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Specialists, Generalists, and Policy Advocacy by Charitable Nonprofit Organizations

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Previous research finds modest levels of engagement in policy advocacy by charitable nonprofits, despite legal regulations permitting nonprofit advocacy and the significance of public policy to nonprofit constituencies. This paper examines nonprofit involvement in policy advocacy using survey data from Boston, Massachusetts. Nonprofit participation in policy advocacy is associated with professionalization, resource dependence, features of the institutional environment, and organizational characteristics such as size and mission. Drawing from population ecology theory, we examine an additional aspect of organizational mission: whether a nonprofit serves a specialized or general population. We find that nonprofits serving specialized populations are more likely to participate in policy advocacy than nonprofits serving the general population.

Key words: nonprofit organizations, policy advocacy, population ecology, specialist, generalist, resource dependence

Charitable nonprofit organizations provide a diverse range of services, from homeless shelters and community-based health clinics to after-school enrichment programs and environmental conservation. As governments contract out the provision of important public services to nonprofits, these organizations play an increasingly important role in public policies on the ground (Balassiano & Chandler, 2010; Hoefer & Ferguson, 2007; Salamon, 1995; Smith & Lipskey, 1993; Smith & Pekkanen, 2012). As providers of public services, charitable

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nonprofits are sites for the implementation and enactment of public policy. The capacities and effectiveness of these organizations are impacted by those very same policies, especially in terms of government funding allocations and rules governing client eligibility for government-funded services. Despite the growing importance of public policy for the nonprofit sector, previous research finds that charitable nonprofits engage in modest levels of advocacy, particularly lobbying (Bass, Arons, Guinane, & Cartier, 2007; Berry & Arons, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). The low rate of advocacy by public charities is puzzling, given legal regulations that permit nonprofits to engage in advocacy, and in particular, the potential significance of public policy for the populations they serve. As Berry and Arons note, "the lack of political involvement by nonprofits works against the interests of those people who have no one else to represent them" (2003, p. 25).

In this study we analyze survey data from nonprofit organizations in Boston, Massachusetts, to examine the involvement of charitable nonprofits in policy advocacy—work focused on policy issues related to the interests of groups served by nonprofit organizations. A growing body of research explains advocacy engagement by charitable nonprofits by drawing on explanations from organizational sociology, including attention to professionalization, resource dependence, institutionalism, and organizational characteristics. This paper argues for an expanded conception of organizational mission that considers how the narrow or broad scope of a nonprofit's service population influences nonprofit engagement in policy advocacy.

Defining Nonprofit Policy Advocacy

Policy advocacy is a particular type of activity aimed at changing or preventing changes in the policies that directly impact nonprofit organizations and their constituents (Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Boris & Mosher-Williams, 1998). Although advocacy work is often secondary to the service-focused mission of charitable nonprofits (Berry & Arons, 2003; Kimberlin, 2010), it has great potential to impact nonprofit organizations and their constituents. By engaging in policy advocacy, nonprofit organizations can protect existing government programs that serve nonprofit clients (Chin, 2009),

promote government policies that support nonprofit missions (Boris & Mosher-Williams, 1998), increase opportunities for nonprofits to garner government funding (Mosley, 2010), empower citizens (LeRoux, 2007; Marwell, 2004; McNutt & Boland, 2007), help to set the public agenda (Schmid, Bar, & Nirel, 2008), and impact policy implementation (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009).

Given the increasing importance of charitable nonprofits in the provision of social services, this paper focuses on policy advocacy by charitable nonprofits, service providing organizations with tax-exemption under section 501(c)3 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code (Freemont-Smith, 2004). This legal status exempts nonprofits from paying federal income tax and enables them to raise funds from private donors whose donations are tax deductible. (For a review of advocacy activity by other tax-exempt organizations see Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Freemont-Smith, 2004; MacIndoe, 2010; or Minkoff, Aisenbrey, & Agnone, 2005.) Charitable nonprofits risk losing their tax-exempt status if found in violation of IRS regulations which restrict them from attempting to influence legislation as a "substantial part" of their activities (Internal Revenue Service, 2012). This ambiguous guideline regarding lobbying expenses is often cited as having a chilling effect on nonprofit advocacy (Bass et al., 2007). In 1976, the IRS established the "501(h) election" a set of specific expenditure guidelines for lobbying activities. Nonprofits can easily opt into the 501(h) election, which can be made irrespective of the extent of nonprofit advocacy. Regardless of their involvement in lobbying and other advocacy activities, charitable nonprofits are prohibited from endorsing or campaigning for candidates for public office.

Theoretical Framework

A review of the growing literature on nonprofit advocacy indicates that previous research focuses on four sets of factors that influence nonprofit advocacy: rationalization and professionalization, resource dependence, institutional factors, and organizational characteristics.

Rationalization and Professionalization

Rationalization refers to the adoption of formal roles, rules

and structures within an organization designed to systematically allocate resources to meet diverse organizational goals (Weber, 1978). As nonprofit organizations become more rationalized, not only their structures, but also their strategies and activities, reflect their increasingly formalized status (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001; Hwang & Powell, 2009). The growth of rationalization in the nonprofit sector can be seen in trends such as the collection of organizational data (Stoecker, 2007), the adoption of outcome measures (Barman & MacIndoe, 2012; Benjamin, 2008; MacIndoe & Barman, forthcoming), and the use of information technology (McNutt & Boland, 1999). With respect to rules impacting advocacy, nonprofit organizations may adopt the 501(h) election, a set of guidelines for lobbying expenditures (Freemont-Smith, 2004). These rules offer nonprofits a legitimate process for reporting lobbying expenses, regardless of the extent of nonprofit advocacy.

