

2.1 Statement of Research Record, Intellectual Agenda, and Future Research Plans

My research focuses on a range of theoretical and managerial questions lying at the nexus of governance, government-nonprofit relations, and coproduction of public services. I am particularly interested in (1) the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision, and (2) the impact of the nonprofit sector on creating a more effective and equitable public service provision system. My overall research challenges the assumption in the existing public management scholarship that the role of nonprofits is limited to the implementation of public policies through service delivery and funding flows unidirectionally from government to nonprofits. I aim at providing new empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks to conceptualize the roles of nonprofits in society beyond the widely accepted ‘tools of government’ approach that views nonprofits primarily as public service delivery mechanisms (Salamon, 2002)¹. As such, my research indicates that nonprofits can play important roles in financing and creating public services, and they have a consequential impact on how local governments allocate their resources and who benefits from these public services.

As public managers at different levels of the government experience extensive challenges in sustaining the desired level of public service provision, my research has important theoretical and practical implications for efforts to promote citizen participation and cross-sector solutions to complex social problems. By merging my substantive and theoretical expertise with some of the most important issues facing our world today, including but not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic, social equity, and climate change, my research highlights the important roles nonprofits play in society and provides practical guidance regarding how government at local, state, and federal levels could better leverage their strengths and collaborate with nonprofits in public service provision and governance. Here below, I discuss my overall research philosophy, my research trajectory and themes, and future directions.

Research Philosophy

I am an interdisciplinary public and nonprofit management scholar who uses multiple methods and actively engages students and practitioners in my research. My research addresses some of the most fundamental questions in public and nonprofit management research: What are the roles of nonprofits in public service provision? Who benefits from the nonprofit sector? How should the government effectively work with nonprofits and citizens in joint service provision? My research contributions often arise from active engagement and cross-pollination of multiple disciplines and fields of study, in particular public policy, management, urban affairs, environmental studies, sociology, and political science. While I often orient my research in major public and nonprofit management journals, I also actively outreach to other disciplines through my collaboration with other scholars so these important questions can be more broadly understood and explored.

¹ Salamon, Lester M., ed. (2002). *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

I have equipped myself with a broad set of social science methods and applied them to my research (statistical analysis, comparative case studies, longitudinal case studies, systematic literature review, meta-analysis, process studies, field research, semi-structured interviews, and survey methodology). This diverse methodological toolbox and skill set allows me to approach research based on the research question, rather than a particular type of methodology. It also allows me to construct a more comprehensive and balanced picture from different types of evidence.

I have a deep commitment to engaged scholarship and research apprenticeship. Over the past few years, I have prioritized building relationships with community groups and collaborating with scholars who understand how genuine community-based research can be done. Thanks to Humphrey's strong ethic, history, and models of high-quality, engaged scholarship, I have been able to forge these relationships effectively even in my relatively short time in Minnesota. I also regard it as my ultimate responsibility to engage students in research apprenticeship and cultivate the next generation of public affairs scholars. Since I joined Humphrey, I have published eight peer-reviewed articles with doctoral students, including two current Humphrey doctoral students.

Summary of Research Career Trajectory and Accomplishments

I received a B.S. in Environmental Science from Zhejiang University, China in 2010. After many field trips to local NGOs during summer breaks and one year of service in Rural China for two Chinese NGOs after graduation, I realized that the key to environmental protection is not only in science and engineering but also in how citizens can effectively self-organize to maintain their resources. I came to the United States and obtained my M.A. in Philanthropic Studies in 2013 and Ph.D. in Public Affairs in 2017 from Indiana University. Before joining the faculty of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs in 2018, I served as a Visiting Assistant Professor for the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University Bloomington. In addition to my appointment at the Humphrey School, I am a faculty affiliate at the Institute on the Environment and the Minnesota Population Center. I also serve as an external affiliate faculty for the Ostrom Workshop at Indiana University.

My research agenda on the changing roles of nonprofits and their impact on effective and equitable public service provision began with an invitation by my former mentor Beth Gazley to join her research team in 2015 studying coproduction in parks systems. Out of that collaboration, we coauthored one article before I was hired at Humphrey (Gazley, Cheng & LaFontant, 2018) and two articles since (Gazley, LaFontant, & Cheng, 2020; Gazley & Cheng, 2020). Out of this topic on charitable support for public service provision, I also developed an independent set of research questions and datasets for my dissertation. My dissertation was subsequently published in three single-authored articles in *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Public Administration and Theory*, and *Public Performance & Management Review*, all in 2019. I have since continued my research into this topic as the lead author with doctoral students (e.g., Cheng & Wu, 2021; Cheng & Li, 2022; Cheng, Yang, & Deng, 2022) and collaborators with scholars at other institutions (e.g., Cheng, Shi & Andrew, 2020; Cheng, Yu, Shen, & Huang, 2020; Wang & Cheng, 2021). Of special note is that senior colleagues have also sought me out to collaborate on research into coproduction and the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision (e.g., Brudney, Cheng, & Meijs, 2022; Cheng & Sandfort, under review).

