118*	.137**				
(11) Perception of Community Conditions: Quality of Life	.013	.009	.077	.065	-.011	.060	.170**	.042	.103*	.134*			
(12) Response to Declining Revenue: Contracting with NPs	.025	.108*	.017	.069	.074	.139**	.119*	.102*	.067	.024	.063		
(13) School Board Member	.043	-.178**	.057	.198**	.166**	.412**	.069	-.075	-.103*	.012	-.027	.028	
(14) Total Nonprofit Assets, bil. (County)	-.031	.042	-.012	-.016	.130*	.116*	.033	.002	.018	.003	.074	.058	.174**

Note: (1) Dependent variables bolded.

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

\* . Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

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