Professionalization is an additional feature that often accompanies organizational rationalization. Professionalization refers to the certification of expert knowledge through specialized training and demarcated occupational jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). Within the nonprofit sector, professionalization refers to a shift from volunteers and part-time staff to full-time paid staff, as well as reliance on leaders with substantive expertise related to the organization's mission (Hofer, 2000). Previous research finds that the presence of personnel with specific expertise (Mosley, 2010), the use of full-time staff members (Hofer, 2000), and the adoption of a formal legal status that allows particular types of advocacy activity (Kerlin & Reid, 2010) all facilitate nonprofit advocacy.

(H1.1) Nonprofit organizations that adopt the 501(h) election, a set of rules governing the reporting of lobbying expenses, will be more likely to engage in advocacy.

(H1.2) Nonprofit organizations with more capacity as evidenced by a full-time staff will be more likely to engage in advocacy.

(H1.3) Nonprofit organizations led by managers with a management degree in business or nonprofit management will be more likely to participate in advocacy.

Resource Dependence

According to resource dependence theory “the key to organizational survival is the ability to acquire and maintain resources [from the external environment]” (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 2). Organizations act to reduce uncertainties that arise as a result of their dependence on other organizational actors for financial and other resources (Hillman, Withers & Collins, 2009; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Charitable nonprofits, like other organizations, are constrained by their need to obtain resources to provide services and fulfill their missions (Bielefeld, 1992; Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998). In recent decades, government funding has become a vital component of nonprofit budgets, particularly human service nonprofits (Salamon, 1995; Schmid et al., 2008; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). As a consequence, research on the role of resource dependence in shaping nonprofit advocacy primarily focuses on how government funding facilitates—or constrains—nonprofit participation in advocacy (Chaves, Stephens, & Galaskiewicz, 2004; Kimberlin, 2010).

Studies examining how government funding influences nonprofit advocacy have produced conflicting results (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009). Some scholars find that the extent of government funding increases nonprofit engagement in advocacy (Chaves et al., 2004; Donaldson, 2008; LeRoux, 2007; Mosley, 2011; O'Regan & Oster, 2002). Nonprofits are thought to engage in advocacy to safeguard funding or look for new sources of funding. Conversely, other research finds that dependence on government funding decreases nonprofit involvement in advocacy (Child & Grønberg, 2007; Guo & Saxton, 2010; Kerlin & Reid, 2010; Schmid et al., 2008). Berry & Arons (2003) found a great extent of misunderstanding among charitable nonprofits about the nature and degree of legally permissible advocacy activities. Along with other researchers (Child & Grønberg, 2007; Kerlin & Reid, 2010), they conclude that nonprofits may avoid advocacy because they fear the loss of their tax-exempt status and the ability to raise tax-deductible donations (Berry & Arons, 2003).

Recent research has also explored how nonprofit reliance on foundation grants impacts involvement in advocacy (Bass et al., 2007). Some studies indicate that foundations make cautious and incremental efforts to effect policy (Ferris, Hentschke,

& Harmssen, 2008) and that foundation funding lags behind other proponents of social change (Jenkins & Eckert, 1986). Other research finds that foundations selectively engage in advocacy and fund social change efforts in particular areas (Bartley, 2007; McKersie, 1997; Silver, 2001).

Competition for resources might also shape nonprofit advocacy work. As competition for government funding has increased, researchers find that nonprofits feel they must engage in advocacy to protect resources (Suarez & Hwang, 2008). Alternatively, nonprofits might not want to stand out from the crowd by participating in political activities that could offend cautious foundation funders. When nonprofits rely heavily on government funding or foundation grants, managers must carefully consider how policy advocacy might jeopardize—or safeguard—such vital funding streams.

Nonprofit organizations can adopt a variety of strategies to reduce their dependence on resource providers. Nonprofits might work to increase organizational slack by establishing endowments (Bowman, Keating & Hager, 2006) or diversifying their revenue streams (Froelich, 1999). Studies of nonprofit budgets have found that revenues tend to be concentrated in a few funding sources (Grønbjerg, 1993; Milofsky & Romo, 1988). Nonprofits that are able to secure revenues from a variety of sources may be more likely to engage in advocacy since they are less reliant on the dictates of a few dominant funders. In addition, according to Bass and his colleagues, "the more money an organization has, and from more different sources, the more likely it can employ policy staff and be heavily engaged in advocacy" (2007, p. 196).

(H2.1) Greater reliance on government funding will increase nonprofit participation in advocacy.

(H2.2) Greater reliance on foundation funding will decrease nonprofit participation in advocacy.

(H2.3) Nonprofits that experience higher levels of competition for government funding will be more likely to engage in advocacy.

(H2.4) Nonprofits that experience higher levels of competition for private funding will be less likely to engage in advocacy.

(H2.5) Nonprofits with concentrated revenue streams will be less likely to engage in advocacy.

Institutional Environment

Like other organizations, charitable nonprofits are embedded in organizational fields of actors including resource providers, government regulators, clients, and organizational partners that shape how they pursue their missions (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The concept of organizational imprinting suggests that the institutional environment at the time an organization is founded may be particularly influential for subsequent activities (Stinchcombe, 1965). For example, in a study of Indiana nonprofits, Child and Gronjberg (2007) found that nonprofit organizations established in the 1990s, a period characterized as a hostile environment to nonprofits (Cox & McCloskey, 1996), are less likely to engage in advocacy. Nonprofits that perceive hostile policy environments are likely to avoid direct advocacy efforts and focus instead on service provision or grassroots organizing (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009). In contrast, Gormley and Cymrot (2006) find that the perception of threats in the policy environment make nonprofits more likely to engage in advocacy work.

