

The Center on Philanthropy & Public Policy

THE NONPROFIT SECTOR AND THE PRESS

Coverage of Philanthropy and Nonprofits in Nine Major Newspapers

**Matthew Hale
Anthony Colgan
Michael Day
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**Research Paper - 22
February 2005**

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The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy
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Lewis Hall, Room 210
Los Angeles, California 90089-0626

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Printed in the United States of America

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The Nonprofit Sector and the Press: Coverage of Philanthropy and Nonprofits in Nine Major Newspapers

Executive Summary

This report contains the results of a content analysis of 1,034 newspaper articles that ran in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Sun Times*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*. These nine newspapers have a combined circulation of over eight and a half million readers.¹ All stories ran between April 1, 2003 and June 30, 2003 or October 1, 2003 and December 31, 2003. The stories were captured using on-line search archives and had to include one of four key words in the headline or lead paragraph: philanthropy, nonprofit, charity, or foundation. Stories with less than 250 words were excluded. A complete description of the methodology is contained in the appendix.

Journalism students are taught that a good story includes the when, where, what, why and how of a topic. This study leaves the why question for future research and journalists. Our focus is on answering the following questions:

- When do newspaper stories about nonprofits appear during the year?
- Where in the newspapers do these stories appear?
- What receives the most coverage in nonprofit stories?
- How are nonprofits and philanthropies covered?

The first two questions are fairly straightforward. Understanding what gets covered is somewhat more complex and requires breaking down each story into various components and comparing how often different story components appeared in the overall sample of stories. In addition to helping us understand what gets covered, looking at the frequency of various story components provides some indication of the level of contextual details and depth about nonprofits that the stories provide. To explore what gets covered and the depth of nonprofit stories, we asked the following questions:

- Does nonprofit coverage focus at the local, state, national or international level?
- What are nonprofits shown “doing” in the story?
- Does nonprofit coverage focus on individual organizations or the nonprofit sector?
- Who gets quoted most often in nonprofit stories?
- What types of nonprofit organizations receive the most coverage?
- How often do other actors, such as government and the private sector, play a role in nonprofit stories?
- What overall nonprofit themes receive the most coverage?

Understanding how the nonprofit sector is covered is a complex question. To address it requires a framework or lens by which to judge the content of nonprofit stories. A spirited exchange at a

¹ *Editor & Publisher International Year Book 2003*. www.editorandpublisher.com.

recent conference between Stephanie Strum, a *New York Times* philanthropy writer and Robert Egger, a nonprofit activist and founder of the DC Central Kitchen, highlights just some of the difficulties in answering this question and shows the framework we used to judge how the nonprofit sector is covered.²

Mr. Egger argued that the nonprofit sector was large enough and important enough to warrant a section of the paper similar to a business section. In addition, he argued that nonprofit coverage lacks depth or context and what was needed was more coverage of nonprofits as a vital sector of society. In response, Ms. Strum countered if nonprofit activists are successful in advocating for more in-depth coverage they may not like the results, since more coverage may mean more negative coverage. In a perfect world for nonprofits, media coverage of the sector would be filled with contextual detail and leave readers with a positive impression of nonprofit activities. Unfortunately, as we will see these two important characteristics of media coverage can be at odds.

We examine this conflict by revisiting the analysis of what gets covered with two scales. The first scale examines how important or prominent nonprofits were in the stories they appeared in. The second scale explores how nonprofits are characterized in different types of stories. Ultimately, we focus our analysis of how the nonprofit sector is covered by attempting to answer two questions:

- Is newspaper coverage about nonprofits favorable or unfavorable?
- How much depth and contextual detail about the nonprofit sector are contained in newspaper stories?

The results indicate that newspaper coverage about nonprofits is generally quite favorable. More stories left readers with an overall favorable impression of nonprofits than an unfavorable one. For example, slightly more than six out of 10 stories described nonprofits as delivering a service to someone in need. In comparison, only a little more than one out of 10 stories highlighted financial irregularities or mismanagement at a nonprofit.

While most newspaper coverage of nonprofits was favorable, it also lacked depth and context about the nonprofit sector. Less than one out of 10 stories focused on the nonprofit sector. In contrast, almost four out of 10 stories focused on a single nonprofit organization. The results also indicate that stories about the nonprofit sector are much more likely to be unfavorable than stories about single organizations.

As a result, the overall impression of nonprofits left by newspaper articles is one of small, often local organizations that struggle (often valiantly) to help people. Newspaper stories give readers little evidence of the size and scope of the nonprofit sector in the American economy and, in the rare occasion when newspaper stories do discuss nonprofits as a sector, the impression readers are left with is one of scandal, financial mismanagement and a sector in need of more government regulation.

² Transcript available at: http://cpnl.georgetown.edu/doc_pool/IF01Media.pdf

The Nonprofit Sector and the Press: Coverage of Philanthropy and Nonprofits in Nine Major Newspapers

“The media doesn’t tell us what to think, but they do tell us what to think about.”

-- Bernard Cohen

As Cohen suggests, the media’s influence on the public is not a straightforward process of cause and effect. Instead the media frames the way the public sees important topics. To picture this, compare the following hypothetical quotes from newspaper stories about the nonprofit sector.

“A study released today estimates that charities could free up to \$100 billion each year by lowering their administrative overhead. That is enough to give every high school graduate in the country a \$40,000 scholarship.”

“The founders chose to donate the money to the National Childhood Cancer Foundation in part because of the organization’s low administrative overhead. According to organizers, 94% of the money donated to the foundation goes directly toward cancer research and treatment. Because of this, the foundation is one of 1,200 organizations in the country that have received an A+ rating from the American Institute of Philanthropy, a national charity watchdog group.”

Even if “perception is reality” is not always accurate, it is at least reasonable to suggest that an individual reading the first quote might be less inclined to donate time or money to a nonprofit organization than an individual reading the second. Similarly, a reader of the former quote might be more inclined to favor more legislative oversight of the nonprofit sector than a reader of the latter quote. In either case, it is clear that how the media covers the nonprofit sector may have significant effects on the public’s confidence and policymakers’ perceptions of the nonprofit sector.

Just what these effects are, however, is an unanswered question, in part because of a lack of large scale systematic studies of media and nonprofits. In fact, the lack of scholarly attention to this topic leaves even more basic questions largely unanswered, such as when media stories appear, where they appear, what aspects of nonprofits get covered and how the nonprofit sector is portrayed in the media. This study aims to address this information gap in the nonprofit literature.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

While research in this area is remarkably thin, two previous studies inform this study. First, Martens (1996) conducted a content analysis of nonprofit stories appearing in the San Francisco Chronicle in 1991. The study compares the lead paragraphs in nonprofit stories with a study conducted by Corrigan (1990) of lead paragraphs in all news stories. The central question in Martens’ study is what are the most dominant “news value elements” apparent in each type of story. In essence, these are descriptive statements designed to capture the newsworthiness of the story. Martens discovered that in comparison to all news stories, a local connection was more important to the coverage of nonprofits. In addition, he found that conflict was less important in nonprofit stories.

