Voluntas (2022) 33:1051–1063
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00445-4

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RESEARCH PAPERS

How a Nonprofitness Orientation Influences Collective Civic Action: The Effects of Civic Engagement and Political Participation

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Accepted: 7 December 2021 / Published online: 7 January 2022
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Abstract This research addresses the question of how the institutional frame of "nonprofitness" shapes the civic activities pursued by community-based nonprofit organizations (CBOs). Specifically, we study how an organizational commitment and orientation to traditional nonprofit values affect activities that foster collective civic action. We draw on the theoretical frame of institutionalism to examine the role of CBOs as organizational actors that foster civic health through their collective civic action. Our research employs a structural equation model to test associations among several constructs, highlighting the interaction of key variables and activities. Based on our analysis of original survey data, we argue that nonprofits develop a civic capacity through the praxis of nonprofit values, civic health activities, and collective civic action. Our findings extend existing research through new measurement tools that capture the institutional orientation of community-based nonprofits that shapes the nature of their involvement in civil society and collective civic action.

Keywords Civic health · Institutionalism · Nonprofitness · Collective civic action · Community-based organizations

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Introduction

Scholars have long considered nonprofit organizations to be a mainstay of healthy democracy. They have been a locus for fostering the skills necessary for active citizenship and where individuals are able to engage with others to address community issues (Barber, 2004; Dodge & Ospina, 2016; Skocpol, 2003). Among community-based nonprofit organizations (CBOs), extensive evidence has been provided of their role in creating community bonds (Mathews, 2020; Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003), generating trust among individuals (Fernandez et al., 2019; Guo & Musso, 2007; LeRoux, 2007; Putnam, 2000), and developing connections with other organizations through work in the community (Hwang & Suárez, 2019; Schneider, 2007). However, researchers have also documented a progressive decline in the civic capacity generated by the nonprofit sector since the 1950s (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Putnam, 2000), including a shift away from community engagement and community-focused activities such as advocacy and education (Alexander & Fernandez, 2020; Skocpol, 2003; Uslaner & Brown, 2005), limited or niche representation of clients (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999; Zhang & Guo, 2021), and inconsistent community engagement, especially among individuals who differ from existing members or clients (Theiss-Morse & Hibbing, 2005).

The decline in civic capacity has become a focus of research on all matters of civil society. In 2017, a report by the National Conference on Citizenship, entitled *Civic Deserts: America's Civic Health Challenge,* highlighted the lack of places that provide "adequate opportunities for civic engagement" such as spaces for "discussing issues, addressing problems together, and forming relationships for mutual support" (Atwell et al., 2017, p. 5). In short, the vanishing public sphere has made it difficult for individuals to engage with others around issues facing their communities (Rheingold, 2008). Other studies confirm that the form of participation engendered by nonprofits has changed in character and may vary from direct, indirect, or none at all (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). For example, a study conducted in Japan found that low social trust and disconnectedness have reduced civic engagement, especially among the economically disadvantaged who are "less likely to participate in communal actions and, thereby, unable to voice their needs" (Hommerich, 2015, p. 63). In South Korea, researchers found that nonprofit civic participation may result in some forms of political participation, but the context of participation with different types of nonprofits shapes outcomes (Jeong, 2013). A similar study conducted in the USA, drawing on the World Values Survey data, confirmed that certain types of voluntary organizations (e.g., art, music, educational, or environmental organizations) are more likely to foster the political participation of members (Lee, 2020). These examples reveal that there are nuances and complexities to how nonprofit organizations contribute to active citizenry through their expressive roles (Dodge & Ospina, 2016; Fernandez & Alexander, 2017; Frumkin, 2005; Lu, 2015). The constant across these studies is the historic value of the nonprofit role in building trust, connection, and a sense of community, itself—one worth exploring from an organizational perspective.

The following research project takes on the question of how the institutional frame of "nonprofitness" shapes the civic activities pursued by nonprofit organizations. Specifically, we consider how an organizational commitment and orientation to traditional nonprofit values predispose organizations to pursue collective civic action on behalf of members, clients, and stakeholders. We draw on the theoretical frame of institutionalism to examine the role of nonprofits as organizational actors that foster civic health, an aggregate term for social capital, civic engagement, and political participation, through their collective civic action. Our research employs a structural equation model to test associations among several constructs, highlighting the relationships among key variables and activities. Based on our analysis of original survey data collected in the metropolitan area of San Antonio, Texas, and 13 surrounding counties, we argue that nonprofits develop a civic capacity through the praxis of nonprofit values, civic health activities, and collective civic action. Our findings contribute to existing research by deepening our understanding of how the institutional orientation of community-based nonprofits shapes the nature of their involvement in civil society and collective civic action. Specifically, we provide an expanded conceptualization of civic health at the organizational level and a path to measure the component parts. Through application of these measures, we find a nonprofitness orientation is associated with the manifestations of civic health in the work of nonprofits that then supports collective civic action in the community. The importance of fostering these activities within organizations is critical to preserving and advancing civil society and supporting democracy more broadly.