Prior research suggests that the institutional policy environment may have an important influence on a nonprofit's decision to engage in policy advocacy. For nonprofit organizations, the legislative period of the 1990s may be particularly influential. The Istook Amendment, proposed during the 104th Congress (1995-1996), would have placed extensive restrictions on the civic engagement and advocacy work of charitable nonprofits (Cox & McCloskey, 1996). Though ultimately unsuccessful, this legislation is indicative of the restrictive policy environment during this time period which discouraged nonprofit advocacy (Bass et al., 2007).

(H3) Nonprofit organizations established during the restrictive policy environment of the 1990s will be less likely to engage in advocacy.

Organizational Characteristics

Studies of nonprofit advocacy find that organizational characteristics, notably size and mission, significantly influence engagement in advocacy work. Larger nonprofit organizations, as evidenced by staff size or higher budgetary expenditures, are more likely to engage in policy advocacy (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Nicholson-Crotty, 2009). Organizational age is often included as a control variable but does not significantly impact advocacy participation (Suarez & Hwang, 2008; Mosley, 2010).

Since organizational mission is thought to align closely with policy arenas, previous research focuses on how the primary field of nonprofit activity (e.g., human services) impacts advocacy (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Smith & Pekkanen, 2012). Organizational mission in studies of nonprofit organizations is measured using the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE). The NTEE is a nationally recognized taxonomy of U.S. nonprofit organizations developed in 1987 by the National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute (Barman, 2013; Hodgkinson, 1990). The NTEE is used by scholars, government agencies and nonprofit practitioners. Sociologists have also used the NTEE to measure organizational mission in studies of nonprofit advocacy (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007), inter-organizational relations among nonprofits (Blau & Rabrenovic, 1991), and nonprofit commercial revenue (Child, 2010). The Internal Revenue Service uses the NTEE when determining nonprofit tax-exempt status. Finally, the NTEE is utilized by nonprofit practitioners such as Guidestar, a website that promotes transparency in the nonprofit sector by providing public access to nonprofit tax filings, and Charity Navigator, a watchdog organization that rates charitable nonprofits.

The NTEE classifies nonprofits into major groups based on their primary field of activity (Sumariwalla, 1986). Prior research finds that nonprofits with environmental, rights-based, or social change missions are more likely to engage in advocacy than nonprofit organizations with other missions, such as human service nonprofits (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; LeRoux, 2007; Suarez & Hwang, 2008). This research distinguishes between categories of nonprofit mission (e.g., environmental versus human service) but fails to account for how other aspects of nonprofit mission might impact advocacy. We

discuss additional aspects of organizational mission in the following section.

(H4.1) Larger nonprofit organizations will be more likely to participate in policy advocacy.

(H4.2) Nonprofits with environmental and public benefit missions will be more likely to engage in advocacy.

Specialist/Generalist Orientation

Previous research on nonprofit advocacy takes three approaches to nonprofit mission. First, some studies focus on one type of nonprofit organization, for example human service nonprofits (e.g., Mosley, 2010; Nicholson-Crotty, 2007, 2009). This approach facilitates a focus on one set of nonprofits, however a great deal of variation within mission still exists. For example, human service nonprofits include such diverse entities as child care facilities, soup kitchens, and job training organizations. In a second approach, researchers examine large heterogeneous samples of nonprofits and define nonprofit mission using the NTEE, the established national classification system for nonprofits (e.g., Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Suárez & Hwang, 2008). In a third approach, scholars have argued for an expanded classification of nonprofits which combines traditional rights-based definitions of advocacy with a broader conceptualization based on civic engagement (Boris & Mosher-Williams, 1998). This critique of organizational mission as an explanation of nonprofit advocacy is seconded by one that notes that the measure of nonprofit mission in national datasets is often based on information obtained at the time of organizational founding (Smith & Pekkanen, 2012). Nonprofit missions can shift over time, making a nonprofit more or less likely to engage in advocacy.

In this paper, we join previous critiques of how nonprofit mission is accounted for in studies of nonprofit advocacy by arguing that organizational mission encompasses more than the major field of nonprofit activity. For example, organizational mission can be circumscribed by geography (e.g., a nonprofit serving a specific neighborhood) or be defined by a particular scope (e.g., a focus on clean energy as opposed to all

environmental concerns). We look to the theory of population ecology in organizational sociology to suggest an additional way to account for variation in nonprofit mission by focusing on whether nonprofits are generalists or specialists (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1983).

Distinguishing between nonprofit specialists and generalists—organizations that focus on providing a narrow versus a broad range of services—enables us to consider how this additional aspect of organizational mission might impact nonprofit engagement in policy advocacy. Our conceptualization of nonprofit specialists and generalists draws from Hannan and Freeman's (1977, 1983) theory of population ecology which seeks to explain the survival, growth, and death of organizational populations. A foundational concept in population ecology is the environmental "niche," which is defined as the resource space within which organizations operate (Carroll, 1985; Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Organizational survival is linked to the fit between organizations and their resource environment or niche. Some environments favor organizations that specialize, while others favor organizations that generalize.