Since I joined the Humphrey School in 2018, I have published 21 peer-reviewed journal articles and two book chapters in the most visible and well-respected venues in public and nonprofit management research. I also actively outreach to other relevant academic disciplines and fields. I am the sole or first author on 13 of these 21 published peer-reviewed publications and I have four papers currently under review. According to Google Scholar², my publications have been cited 297 times as of June 2022 (297 since I joined Humphrey in 2018) and my citation has shown steady growth over the last four years (19 in 2019, 59 in 2020, 123 in 2021, and 91 in 2022 as of June 15th). I have an h-index of 7 (meaning 7 publications with at least 7 citations) and an i10-index of 7 (meaning 7 publications with at least 10 citations). I am committed to making my research accessible not only in English but also in other languages. The main contents of nine of my articles have been translated into Chinese (links to translations are provided in my C.V.).

My 2019 *Public Administration Review (PAR)* article on the changing role of nonprofits in public service provision is listed as one of the Highly Cited *PAR* Articles³. My 2019 *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (JPART)* article on the funding interaction between the government and nonprofits is listed as one of the Highly Cited *JPART* Articles⁴. My research has been recognized by many awards, including the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) Best Conference Paper Award, Wen Wang Best Young Scholar Paper Award, the Felice Davidson Perlmutter Best Paper Award of the ARNOVA Theory, Issues, and Boundaries Section, the ARNOVA Emerging Scholars Award. My work has been supported by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs Faculty Interactive Research Program, Ostrom Research Award, and Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy Research Fund. Currently, I serve as the Managing Editor for *PAR*, one of the top public administration journals, and the Editorial Board Members for *Nonprofit Management and Leadership (NML)* and *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*.

Major Themes of Scholarship and Publications

In this section, I summarize my scholarship and accomplishments on two interrelated themes: (1) the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision, and (2) the impact of the nonprofit sector on creating a more effective and equitable public service provision system. My research makes an important contribution to the existing literature by presenting new evidence about the prevalence and permanency of public service reliance on private philanthropy, articulating the theoretical mechanisms through which nonprofits may influence the distribution of public services, and using innovative methods to assess the impact of the nonprofit sector on effective and equitable public service provision. I briefly describe how this research agenda develops and use selected articles to demonstrate my major contributions.

Changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision

Public and nonprofit management scholars have made significant progress in understanding the diverse patterns of government-nonprofit relations, especially through conceptualizing the role of

² <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=BMsacpoAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao>

³ [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1540-6210.highly-cited-par-articles](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/(ISSN)1540-6210.highly-cited-par-articles)

⁴ This paper is listed as one of five Highly Cited *JPART* Papers from *JPART*'s 2018 and 2019 issues.

nonprofits as providers of public services. My research advances this area of inquiry by bringing new empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks to investigate the antecedents, processes, and consequences of nonprofit organizations becoming important players in creating, planning, and financing public services. Existing research tends to focus narrowly on the effects of government funding flows on nonprofits while overlooking the impact of nonprofits on government through, for example, private funding, planning, and co-design of public services. In other words, nonprofits are framed as a neutral tool for government to use in service delivery. By recognizing the political roles nonprofits play in the upstream of the policy-making process, my research suggests that nonprofits play critical roles in determining who gets what, when, and how. They can also influence the behaviors of local governments via multiple mechanisms beyond direct political advocacy. The policy and management implications are huge as governments at all levels and around the world are suffering from extensive budget cuts and financial losses.