Nonprofits and Civic Action

Over the past several decades, scholars have debated the substance and quality of the civic role of nonprofit organizations in the USA and abroad. However, as evidenced in the above studies and those produced throughout the USA from the National Conference on Citizenship, the research tends to capture measures of individual civic activity and engagement with nonprofits, and how these activities foster various components of civic activity among individuals (e.g., voting habits and political engagement with elected officials, engagement with community groups, volunteering time, and donations to nonprofits). We advance the argument that a neglected element in studies of civic activity to date is the role played by community-based organizations (CBOs) as institutional actors that provide the space and foster the mechanisms for individuals to engage in their community. CBOs are a viable representation of the civic health of a community because they are a relational, accessible, and trusted form of local governance that provides citizens with an opportunity to shape their communities (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). CBOs contribute to civic health by fulfilling a generative role when they contribute to the arena for active citizen engagement, and they also fulfill a mediating role when they give voice to community concerns and shape policy in the interorganizational arena occupied by other organizational actors—public, private, and nonprofit (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977). For example, local public library or public school foundations generate active citizen engagement when they hold meetings to gain feedback and insights from the community or sponsor events or fund-raising drives to gather financial support for additional public resources. They may also carry out a mediating role in communicating with the city or school board to change an after-school policy affecting parents and students, advocate for budget changes

that shift money back to teachers or libraries, or work with other community groups to address homeless student needs.

The current research takes an institutional theory perspective on the role of CBOs. Institutions are distinct from rational, means-oriented organizations in that they have become adaptive and cooperative systems that embody cultural values and moral commitments of a society (Scott & Davis, 2007). As value-driven organizations, CBOs are structural representations of human agents and their actions; they are manifestations of their communities (Mosley, 2020). We argue that organizations and agents are mutually constitutive (Giddens, 1976) in that the structural conditions established by organizations generate both the opportunities and constraints for individual action by creating common frames of meaning, in this case, by shaping active citizenry engaged in addressing community issues. In turn, individual members shape organizations of which they are a part. Their ability to act as institutional representations of communities within the broader public sphere has been supported through both empirical and theoretical work (Fernandez & Alexander, 2017; Lee, 2020; Sampson et al., 2005).

The interdependence of healthy associational life and the health of a democracy has led to a recognition and appreciation for the distinctive values that have defined the nonprofit sector in an institutional sense. These are the same values that have enabled organizations to act on behalf of and with clients in addressing issues across communities (Handy et al., 2014; Schneider, 2007), improved and provided a client-centered service experience (Alexander & Nank, 2009; Mosley, 2020), and practiced internal modes of democratic processes that transform individuals into citizens (King & Griffin, 2019). This institutional value set includes their expressive dimension, the values, beliefs, and ideas embodied in the mission and activities that give meaning to organizations for members and positions them as actors within civil society (Frumkin, 2005).

While fostering civic activity among individuals is considered a valuable outcome of nonprofit work, it is also manifest in the institutional role of organizations as actors themselves that generate bonds of trust, engage with other organizations in pursuit of community goals, and participate in various forms of political action (e.g., attending community meetings, community education, advocacy). The neglected orientation of civic health, including organizations and organizational activities, has more recently garnered recognition (Buffardi et al., 2017; Chin, 2018; Hwang & Suárez, 2019). To that end, this research furthers a line of inquiry that seeks to measure the civic contribution of organizations to complement the existing research on individual contributions to civic health within a community. Essentially, we shift our focus from what individual community members do to what the organizations foster through their role as institutional actors.

Conceptual Background and Hypotheses Development

We explore how a "nonprofitness" institutional frame predisposes CBOs to engage in collective civic action. We begin first by defining collective civic action and our hypothesis that a nonprofitness orientation and organizational engagement in civic health activities will influence an organization's participation in collective civic action. Such engagement, either ongoing or episodic, can lead to political participation among individuals who are first engaged by the nonprofit organization through their programs and then asked to act in the political sphere (Lee, 2020).

Collective Civic Action (CCA)

Collective action occurs when individuals with shared interests join to achieve a common goal (Johnson & Prakash, 2007). Organizations are most commonly the locus of collective action because they provide "the infrastructure for initiating and coordinating action…expend resources to overcome obstacles to collective action, and they provide a context for people's attachments to collective goals and processes" (Flanagin et al., 2006, p. 32). Prior research supports the focus on organizations as primary actors, as collective action responses tend to vary based on the nature of the problem to be solved, which results in the employment of different institutional mechanisms (Olivier, 2019). A subset of collective action responses belongs to Lichterman and Eliasoph's (2014) conceptualization of collective civic action, which involves "civic actors [that] imagine themselves as members of some larger, shared society rather than purely as a collection of self-improving individuals…with no shared mission of improving a society beyond the confines of the group" (p. 809). CCA therefore focuses on broader issues in the community, such as the prevalence of homelessness, the strained system of foster care, or animal rescue services in an overpopulated area. It may be for purposes of social change and protest, demonstrations, broader ongoing community initiatives, or to generate community awareness of issues facing groups or subgroups within a community (e.g., Black Lives Matter and police brutality, housing disparities, manifestations of institutional racism within all manner of systems). CCA occurs through the coordinated efforts of various organizations that seek to achieve a goal that is beyond the ability of an individual organization; it involves an ongoing or

consistent engagement rather than a onetime endeavor (Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014; Suárez, 2020).