The study also found that the nonprofit stories focused more on specific issues (e.g. health, education) than on providing information about nonprofit organizations, although he discovered that 10 percent of the stories dealt with the organizational aspect of nonprofit funding. The study found that 12 percent of all nonprofit stories appeared on the front page compared to just 8 percent for all other issues. Finally, the study found that almost 64 percent of nonprofit stories resulted from coverage of some event held by a nonprofit.

While this work should be commended for exploring the topic, its focus on a single newspaper makes it somewhat difficult to generalize the findings. In addition, the study only focused on a few issues within the nonprofit world, such as health, housing, education, poverty, crime, the environment, the arts and children's issues. In addition, the study centers on specific aspects of individual nonprofit organizations such as management, research and regulation. As a result, it is possible that the study did not capture the full breadth of nonprofit activities that might be covered.

A second study, *Truth of the Sidelines: Philanthropy & Foundations in the Media*, produced by Douglas Gould and Co, Inc., looked at coverage of philanthropy and foundations on television, radio, newspapers and the Internet. Several of the findings are particularly relevant to our work. In particular, Gould looked at who was quoted in media stories. He found that actors outside the nonprofit realm often define the stories about foundations:

Foundations have allowed other actors to define their work and role. In covering philanthropic issues, the media often quote people not directly associated with foundations, and this allows important issues about foundation work to be framed without input from the foundations themselves (Gould, 2003, 4).

In addition, Gould found a “dramatic” decrease in positive coverage of philanthropy between 1997-1998 and 2002-2003. For example, coverage of “fraud” increased from 4 percent of all stories in the first time period to 8 percent in the second. Finally, Gould found a significant increase in stories around the Thanksgiving and Christmas season.

While this report is impressive in that it looks at a variety of different types of media and makes comparisons over two different time periods, it suffers from some methodological problems. For example, the report used search terms such as regulation, mismanagement, lobbying and tax to extract stories from electronic search engines. As a result, it is possible that the stories extracted were biased towards negative stories. In addition, the narrow focus of the search terms limited the number of articles extracted and therefore analyzed. Finally, because the Gould study centers on multiple types of media and focuses specifically on foundations, it is somewhat difficult to make comparisons between their study and this one.

WHEN DO NONPROFIT STORIES APPEAR?

The sampling methodology was designed to capture stories in two contrasting time periods. While we expected a slight increase in coverage around tax day (April 15th) the first time period was chosen primarily to serve as a contrast to the second. Following the findings of the Gould report, we expected that the nonprofit sector would receive significantly more coverage around the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays when donations to the nonprofit sector traditionally rise. As Table 1 shows, there was, in fact, an increase in stories at the end of the year and into the holiday season. Overall, however, the number of stories was fairly evenly distributed throughout the six months comprising the study.

Table 1: When nonprofit stories appear

Month	Number of stories (N=1034)	% of all stories
April	152	15%
May	156	15%
June	167	16%
Total April to June	475	46%
October	180	17%
November	201	19%
December	178	17%
Total October to December	559	54%

WHERE DO NONPROFIT STORIES APPEAR?

Where stories are placed within a newspaper is often as important as what the stories say. Obviously, front page stories are read by more people and hence are more important. Only 5 percent of the stories in our sample appeared on the front page. This is somewhat less than the 12 percent front page stories found by Martens (1996) and the 9 percent found by the Gould Report (2003). Twenty-two percent of the stories appeared in the front section of the paper, but not on the front page. Seventy-three percent of all stories appeared in an inside section of the newspaper. Most of these appeared in the local or metro section of the paper, indicating that nonprofit stories are often locally focused. Even so, we found stories in every section of the newspaper.

Table 2: Placement of stories

Placement	Number of stories	% of all stories
Front Page	50	5%
Front section, not front page	232	22%
Inside section (<i>Metro, Local, Business, Sports, Lifestyle</i>)	752	73%

WHAT GETS COVERED IN NONPROFIT STORIES?

Next, we explore what gets covered in nonprofit and philanthropy stories. This question is important for two reasons. First, answering it provides a description of the various components of a story that receive the most coverage. Second, by analyzing what gets covered, it is possible to begin to characterize the level of depth and contextual detail the stories provide about nonprofits. We examine these questions in several ways. First, we compare how often stories focus on the local, state, national and international levels. Second, we explore what actions of nonprofits (e.g. service delivery, research) receive the most coverage. Third, we compare the amount of coverage about individual organizations to the amount of coverage about the nonprofit sector as a whole. Fourth, we report who gets quoted most often in nonprofit stories. Fifth, we report how often different types of organizations (e.g. advocacy, research, environmental) appear in the newspaper. Sixth, we examine how often government, elected officials and private businesses play a role in stories about nonprofits. And finally, we explore which overall themes received the most coverage.

Where do nonprofit stories take place?

It is conventional wisdom that in order for a story to make news it needs to have a local “hook,” meaning there needs to be a local connection to make the story interesting to local readers. To explore this concept, we coded each story as to whether or not it mentioned activities taking place at the local, state, national or international level. In addition, when the action in the story took place in more than one setting we ranked all mentioned settings in order of importance. Table 3 reports these results.

Table 3: Where nonprofit stories take place

Story setting	Number of stories where setting was mentioned (% of all stories)	Number of stories where setting was ranked as most important (% of all stories)
Local	611 (59%)	583 (56%)
State	113 (11%)	65 (6%)
National	396 (38%)	295 (29%)
International	134 (13%)	92 (9%)

As expected, the results show that stories with a local angle receive the most coverage. Fifty-nine percent of all stories included some form of a local “hook,” and a locality was the primary setting in 56 percent of the stories. It is interesting to note that more stories focused at the international level than the state level. While it is possible this finding reflects a somewhat smaller role of nonprofits in statewide activities, it is more likely a bias in the sample towards national newspapers in big markets coupled with coverage about the role of nonprofits in the Iraq conflict.

While it is clearly possible that a story with only one setting can include a great deal of depth and detail, it is also possible to suggest that multiple settings provide a greater opportunity to discuss

nonprofit activities across a broader spectrum. For example, a story that begins by describing an innovative approach to feeding the homeless and ends with a discussion of how a nationwide homeless coalition has started disseminating information about the approach would be characterized as having both a local and national setting. This story would also have more depth and context in it than a story that only focused on the local organization.

When we examine how many stories had multiple settings we discover that over 80 percent of the stories had a single setting, while 17 percent of the stories mentioned two settings. The most common pairing of settings was local and national which occurred in approximately 7 percent of the stories. This finding can be seen as an indication that, in general, nonprofits are not portrayed as acting on multiple levels and across different communities.

What actions of nonprofits get coverage?

The next way of examining what gets covered is to explore what nonprofits and philanthropies are reported as “doing” in the story. It is important to note that a single story may have been coded as mentioning more than one of these actions. Table 4 reports these results.