In stable resource environments with reliable resource flows and low competition, specialist organizations will outperform generalists, because resources are abundant organizations can specialize (providing a narrow product or service) without concern of being restricted by their resource environment. In contrast, generalist organizations are more successful in competitive, dynamic resource environments (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Generalists are better suited than specialists to turbulent organizational environments marked by varying resource levels and changing preferences. For example, if the preferences of resource providers shift, a generalist nonprofit that provides a broader range of services is more likely to succeed in such a changing resource environment. In contrast, a specialist organization might be at greater risk in a turbulent environment if the services a nonprofit offers, and the services that resources providers are interested in funding, no longer match.

Nonprofit organizations vary in their degree of specialization. Research examining nonprofits employs several different approaches to defining specialists and generalists. For example, studies that define nonprofit specialists and generalists focus

on: the characteristics of the nonprofit service population (e.g., Archibald, 2007), the geographic focus of the nonprofit (e.g., Guo & Brown, 2006); the number or extent of programs and services offered (e.g., Tucker, Singh, & Meinhard, 1990); or the distribution of organizational resources (e.g., Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998). Tucker, Singh and Meinhard (1990) classify voluntary social service organizations as generalists if they operate in a single domain, providing one main service to a specific population. A nonprofit organization offering settlement assistance to new immigrants operates within a single domain and is classified as a specialist organization, while a nonprofit providing medical, legal and counseling services to immigrants operates in multiple domains and is considered generalist. Another approach distinguishes generalists and specialists according to the levels of socio-demographic diversity within a nonprofit's membership base (McPherson, 1983; McPherson & Rotolo, 1996; Stern, 1999). Attention to the specialist or generalist orientation of a nonprofit's service population provides an additional way to explore how nonprofit mission impacts whether an organization will participate in policy advocacy.

(H5) Nonprofit organizations serving a specialized population will be more likely to engage in advocacy than nonprofits that serve the general population.

Methods

Data and Sample

We examine nonprofit participation in policy advocacy by analyzing survey data from executive directors of nonprofits in Boston, Massachusetts. Nonprofit managers were asked about a range of organizational attributes and practices, including their participation in advocacy activities. The sample, stratified by mission, size, and geographic location, was drawn from the Business Master File maintained by the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) at the Urban Institute. The sample focused on service providing nonprofit organizations and excluded organizations without a primary focus on providing services, as well as religious organizations that are not required to register with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS),

smaller nonprofits that are not required to file a tax return with the IRS, and mutual benefit organizations which only provide services to members (as opposed to the general public). Aside from the exclusions noted above, the distribution of nonprofit mission and organizational size in the sample is comparable to nonprofits across Massachusetts (MacIndoe & Barman, 2009). The University of Chicago Survey Lab administered the online survey between September 2008 and February 2009 and achieved a sixty-three percent response rate ($N = 379$).

Dependent Variable

The dichotomous dependent variable measures nonprofit participation in policy advocacy through responses to the survey question: "Does your organization engage in policy advocacy by officially supporting certain positions on policy issues or on issues related to the interests of certain groups?" About half (48.8%) of nonprofits participated in public policy.

Independent Variables

Rationalization/Professionalization. The model includes three dichotomous measures: (1) if a nonprofit took the 501(h) election; (2) if a nonprofit has full-time, paid staff; and (3) if the nonprofit director has a master's degree in business administration or nonprofit management.

Resource dependence. The model includes five measures: (1) whether a nonprofit reported government funding as their first or second largest revenue source; (2) whether a nonprofit reported foundation funding as their first or second largest revenue source; (3) a scale ranging from 0 to 3 capturing nonprofits' reported competition for government funding with other nonprofits, for-profits, and/or government agencies; (4) a scale capturing nonprofits' reported degree of competition for private funding; and (5) a measure of nonprofit revenue diversification, the Hirschman-Herfindahl Index (HHI), which takes on values between 0 and 1. Higher values indicate that nonprofit revenue is more concentrated in fewer sources. The HHI measure is calculated using six types of nonprofit revenue available in the NCCS data (contributions, program revenues, dues, investment income, special event income and other income) (Carroll & Stater, 2009; Frumkin & Keating, 2011).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable & Source ^{a,b}	Mean	Min	Max	S.D.	Operationalization
<i>Dependent Variable</i>					
Participation in Policy Advocacy ^a	0.49	0	1	0.50	Does your organization work to support positions on policy issues or on issues related to the interests of certain groups?
<i>Independent Variables</i>					
Professionalization and Rationalization					
501(h) Election ^b	0.06	0	1	0.24	Nonprofit takes 501(h) election to report advocacy expenses
Full-time staff ^a	0.78	0	1	0.41	Nonprofit has paid full-time staff
Management degree ^a	0.23	0	1	0.49	Executive director has MBA or MA in non-profit management
Resource Dependence					
Government funding ^a	0.42	0	1	0.47	Government funding is top 1 or 2 source of revenue
Foundation funding ^a	0.32	0	1	0.49	Foundation funding is top 1 or 2 source of revenue
Competition for government funding ^a	1.06	0	3	0.90	Competition with nonprofits, for-profits and government agencies
Competition for private funding ^a	1.24	0	3	0.81	Competition with nonprofits, for-profits and government agencies
Funding diversification ^b	0.48	0	1	0.36	Hirschman-Herfindahl Index, higher value: more concentrated
Institutional Environment					
Restrictive policy environment ^b	0.32	0	1	0.47	Nonprofit established during 1990s
Organizational Characteristics					
Age ^b	23	1	86	18.70	Age in 2009 based on IRS rule date
Size ^b	13.22	8.66	19.10	1.79	Natural log of annual expenses
Field of Activity ^c					
Arts ^b	0.21	0	1	0.41	e.g. museums, performing arts orgs.
Education ^b	0.20	0	1	0.40	e.g. adult education, libraries, after-school education programs
Environment ^b	0.05	0	1	0.22	e.g. environmental preservation, botanic gardens
Health ^b	0.05	0	1	0.22	e.g. community health clinics, hospices, substance abuse
Human Services ^b	0.24	0	1	0.43	e.g. food banks, housing, YMCAs, shelters, family services
Public Benefit ^b	0.25	0	1	0.43	e.g. neighborhood associations, rights orgs.
Specialist/Generalist ^a	0.54	0	1	0.5	Nonprofit serves a specialized population

a=Data source: BANS Survey, Boston Area Nonprofit Study. b=Data source: NCCS data, National Center for Charitable Statistics. c=Classified using National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities.