While research shows that CCA efforts have been differentially successful (depending on community make-up and heterogeneity of individuals and organizations), it tends to be more effective when a critical mass of individuals see a problem similarly and where organizations are able to coordinate resources (Longhofer et al., 2019). CCA includes the following attributes: a public focus, it relies on the coordinated efforts of multiple organizational actors (actors may be cross-sectoral), and it involves some degree of organizational representation of the mission and clients in the broader sphere. Given this dynamic of external focus, we argue that engagement in CCA is a manifestation of the mediating role of nonprofit organizations. While existing research explores community-level factors that contribute to collective civic action (Sampson et al., 2005), our research is focused on determining what organizational factors contribute to nonprofits engaging in collective civic action. We first examine the institutional value orientation within nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofitness Orientation

Nonprofit services are often framed in terms of moral work where the values and goals of the sector shape and motivate how the work is carried out (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2014). Research demonstrates that nonprofit workers, and the public alike, view the nonprofit space as something distinctive and trustworthy when compared to business and government work that occurs in the USA and beyond (Becker et al., 2020; Lapworth et al., 2018; Park et al., 2018; Xu, 2020). Much of this distinctiveness is attributed to the public benefits created as nonprofits fulfill their expressive and instrumental roles in society (Moulton & Eckerd, 2012). An underlying assumption regarding the nonprofit sector is that it builds upon normative traditions around public benefit, social capital, and services to others that are observed in organizational behavior. Xu (2020) calls for a systemic understanding of nonprofitness that accounts for the "moral and cultural origins of 'nonprofitness' and then considers the theoretical interactions between service areas and nonprofitness" (p. 1306). These moral and cultural roots are embedded in institutions—organizations and their respective fields—that establish and promote order through experience, social obligation, and shared understanding (Scott & Davis, 2007). Using an institutional logic framework, we seek to unpack how core sectoral values associated with an organization, what we term a nonprofitness orientation, in turn influence nonprofit activities to promote civic health within their communities.

Institutional logics provide the broader milieu within which organizations operate (Friedland & Alford, 1991). They in turn affect practices, decision-making, sensemaking, collective mobilization, and organizational identity (Albrecht, 2018; Thornton et al., 2012). They allow us to conceptualize nonprofits along a continuum where different logics (e.g., profession, democracy, the state) coexist and evolve over time as organizations shift in how they function (Knutsen & Brock, 2014; Skelcher & Smith, 2014). Using an institutional logics approach, Robichau et al. (2015) argue that determining a nonprofitness orientation is a matter of degree to which an organization is affected by moral authority and nonprofit values. As nonprofits espouse varying levels of expressive and instrumental dimensions infused with core sector values, organizational decision-making and management follows. The distinctive work of the nonprofit sector encompasses values that drive action toward social change, representation, charitableness, innovation, and service provision (see Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Frumkin, 2005; Moulton & Eckerd, 2012). But how does an understanding of the sector's purpose play out in practice? In a comparative study of fair trade nonprofits and businesses, Child et al. (2016) found that normative and cultural–cognitive scripts of practitioners toward sectoral orientations continue to play a prominent part in shaping workers perceptions of how to behave and view their workplaces. To this point, we examine to what extent agreement with a nonprofitness orientation influences organizational activities. We expect that as a nonprofitness orientation increases, based on organizational alignment with core nonprofit values, the organization will demonstrate activities that foster civic health within their communities.

H1 A nonprofitness orientation is positively associated with community and individual engagement activities of the organization.

H2 A nonprofitness orientation is positively associated with political participation activities of the organization.

Civic Health

Civic health is an umbrella term used to measure the wellbeing of public life. It references three aspects of civil society: social capital, civic engagement, and political participation. While the term has been readily applied to individual activity in the public sphere (NCoC, 2006), we apply it to nonprofits as they are engaged in both the generative work of fostering associational life and the mediating work of acting in the interest of their members in the interorganizational environment (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977). In a generative role, nonprofits are focused on carrying out their mission by engaging their clients to build trust and a shared understanding of issues facing clients and community (i.e., social capital). This may include

opportunities for clients and the community to engage, fostering awareness and discussion of issues facing the community (i.e., civic engagement), and encouraging client participation in representing their needs in the broader community (i.e., political participation) (Fernandez et al., 2019). For example, a Women's Community Center may hold support groups for women who have children with autism, and they may also hold seminars on autism awareness in the community and work with clients to represent the needs of autistic children in the public school system.

