

Preface

In recent years, the study of nonprofit and voluntary organizations has been a growth field, a fact that is apparent in the proliferation of nonprofit degree and certificate programs in schools of business and public affairs, the founding of new independent centers devoted to nonprofit research, and the steady increase in scholarship concerned with nonprofit organizations. To date, however, the study of nonprofit organizations has yet to find a home in any single discipline. And this may well be for the best. Our understanding of nonprofit organizations has benefited from the attention of economists, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, historians, and management scholars. In writing this book, I have endeavored to bring together some of the most significant and contentious ideas about the nonprofit and voluntary sector and to integrate at least some elements of the competing disciplinary perspectives that have emerged. This is, after all, a book about the nonprofit and voluntary sector written by an organizational sociologist who teaches strategic management in a public policy school. It is my sincere hope that this book will cross disciplinary bounds and that it will serve as a useful and clarifying overview of the pressing conceptual and policy problems facing nonprofit organizations today.

Dividing nonprofit action into four broad functions, this book examines how nonprofit organizations promote civic and political engagement, deliver critical services within communities, provide an institutional vehicle for social entrepreneurship, and allow the expression of values and faith. The core of the book explores the tensions and problems that have arisen in each of these functional realms and the boundary disputes that have broken out as nonprofit organizations have been drawn into competition and collaboration with government and business. In exploring the multiple roles of nonprofit organizations, I argue that the long-term health and viability of nonprofit organizations de-

pend on the achievement of balance among the four functions, so that no one function is allowed to dominate the other three. This has not always been achieved in recent years and the results have been painfully clear: charges of politicization, vendorism, commercialism, and particularism have plagued nonprofit organizations. The argument developed here is that only when nonprofits achieve important successes in each of their functions will they receive and sustain the financial support and public acceptance that they need to continue to grow. In tackling these broad and complex issues, I have aimed to provide a perspective on nonprofit activity that will be relevant to scholars and students approaching the topic from a wide array of backgrounds and levels of familiarity.

The intellectual debts I have accumulated over the years are very large. From the very first moment I joined the faculty of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and began to work on this book, I have benefited greatly from the good counsel and insightful criticisms of Mark Moore and Christine Letts, who together helped launch the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, where I have been a faculty affiliate. I am grateful to both of them for creating a place where it is possible to do serious work within a community of scholars and students. My faculty colleagues at the Hauser Center and within the broader Kennedy School of Government have all contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of this book. Through numerous seminar presentations, e-mail exchanges, and hallway discussions over the years, their active—sometimes aggressive—questioning has led me to sharpen and improve my arguments. I owe a special debt to Peter Dobkin Hall, who read and commented on the entire manuscript and generously shared with me his encyclopedic knowledge of all things nonprofit. My understanding of the nonprofit sector has been substantially enriched by friendships, conversations, and collaborations over the years with Joseph Galaskiewicz, Paul Light, Steven Rathgeb Smith, Brint Milward, Barry Karl, Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, Marion Freemont-Smith, Allen Grossman, Elizabeth Keating, Donald Haider, David Reingold, and William Ryan.

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