Researching the Third Sector:
Approaches, Methods, and Applications

Open Call for a Special Issue to VOLUNTAS

Guest Editors:

Mirae Kim, PhD.
Assistant Professor
Department of Public Management and Policy
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
Georgia State University, USA

Paloma Raggo, PhD.
Assistant Professor
Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership
School of Public Policy and Administration
Carleton University, Canada

Please send abstracts between 300 to 400 words no later than **May 1, 2020** to voluntas.method@gmail.com. Please follow the instructions below for submission.

Full paper submissions for initial review by the guest editors will be due **October 15, 2020**.

The methodological toolbox of researchers investigating the third sector is diverse in terms of epistemologies, approaches, academic traditions, fundamental assumptions, methods, and practice. However, our conversations and debates often focus on the results of our studies, not the research processes behind the findings. There is an increasing demand for greater transparency in research processes and decisions from peer reviewers, editors, funding agencies, institutional review boards, students, organizations we partner with, and other stakeholders involved in the research endeavor. With this increased demand for greater research accountability, scholars have been asked to justify their methodologies in the research they publish. Yet, there are very few methodological articles published about the process of researching the third sector, its challenges, and implications despite the centrality of methodology for published and peer reviewed research.

Scholars and students interested in the sector's people, organizations, and critical issues would benefit from learning more about the type of questions, research strategies, and applications that are developed in our field of study. Are there special considerations one should keep in mind when engaging with marginalized populations? What is the responsibility of the researcher and what approaches can one take if the findings of a research project

could be detrimental to the organization under study? What can the third sector learn from big data techniques and what are some of the pitfalls we should avoid? What are the data limitations and measurement challenges in our field of study? What research challenges exist in studying informal vs formal organizations in the sector? What are the research costs and their implications for participants and researchers?

The answers to some these important questions are diverse, at time contradictory, but also underdeveloped in academic journals in our field. While methodological discussions are often considered as the domain of a narrow set of dedicated journals or book chapters, the research *of the study* of nonprofit organizations, the people involved, and the range of critical issues would benefit from a sustained and collective discussion.

In this themed issue, interested contributors are invited to think about the methods, research processes, and challenges specific to the study of the third sector. Whether scholars adopt more positivist-oriented methodologies or engage in highly participatory research, we all benefit from learning about the processes, decisions and rationales behind each approach. Furthermore, a critical conversation on the specificities of studying our sector from various research angles can enrich our collective understanding of the opportunities to advance knowledge from various academic traditions and reiterate the need to foster an inclusive and diverse research community.

This themed issue has four main goals:
1. To illustrate the diversity of research approaches in our field of study.
2. To create a broad repository of short methodological-oriented pieces for scholars and students to cite and further their understanding of the nonprofit sector.
3. To critically analyze the particular considerations when engaging with the sector and ask scholars to reflect on the implications of their research on the organizations, processes, and people they study.
4. To develop a core research community interested in furthering the idea of methodological pluralism for the study of our sector.

The ideal final contribution would be between 4000 to 5000 words including citations. It would narrow down to one particular research issue, theme, method, or approach. To ensure the overall coherence of the themed issue and the use of these methodological pieces by other scholars and students of the sector, authors should address each of these essential aspects in their contributions:
1. Define the research issue, method, or approach being discussed in the paper. Authors should offer a **brief overview** of the issue/method/approach based on a concise review of the relevant literature.
2. Provide an **assessment** of the use of the method/approach in the field, e.g., how it is used in specific parts or for specific questions about the third sector. Authors are strongly encouraged to provide an application/illustration/example(s) based on their work, examples from VOLUNTAS articles, and/or the relevant literature.

3. Provide an **analysis and recommendations** regarding how the research issue, method, or approach is particularly apt for certain third sector research questions or topics.
4. Discuss the methodological **implications/considerations/limitations** when studying the third sector informed by the assessment and analysis you have presented.

Contributions should reflect the broad diversity of research in our field. Scholars studying a broad range of organizations, people, and critical issues are invited to contribute. Some of the research focus could include (but is not limited to): grassroots organizations, governance research, leadership, fundraising, volunteerism, activism, nonprofit organizations, civil society organizations, international nongovernmental organizations, foundations, philanthropists, volunteerism, and the social economy.

Contributions can include but are not limited to the following methodological themes:

Access to data
Archival research
Big data analysis
Case study research
Coding (qualitative and/or quantitative)
Content analysis
Data standards
Defining the unit of analysis
Ethical research
Ethnographic research
Experiments (Natural, Lab, Quasi, Survey)
Feminist Research
Images and visual data
Interpretive approaches

Interviewing
Levels of analysis issues
Machine learning
Measurement issues/challenges
Mixed-method research designs
Participatory research
Qualitative data software
Qualitative interviewing
Quantitative analysis/large datasets
Social Media data analysis
Surveys
Textual analysis (manual and automated)
Transparency in research

Feel free to contact the guest editors at: voluntas.method@gmail.com if you have any questions regarding a potential contribution to this themed issue.

Abstract submission guidelines:
- Include email and corresponding address (not included in word count)
- Title of the paper
- 300-400 word abstract (not including citations)
- Abstract should clearly address the three essential aspects as discussed above.
- Please submit in a **word document** and include your last name in the document's name (example:Lastname_methodspiece.docx)
- Include in the subject of your email: Voluntas Methods themed issue

Timeline:

- May 1, 2020: Submission of abstracts to themed issue guest editor
- June 1, 2020: Selected authors receive an invite to submit a full manuscript
- October 15, 2020: Submission of 4000-5000-word documents (including citations) to themed issue guest editors.
- January 5, 2020: Papers reviewed by themed issue guest editors and returned to authors with feedback.
- March 1, 2021: Authors revise their papers for blind peer review and submit directly to *VOLUNTAS*.