



# On Being Nonprofit: A Conceptual and Policy Primer

By Peter Frumkin

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This concise and illuminating book provides a road map to the evolving conceptual and policy terrain of the nonprofit sector. Drawing on prominent economic, political, and sociological explanations of nonprofit activity, Peter Frumkin focuses on four important functions that have come to define nonprofit organizations. The author clarifies the debate over the underlying rationale for the nonprofit and voluntary sector's privileged position in America by examining how nonprofits deliver needed services, promote civic engagement, express values and faith, and channel entrepreneurial impulses. He also exposes the difficult policy questions that have emerged as the boundaries between the nonprofit, business, and government sectors have blurred. Focusing on nonprofits' growing dependence on public funding, tendency toward political polarization, often idiosyncratic missions, and increasing commercialism, Peter Frumkin argues that the long-term challenges facing nonprofit organizations will only be solved when they achieve greater balance among their four central functions. By probing foundational thinking as well as emergent ideas, the book is an essential guide for nonprofit novitiates and experts alike who want to understand the issues propelling public debate about the future of their sector. By virtue of its breadth and insight, Frumkin's book will be an invaluable resource for anyone interested in understanding the complex interplay of public purposes and private values that animate nonprofit organizations.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Frumkin's little volume captures accurately and provocatively the contested and continuously-changing nonprofit domain. Unblinded by nonprofitdom's self-serving myths, it candidly identifies both the strengths and weaknesses of America's fastest-growing organizational sector. (Peter Dobkin Hall, Harvard University)

Peter Frumkin has just redefined the field of nonprofit and voluntary organizations. His lucid book gives all of us new insights on just what it means to be nonprofit-like, and advances the debate on a host of critical issues facing the nonprofit sector at this critical moment in history. Absolutely essential reading for anyone in and around the sector. (Paul Light, Brookings Institution)

Both well-researched and clearly written, this sympathetic but unsentimental analysis of the nonprofit and voluntary sector is a first-rate addition to the literature. Because it is sophisticated in its conceptualizations, unfreighted by jargon and cant, and manageable in length, this insightful book should be indispensable to both graduate and advanced undergraduate students as well as to teachers and scholars looking for a compact overview of the field. (Laurence E. Lynn, Jr., University of Chicago)

Peter Frumkin's book is an excellent introduction to the issues that the nonprofit sector faces today. It not only reviews the social science work done on the sector, but explores the policy questions that the sector faces in the 21st century. (Joseph Galaskiewicz, University of Arizona)

This intelligent analysis sheds light on the meaning and operation of the nonprofit sector. Authorities, including those in government, have often portrayed nonprofits as merely forms of interest groups or, alternatively, service organizations that educate, feed, or otherwise assist some subset of society. This book makes clear that nonprofits include both of these types of organizations and others...Highly recommended. (W. P. Browne *Choice* 2003-03-01)

*On Being Nonprofit* is an excellent volume for the beginner, as well as a provocative volume for the experienced scholar. I hope this well-written book will stimulate more theorizing about the nature, functions, and contributions of such third sectors in various societies. (Virginia A. Hodgkinson *Contemporary Sociology*)

Frumkin's book ties together, in one place, many strands of thought about the nonprofit sector, and will serve as an important resource for scholars. Exceptionally well-written and easy to understand...Frumkin gives us the kind of intellectual tour of the sector that those of us who call ourselves 'nonprofit scholars' have needed for a long time. (Arthur C. Brooks *Public Administration Review* 2003-07-01)

The book's strong features are its inclusive conceptual framework, its consideration of current debates and controversies, and its exploration of a series of basic tensions that seem inherent in the nonprofit sector due to its diversity. These are challenges that academics, practitioners, policy makers, and other nonprofit stakeholders must understand. (Wolfgang Bielefeld *Nonprofit And Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 2003-12-01)

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## About the Author

Peter Frumkin is Professor of Public Affairs at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, and Director of the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service, both at the University of Texas at Austin.

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