In a mediating role, nonprofit activity moves outside the organization to foster bridging social capital among other organizations to address issues of shared importance in the community through advocacy and representation. Hwang and Suárez (2019) identified this dynamic in a study of local nonprofits in the San Francisco Bay area, where increased collaboration among organizations and "embeddedness in the external environment facilitates nonprofit advocacy, which involves reaching out to and mobilizing other organizations for a greater cause" (p. 102). In the interorganizational environment then, nonprofits can represent clients' concerns, work with other organizations to address issues facing the broader community, and even influence local policy by representing community concerns among other institutions. Accordingly, in their mediating role, the Women's Community Center may address the challenges of families with autism by working with the local school system, the public library or other community and recreational organizations to foster the coordination of services or educational offerings in multiple settings. We expect that an organization's support for engaging in and promoting civic health activities, including individual and community engagement and political participation through creating greater awareness and opportunities to engage in advocacy, will lead to engagement in collective civic action within the broader community (i.e., addressing broader issues with other organizations).

H3 Community and individual engagement efforts undertaken by the organization are positively associated with collective civic action efforts.

H4 Political participation efforts undertaken by the organization are positively associated with collective civic action efforts.

Participating Nonprofit Organizations: Data and Organizational Measures

A "state of the nonprofit sector" survey was conducted in South Texas in an area that included the city of San Antonio and the 13 counties surrounding the metropolitan region. The primary intent of the survey was to take stock of the nonprofit community in coordination with the local Nonprofit Council to equip funders, community leaders, and other stakeholders with information to understand and better support the nonprofit community. The survey instrument consisted of five sections that addressed general organizational information, descriptive data regarding programs and services, financial information, organizational activities with regard to civic health, nonprofit values, and unmet needs. The online survey was distributed using Qualtrics. Respondents, typically the executive director or senior point of contact within the organization, received via email an introductory letter indicating the purpose of the survey, a survey link, and a list of information required to answer the questions. In all, the survey was sent to 1,310 email addresses and a total of 552 of emails were opened. Efforts were undertaken to foster participation in the survey. At the end of six weeks 279 organizations had completed the survey in its entirety (21% response rate). A challenge to generating a greater response rate was the lengthy amount of time required to complete the survey (more than 30 min).

A number of organizational descriptive variables were included in the survey to gain insight into the types of organizations participating. The organizations participating in the current investigation primarily served one county (54.40%) in the metropolitan region and were largely engaged in projects, issues, and activities other than human services (62.60%). These types of organizations included: arts and culture, animal rights and rescue, social services, and environmental sustainability. The median age of the organization was 19 years, and the mean number of full-time employees was 29.10. Information regarding organizational characteristics of the 279 organizations participating in the survey is presented in Table 1. To obtain the most accurate financial data available on the organizations, we used IRS tax form 990 data to verify financial reporting.

Survey Measures

Four scales were used to test the hypotheses developed for the path model (see Fig. 1). For each of the four scales, organizational participants were asked to "Indicate how well the following statements describe your organization's work" for the items included in each scale. A seven-point Likert-type scale was used for participants to rate each

Table 1 Participating organization characteristics

Characteristic	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Organization Age	28.86	31.30	0	151
Total Annual Revenue	$4.20 M	$16.83 M	$500.00	$245 M
Total Annual Expenses	$3.98 M	$16.37 M	$650.00	$242 M
Full-Time Employees	29.10	76.95	0	617
Counties Served	3.67	4.25	1	13

n = 279; all dollar amounts are in US$

item. Rating anchors ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The measures were derived from and are congruent with previous studies on nonprofitness and civic action (Fernandez & Alexander, 2017; Robichau et al., 2015). Below each individual measure is described.

Nonprofitness Orientation

Nonprofitness is a composite scale of five items pertaining to agreement with statements about the work and values of the nonprofit. Respondents were asked how well the following describe your organization's work: protecting individual and community values, experimenting with innovations in programs, driving social change, serving the poor or underrepresented, and providing supplements to government or business. The scale was used (and developed) in research conducted by Robichau and Fernandez (2017) to investigate sector influences on nonprofit organizations. The scale has also been used to study marketization strategies of nonprofit organizations (Robichau & Wang, 2018).

Individual and Community Engagement

Individual and community engagement is the first component of civic health, combining measures of social capital and civic engagement. Past research has indicated that social capital and civic engagement are closely entwined and harder to separate when applied to practical activities of nonprofit work (Fernandez et al., 2019), especially when considering the movement from building trust to activating civic engagement (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). To measure this component, we used six items on statements about engaging clients and the community as well as creating awareness of client needs and relevant community issues to stakeholders (Fernandez & Alexander, 2017). A sample item is, "Hold meetings, events, or activities that engage clients and members of the broader community (those not directly served by your nonprofit)."

Political Participation

The second component of civic health is measured using three items about the organization's political participation, including representing client needs to government and within the broader interorganizational setting and articulating local policy responses to issues that may impact clients (Fernandez & Alexander, 2017). Political participation encompasses various types of advocacy, including representing interests of clients, (LeRoux & Goerdel, 2009) at both the local and social level, but also in the larger policy arena (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). A sample item is, "Represents client interests to governmental agencies."