Institutional environment. The model includes one measure that captures how the institutional environment might impact nonprofit advocacy: an indicator if a nonprofit was established during the 1990s, an inhospitable policy environment for nonprofits.

Organizational characteristics. Organizational size is measured as the natural log of annual organizational expenses in 2009. Organizational age in 2009 is calculated using the year of IRS registration. Nonprofit mission is measured using the National Taxonomy for Exempt Entities (NTEE), the national standard for classifying nonprofit organizations by their primary tax-exempt purpose (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Hodgkinson, 1990). The taxonomy was developed in 1987 by the National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute (Barman, 2013). Following previous studies of nonprofit organizations (e.g., Blau & Rabrenovic, 1991; Boris & Mosher-Williams, 1998; Child, 2010; Child & Grønbjerg, 2007) we use the following major NTEE categories to characterize mission: arts, education, environment, health, human service and public benefit. Please see Table 1 for examples of nonprofits in each mission category. Our sample did not include nonprofits from three additional NTEE categories: international, religious, and mutual benefit organizations.

Generalist/Specialist orientation. In order to define whether a nonprofit is a specialist or a generalist, we follow previous research that classifies specialists according to the range of an organization's service population (McPherson & Rotolo, 1996; Tucker et al., 1990). The variable used in the analysis is constructed from responses to the survey question: "Please indicate which groups your organizations specifically aims to serve through its programs and activities." Respondents were asked to check all that apply from the following list: "general population (no specific subgroups), children/adolescents, disabled, families, minorities (immigrants, cultural ethnicities), seniors, veterans, women and other." In addition to the survey data, the home pages of nonprofit websites were examined to see how nonprofit organizations defined their service populations, and this information was cross-referenced with their survey responses. The variable used in the analysis is coded 0 for nonprofit organizations that selected only the "general population (no specific subgroups)" and coded 1 for nonprofit

organizations that selected one or more specific service populations. Table 2 shows the distribution of specialists and generalists in the sample. Just over half of nonprofits in the sample (54.4%) are specialists, organizations that serve specific populations as opposed to the general public.

Table 2. Nonprofit Generalists and Specialists and Participation in Advocacy

Population Served	All Nonprofits		Participate in Advocacy?	
	N	%	N	%
General population	173	45.6	74	42.8
Specialist population	206	54.4	111	53.9
Total Sample	379	100	185	48.8

Table 3. Nonprofit Generalists and Specialists and Participation in Advocacy

Field of Activity	(1) All Nonprofits		(2) Participate in Advocacy?		(3) Nonprofit is Specialist	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Arts & Culture	79	20.8	20	25.3	11	13.9
Education	75	19.8	30	40.0	58	67.7
Environment	19	5.0	11	57.9	2	11.8
Health	20	5.3	9	45.0	9	53.5
Human Services	92	24.3	51	55.4	72	74.0
Public Benefit	94	24.8	64	68.1	54	52.7
Total	379	100	185	48.8	206	54.4

Findings and Discussion

Descriptive Findings

Approximately half (48.8%) of the nonprofits in the study participated in policy advocacy (Table 2, Column 4). In Berry and Arons’ (2003) seminal study of nonprofit advocacy, twenty-four percent of nonprofits in a national survey were politically active. However, our findings accord with more recent

Table 4. Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. 501(h) Election	-																
2. Full-time staff	-.02	-															
3. Mgmt degree	.03	.18***	-														
4. Gov't funding	-.01	.28***	.07	-													
5. Foundation funding	-.03	.22***	.10**	.17***	-												
6. Competition: Govt. funding	-.05	.23***	.07	.37***	.02	-											
7. Competition: Private funding	-.04	.22***	.07	.19***	.09*	.48***	-										
8. Resource diversification	.06	-.04	-.02	.03	.13**	-.05	-.06	-									
9. Restrictive policy environment	.03	-.12**	.03	.03	.16**	.00	.01	.18***	-								
10. Age	.09*	.11**	.03	.02	-.12**	.03	.02	-.18***	-.36***	-							
11. Size	.16***	.35***	-.03	.14**	-.13**	.13**	.12**	-.13**	-.33***	.39***	-						
12. Arts	-.05	-.20***	-.02	-.24***	-.06	-.12**	-.09*	-.04	-.03	-.02	-.20***	-					
13. Education	-.05	.09*	.02	-.05	.00	.01	.00	.02	.03	.05	.00	-.29***	-				
14. Environment	.04	-.02	-.09*	-.09*	.00	-.16***	-.07	.13**	-.11**	-.02	-.06	.39***	-.11**	-			
15. Health	.04	.07	.02	.00	-.16**	.04	.09*	-.11**	-.09*	-.02	.20***	-.14**	-.12**	-.05	-		
16. Public Benefit	.10**	.02	.00	.06	.17***	-.06	.00	.11**	.16**	-.13**	-.13**	-.34***	-.29***	-.13**	-.14**	-	
17. Specialist	.06	.05	.01	.09*	.01	.00	-.07	-.01	.06	.00	.16**	-.49***	.23***	-.20***	-.04	.04	-