In my 2019 solo-authored paper in *Public Administration Review*, “**Exploring the Role of Nonprofits in Public Service Provision: Moving from Coproduction to Cogovernance**”, I present a theoretical framework for understanding nonprofits’ involvement in co-governance, or the planning and design of public services, as compared to coproduction which emphasizes the involvement of users in service delivery and production. Factor analysis of various supporting activities of these nonprofits suggests that co-governance is a distinct type of nonprofit support for public services. Moreover, nonprofits are more likely to get involved in co-governance when they are younger, larger, and operate in communities that are more resourceful and stable, and have a lower level of social capital and government capacity of providing corresponding public services. This article presents one of the first empirical assessments of the conditions under which nonprofits go beyond the production and delivery of public services to also consider what has become a key area of my research, namely the important roles nonprofits also play in creating, planning, and financing public services. This article is included in *PAR*’s virtual issue of Highly Cited Papers and was awarded the Wen Wang Award for Best Young Scholar Paper by the China-America Association for Public Affairs. Its content has also been translated into Chinese.

Based on the understanding of nonprofits have become key players in financing and creating public services, I went on to examine how local governments manage their collaboration with these nonprofits and how nonprofits respond to changes in public spending on services. In “**Governing Public-Nonprofit Partnerships: Linking Governance Mechanisms to Collaboration Stages**”, I did fieldwork and conducted interviews in major cities in the Ohio River Basin Region to understand the mechanisms through which these government-nonprofit partnerships are governed and how various governance mechanisms are connected to different stages of the collaboration continuum, namely philanthropic partnerships, transactional partnerships, and integrative partnerships. This paper adds to the much-needed scholarship on the forms and intensity of nonprofit collaboration (Gazley & Guo, 2020)⁵. Regarding how nonprofits respond to government budget cuts, assistant professor at the George Washington University Lang Yang and I published a paper in *American Review in Public Administration*, titled “**Providing Public Services without Relying Heavily on Government Funding: How do Nonprofits Respond to Government Budget Cuts?**” While we assume that nonprofits would

⁵ Gazley, B., & Guo, C. (2020). What do we know about nonprofit collaboration? A systematic review of the literature. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 31(2), 211-232.

fill in the gap when there is a cut in the overall public spending on park services, it is an empirical question regarding whether and how nonprofits would do so. In addition, government spending cuts are often both a signal for gaps in public service provision and revenue loss for nonprofits. We find that park-supporting nonprofits increase fund-raising efforts and diversify revenue portfolios in response to incremental changes in the government spending environment. Facing a dramatic government budget cut on parks and recreation, nonprofits are more likely to reduce administrative expenses and spend more on programs to fill in the gap. These findings about the nuances of nonprofit responses to reduced government funding are an important element of my contributions to our recognition of the important role of nonprofits in not only delivering public services, but also in defining, planning, and financing public services.

Building on my substantive expertise in the subsector of parks and recreation services, I have extended this line of inquiry to other policy domains and geographical contexts, including urban climate governance (Cheng, Park, & Krause, under review), human services (Cheng & Sandfort, under review), the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheng et al., 2020; Wang & Cheng, 2021), and government-nonprofit relations in China (Cheng & Wu, 2021). I bring new streams of literature, theory, and approaches to these inquiries. This is significant not only for empirical reasons but also for theoretical reasons. For parks and recreation services, government capacity is relatively low while nonprofits have been documented as powerful players in raising private funds to finance public park services. It is, therefore, a great starting point toward understanding nonprofits' role beyond service delivery. However, is this just a special phenomenon in one public service subsector? For the studies I highlight below, I strategically chose contexts where government capacity is believed to be strong as compared to their nonprofit partners (e.g., human services, government-nonprofit relations in China, and COVID-19 responses in China). By conducting research at the two ends of this continuum, I aim at providing theoretical insights into the changing roles of nonprofits that travel across public service subsectors and geographical contexts.

My co-authored paper with University of Maryland doctoral candidate Zhongsheng Wu, “**The Contingent Value of Nonprofit Political Connections on Private Donations: Exploring the Moderating Role of Transparency**”, explores the moderating role of transparency between political connections and private donations in over 2,000 foundations in China. It also won the Felice Davidson Perlmutter Best Paper Award in the ARNOVA Theory, Issues, and Boundaries Section. In 2020, I co-organized an International Workshop on Coproduction of Public Services in Comparative Perspectives at Zhejiang University, China, and served as the guest editor for this special issue in *the Journal of Chinese Governance*. In my editorial essay “**Bridging the Great Divide: Toward a Comparative Understanding of Coproduction**”, I outline how the concept and theory of coproduction transform how we think about government-nonprofit relations in public service provision and how to achieve greater synergy to guide effective public service provision and institutional design.