Table 4: Coverage of nonprofit actions

Does the story...	Number of stories	% of all stories
Report on a nonprofit or philanthropy delivering some service?*	628	61%
Encourage readers to volunteer or become active in a nonprofit or philanthropy?	127	12%
Describe a report released by a nonprofit or philanthropy?	124	12%
Describe an internal problem (financial irregularities, mismanagement)?	139	13%
Describe an external problem (difficulty in getting donations, cuts in funding)?	212	21%

* This category was created by collapsing two questions. The first asked if the story reported the nonprofit or philanthropy helping a specific person. The second asked if the story showed a nonprofit trying to solve some problem.

The results show that service delivery is the most common nonprofit action in newspaper stories. Sixty-one percent of all stories gave some evidence that a nonprofit was delivering a service by trying to help a specific person or solve a problem. Twelve percent of the stories made a direct appeal to readers to help a nonprofit or philanthropy.³ Overall, 33 percent of the stories mentioned either an internal or external problem faced by nonprofits. Of these, 13 percent

³ It is interesting to note that of the 127 stories making an appeal to readers, thirty (24 percent) were stories about a newspaper’s own charitable efforts or charitable fund.

described an internal nonprofit problem such as financial mismanagement or accounting irregularities. Significantly more stories (21 percent) mentioned some sort of external problem faced by nonprofits, such as cuts in government funding. Slightly less than 9 percent of the stories mentioned both internal and external problems. For example, accusations of financial mismanagement (an internal problem) might lead to cuts in government funding (an external problem).

The fact that service delivery received significantly more coverage than either internal or external problems suggests that nonprofit coverage is generally more positive than negative. We will revisit this finding in a later section.

A nonprofit organization or the nonprofit sector

Next we examine the number of nonprofits the story described in the story. This is an important component of understanding what gets covered because it allows us to compare the number of stories about one organization or a small group of organizations with the number of stories about the nonprofit sector.⁴ In addition, this question addresses the depth of nonprofit coverage. A story about the nonprofit sector almost by definition contains more depth and context about nonprofits than a story about an individual organization. We also coded for stories where the focus of the story was a report released by a nonprofit organization. In most, but not all, cases, these stories only mentioned the organization releasing the report, so it is possible to consider these stories as focusing on organizations and not the sector. Similarly, when nonprofits or philanthropies were mentioned in a cursory or passing fashion, it was most often individual organizations that were mentioned in passing and not the nonprofit sector. Table 5 contains these results.

⁴ Our definition of a nonprofit sector story is somewhat expansive. We included stories about sections of the nonprofit sector as a “sector” story. For example, several papers reported stories about increased congressional oversight of nonprofit credit counseling organizations. Since these stories focused on the activities of hundreds if not thousands of individual organizations, we coded these stories as being about the entire sector.

Table 5: Single organizations vs. sector coverage

The story focused on...	Number of stories	% of all stories
The nonprofit sector	84	8%
Individual organizations	950	92%
<i>A single organization</i>	376	36%
<i>A few organizations (more than one but less than ten)</i>	212	21%
<i>A report released by an organization</i>	80	8%
<i>Stories where nonprofits are mentioned in passing</i>	282	27%

With only a slight exaggeration, the results suggest that coverage of the nonprofit sector as a whole was virtually nonexistent in major newspapers. Less than one in ten stories (8 percent) focused on the entire nonprofit sector. Almost as many stories were about a report released by a nonprofit (80) as were about the nonprofit sector (84). In contrast, slightly more than a third of the stories (36 percent) focused on a single nonprofit or philanthropy. An additional 21 percent of the stories centered on the activities of more than one but less than 10 individual nonprofits. The overwhelming majority of these stories mentioned between two and five organizations. Slightly more than one in four stories (27 percent) used nonprofits or philanthropies as background for a story about another topic and hence were not about the nonprofit sector. If our assumption that stories focusing on the sector provide more depth is true, these results again suggest a somewhat superficial nature to nonprofit coverage.

What types of organizations receive the most newspaper coverage?

Next we examine the types of nonprofit organizations that received the most coverage. When a story mentioned a specific nonprofit by name we recorded the name and, *using the information provided in the story*, characterized the organization into broad functional categories. Overall, an organization was mentioned by name 1,198 times. Of these, we found 210 cases (17 percent) where the name of at least one organization was mentioned, but no additional information was provided.⁵ When this occurred we simply recorded that an organization had been listed, but did not attempt to classify them by function. Thus these cases are excluded from the analysis below, leaving a total of 998 cases.⁶ Once again, it is important to reiterate that our classification of

⁵ In some of these cases, a large number of nonprofits were listed by name only in the same story.

⁶ In an effort to simplify the coding process and analysis, each organization was classified into only one functional category. As a result, a single organization might be classified differently in different stories. In addition, some stories characterized a single organization as having multiple functions. For example, a story about the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation might mention the foundation's support for education in the United States (coded as education) and efforts to combat the spread of AIDS worldwide (coded as health care). In these cases, we classified the organizational function that was most important. Even with this coding convention we found a small number of cases where, despite the presence of some additional contextual information, the precise function of the organization was unclear or unspecified. Because of these difficulties, the results presented in Table 6 provide only a rough characterization of the types of individual nonprofits receiving coverage. Despite this caution the results provide an important contextual detail.

organizations is based only on information provided in the story, not on what the organizations may actually focus on. Table 6 contains these results.

Table 6: Types of organizations

Type of organization	Number of times mentioned and additional information provided (N=998)	% of all cases
Advocacy (Gay & Lesbian Alliance, ACLU)	203	21%
Arts (Museums, galleries)	49	5%
Counseling organizations (Suicide hotlines, relationship counseling)	12	1%
Direct Aid (Monetary or direct services)	179	18%
Education	80	8%
Environment	65	7%
Event organization (Cinco deMayo festival, state fairs)	8	1%
Health Care (Hospitals, research about health issues)	36	4%
Homeless services (Food Banks)	92	9%
Nonprofit sector (Umbrella organizations, watchdog groups)	48	5%
Religious organizations	36	4%
Research organizations	91	9%
Unspecified or unclear	35	4%
Youth (non-education)	55	6%

The results show that in 21 percent of cases where an organization was mentioned by name and some additional organization information was provided, the group was portrayed primarily as advocating for some cause or issue. In 19 percent of these cases, the primary function of the organization was described as providing direct aid to someone in need. It is interesting to note that organizations concerned with the entire nonprofit sector, (e.g. Independent Sector or the National Center for Responsive Philanthropy) appeared in just 5 percent of these cases. This supports earlier findings that coverage of the nonprofit sector was minimal, since these organizations generally speak to sector- wide issues.

Who gets quoted?

Building on the findings discussed above, we then examined who was quoted most often in nonprofit stories. Exploring who gets quoted helps address the question of what gets covered as well as provides some indication of the depth of coverage.

In this section, the focus is again on the 998 cases where an individual organization was named in a story and some additional information was provided about the organization. In each of these cases, we recorded who (if anyone) was quoted in connection with the nonprofit mentioned. We recorded whether or not a quote came from someone representing the organization, someone affected by the organization, or someone not connected with the organization. We did not count the number of individual quotes in each story. As shown in Table 7 we also report how often more than one “type” of person was quoted.

Table 7: Who gets quoted?