Collective Civic Action

Collective civic action was measured using two items that addressed different ways nonprofits can interact within the

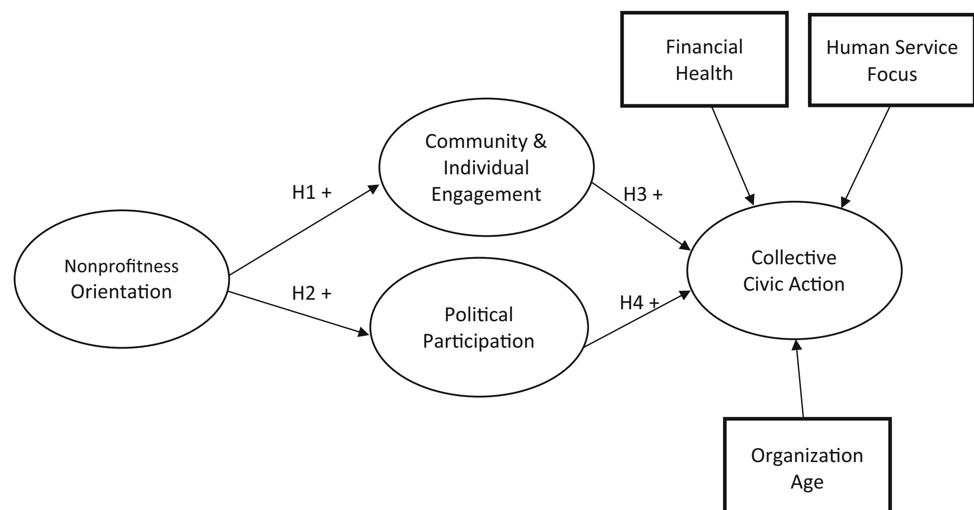

Fig. 1 Hypothesized relationships

interorganizational environment (Sampson et al., 2005). This set included (1) engagement with other organizations to address broader issues in the community and (2) promoting causes or policies on behalf of clients and communities. These questions indicate how the organization is involved in interorganizational collaboration (Lu, 2018) for purposes of addressing broader issues in the community.

Control Variables

In this study, we use three control variables to account for organizational age, whether there is a human service focus, and a measure of financial health of the organization. Organizational age is used as an indication of organizational resilience (Hasenfeld & Schmid, 1989; Simon, Donovan, and Andrews, 2001) in that younger organizations are more likely to fail, and those that are more established tend to be in a more stable stage in their life cycle. Research indicates that organizational age influences an organization's ability to engage in civic activities, especially regarding advocacy and collaborative work (Simon and Donovan 2001). We also accounted for whether an organization is human service-oriented, as these organizations tend to engage in more collaboration, political participation, and advocacy (Lu, 2015). A measure of the financial health of organizations was calculated by dividing the nonprofit's expenses by its revenue. This variable provides a contemporaneous measure of financial health (Keating et al., 2005).

Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations for all survey items. To test the hypothesized relationships, we employed structural equation modeling (SEM) using SPSS AMOS with maximum likelihood estimation. There has been some discussion in the literature with respect to utilizing ordinal and categorical data with SEM (Ba et al., 2021; Beauducel & Herzberg, 2006). Our review of the recent nonprofit literature revealed that our approach to using SEM to test our hypotheses is commonly utilized and consistent with current analytic practice (e.g., Peng & Liang, 2019; Wang & Ki, 2018). Multiple studies and commentaries have confirmed that the use of data of this type is appropriate with SEM (Kline, 2016; Sullivan & Artino, 2013). To test our hypotheses, we examined both the overall fit of the model and the parameter estimates of the structural paths. To determine appropriate model fit, we used the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR; Hu & Bentler, 1999), root means square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990), and the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990). The fit indices suggest our hypothesized model fit the data well ($\chi^2_{136} = 381.76$; $p < 0.01$; SRMR = 0.07; RMSEA = 0.08; CFI = 0.90). The standardized path estimates for the latent variables in our model are shown in Fig. 2.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that nonprofitness orientation is positively associated with community and individual engagement undertaken by the organization. The standardized path coefficient from nonprofit orientation to community and individual engagement was both positive and statistically significant (0.72; $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that as nonprofitness orientation increases, organizations are more likely to demonstrate engagement with individual clients and stakeholders and with the broader community, thus supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicts nonprofitness orientation is positively associated with political participation undertaken by the organization. The standardized path coefficient from nonprofit orientation to political participation was both positive and statistically significant (0.84; $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that as nonprofitness orientation increases within an organization, organizations are more likely to demonstrate engagement in political participation and advocacy, thus providing support for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicts community and individual engagement activities undertaken by the organization are positively associated with collective civic action efforts. The standardized path coefficient from community and individual engagement to collective civic action was both positive and significant (0.42; $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that as community and individual engagement activities increase, so will agreement with collective civic action efforts undertaken within the organization, thus supporting Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 predicts political participation efforts undertaken by the organization are positively associated with collective action efforts. The standardized path coefficient from political participation to collective civic action was both positive and significant (0.80; $p < 0.05$). This finding provides evidence that as political participation activities are undertaken, that collective civic action activities undertaken by the organization will increase, thus providing support for Hypothesis 4.