In the human services subsector, my former Humphrey colleague Jodi Sandfort and I use a process-oriented inductive study of Minnesota's 2-Generation Policy Network to track how government agencies rebuild trust with nonprofit organizations serving Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) communities. As compared to variance studies which focus on the cause and effect, process studies focus attention on how and why things evolve and develop over time. This paper, titled “**Public Management Reform to Overcome Institutional Racism:**

Exploring Government’s Trust Building Tactics to Renew Relationships with Nonprofits Serving BIPOC Communities”, won the 2021 ARNOVA Best Conference Paper Award and is currently under Revise & Resubmit at *Public Administration Review*. We find that local government’s intentional tactics both inside the bureaucracy and with BIPOC-serving nonprofits allowed them to create new collaborative infrastructures that both changed organizational routines and built power to address racial inequities in the existing human service system. We contribute to the existing literature by building a conceptual model that recognizes that while trust operates as a resource in public service collaborations, it must be purposively built through cascading administrative tactics. This research is supported by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs Faculty (CURA) Interactive Research Program which aims at cultivating collaborative research projects between faculty members and community-based organizations in Minnesota. I have also presented the key findings from this study to the city council of Mounds View to facilitate their efforts to better engage their BIPOC residents. It shows my commitment to conducting community-engaged research and I expect to do more of that in my future research.

As countries around the world were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, I also quickly shifted my research to shed light on this critical challenge facing human society, particularly from the lens of how nonprofit organizations work with government to coproduce quick and effective responses to the pandemic. In my 2020 co-authored paper in *Public Administration Review*, “**Coproducing Responses to COVID-19 with Community Organizations: Lessons from Zhejiang Province, China**”, my collaborators at Zhejiang University and I argue that solely crediting the central government for the early success in containing COVID-19 in China is not only dangerous on ideological grounds but also misleading in terms of how the world can learn from the experiences in China. We show strong evidence from the case of Zhejiang Province that community-based organizations were actively involved in all three stages of Zhejiang’s response to COVID-19. Since its publication in 2020, this article has been cited 63 times and is used as an important reference for understanding the role of nonprofits in China’s COVID-19 responses. In another co-authored paper “**Cross the River by Feeling the Stones: How Did Nonlocal Grassroots Nonprofits Overcome Administrative Barriers to Provide Quick Responses to COVID-19?**”, assistant professor at the Remin University of China Xiaoyun Wang and I found that grassroots nonprofit organizations were able to overcome administrative failures and provide quick pandemic relief during the Wuhan lockdown by leveraging social media platforms, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and using online tools for trust-building. Working with the former director of the Ginkgo Foundation Xueshan Zhang, we actively translated our findings into practitioner-oriented venues because of the practical significance of our research, writing for US nonprofit leaders in *Nonprofit Quarterly* (Cheng, Wang & Zhang, 2022) and Chinese audiences in *Social Innovators* (Wang & Cheng, 2021). I was invited by the US Government Accountability Office to present my COVID-19 research in 2022, demonstrating the impact and reputation of my research in the US and globally.

Built on my empirical work on the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision, I also begin to conduct knowledge synthesis and theory development work. By overlooking the role of nonprofits in creating and financing the provision of public services, public management scholarship represents nonprofits as tools of government and uses the voluntary failure theory to demonstrate the limitations of the nonprofit sector and justify why government funding and intervention are desirable. This is an incomplete understanding of nonprofits’ roles and potential.

Working with the University of Minnesota librarian Maggie Parra⁶, Humphrey doctoral students Shuyi Deng and Ahmad Banamah, and assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh Huafang Li, I conduct a systematic literature review on the use of voluntary failure theory to explore how this theory explains some of the origins and impact of an overly narrow focus on service delivery. Among other implications, we find that few empirical studies seriously engage the voluntary failure theory and the theory is mainly used as a background for government contracting with nonprofits. Also, many studies use voluntary failure to say something completely different compared to the original four forms of failures (philanthropic insufficiency, philanthropic particularism, philanthropic paternalism, and philanthropic amateurism). The preliminary findings of this research have been presented at the 2022 Public Management Research Conference in Phoenix and we plan to submit this paper to the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*.

The impact of the nonprofit sector on creating a more effective and equitable public service provision system

This line of scholarship grows organically from my research on the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision. As nonprofits become important players in the financing and planning of public park services, how do they influence the budgetary decisions of local governments? How do they influence the allocation of public funding? Do they promote or compromise the effectiveness and equity of public service provision? Assessing and evaluating the impact of the nonprofit sector has been a central yet less studied topic of nonprofit and voluntary studies, especially compared to the field's focus on the determinants of nonprofit activities. I contribute to this line of scholarship by bringing new empirical evidence, proposing new theoretical frameworks, addressing key methodological barriers, and conducting a meta-analysis of existing quantitative studies in diverse disciplines. I discuss these contributions in detail below.