***p<.001, **p<.05, *p<.10 (two-tailed tests).

surveys of state and metropolitan nonprofit sectors that find rates of nonprofit advocacy that approach or exceed fifty percent of the sample in their respective studies (e.g., Guo & Saxton, 2010; Mosely, 2010). Table 2 shows the division of the sample between generalists and specialists. More specialists than generalists (53.9% vs. 42.8%) participated in policy advocacy. Table 3 shows the distribution of nonprofits in our study by field of activity, participation in policy advocacy, and focus on serving a specialized population. A majority (54.4%) of the nonprofits in the study serve a specialized population (Table 2), with human service and education nonprofits having the greatest proportion of specialists (Table 3, Column 3). A majority of nonprofits in three fields of activity participated in policy advocacy (Table 3, Column 2): public benefit (68.1%), environment (57.9%), and human services (55.4%). These descriptive results show marked differences in specialists and generalists by nonprofit mission.

Logistic Regression Results

Table 4 provides correlations of the independent variables included in the analysis. Table 5 presents results from logistic regressions explaining nonprofit participation in policy advocacy. Logistic regression is appropriate given the dichotomous nature of our dependent variable, whether or not a nonprofit organization engaged in policy advocacy. With logistic regression, the regression coefficients (B_i) represent the increase in the log odds of the dependent variable. This is in contrast to ordinary least squares regression, where regression coefficients represent direct effects of independent variables on the dependent variable (Menard, 2001). When interpreting logistic regression results, it is often useful to calculate the odds ratio, the exponential function of the regression coefficient (e^{B_i}). The odds ratio is the ratio of the odds of an event (e.g., that a nonprofit organization will engage in policy advocacy) occurring in one group (e.g., nonprofits that have full-time staff), to the odds of the event occurring in another group (e.g., nonprofits that do not have full-time staff), with the other variables in the model held constant. It is often more useful to interpret the odds ratios, as opposed to the regression coefficients, when discussing logistic regression results.

Table 5. Logistic Regressions Predicting Nonprofit Involvement in Policy Advocacy (N=379)

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Odds Ratio	Coefficient (Std. Error)	Odds Ratio	Coefficient (Std. Error)
<i>Rationalization and Professionalization</i>				
501(h) Election	6.26**	1.83 (0.61)	6.32**	1.84 (0.62)
Full-time staff	2.48**	0.91 (0.36)	2.53**	0.93 (0.36)
Management degree	1.94**	0.66 (0.25)	1.94**	0.66 (0.25)
<i>Resource Dependence</i>				
Government funding	2.00**	0.69 (0.28)	2.02**	0.70 (0.28)
Foundation funding	0.97	-0.03 (0.26)	0.97	-0.03 (0.26)
Competition: Govt. funding	1.58**	0.45 (0.17)	1.59**	0.46 (0.17)
Competition: Private funding	0.86	-0.15 (0.17)	0.88	-0.13 (0.18)
Resource diversification	0.82	-0.19 (0.34)	0.85	-0.16 (0.35)
<i>Institutional Environment</i>				
Restrictive policy environment	1.00*	-0.00 (0.00)	0.99*	-0.01 (0.00)
<i>Organizational Characteristics</i>				
Age	1.00	0.00 (0.01)	1.00	0.00 (0.01)
Size	1.00*	0.00 (0.00)	1.00*	0.00 (0.00)
<i>Mission¹</i>				
Arts	0.38**	-0.96 (0.38)	0.49*	-0.72 (0.42)
Education	0.60	-0.51 (0.36)	0.60	-0.52 (0.36)
Environment	5.23**	1.65 (0.59)	5.33**	1.67 (0.59)
Health	0.66	-0.42 (0.55)	0.75	-0.29 (0.56)
Public Benefit	2.22**	0.80 (0.36)	2.42**	0.89 (0.36)
<i>Specialist/Generalist</i>		-	1.63**	0.49 (0.23)
Constant	0.61	-0.50 (1.13)	0.47	-0.75 (1.15)
Log Likelihood Chi-Square ²		438.21		428.16
Degrees of freedom		16		17

**p<.05, *p<.10 (two-tailed tests). ¹Human services is the reference category. ²The chi-square statistic is statistically significant at the .01 level (critical value=10.05, degrees of freedom=1), indicating that Model 2 is a better fit to the data.

Model 1 (Table 5) tests hypotheses concerning rationalization/professionalization, resource dependence, the institutional environment and organizational characteristics. Model 2 tests an additional hypothesis about organizational mission: whether nonprofit organizations that serve a specialized

population are more likely to participate in policy advocacy. An examination of the chi-square statistics for Models 1 and 2 (Table 5, footnote 2) indicates that the addition of the specialist variable improves the fit of the model. By including measures of organizational mission and the indicator of specialization in the regression model, our analysis controls for the effect of specialization on nonprofit engagement in policy advocacy, independent of nonprofit mission. Since the results are consistent across the models and model fit is improved in Model 2, we focus our discussion on Model 2.