Discussion

In this investigation, we investigated the factors that contribute to CBOs engaging in collective civic action, or work that occurs in the broader, interorganizational environment to address issues across the community. We considered the nonprofitness orientation of organizations as indicated in survey responses, which reflects a high level of agreement with traditional sector values, such as

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. NP1	4.97	1.91									
2. NP2	5.84	1.46	.49								
3. NP3	5.52	1.61	.55	.67							
4. NP4	6.23	1.47	.41	.59	.52						
5. NP5	5.89	1.59	.57	.51	.48	.62					
6. CIE1	5.89	1.47	.30	.45	.29	.32	.31				
7. CIE2	5.40	1.69	.19	.37	.29	.19	.17	.67			
8. CIE3	5.57	1.53	.40	.42	.53	.33	.35	.49	.52		
9. CIE4	5.71	1.43	.32	.43	.42	.29	.27	.57	.55	.64	
10. CIE5	5.15	2.10	.13	.25	.28	.02	.07	.38	.45	.40	.38
11. CIE6	5.19	1.73	.26	.42	.38	.26	.16	.47	.46	.47	.47
12. PP1	4.88	1.95	.42	.35	.32	.33	.30	.33	.23	.40	.31
13. PP2	5.30	1.82	.38	.45	.39	.42	.34	.39	.33	.49	.38
14. PP3	4.91	1.88	.43	.42	.47	.37	.93	.29	.21	.51	.33
15. CCA1	5.91	1.38	.34	.53	.46	.46	.35	.53	.43	.53	.50
16. CCA2	5.52	1.66	.53	.49	.55	.52	.53	.33	.27	.53	.37
17. FH	1.67	8.99	.01	.06	−.03	−.08	.06	.05	.01	.08	.04
18. AGE	28.86	31.30	.04	−.03	−.10	.02	.02	.04	.02	.05	.01
19. HS	.37	.48	.15	.07	.08	.15	.09	.01	−.04	.03	−.05

Variable	Mean	SD	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. NP1	4.97	1.91										
2. NP2	5.84	1.46										
3. NP3	5.52	1.61										
4. NP4	6.23	1.47										
5. NP5	5.89	1.59										
6. CIE1	5.89	1.47										
7. CIE2	5.40	1.69										
8. CIE3	5.57	1.53										
9. CIE4	5.71	1.43										
10. CIE5	5.15	2.10										
11. CIE6	5.19	1.73	.51									
12. PP1	4.88	1.95	.15	.28								
13. PP2	5.30	1.82	.16	.40	.59							
14. PP3	4.91	1.88	.20	.35	.69	.67						
15. CCA1	5.91	1.38	.29	.46	.50	.53	.49					
16. CCA2	5.52	1.66	.20	.26	.52	.48	.55	.42				
17. FH	1.67	8.99	.07	.08	.04	.05	.04	.02	−07			
18. AGE	28.86	31.30	−.08	−.04	.15	.11	.07	.03	.01	−.00		
19. HS	.37	.48	−.10	−.03	.10	.08	.09	.05	.09	.05	.08	

Correlations greater than .12 are significant at $p < .05$. Variables: *NP* Nonprofitness Orientation; *CIE* Community and Individual Engagement; *PP* Political Participation; *CCA* Collective Civic Action; *FH* Financial Health; *AGE* Organization Age; *HS* Human Service Organization. See Appendix for item description