In my solo-authored paper in the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (JPART)*, “**Nonprofit Spending and Government Provision of Public Services: Testing Theories of Government-Nonprofit Relationships**”, I examine how the spending of these government-supporting nonprofits influences local governments' budgetary decisions. This 2019 article was published during a time when *JPART* has published little nonprofit scholarship in recent years. The findings indicate that spending by park-supporting nonprofits has a decreasing effect on the level of public operational spending on parks. However, there is a net gain in total community support for parks and recreation services. This article further proposes a research agenda for a two-way understanding of government-nonprofit funding interactions in theory building and testing. This article is recognized as one of five *JPART* highly cited articles published in 2018 and 2019. With assistant professor at the University of Hong Kong Zhengyan Li, my *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* paper, “**Government-nonprofit Partnerships outside the Contracting Relationship and Public Funding Allocation: Evidence from New York City's Park System**”, extends this line of inquiry from large U.S. city park systems to individual city park units in the New York City's Park System – exploring the relationship between government-nonprofit partnerships outside the contracting relationship and public capital funding allocation. Our findings indicate that park units supported by government-

⁶ <https://www.continuum.umn.edu/2022/02/joining-the-team/>

nonprofit partnerships are likely to receive more public capital project funding. The contrast of findings of these two studies indicates the importance of contextualizing government-nonprofit relationships in different levels of analysis and public service subsectors for future research. Taking the findings of these two articles together, it also suggests the importance of assessing the impact of these nonprofits on equitable public service provision. The overall decline of public funding for park systems and the increase of capital funding to park units supported by government-nonprofit partnerships may pose equity concerns for those parks that do not have support from those partnerships

While my research on how nonprofits influence local governments' budgetary decisions has important implications for effective and equitable public service provision, it is not a direct test of such impact. To assess who benefits from the increasing involvement of nonprofits in the planning and design of public services, I extend this line of inquiry in two distinct yet interconnected directions. On the one hand, the answer to the question of who benefits depends on which communities directly benefit from the services provided by these nonprofits. On the other hand, or one step further, the answer depends on who has better access to public services as nonprofits are increasingly involved in the financing and creation of public services.

In a co-authored paper published in *Public Administration Review* "**Does Coproduction of Public Services Support Government's Social Equity Goals? The Case of U.S. State Parks**", my former mentor Beth Gazley, Indiana University doctoral student Chantalle LaFontant and I use multiple data sources from the California and Florida state parks systems to compare public parks with and without supporting "friends" groups. We find that wealthier Florida counties with greater income inequality are more likely to benefit from a charity supporting a nearby state park. However, there is no similar pattern in California. We further propose that the association between community wealth and park charity presence may depend on state characteristics such as the funding structure of each state park system, not just community wealth differences. In other words, policy and institutional designs matter as we delineate the equity implications of the nonprofit sector.

Built on the foundation of this *PAR* article, we connect the locations of park-supporting nonprofits to which racial-ethnic groups have better access to public park services. In our 2022 *Public Administration Review* article "**Nonprofit Density and Distributional Equity in Public Service Provision: Exploring Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Public Park Access across U.S. Cities**", assistant professor at the George Washington University and Humphrey doctoral candidate Shuyi Deng and I made an important contribution to the literature by proposing three theoretical mechanisms through which communities with a larger nonprofit sector may create favorable conditions for public services to be distributed to certain racial-ethnic groups, namely substitution, resource lever, and patronage politics. Using a unique geospatial dataset of 2,392 U.S. city park systems, we empirically test this framework and find that communities with a higher density of park-supporting nonprofits generate better park access for all racial-ethnic groups. However, more benefits accrue to whites than to other racial-ethnic groups. These complicated realities require public managers to design better policies and institutional structures to ensure both equitable public service provision and active participation of non-governmental actors. This paper is part of *PAR*'s Race and Gender Symposium, a major effort in centering social equity in public and nonprofit management research.

Beyond the empirical context of parks and recreation services, I also use systematic literature review and meta-analysis techniques to gain a broader understanding of the nonprofit sector's social impact. In our paper in *VOLUNTAS* "**Dealing with Endogeneity to Understand the Societal Impact of the Third Sector: Why Should We Care and What Can We Do about It?**" Humphrey doctoral student Jung Ho Choi and I did a systemic literature review to understand how existing empirical studies address endogeneity when assessing sector impact. By endogeneity, we mean the omitted variables or uncaptured causes that both drive the changes of the outcome variable and the explanatory variable. This problem is very common yet challenging to deal with when assessing the impact of the nonprofit sector. By conducting this systematic review, we find that most quantitative studies of the nonprofit sector's societal impact are published in journals outside the main nonprofit journals. We then offer specific examples of how recent methodological advancements in addressing endogeneity help nonprofit researchers better solve this problem.