	Number of cases where an individual organization was named (N=998)	% of all cases
Additional context is provided but no direct quotes from or about the organization are included	256	26%
Someone representing the nonprofit is quoted	622	62%
Someone helped by the nonprofit is quoted	174	17%
Someone outside the organization is quoted	400	40%
Only one category of speaker	384	38%
Two categories of speakers	238	24%
Three categories of speakers	112	11%

Not surprisingly, individuals representing nonprofits are quoted more often (62 percent) than any other source. In general, newspaper stories are less likely to quote from people directly affected by the actions of a nonprofit. In slightly more than one in four of these cases (26 percent), no one was quoted directly about the individual organization or its actions.

These findings also speak to the question of the depth of nonprofit stories. If three different types of people are quoted in a story it is highly likely that they will present three different perspectives on the subject. Therefore, it is possible to argue that more diversity of sources means more contextual diversity and, hence, more depth. The fact that only 11 percent of the cases described above had three different categories of people quoted, again suggests that depth and context are largely missing from nonprofit stories.

What other actors play a role in nonprofit stories?

In the next section, we report how often government, elected officials and the private sector received some coverage in nonprofit stories. Since the government/nonprofit relationship is

central to the nonprofit sector, we also report how and how often newspaper stories frame the government/nonprofit relationship. It is important to note that a single story may have included more than one government/nonprofit frame. Table 8 contains these results.

Table 8: Other actors in nonprofit stories

Type of other actor mentioned	Number of stories	% of all stories (n=1034)
Business	249	24%
Elected officials	156	15%
Government	313	30%
<i>The tax implications of donating to nonprofits</i>	34	3%
<i>The role of government in overseeing or regulating nonprofits</i>	126	12%
<i>A partnership between government and nonprofits</i>	113	11%
<i>The amount of money government gives to nonprofits</i>	53	5%
<i>The amount of money nonprofits save government and/or taxpayers</i>	13	1%
<i>Other</i>	29	3%

It is perhaps not surprising given our focus on stories about nonprofits that other actors generally do not play a role in these stories. Just 30 percent of all stories mentioned interactions between government and nonprofits in any fashion, and just 24 percent of the stories mentioned the private sector. It is somewhat surprising, however, given the amount of political rhetoric surrounding the increased role of nonprofits in society, that elected officials were mentioned in only 15 percent of all stories.

The most common portrayal of the government/nonprofit relationship was with the government playing the role of nonprofit regulator. This occurred in just 12 percent of all stories, but only 40 percent of the stories mentioned government in any way. This was closely followed by reporting on a partnership between government and nonprofits to deliver some service. By comparison, the tax implications of donating to nonprofits and the amount of money government “gives” to nonprofits were less prevalent characterizations, occurring in just 3 and 5 percent of the stories, respectively. It is again interesting to note that despite a great deal of political rhetoric about the potential of non-profits to “save” government money, only 1% of all the stories in our sample specifically mentioned this type of interaction.

What overall themes get the most coverage?

Well-written newspaper stories have a central theme or guiding narrative, which good headlines often capture in very few words.⁷ In the next section, we report our attempt to classify and quantify the stories by the central *nonprofit* theme in the story.⁸ It is important to note that since the focus is only on the *most important* theme, some detail is lost.⁹ In some cases, we used other measurements to assist in identifying the overall theme.¹⁰ After the initial characterization of each theme, we aggregated themes into larger categories designed to focus on what a reader might learn about nonprofits from each story. In essence, this section reports the single most important “thing” about nonprofits contained in each story. Table 9 reports these results. A more complete description of the methodology used for this section is contained in the appendix.

⁷ Unfortunately, not all the stories in our sample are well written or have good headlines, so we often examined the story beyond the headline to determine the primary theme.

⁸ Since the focus is on the central *nonprofit* theme of the story, we also report a separate category for the stories where the nonprofit played only a minor or passing role in the story.

⁹ For example, a story that focuses primarily on one fundraising event would be characterized as a “single event” story, even if a portion of the story described the strategy used by the nonprofit to get people to attend the event. If the focus of the story was on the planning strategy and not the event, the story would be coded as “the strategy of a nonprofit.”

¹⁰ For example, a story classified as a “sinner” story focuses on some malfeasance by a nonprofit or the nonprofit sector. To be classified a “sinner” story, the overall characterization of the nonprofit sector as described in the following section would have to be overwhelmingly negative as well.

Table 9: Most important themes

Themes	Number of stories	% of all stories (n=1,034)
Nonprofits raise money and need help	314	30%
<i>“Big Donation Given”</i>	34	3%
<i>“Celebrities”</i>	53	5%
<i>A single event hosted by a nonprofit</i>	107	10%
<i>A listing of events hosted by nonprofits</i>	77	7%
<i>Direct appeal for assistance from readers</i>	43	4%
Nonprofit are involved in activities	214	21%
<i>Nonprofits acting with government</i>	37	4%
<i>Nonprofits acting in the courts</i>	11	1%
<i>Nonprofits attacking an issue or group</i>	11	1%
<i>Nonprofits partnering to deliver a service</i>	38	4%
<i>The strategy of nonprofits</i>	61	6%
<i>Nonprofits facing difficult times</i>	31	3%
<i>Nonprofits as an example of a trend</i>	25	2%
Nonprofits are a source for research and opinion	120	12%
<i>Nonprofit report released</i>	69	7%
<i>Someone from a nonprofit comments as a source or expert on the main story topic</i>	51	5%
Nonprofits are saints and sinners	228	22%
<i>“Saint” stories</i>	121	12%
<i>“Sinner” stories</i>	107	10%
Nonprofits play only a minor or passing role in the story	158	15%

The first interesting finding in this section is how frequently the primary theme of the story revolved around nonprofits search for money or help. Thirty percent of all stories focused on some variant of this central theme. Within this category it is also interesting to note the frequency with which nonprofit events get reported. A full 10 percent of all stories focused on a single event and another seven percent focused on more than one upcoming event. In many cases, these stories were straight news reporting which may help explain their comparative frequency.

A second interesting finding was the relative balance between the 12 percent of stories we characterized as “saint” stories with the 10 percent of the stories we characterized as “sinner” stories. The “saint” stories were glowing testimonials to the nonprofits involved in the story while “sinner” stories painted nonprofits in the worst possible light. This slight tendency of stories to be more favorable towards nonprofits will be amplified in a later section.

HOW NONPROFITS GET COVERED?

In the previous sections we outlined where and when nonprofit stories appear and provided an extensive look at what gets covered in these stories. In this final section, we ask perhaps the more complex questions: how do newspaper stories portray nonprofits and how might this portrayal influence readers?

We begin this section by exploring how important or prominent a role nonprofits play in the stories. This is an important question, since the answer provides another indication about the depth of coverage about nonprofits. We suggest that the more prominent role nonprofits play in the story the more depth the story conveys about nonprofit organizations and the nonprofit sector. If our results show that the nonprofit is prominently featured *and* presented in some level of depth then it is possible to argue that newspaper stories may help raise the value and appreciation of the nonprofit sector. If, on the other hand, the results show that nonprofits are not prominently featured and not covered in- depth, it is possible to argue that newspaper stories reinforce the perception that nonprofits are a relatively small and unimportant part of society.