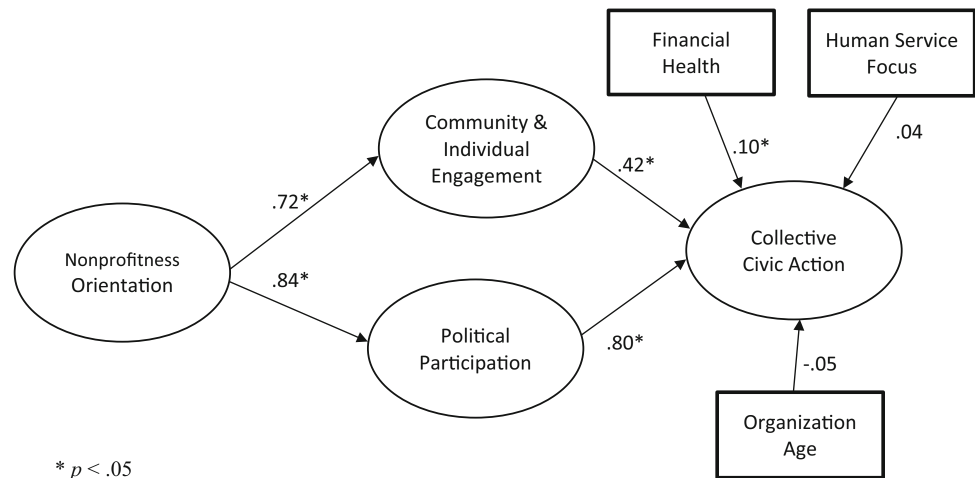

Fig. 2 Standardized structural relationships

charitableness, representation, social change, and innovation. Agreement with these values was strongly associated with various types of civic health activities undertaken by the organization and in turn was associated with measures of collective civic action. As an example of these relationships, we observed that in the South Texas region where this study was conducted, there exists one of the highest populations of children in the child welfare system in the state. Among organizations in the study that focus on child welfare, leaders indicated in their mission and programs various efforts to act with other mental health organizations, family counseling and therapy nonprofits, as well as faith-based organizations, to address the growing needs of families impacted by crisis and trauma as well as creating greater awareness of the need for families that can help care for children removed from their home. These activities were complemented by their orientation to work with family courts to enhance policy involving their responsiveness to children and families in the system. Their commitment to undertaking these activities also demonstrated a community-wide effort to support families, youth in schools, and future parents to prevent families from ever having to engage with the child welfare system. This example involves multiple nonprofit actors representing different aspects of the child welfare system.

Our findings lend credence to how the presence of key nonprofit values is associated with organizational practices that support beneficiaries and citizens alike. It is these kinds of value-driven orientations to serve others, especially when government services are insufficient, that is one of the defining features of the nonprofit sector at large (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2014). The direct association between a nonprofitness orientation to community and individual engagement and to political participation suggests a path from mission and work *within* an organization to mission and work *beyond* the organization. This path is similar to what researchers have observed among nonprofits in their interorganizational work through collaborative governance regimes (Mosely, 2020), collective impact models (Cooper, 2017), and the rise of coalitions and networks (Cooper & Shumate, 2012). What we observed is that value orientations and internal activities exist to achieve work with other organizations and ultimately undertake collective civic action.

The theoretical implications from the results of our study are noteworthy for several reasons. This research aligns well with the growing interest in institutional logics of the nonprofit sector (Albrecht, 2018; Child et al., 2016; Pache & Santos, 2013). The fundamental idea that norms around what values and behaviors are acceptable in the nonprofit field indicate both a general recognition toward professionalization among workers and expectations the general public has of the sector, as well as the need for research that addresses what sociology and organizational theory scholars have long speculated to be true: shared understandings, logics of action, workplace identities, and beliefs shape organizational practices in tangible ways (Scott & Davis, 2007; Thornton et al., 2012). The institutional logics governing the nonprofit sector in general are areas to be nurtured as critical to healthy societies. Within nonprofit organizations, institutional logics function as a powerful though sometimes unconscious force, influencing the behaviors and meaning actors draw upon as they commit to carrying out the organizational mission and serving others. We recognize the plurality of nonprofit logics (e.g., social welfare vs. commercial or the state vs. religion) as challenging to distinguish between (see Knutsen & Brock, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013), and we agree with researchers who see that this plurality creates agency among actors that needs to be examined more narrowly (Skelcher & Smith, 2014). Arguably, these varying logics of action are what contribute to nonprofits' civic identities, including their orientation toward civic work and their capacity to undertake such efforts (Handy et al., 2014;

Scott & Lane, 2000). Notwithstanding the limitations of funding from both governments and private grants that may prohibit or deter organizations from collective civic action, CBOs are inclined toward their institutional role in the interest of their stakeholders, however, limited that may be at certain points in time.

The current investigation enhances our understanding of a nonprofit's civic identity. The civic identity of an organization tends to be highly theorized in the research, with many overlapping and consequential dimensions, but in a practical, even measurable sense, it has been harder to distinguish. Civic work is often composed of the activities that go unfunded and unaccounted for in the year-to-year evaluations of nonprofit work (with the exception of purely civic organizations or those nonprofits whose sole purpose is advocacy). While annual evaluations focus on program outcomes, organizational performance, measures of financial viability, and managerial capacity, it is the influence that organizational processes have on engaging stakeholders and addressing broader issues that can often be undetectable (and unnoticed) by funders. We suggest that there are differences in "measuring to prove" what nonprofits do versus "measuring to improve" how communities are made better off (Suykens et al., 2021, p. 20); a distinction no less complicated by the very work it takes to do so and the complexity of measuring such efforts. We aimed to take an initial step in measuring a civic identity by considering organizational values and the composition of activities within CBOs that contribute to engagement outside their organizations to make communities better off. Through this study and the proposed model, we suggest that it is not only how organizational values and activities align, but how clients, stakeholders, and other organizations are engaged in representing individual interests and those of others in the community that are impacted by broader, complex social issues. These activities are critical to substantiating the civic identity of nonprofits in the community, especially among community-based nonprofits that conduct their work within a larger ecology of community issues.