In Model 2 (Table 5), we find strong support for the hypotheses concerning the influence of rationalization and professionalization on nonprofit advocacy (H1.1, H1.2, H1.3). Nonprofit organizations that adopt rules concerning the reporting of expenditures on advocacy work (the 501(h) election) are 6.3 times more likely to engage in policy advocacy than nonprofits that do not opt into this set of rules (Odds ratio = $\exp(B[501(h) \text{ Election}]) = \exp(1.84) = 6.32$). Taking the 501(h) election indicates an understanding of the tax treatment of nonprofit lobbying expenditures that may facilitate participation in advocacy more broadly (Bass et al., 2007).

Professionalization is another important predictor of nonprofit advocacy. Nonprofits with a full-time paid staff are 2.5 times more likely to participate in advocacy than nonprofits with part-time or volunteer staffs. The presence of a full-time paid staff indicates an increased capacity to engage in advocacy (Hoefer, 2000). Finally, nonprofit organizations led by executive directors with business or nonprofit management degrees are almost twice as likely to engage in advocacy work (odds ratio = 1.94). Executive directors with management credentials are exposed to a set of professionalized norms concerning policy-making and nonprofit relationships with government that may predispose them to advocacy work. An alternative explanation for our findings concerning rationalization and professionalization may be that nonprofits that are looking to begin or expand their advocacy activities take on professional, full-time staff in order to develop a policy agenda, rather than engage in advocacy due to the presence of staff. In each case, rationalization is a measure of capacity that allows organizations to develop and engage in advocacy work. The analysis indicates that this increased capacity is associated with greater

advocacy, but we do not know the temporal order. Whether (for example) increasing full-time staff precedes or follows nonprofit engagement in advocacy is a question for future research.

In contrast to the support for hypotheses concerning professionalization, we find mixed support for hypotheses drawn from resource dependence theory. Hypotheses concerning government funding (H2.1, H2.3) are supported, while hypotheses concerning foundation funding and resource diversification (H2.2, H2.4, H2.5) are not supported. Nonprofit organizations that identified government grants and contracts as their first or second largest revenue source were twice as likely to engage in advocacy as organizations without a substantial reliance on government funding. This finding concurs with previous research that finds reliance on government funding increases nonprofit advocacy (e.g., Donaldson, 2008; LeRoux, 2007; Mosley, 2010, 2011). Although reliance on government funding increases nonprofit participation in policy advocacy, reliance on foundation funding does not significantly impact nonprofit advocacy.

Interestingly, the importance of government funding is not the full story. We also find that nonprofits reporting higher amounts of competition for government funding were significantly more likely to engage in policy advocacy. This finding suggests that one reason why government-funded nonprofits might participate in advocacy is to distinguish themselves from their competitors in the quest for government support (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009). However, the influence of competition on nonprofit advocacy does not extend to competition for private funding, which does not have a significant impact on advocacy. Finally, our hypothesis that nonprofits with more diversified revenue streams would be more likely to engage in advocacy is not supported. This is curious given previous research that suggests resource diversification may offer nonprofits more independence from resource providers (Bass et al., 2007). To the extent that nonprofit advocacy is an attempt to safeguard existing or to cultivate new sources of government support, it may be that reduced reliance on government funding makes advocacy unnecessary.

We find support for our hypothesis (H3) that the institutional environment at the time of organizational founding

impacts a nonprofit's subsequent engagement in advocacy. Nonprofit organizations founded during the 1990s are slightly less likely to participate in policy advocacy than nonprofits founded at other times. This supports previous findings that the institutional environment can have long-term impacts on advocacy behavior (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007).

We find support for hypotheses related to how organizational characteristics influence advocacy (H4.1, H4.2). Larger nonprofits are significantly more likely to engage in policy advocacy. One interpretation of this finding is that larger organizations possess greater capacity—be it budget, staff, or volunteers—to engage in advocacy work which is typically ancillary to the primary service providing mission of charitable nonprofits. In addition to organizational size, we find that nonprofit mission category matters. The odds ratios in Table 5 indicate that environmental nonprofits are 5.3 times more likely than human service nonprofits to engage in policy advocacy. Similarly, public benefit nonprofits are 2.4 times more likely than human service nonprofits to engage in policy advocacy. Arts nonprofits are half as likely to engage in policy advocacy as human service organizations.

These results concerning the influence of nonprofit mission on advocacy make intuitive sense, since some nonprofits have organizational missions that more easily encompass advocacy work (Smith & Pekkanen, 2012). For example, environmental organizations may engage in advocacy to exert influence over the extensive government regulations that the environmental field experiences (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007). However, it is interesting to note the relatively high levels of policy advocacy reported across other types of nonprofit missions (e.g., Table 3, Column 2: human service: 55.4%, health: 45.0%). Looking to other aspects of organizational mission, such as the nature of the nonprofit service population, might help to explain advocacy by categories of nonprofits that are not statistically significant in the analysis of mission classifications.

We find support for the hypothesis drawn from population ecology (H5) that specialists are more likely than generalists to engage in policy advocacy. The odds ratio indicates that nonprofit organizations that serve specialized populations are 1.6 times more likely to engage in policy advocacy than nonprofits that serve the general population. This finding is important,

as it provides another way to assess the influence of organizational mission on nonprofit advocacy, by examining the narrowness or broadness of a nonprofit's service population. The model results indicate that being a specialist makes it more likely that a nonprofit organization will engage in policy advocacy, controlling for a range of other variables including nonprofit mission. Previous research has also found an association between the narrowness of the interest represented and nonprofit participation in advocacy coalitions (Hojnacki, 1997).