We already have some indications of the answer to the question of prominence. The fact that newspaper stories about nonprofits and philanthropies do not generally warrant front page coverage indicates that nonprofits and philanthropies are generally not seen as vitally important. The fact that coverage of the nonprofit sector is virtually nonexistent in comparison to stories about individual organizations suggests again that newspaper stories do not capture the true importance of nonprofits in society. This section expands on these initial results.

The second way of addressing these questions is by looking at the overall impression of nonprofits in newspaper stories. Newspaper stories can leave the reader with a favorable impression of nonprofits or an unfavorable one. Obviously, if more stories leave a favorable impression, it is more likely that readers will support the efforts of nonprofits, whereas more unfavorable impressions might lead readers to decline to support nonprofits.

For each story, we coded for the overall impression of nonprofits and the nonprofit sector. In this section, we report these results and then compare many of the previous tables along this variable. This not only allows us to show whether or not the stories as a whole were favorable or unfavorable towards nonprofits, but also more specifically, what types of stories are the most favorable toward nonprofits.

Once again, we already have some indications as to the answer to this question. The fact that the service delivery components of nonprofits receive comparatively more coverage than internal and external problems suggests that the stories seem to leave a somewhat favorable impression. Similarly, the slight edge in “saint” stories over “sinner” stories also suggests a positive skew in the overall characterizations of nonprofits. As we shall see, however, the results are somewhat more complex.

Prominence of the nonprofit sector

We used a seven-point scale to characterize each story for how important the nonprofits were to the entire story. A score of seven indicates that the story would be completely different without nonprofit involvement. A score of one indicates nonprofits form a very minor part of the story. Another way to think about this category is that more than 80 percent of the story content was devoted to a nonprofit or the nonprofit sector for a story to receive a score of seven. A score of one would indicate that less than 20 percent of the story was about nonprofits. It is important to note these are coder estimations not actual counting of sentences or paragraphs. Table 10 presents these results.

Table 10: Prominence of nonprofits

Prominence of the nonprofits	Number of stories	% of total stories
Less than 50% of the story is about nonprofits	417	40%
Around 50% of the story is about nonprofits	100	10%
More than 50% of the story is about nonprofits	517	50%

The results paint a picture of two different types of nonprofit stories. On one hand, half of the stories were predominantly about nonprofits. In this type of story, the nonprofit or the nonprofit sector was more likely to be described with a fair amount of detail and depth. On the other hand, nonprofits played a lesser or supporting role in 40 percent of all stories. These stories generally lack the same depth of coverage about nonprofits or the nonprofit sector. The remaining 10 percent of the stories were judged as being evenly split about nonprofits and other topics. These results suggest that even in stories where they were mentioned, nonprofits often do not play a leading role. This is yet another indication that in-depth coverage of nonprofits is missing from newspaper stories.

Characterizations of nonprofits

Next we explore whether the newspaper coverage of nonprofits and philanthropies reflects favorably or unfavorably on the nonprofit sector.¹¹ To address this question we again used a standard seven point scale. A score of seven was very unfavorable towards the sector and a score of one was very favorable towards the sector. A score of 4 was used for a story equally divided between positive and negative characterizations. Table 11 contains the results for all stories.

¹¹ As explained in the appendix, the question was phrased in terms of the impression towards the nonprofit sector. This does not mean the story had to be about the nonprofit sector to qualify. A story that focuses on a single organization either positively or negatively still leaves the reader with some overall impression of nonprofits.

Table 11: Characterizations of the nonprofit sector

The story is...	Number of stories	% of stories
Very favorable toward the nonprofit sector	245	24%
Somewhat favorable toward the nonprofit sector	114	11%
Slightly favorable toward the nonprofit sector	109	11%
Neutral	406	39%
Slightly unfavorable toward the nonprofit sector	33	3%
Somewhat unfavorable toward the nonprofit sector	52	5%
Very unfavorable toward the nonprofit sector	75	7%

Overall, nonprofit stories tended to be quite favorable towards the nonprofit sector. Forty-six percent of the stories were at least slightly favorable in their characterization of the nonprofit sector. Almost one in four stories was very favorable towards the sector. Thirty-nine percent gave a neutral or balanced picture of the nonprofit sector. Just 15 percent of the stories were more negative than positive and only 7 percent of the stories left the most negative impression. While these results are perhaps welcome (if not surprising) news to the nonprofit community, they tell a somewhat incomplete story as we shall see in the following tables.

Nonprofit prominence and characterization

We begin our comparisons of the characterization of nonprofits in different types of stories by examining how the prominence of nonprofits in the story influences how they are characterized. The goal is to explore if stories where nonprofits are prominent leave a favorable or unfavorable impression. Table 12 contains these results. In this table and all the following tables, the favorable and unfavorable categories indicate stories coded as at least slightly favorable or unfavorable on the overall scale.

Table 12: Characterizations by prominence of nonprofits in the story

Prominence of the nonprofits	Number of stories	Number of favorable stories (%)	Number of neutral stories (%)	Number of unfavorable stories (%)
Less than 50% of the story is about nonprofits	417	105 (25%)	284 (68%)	28 (7%)
Around 50% of the story is about nonprofits	100	31 (31%)	57 (57%)	12 (12%)
More than 50% of the story is about nonprofits	517	332 (64%)	65 (13%)	120 (23%)

The results show that 64 percent of the stories where nonprofits were the most prominently featured were coded as being favorable towards the nonprofit sector. This is a further indication that coverage of the nonprofit sector is generally more positive than negative. In addition, these results suggest that the more prominent the role nonprofits play in the story, the more likely the story is to leave a favorable impression.¹²

Characterizations of nonprofits on the front page

Next, we compare the prevalence of favorable and unfavorable stories with where they appeared in the paper. As noted earlier, 5 percent of the stories appeared on the front page, 22 percent were in the front or news section but not the front page and the remaining 73 percent of the stories appeared in an inside section of the paper. When we compare these results with the characterization scale, a more nuanced picture emerges. Table 13 contains these results.

Table 13: Characterizations by story placement

Placement	Number of stories (% of all stories)	Number of favorable stories (% of section)	Number of neutral stories (% of section)	Number of unfavorable stories (% of section)
Front Page	50 (5%)	15 (30%)	20 (40%)	15 (30%)
Front section	232 (22%)	76 (33%)	91 (39%)	65 (28%)
Inside section	752 (73%)	377 (50%)	295 (39%)	80 (11%)

¹² It is obvious that the coders felt more confident in making characterizations about the nonprofit sector in stories where nonprofits played a prominent role. The number of stories coded as being neutral decreases as the prominence of nonprofits increases. The larger point, however, still holds.