Built on this *VOLUNTAS* paper, I work with assistant professor at the University of Hawaii ChiaKo Hung to conduct a meta-analysis to further assess whether the nonprofit sector makes a positive impact on society across various policy domains (e.g., less crime, cleaner environment, better health outcomes or more active citizen participation) and how this impact is moderated by policy domains, geographical units of analysis, research design, and publication bias. Using 340 effects from 28 studies, we find a small but positive impact of the nonprofit sector on society, with a substantively larger positive effect in policy domains of citizen participation and the environment. We further propose a research agenda that fosters more cross-pollination between nonprofit studies and major social science disciplines on this important topic. This article titled "**Quantitatively Assessing the Impact of the Nonprofit Sector on Society: A Meta-Analysis**" is currently under review at *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*.

Future Research Directions

I maintain a robust research pipeline currently including three papers under revise & resubmit, one under review, and several work-in-progress. Looking beyond my existing research projects, I am exploring new directions to take my research. In particular, I am developing a research agenda in two directions: understanding the process of collaboration and system change, and exploring how digital platforms transform government-nonprofit relations and local governance. Both directions connect and expand my work in the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision and their social impact. They also present exciting opportunities to collaborate with community partners and generate actionable policy impact. As we begin to have a better understanding of the causes and effects of these changing roles of nonprofits, it is critical to understand the process through which government and nonprofits can work together to improve the effectiveness and equity of the existing public service provision system. The emergence of new technologies such as digital platforms may also be a game-changer in how government interacts with citizens, nonprofits, and other stakeholders.

Regarding the first direction in understanding the process of collaboration and system change, I have drafted one manuscript on government's trust-building process with nonprofits serving BIPOC communities (Cheng & Sandfort, under review). I am now conducting research in two field settings where nonprofits play active and critical roles in changing the policy field: advancing park equity in North Minneapolis and supporting minority-owned businesses in

Minnesota. For the first project on park equity, I was recently nominated as a board member of the Minneapolis Parks Foundation and am deeply involved with its project of redesigning and reimagining the North Commons Park - a park located in one of Minneapolis' largest black and marginalized communities. I am particularly interested in how the CEO and senior staff of the park foundation build trust with its board and donors in this new strategic investment in North Minneapolis and how they manage their relationship with nonprofit partners and residents in North Minneapolis. For the second project on the evolution of a consortium of six Minnesota-based organizations that support minority entrepreneurs and their businesses, I was invited to join the research team by my Humphrey colleagues John Bryson, Barbara Crosby, and Humphrey doctoral alumni Danbi Seo. We are in the final year of our six-year data collection of monthly CEO interviews and meeting observations. It will offer important insights regarding how nonprofits strategize in their efforts of creating system change and how they balance it with their internal organizational capacity and needs.

The second direction of my future research centers on how digital platforms transform citizen participation and local governance. It starts with my COVID-19 research in which digital platforms played such a critical role in facilitating governmental and non-governmental actions (Cheng et al., 2020; Shen, Cheng & Yu, 2022; Wang & Cheng, 2021). As the effects of the pandemic continue, will these technical innovations that emerged in the crisis fade away or go on to transform existing public service provision and governance systems? How will they change how government interacts with citizens, nonprofits, and other key stakeholders? At what scale will they help the existing administrative reforms? I think the interplay of technological innovations and institutional reforms is a key topic for future public management research and I hope to be an important voice in this conversation.

In summary, I am committed to advancing public and nonprofit management scholarship in a diverse set of policy fields. My research trajectory demonstrates my ability to not only publish in the most prestigious venues of my academic discipline but also gain national and international attention in some of the most critical conversations in my field. As a scholar, I am driven by the goal of creating a better and more comprehensive understanding of the roles of nonprofits in public service provision and urban governance. I believe nonprofits play critical roles in our society beyond the tools of government and I hope my research sheds light on these important roles and their impact. As I move further along my career path, I aim to be a locally respected voice in key public policy issues, an internationally recognized scholar in public and nonprofit management, and a mentor and role model for future public affairs scholars and practitioners.