It may be easier for nonprofit organizations serving specialized populations to devote resources to policy advocacy. For such specialist nonprofits, all organizational effort can be expended on behalf of one set of constituents. In contrast, generalist nonprofit organizations that serve the population at large have to contend with multiple constituent groups with divergent, possibly conflicting, interests. This might necessitate that a nonprofit generalist prioritize among the interests of various groups, and justify these choices to organizational stakeholders (e.g., donors, board members, etc.).

Implications

We find that policy advocacy by charitable nonprofits is explained by whether a nonprofit serves a specialized population alongside factors drawn from organizational theory, including increased rationalization and professionalization, reliance on resource providers, the institutional policy environment, and organizational attributes like size and mission. These findings suggest important implications concerning the study of nonprofit advocacy, the evolving role of charitable nonprofit organizations in public policy, and how the engagement of nonprofit specialists in policy advocacy might be influenced by the resource environment.

Incorporate Specialist/Generalist Orientation in Studies of Nonprofit Advocacy

One implication of our analysis is that future research should consider the ways in which the broad or narrow scope of nonprofits' service population conditions their involvement in advocacy and other organizational activities. Mission is an

unquestionably important part of a nonprofit's decision to devote resources to policy advocacy. However, some scholars have raised concerns about nonprofit classifications for understanding the relationship between organizational mission and advocacy (Boris & Mosher-Williams, 1998). Distinguishing between nonprofit specialists and generalists underscores how an additional aspect of organizational mission, the narrow or broad scope of nonprofit services, impacts engagement in policy advocacy. Our study demonstrates that the nature of a nonprofit's service population plays an important role in an organization's decision to advocate.

Policy Advocacy as an Adjunct to Service Provision

An additional implication of this research involves the prevailing view of charitable nonprofits as service providers. Many scholars note the important role that nonprofit organizations serve as intermediaries between citizens and the state, building social capital in communities and empowering residents (e.g., Berry, 2005; Cohen, 2001; LeRoux, 2007; Marwell, 2004; Smith & Pekkanen, 2012; Warren, 2004). While the nonprofit sector increasingly shoulders responsibility for delivering public services (Salamon, 1995), our research joins other work that shows a substantial number of charitable nonprofits are taking on the additional responsibility of policy advocacy. In particular, we show that specialist nonprofit organizations serving narrowly targeted populations are significantly more likely to undertake policy advocacy on behalf of their constituents than are nonprofits serving the general population. As nonprofit organizations have become an integral part of the welfare state through contracting out, this research suggests that policy advocacy on behalf of specific populations may have also been outsourced alongside service provision.

Previous research explores how nonprofits can be conceptualized as interest groups (Berry & Arons, 2003) and how the various constituencies of nonprofits (e.g., clients, employees) also comprise communities of interests (Clarke, 2000). Our research compliments scholarship suggesting that a hybrid form of nonprofit organization is emerging. For example, Minkoff's (2002) study of advocacy by national nonprofit membership organizations found that these organizations increasingly incorporated service provision into their activities as a way

to promote the political and social rights of their minority members. We reach similar conclusions about the blending of service and advocacy by charitable nonprofit organizations, though our research is grounded in a study of service providers that incorporate advocacy into their work (as opposed to membership organizations that incorporate services alongside their advocacy work). Our findings indicate that nonprofit organizations respond to the needs of their constituents by supplementing service provision with advocacy. This finding may be especially salient for specialist organizations that serve historically disadvantaged client bases.

Resource Environments, Specialization, and Policy Advocacy

A further implication of this research involves predilections from population ecology theory concerning how specialists and generalist organizations fare in turbulent resource environments. As previously discussed, our findings show that nonprofit specialists are more likely to engage in policy advocacy than are nonprofit generalists. Practically, this may mean that nonprofit organizations serving minority concerns are more likely to engage in advocacy. Population ecology theory predicts that specialists will thrive in stable resource environments but may falter, relative to generalist organizations, in turbulent environments (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). This suggests that nonprofit specialist organizations may be best positioned to engage in policy advocacy when faced with stable resource environments. However, much policy change is prompted by restrictions in public or private resources. For example, Martin, Levey, and Cawley (2012) describe a “new normal” as state and local governments, operating with diminished resources, increasingly turn to the nonprofit sector as they seek to maintain service provision and to lower administrative costs. For those who see promise in our findings that nonprofits serving specialized populations are more likely to engage in policy advocacy, there should also be a note of caution, as population ecology theory establishes that these organizations (specialists) face greater challenges in difficult resource environments—the precise conditions when policy advocacy is often most necessary to safeguard funding, or to protect the interests of nonprofit constituents.

Study Limitations

The analysis in this paper should be framed by some caveats. Since the focus of this research is service-providing charitable nonprofits, the data from this study do not permit us to assess the advocacy activity of smaller grassroots nonprofits that comprise an important part of the nonprofit sector (Smith, 1997, 2000). In addition, this study is based on a sample of nonprofits located Boston, Massachusetts. While much research on the nonprofit sector is based on analyses of specific regions (e.g., Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001), our study's focus on one city may limit the generalizability of our findings.

Conclusion

This paper examines explanations for the engagement of charitable nonprofit organizations in policy advocacy. Our findings expand previous research on nonprofit advocacy by applying a population ecology lens, which indicates that nonprofit organizations serving specialized populations are more likely to engage in policy advocacy. Population ecology theorizes that specialist organizations should outperform generalist organizations in unstable environments (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Future studies of nonprofit advocacy might investigate how the policy advocacy of specialists and generalists nonprofits is shaped by favorable and unfavorable policy environments. Finally, additional research on nonprofit advocacy could investigate the strategies and resources used in policy advocacy of specialists and generalists nonprofits.

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