The results show that as the nonprofit stories move away from the front page the more favorable they become to the nonprofit sector. Thirty percent of the stories on the front page were coded as being at least slightly favorable towards the nonprofit sector. In contrast, fifty percent of the stories appearing in an inside section were coded as favorable to the sector. It is highly likely that this pattern is not unique to stories about nonprofits, but even so, it suggests that appearing on the front page may not always be beneficial to the nonprofit sector. In addition, this finding provides additional context to our overall finding about the generally positive nature of nonprofit stories. Stories on the inside section far outnumber stories in the front section and since they are more likely to be coded as favorable, they pull the overall results in that direction.

Characterizations and nonprofit actions

We now compare the characterization of nonprofits in stories that mention various actions of nonprofits. It is important to note that a single story might mention more than one action. As a result, the results presented below only show general tendencies and not direct correlations between the actions mentioned in the story and the overall story characterizations. Even so, the results provide some indication as to how the actions reported influence the overall characterization. Table 14 contains these results.

Table 14: Characterizations by nonprofit actions

Does the story...	Number of favorable stories (% of action)	Number of neutral stories (% of action)	Number of unfavorable stories (% of action)
Report on a nonprofit or philanthropy delivering some service?* (<i>n</i> =628)	414 (66%)	168 (27%)	46 (7%)
Encourage readers to volunteer or become active in a nonprofit or philanthropy? (<i>n</i> =127)	96 (76%)	25 (20%)	6 (5%)
Describe a report released by a nonprofit or philanthropy? (<i>n</i> =124)	21 (17%)	86 (69%)	17 (14%)
Describe an internal problem? (financial irregularities, mismanagement) (<i>n</i> =139)	19 (14%)	21 (15%)	99 (71%)
Describe an external problem? (difficulty in getting donations, cuts in funding) (<i>n</i> =212)	56 (26%)	35 (17%)	121 (57%)

* This category was created by collapsing two questions. The first asked if the story reported the nonprofit or philanthropy helping a specific person. The second asked if the story showed a nonprofit trying to solve some problem.

The results confirm that when stories report on the service delivery aspects of nonprofits, they are more likely to leave a favorable impression about the nonprofit sector. Similarly, stories about internal problems such as financial mismanagement are more likely to leave an overall unfavorable impression. The fact that stories mentioning service delivery far outnumbered stories mentioning internal or external problems coupled with the impressions left by these

stories again leads to the conclusion that the stories tend to be more positive than negative towards the sector.

Characterizations of the single organization vs. sector focus

Next we compare the number of favorable and unfavorable stories with the number of individual nonprofit organizations that the story focuses on. As stated earlier, stories about the nonprofit sector almost by definition contain more in-depth discussions of nonprofits than stories about individual organizations. By looking at the overall characterization of these stories in comparison to stories about individual nonprofits we are able to see how the addition of contextual detail influences the characterization of nonprofits. Table 15 contains these results.

Table 15: Characterizations by number of organizations

	Number of favorable stories (% of focus)	Number of neutral stories (% of focus)	Number of unfavorable stories (% of focus)
Stories focused on...			
The nonprofit sector (<i>n</i> =84)	28 (33%)	24 (29%)	32 (38%)
Primarily individual organizations (<i>n</i> =950)	440 (46%)	382 (40%)	128 (13%)
Breakdown of all stories focusing on individual organizations (<i>n</i>=950)			
Stories focused on a single organization (<i>n</i> =376)	261 (69%)	48 (13%)	67 (18%)
Stories focused on two to ten individual organizations (<i>n</i> =212)	117 (55%)	63 (30%)	32 (15%)
Stories focused a report released by an organization (<i>n</i> =80)	7 (9%)	69 (86%)	4 (5%)
Stories where nonprofits were mentioned in passing (<i>n</i> =282)	55 (20%)	202 (72%)	25 (9%)

The results show that nonprofit sector stories are more likely to leave an unfavorable impression than stories about a single organization or a small number of organizations. Thirty-eight percent of the stories about the entire sector were coded as being unfavorable towards the sector compared with just 13 percent that focused on individual nonprofits. When we break the individual nonprofit category down, we see that 18 percent of the stories about a single organization and 15 percent of the stories about a small group of nonprofits were coded as unfavorable.

These results highlight an important conflict in how nonprofits are covered. More coverage of the nonprofit sector has long been a goal of many in the nonprofit community. Yet these results indicate that when sector stories occur, they were more likely to be negative than stories about

individual organizations. On one hand, our results suggest that stories about individual organizations provide less contextual depth than stories about the nonprofit sector. On the other hand, stories about individual organizations paint nonprofits in a more favorable light.

Nonprofit characterizations with government, elected officials and business

We now examine how nonprofits are characterized when government, elected officials and the private sector appear in the stories. The focus here is on how the appearance of these other actors influences the way nonprofits are characterized. Table 16 reports these results.

Table 16: Characterizations when other actors appear

	Number of favorable stories (% of row)	Number of neutral stories (% of row)	Number of unfavorable stories (% of row)
Stories mentioning government (<i>n</i> =313)	121 (39%)	82 (26%)	110 (35%)
Stories mentioning elected officials (<i>n</i> =156)	66 (42%)	51 (33%)	39 (25%)
Stories mentioning the private sector (<i>n</i> =249)	138 (55%)	51 (20%)	33 (13%)

The results suggest that slightly more stories mentioning government were favorable (39%) than unfavorable (35%). Yet the results also show that when government is a part of the story, nonprofits are more likely to be portrayed unfavorably than when elected officials or the private sector appears. In particular, it is interesting to note that in more than half of the stories mentioning the private sector, nonprofits were portrayed favorably.

Overall, these findings suggest that newspaper stories place nonprofits in opposition to government and to the private sector. In terms of government, nonprofits are more likely to be seen in an unfavorable light since they are being regulated or reprimanded by government.¹³ In terms of the private sector, these results suggest that nonprofits are seen as a counterweight to private interests.¹⁴ In both cases, it appears that conflict is reported. The results of this conflict reporting, however, have quite different outcomes for the portrayal of the nonprofit sector.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results presented here both confirm and contradict findings from previous research. This research clearly supports the Martens study showing the importance of a local angle or hook in

¹³ As noted earlier, the most common way the government/nonprofit relationship was described was with government as the regulator of nonprofits. This helps explain the high incidence of negative nonprofit characterizations when the government plays a role in the story.

¹⁴ Although we did not specifically code for how the private sector/nonprofit relationship was characterized, our impression was that the private sector was either briefly mentioned as donating money to the nonprofit or that a nonprofit and a private business were in direct conflict.

nonprofit stories. In addition, the general positive nature of the stories may suggest, as Martens did, that conflict is less important in nonprofit stories. Even so, our findings suggest that conflict does occur in stories, in particular when the stories include references to government and the private sector. Martens also highlighted the importance of time-based events in nonprofit stories. Our findings clearly suggest that events play an important role in generating news coverage, although to a lesser extent than the Martens study suggests.¹⁵

Although differences in our coding instruments make direct comparisons with Martens' study somewhat problematic, our results suggest that coverage of the organizational activities of individual nonprofits is much more prevalent than Martens found. In addition, we found far fewer instances of nonprofit stories appearing on the front page of the newspapers than the Martens study.