The results of this study have several practical implications for community-based organizations and their leadership. First, organizational leaders should make efforts to measure and report the work they are doing outside the organization that may not be directly related to a specific program, or initiative, but that contributes to the broader civic mission of the organization, nonetheless. Second, we encourage representatives within CBOs to identify and then work to tackle community-wide issues that impact stakeholders and the broader community, such that a collective response is perceived as necessary and then undertaken. For example, an interfaith social services agency may join with an immigrant resource center in advocating for a new local police policy concerning the arrests and detentions of immigrants, in an effort to reduce deportations and family separations. Efforts such as these are beneficial for multiple stakeholders and should be considered as meaningful contributions of the organization's instrumental and expressive roles in serving a community (Mosley, 2020). Third, our results suggest a mindset toward the core values of nonprofit organizations, a nonprofitness orientation, is not enough to result in collective civic action. Organizational leaders must task their staff with engaging individuals in both the activities of the organization and in the broader community, as well as encouraging stakeholders to represent themselves among policy bodies (state or local level). In other words, the activities which foster the civic health of the organization, and the professional orientation of leadership and staff toward core nonprofit values, help to establish a foundation for broader activities in the realm of collective civic action. While research is still needed to enhance our understanding of the processes involved in moving between internal activities and external activities, there is reason to believe that civic health acts as a scaffold to motivate and then support collective civic action. Nonprofit representatives should keep this in mind when seeking to connect the internal and external expressive dimensions of their work.

Limitations and Future Research

Our study has several limitations which are useful to consider. First, nonprofits that were members of the regional nonprofit council in the South Texas region participated in our study. There was a relatively positive participation rate and the nonparticipating organizations were similar in characteristics to the participating organizations. While the results of our study supported the hypothesized relationships among a nonprofitness orientation, civic health (comprised of individual and community engagement as well as political participation), and collective civic action, future research would do well to focus on comparing different regions within the USA and in other countries to provide further support for the results we obtained. Second, our measures used to test the hypothesized relationships were broad in nature. However, we did not measure microelements of political participation or individual and civic engagement for example to identify more finely assessed elements for each of the variables. Additional research focusing on the specific components of these variables related to local conditions would provide additional insight on the unique mechanisms, activities, or components which influence collective civic action within community-based organizations. Further, conducting qualitative research to more closely understand the

processes and effects the antecedents of collective civic action have on the development of collective civic action would provide a rich context to add additional clarity to quantitative findings. Third, our study did not identify how a nonprofitness orientation develops. Could it be that the mission of the organization, people engaged with the organization, or other factors such as funding, clients, or services affect this development? Identification of these elements which nurture this type of orientation would allow for understanding about differences among organizations and what stimulates an orientation toward values relevant to nonprofit work. Finally, our data are cross-sectional and reflects an individual's view of their nonprofit's work. It is worth noting that data from multiple individuals within one organization may capture a richer assessment of a nonprofit's values, culture, and orientation toward collective civic action.

Conclusion

Organizational leaders may do well to think institutionally, but also within broader systems of activities across sectors within the community they serve. This research tended to focus exclusively on community-based nonprofits and their work, but we suspect a good portion of this work takes place in coordination with government representatives as well as actors in the private sector. Collective civic action is publicly focused and has the potential (if not the realization already) that a systems approach to solving local issues is critical to success. This research provides evidence of the connections between a nonprofitness orientation, civic engagement activities, and action and we believe this can empower organizational leaders to act, assess their processes and existing activities to make a substantiated case for their work in the community that is making an impact.

Appendix: Survey Items

"Indicate how well the following statements describe your organization's work."

Nonprofitness Orientation (NP)

Act as an alternative to government by protecting and promoting individual and community values and interests. (NP1)

Experiment or be innovative in programs, processes, and service delivery. (NP2).

Drive social change. (NP3).

Serve poor, under-represented, or disadvantaged individuals. (NP4).

Provide or supplement services government and businesses cannot or do not offer. (NP5).

Community and Individual Engagement (CIE)

Actively facilitates opportunities for stakeholders (e.g. staff, volunteers, and clients) to engage or network with one another through events or meetings. (CIE1)

Holds meetings, events, or activities that engage clients AND members of the broader community (those not directly served by your nonprofit). (CIE2)

Fosters awareness among clients of community issues that may impact them. (CIE3).

Promotes client/citizen participation in community related events or activities. (CIE4).

Has members of the client community on the board. (CIE5).

Has structured ways for members of the client community to shape programming within my organization, other than serving on the board. (CIE6)

Political Participation (PP)

Represents client interests to governmental agencies. (PP1).

Represents client needs in larger, inter-organizational settings/meetings. (PP2).

Acts on behalf of clients by articulating local policy responses to community-based issues impacting them. (PP3)

Collective Civic Action (CCA)

Engages with other organizations to address broader community issues. (CCA1).

Promote causes and policies on behalf of clients and communities. (CCA2).

Acknowledgements The authors would like to thank the members and leaders of the San Antonio Nonprofit Council for their funding and collaboration in the implementation and study of the State of the Sector research project.

Declarations

Conflict of interest There are no known conflicts of interest associated with this research.

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