

Sustainability is a challenge that most nonprofit organizations must address: managing financial viability in an evolving funding landscape, contending with “competing” nonprofit organizations while establishing collaborative partnerships, demonstrating value and accountability to funders and supporters, and maximizing the contribution of leadership within the community. However, these challenges become exacerbated, if not overshadowed, by other factors for nonprofits serving those communities that are most in need. Nonprofit organizations serving high-need or low-income, and sometimes minority, populations are faced with balancing multiple community challenges that reach far beyond the mission of the organization (e.g., economic challenges, poor education, poor health, crime or safety issues, housing concerns, lack of business or community development). Understanding the interaction between the economic and cultural contexts of low-income communities and the sustainability challenges that nonprofit organizations face is necessary to maximize strategies to address financial sustainability challenges and ultimately improve nonprofit services for communities of the greatest need.



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One of the primary challenges faced by nonprofit organizations serving low-income communities is the struggle to raise funds for operations, as few community members have the viii means to contribute financial support to nonprofits. Fostering a culture of giving by encouraging community members to donate, even if it is a small amount, and involving community members in fundraising efforts can help address the “willingness to give” gap and may address fundraising challenges in communities where many residents have very limited resources to spare. Nonprofits in low-income communities are also tasked with striking a balance between (1) meeting the expectations of mainstream funders and/or governing bodies and (2) staying connected to the local community and being perceived as genuine. Utilizing technology and developing a marketing strategy that clearly defines the nonprofit’s social mission will help reach new audiences and build a reputation within the community. In an environment flooded with many nonprofits seeking to serve the same community, nonprofits can address financial constraints to operations and limit competition by establishing high-impact partnerships with organizations that have similar strategic goals. Collaborations may also benefit nonprofits in low-resourced areas by building capacity to perform formal evaluations and demonstrate the value of their operations. Finally, strategically engaging volunteers through community outreach can help promote the sustainability of nonprofits and foster support from the community.