In part, because of dissimilarities in focus, our results are somewhat less consistent with the tone if not the results of the Gould report. On one hand, Gould suggests that foundation staff members do not appear as frequently as they should in philanthropy and foundation stories, but their results indicate that nonprofit staff members were quoted more often than any other group of people. Our data did not distinguish between nonprofit and foundation staff, but our results also indicate that nonprofit staff were also the most likely to be quoted.

Similarly, the Gould report suggests a "dramatic" increase in negative stories about philanthropies and foundations from 1997-1998 to 2002-2003. Even so, they found just 8 percent of the stories in the latter time period focused on fraud and 5 percent of these stories focused on scandal. Despite the fact that we found a greater frequency of stories mentioning internal and external problems (such as fraud and scandal) we suggest that coverage of nonprofits is overall quite positive and does not generally focus on these negative aspects.

The Gould report also suggests that stories about philanthropy and foundations have the potential to generate news coverage in part because they often fall into the hard news category of reporting.

Philanthropy stories often lend themselves to in-depth analyses or profiles. Therefore, it is recommended that nonprofit organizations and foundations aggressively and persistently approach media outlets with ideas for feature stories (Gould, 2003, 5).

While it is somewhat unclear how this Gould data informs this conclusion, our results seem to suggest the opposite in some ways. Our results suggest that stories about nonprofits often lack depth and context. We did find many stories that reported on events, which can be characterized as straight if not hard news; however, we also found little evidence to suggest that nonprofit stories lend themselves to in-depth analysis.

Despite these differences, our results are similar to the Gould findings with respect to the lack of coverage on the front page, the preponderance of stories in the metro section and the importance

¹⁵ The difference between the two studies in terms of the extent of event coverage is most likely because of the more narrow definition of an event story used in our study.

of a local angle. In addition, we also found an increase, albeit a smaller one, in stories during the Thanksgiving and Christmas season

In many respects, this report provides evidence that both Mr. Egger and Ms. Strum are, to some extent, correct. Two examples illustrate this. First, the results indicate that in comparison to stories about individual organizations, coverage of nonprofits and philanthropy as a sector is virtually nonexistent. Yet, when stories are sector-based, they are more likely to paint an unflattering picture of nonprofits. Second, the results show that nonprofit news stories are rarely on the front page. But when nonprofit stories do appear on the front page, they are more likely to paint a negative picture of the nonprofit sector than when they appear on an inside section of the paper.

These results pose a difficult dilemma for those interested in improving the quality and quantity of nonprofit media coverage. On one hand, the results suggest that newspaper coverage of nonprofits and philanthropy is generally quite positive towards the sector. More often than not, the stories we analyzed were coded as being at least slightly favorable towards the nonprofit sector and a significant number of stories were seen as extremely positive towards the sector. On the other hand, the results suggest that stories are often superficial and fail to provide important contextual details about the nonprofit sector.

In essence, the results point to two different types of nonprofit stories. One type is without depth or context, yet generally leaves the reader with a favorable impression towards nonprofits. The other is filled with depth and context, but often highlights problems in the nonprofit sector, thus leaving a negative impression of nonprofits.

Further analysis and research is necessary to answer this and other important questions. While this report provides what we believe is the first systematic attempt to analyze newspaper coverage of nonprofits nationwide, it is important to note that as a first attempt, it suffers from some limitations. For example, our sampling methodology was designed to capture as many nonprofit stories as possible given the limitations of electronic search engines. As a result, 27 percent of the stories in our sample were only marginally related to the nonprofit sector. This clearly affects the overall findings. Since our goal was to provide a complete picture of all nonprofit related stories, we kept these stories in the analysis. Future research should focus on stories specifically focused on nonprofits.

A second limitation of the study is the lack of specific information about the nonprofit organizations in the stories. The vast majority of the stories centered on individual organizations. While we were able to characterize and report many details about individual organizations, future research should expand on this work and focus more attention on the organizational aspects of nonprofit coverage.

As a first step, this report suggests numerous avenues for future research in addition to the ones caused by the limitations of this data. For example, the application of more sophisticated statistical techniques may be able to specifically isolate factors that lead to positive and negative coverage. In addition, it is important to remember that newspapers only form one part of the

media landscape. These results should be compared and contrasted to coverage of nonprofits on television, radio, and the Internet.

In conclusion, this report offers some “good” news to the nonprofit sector. We show a distinct pattern and clear tendency towards positive coverage of the nonprofits. The stories about nonprofits reflect the tremendous diversity of the nonprofit sector in all aspects of society. It is also important to note that, while rare, we did find some stories rich in depth and contextual detail, balanced or even positive in impression, and focused on the nonprofit sector. It is possible for newspapers to cover nonprofits in the way that provides readers with a greater understanding of the importance of nonprofits to society.

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APPENDIX: RESEARCH AND SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

This report contains the results of a content analysis of 1,034 newspaper articles that ran in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Sun Times*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*.¹⁶ These nine newspapers have a combined circulation of over eight and a half million readers.

All stories ran between April 1, 2003 and June 30, 2003 or October 1, 2003 and December 31, 2003. The first time period was chosen to provide a contrast to the second, when we expected an increase in media coverage corresponding with the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays when giving, fundraising and concern for the needy traditionally increases.

Capture and Sampling Methods

All stories were captured using on-line search archives and had to include one of four key words in the headline or lead paragraphs: philanthropy, nonprofit, charity, or foundation. Stories with less than 250 words were excluded. For most of the newspapers, we used the Lexis-Nexis search archive. The *Wall Street Journal* stories were captured using the newspaper's own Proquest search engine, which has the same functionality and virtually the same design as Lexis-Nexis. The *Los Angeles Times* stories were also captured using the newspaper's own search engine, which is slightly less sophisticated and precise. Despite the use of different search engines we found only minor differences in the *Los Angeles Times* stories, which are clarified below.

The use of the four key words created an enormous initial sample of 6,726 stories. There are three reasons for this. First, the inclusion of the terms foundation and charity returned a large number of stories unrelated to nonprofits and philanthropy. For example, stories that mentioned the foundation of a building or used the phrase, act of charity, were captured by the search engines. We printed lists of all story headlines and lead paragraphs and extracted the stories that appeared unrelated in any way to the nonprofit sector.

The second reason for the large size of the initial sample was that we did not exclude minor obituaries and wedding notices from the search. In many cases, these stories would include a line such as, "In lieu of flowers, mourners are asked to donate to the 10th Street Nonprofit Collective," or "Guests are asked to bring cans of food for the couples favorite charity." We solved this problem by returning to the search engine and excluding stories mentioning obituaries or paid notice (a tag for a purchased obituary) and wedding anywhere in the text. While this eliminated the stories described above, it is also possible that the exclusion of these terms eliminated valid nonprofit stories containing these words, although we believe this to be quite rare and inconsequential.

The third reason for the size of the initial sample was that we did not originally exclude stories under 250 words. In a concession to time and costs, we followed previous research methods and excluded stories under 250 words. Limiting stories to those over 250 words was again done by hand based on the story summaries.

¹⁶ *Editor & Publisher International Year Book 2003*. www.editorandpublisher.com

Los Angeles Times

The following section explains the differences in the *Los Angeles Times* search engine and how these differences may affect the sampling and results. The primary difference in the *Los Angeles Times* search engine is that users must pay for it and it has less functionality. For example, the search engine does not allow users to print a list of stories and lead paragraphs. In fact, the search engine only allows users to extract stories where designated key words appear in the entire text or headline, and not just the headline and lead paragraphs. In addition, because story summaries were unavailable, it was not possible to extract stories unrelated to nonprofits or eliminate stories under 250 by looking at story summaries. As a result, we were forced to sample from a larger universe of stories.

As a result, the total number of stories initially retrieved from the *Los Angeles Times* was far greater than any other paper, however, based on the sample of stories, we believe that many more of the *Los Angeles Times* stories would not have met either the word count criteria or even our broad criteria for stories related to nonprofits. In a perfect world, we would have printed the full text of all stories, eliminated those not meeting our criteria and sampled from the remainder. However, because the *Los Angeles Times* search engine is subscription based, doing this was cost prohibitive. As a result, the *Los Angeles Times* is somewhat over represented in the sample. In order to see if this biased the sample in any way, we compared the *Los Angeles Times* stories to the stories in all other papers on the major variables. In general, the differences were insignificant. In one area, however, the differences were marginally significant. Nonprofits in *Los Angeles Times* stories tended to be slightly less prominently featured than nonprofits in all other stories. The *Los Angeles Times* had an average score on the prominence variable of 4.05 while the average for all other stories was 4.38. This appears minor, however, the difference was marginally significant ($p=.10$).

Breakdown of stories by newspaper

The search criteria and filtering mechanisms identified above extracted a total of 4,919 stories. Because our initial attempt to exclude stories that contained key words but were not related to nonprofits in any way was based on an examination of just the headlines and lead paragraphs only, it was impossible to know exactly how many of the remaining stories were in fact unrelated to nonprofits. As a result, we oversampled from the universe and randomly extracted 1,429 stories or 28 percent of the 4,919 stories. This cautionary measure turned out to be worth the additional effort, as a more complete review of the stories found an additional 395 stories with no connection of any kind to nonprofits or philanthropy. We excluded these stories from further analysis. As noted in the report, we used a broad definition of a nonprofit story. To be included in the sample, some component of the nonprofit sector (e.g. an organization or an issue) had to be included in the story in the correct context. As a result, our sample includes many stories where nonprofits or philanthropies are only mentioned with a minor or passing reference. In essence, we chose to provide a more complete picture of how nonprofits are used in newspaper stories over a more narrowly focused analysis of stories concentrating on nonprofits. The extensive process described above left a total of 1,034 stories comprising 21% of the 4,919 stories extracted after filtering the initial sample. Table A1 provides a specific breakdown of all stories by newspaper.

Table A1: Stories by newspaper

Newspaper	Total Stories Sampled (n=1,429)	Total Valid stories coded (n=1,034)	Percentage of valid stories
<i>Atlanta Journal</i>	140	111	11%
<i>Boston Globe</i>	138	115	11%
<i>Chicago Sun Times</i>	66	44	4%
<i>Houston Chronicle</i>	205	170	16%
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	349	212	21%
<i>New York Times</i>	183	134	13%
<i>USA Today</i>	51	47	5%
<i>Washington Post</i>	171	139	13%
<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	126	81	8%

Coding procedures

The content analysis instrument was developed by the primary author with the assistance of three graduate students. The instrument was finalized over a series of nine drafts. With each successive draft, the students would code a sample number of stories in an attempt to find stories that were difficult to answer using the draft instruments. This process also allowed for the formation of coding conventions and rules. Once the final draft was completed, a randomly drawn sample of 100 stories was coded by the three graduate students and the author. Tests for intercoder reliability indicated an agreement rate of 91 percent on this sample of stories.

During the coding process, each coder was randomly given some of the same stories to code to check for coder drift. The agreement rate never fell below 84 percent and improved as the study progressed and coders became more accustomed to coding conventions. In another attempt to insure reliability, each story was cross checked by the primary author in an attempt to eliminate obvious errors due to coder fatigue or carelessness, which thankfully were rare. Finally, the data itself was checked and cleaned by the primary author after it was entered into the database. This process was designed to eliminate obvious data entry errors and any data inconsistencies. For example, if a story was coded as discussing a partnership between a nonprofit and government, but indicated that the story did *not* mentioned *any* government involvement; the story was examined again and recoded as necessary.

Clarification of coding conventions

In most cases the presentation of results is fairly straightforward and many methodological questions were answered in the main paper. A few instances, however, require some additional clarification.

In Table 9, we presented an analysis of the major themes in the story. These themes were determined by the primary author after the initial content analysis was completed in a variety of ways. First, all coders, including the primary author, were asked to briefly summarize the article, focusing on the role that nonprofits played in the article. This formed the basis of the theme characterizations. During the coding process, we began to develop a sense of reoccurring themes and developed categories and notes about these themes. For example, we discovered that events were often a focus and often wrote in the story summaries the word event. In some cases, determination of the major theme was aided by other variables. For example, a “saint” story had to be coded as very favorable and a “sinner” story as very unfavorable. If a story met these criteria, the story summaries and notes were used to confirm the coding. For example, a story summary describing a financial scandal would confirm that the story theme would be a “sinner” story. Another example is for stories focusing on a report. In this case, since we directly asked a question about the story focusing on a report released by a nonprofit, we started with the variable and used the story summary to confirm the categorization. In essence, the determination of story theme was based on these types of comparisons across different variables. In addition to providing an analysis of the major themes in nonprofit stories, this process also allowed for cross checking of data for consistency.

A second clarification runs throughout the data. In most cases, the three graduate coders were given an option of unclear and they were encouraged to use it when they honestly felt some difficulty in coding accurately. The primary author re-examined these stories and made a determination on the variable.

A third clarification is in regard to the favorable and unfavorable classifications used throughout the report. The specific question asked how the story reflected on the nonprofit sector as a whole. This does not mean that the story had to be related to or even mention the nonprofit sector to be counted. Perhaps a more specific phrasing of the question would be simply how the story reflected on nonprofits. It is our contention that even a story marginally about nonprofits leaves the reader with some impression of the nonprofit sector. For example, a story where nonprofits are barely mentioned is more likely to infer that nonprofits are unimportant and perhaps even unnecessary. In essence, the coder followed a convention to report their impression of nonprofits if they knew nothing more than what they read in each story. While this is a subtle distinction, the clarification is important since the characterization variable forms such a large part of the report.

A fourth and final clarification is in regard to the questions about the involvement of other actors (government, business, and elected officials) in the story. Our original intention was to focus on how the relationship between these actors was characterized, not simply in the presence of these actors in the story. This proved quite difficult, primarily due to the difficulty in accurately determining what constitutes a relationship. Shortly after we began coding, a determination was made to focus on the presence of other actors and not the relationship. The primary author communicated this to the students and re-examined all stories that had been coded (approximately 350) and re-coded these stories with this new convention.

The codebook is available upon request and the authors welcome comments and questions about the methodology.